

APPLICATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN CHINESE ESL FAMILIES

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Date: 4/30/10

APPLICATION OF BILINGUAL EDUCATION IN CHINESE ESL FAMILIES

A Seminar Paper

Presented to

The Graduate Faculty

University of Wisconsin-Platteville

In Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirement for the Degree

Master of Science

In

Education

By

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2010

Abstract

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The problem to be addressed is to explore how parents applying bilingual education to teach their children English at home. A brief review of literature on the studies of bilingual education in China will be conducted. A second review of literature theories of bilingual education will be conducted. Based on the theories, some case studies will be conducted. The author will interview three families in which parents apply bilingual education. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

Through a review of the literature, it is found that apply bilingual education in Chinese family is possible and good for both parents and children. In the studies on second language acquisition and children's language acquisition, it is said that children are born with language ability and have a critical period for acquiring languages, not learning languages. It is important to this study to note the difference between learning and acquisition.

According to the studies on theories and previous successful case studies, it is suggest that parents have to try their best to provide English input for their children. It is unnecessary to worry the limit English ability of parents, because children can have

the ability to know the rules of a given language. The most important thing is children's exposure to English as much as possible.

The case studies conducted by the author are practical and demonstrate the same problem: parents do not have enough time to teach their children English at home. However, making use of every opportunity to expose children to English is a good solution of this problem. Through these case studies, it is believed that early starting of bilingual education will benefit children's future English study. Beside this, the multiple methods of English exposure can arouse children's interest in learning English.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

With the rapid development of globalization, many people in China are becoming aware of the importance of mastering English as an international language. English has been instituted as a subject at every level of Chinese education, and even in some kindergartens, young children have some courses taught in English. Many parents can now speak English because China's "Opening-up" promoted English study since the 1970s. However, many parents experienced frustration in their early days studying English because the teaching methods were not so well developed at that time. In order to help children study English more easily, many parents would like to form a bilingual environment in their home so they can maintain their children's bilingual education (Liu, 2006).

Although there are many contrary opinions on bilingual education, many experts agree on the opinion that bilingual education should be used in the teaching process. The research in this study will review previous studies on bilingual education, the theories of bilingual teaching, and some successful cases of bilingual parenting. The researcher will also conduct case studies to explore some effective bilingual teaching methods.

Statement of the Problem

The problem expressed as a question is as follows:

How can parents apply bilingual educations at home to enable their children to acquire English as a second language?

Definition of Terms

Bilingual education. It is a broad term that refers to the presence of two languages in instructional settings. (Guthrie, 2003) For the purpose of this study the instructional setting can be the home environment.

ESL. Abbreviation for the term English as a second Language (Retrieved on January 7, 2009 from <http://www.answers.com/topic/esl>). This term in this thesis refers to English as Chinese children's second language taught by parents at home.

Delimitations of the Research

The research will be conducted in and through the Karmann Library at the University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Library of SCUN, during the 2010 spring semester. Primary searches will be conducted via the Internet through EBSCO host with ERIC, Academic Search Elite, Wilson Index and CNKI as the primary sources. Key search topics included "bilingual education", and "ESL".

Methodology

A brief review of literature on the studies of bilingual education in China will be conducted. A second review of literature theories of bilingual education in general will be conducted. Based on the theories, some case studies will be conducted. The author will interview three Chinese families in which parents apply bilingual education. The findings will be summarized and recommendations made.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Several definitions of bilingual education

It is difficult for us to define “bilingual education,” because this phenomenon is “loose” (Li, 2007). According to Li, the definition is “loose” because there are widely different understandings of what bilingual education actually constitutes. Baker and de Kanter (1981) and Porter (1990) consider that “the presence of bilingual students in the classroom is deemed sufficient to classify a program as bilingual (Li, 2007), while Baker (2001) and Skutnabb-Kangas (1981) classify bilingual education into “weak” and “strong” forms or non-bilingual and bilingual programs (Li, 2007). Li’s second reason for defining bilingual education as “loose” is that there is a wide variety of educational approaches to effectively foster or promote bilingualism, biliteracy, and academic success for bilingual students. These factors complicate the attempts to ascertain the features necessary for successful bilingual education. Therefore, bilingual education has many definitions. Yet, as Brisk notes, “Bilingual education, broadly defined, is the use of two languages as media of instruction” (quoted in Hinkel, 2005, p.8). This definition mirrors what is cited in Li:

