



## Foreword

## Being a Bilingual/Multilingual

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More than half the world's population is bilingual.<sup>1</sup> About 20% of the population in the United States and Canada speak a language at home other than English.<sup>1,2</sup> Bilingualism is far more prevalent in Europe, with approximately 56% of the population across all the European Union countries reporting functionally bilingual.<sup>3</sup> Although bilinguals make up a significant percentage of the world's population, the topic of bilingualism has been a baffling area of research for many years. It is mainly due to the misconceptions about children/individuals who are bilingual. Speaking two or more languages affects the developing minds, or bilingual children find it confusing to learn two languages are some popular misconceptions about bilinguals that continue to persist.<sup>4</sup> But research in this area has suggested otherwise. For example, Peal and Lambert compared the performance of French monolinguals to English-French bilinguals on a battery of tests.<sup>5</sup> The authors found that the bilinguals outperformed monolinguals on language tasks. Although surprising, this finding has been confirmed in several follow-up studies that suggest bilingual children are at an advantage across a range of linguistic and nonlinguistic skills.<sup>6</sup> The advantages of bilingualism do not just stop in childhood. It continues well past into adulthood as well.<sup>7</sup>

Unfortunately, despite the surmounting evidence concerning the advantages of bilingualism, the misconceptions surrounding bilingualism have continued to gain ground, leading people to believe that a monolingual approach is a better way to raise not only typically developing children but also children with language deficits. In many countries where bilingualism or even multilingualism is the norm (e.g., India), there is a biased perspective that children with language disorders cannot learn multiple languages. Thus, children with language disorders in such countries are often made to choose a monolingual approach to their educational instruction and intervention. The area of research is further complicated by several external variables such as the interaction of the first language (L1) and second language (L2) in bilingual children, the age of the exposure to L2, the amount of exposure to L2, and so on. As researchers, we must

continue to untangle these myths and misconceptions to understand the true nature of bilingualism.

In this special issue of “Language Development and Disorders in Multilingual Children,” we have assembled a total of six articles, including original research, case studies, and reviews that highlight the different facets of bilingualism and multilingualism. Tran et al surveyed the language practices at home among 151 Vietnamese-Australian parents.<sup>8</sup> The survey findings revealed that about a third of the participants (35.6%) had a family language policy, and 72.5% of those consistently implemented their policy. The authors emphasize that without support from the government, most of the Vietnamese-English bilingual children in Australia are at risk of abandoning the consistent use of Vietnamese over the use of the dominant language, English. Freeman and Schroeder, in their review, present important strategies that should be considered when using norm-referenced tests to assess language skills in bilingual children.<sup>9</sup> The authors also present alternatives to norm-referenced tests, including dynamic assessment measures, nonword repetition, language sampling, nonlinguistic cognition, and parent report. Srikar et al in their paper present a combination of literature review as well as four case vignettes.<sup>10</sup> The first half of their article reviews previous literature that could potentially contribute to the decision-making process while selecting language(s) for intervention for children with autism spectrum disorders who are exposed to more than one language. The second half of the article presents four case vignettes that highlight the challenges faced by clinicians in the language selection process for intervention in a country like India. Rego et al measured the lexical knowledge of typically developing Konkani-English speaking bilingual children as a function of L1 and L2 and age.<sup>11</sup> The findings indicated that the vocabulary size of the participants in both languages increased as a function of their age. However, the influence of L1 over L2 or vice versa on lexical knowledge could not be established. Mohan et al investigated if the nature of the L1 written script influenced the L2 literacy skills in two groups of bilingual children. Interestingly, the authors found that the

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nature of L1 written structure influences L2 literacy skills.<sup>12</sup> Finally, Grech administered the sentence imitation test on a large group of bilingual Maltese children to evaluate if this test was a good predictor of verbal comprehension and phonological awareness in these children.<sup>13</sup> The findings revealed that the sentence imitation test is a valid and reliable indicator of the language skills of bilingual Maltese children.

Although we are aware that there is a continued need for additional research in bi/multilingualism, we hope this issue will unravel some of the complexities surrounding bi/multilingualism.

#### Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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