Bilinguality and Bilingualism states that the bilingual education is a kind of education plan which describes the using two or more than two languages in different levels in the teaching process. The two languages are used as the teaching media rather than the subject.

Li continues with a second definition, paraphrasing: Siguan and Mackey (1987) who posit in *Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* that bilingual education refers to teachers using two languages as teaching media in the process of teaching other subjects, such as science, mathematics and so on, rather than teaching languages (Li, 2007).

No matter how “loose” the phenomenon of bilingual education is, the general definition in *Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics* (2005) might help parents understand bilingual education better. It defines bilingual education as:

The use of a second or foreign language in school for the teaching of content subjects.

Models of Bilingual Education

Understanding models of bilingual education will help parents to have a better idea on how to design their own models of teaching at home. In this part of this research, several classroom models will be discussed.

Brisk states in *Bilingual Education* that “[s]ome models introduce both languages simultaneously, other gradually, yet others switch after a certain number of grades. Some continue teaching both languages through the length of the program. Others teach in the first language for a short period of time” (quoted in Hinkel, 2005, p. 8) Brown and Eisterhold note in *Topics in Language and Culture for Teachers*, (2004) mentioned that there are five modes of bilingual education in USA. These are newcomer programs, transitional or early-exit bilingual education, developmental or

late-exit bilingual education, two-way immersion classrooms and second language immersion.

Newcomer programs are designed for immigrant students who have limited English proficiency and many of whom also have limited literacy skills in their first language because of limited or interrupted schooling. Some programs develop both first language and second language skills, while others focus on the second language and content knowledge (Brown & Eisterhole, 2004).

Transitional or early-exit bilingual education is very common in the United States (Brown & Eisterhole, 2004). In this program, Lemberger (1997) notes “the native language is temporarily used (for 1 to 3 years) to develop literacy and content area skills with increasing doses of English that eventually replace the native language” (p.15). After students have grasped academic content to some extent, no emphasis is put on the retention and development of their native language skills (Reed & Railsback, 2003). That is to say, in this program first language instruction is gradually phased out, and English instruction is gradually phased in (Baker & Kanter, 1981).

Developmental or late-exit bilingual focuses on educating students in two languages. Both languages are used in academic teaching for a period of time (Brown & Eisterhole, 2004). Developmental bilingual education typically lasts throughout elementary school and forty percent of students’ instructions are taught in their native language (Reed & Railsback, 2003).

Two-way immersion classrooms are designed to improve students' proficiency of both first language and second language. The percentages of first and second language can be 90 to 10 or 50 to 50. The training ability of schools, families and community commitment should be at a high level. Interaction is very important in these programs and teachers have to be good at both languages (Reed & Railsback, 2003).

Finally, second language immersion activities are designed to teach students to use a second language to express the most of language content (Brown & Eisterhole, 2004). This part of Brown and Eisterhole's five part taxonomy is much like bilingual education in China. In China, some courses in university are taught bilingually. The text books are in both English and Chinese. Teachers of these courses have to have the ability of using two languages to teach the content.

Characteristics of Bilingual Education

Both languages have to be used as mediums in Bilingual education. This aspect is a characteristic of bilingual education. That is to say, bilingual education requires a large amount of language immersion. According to the classic definition of bilingual education posited by Andersson and Boyer (1970), "bilingual education is instruction in two languages and the use of those two languages as a medium of instruction for any part, or all, of the school curriculum" (Li, 2007, p.5). Thus, a successful program of bilingual education needs both languages used as a medium for instruction in non-language courses such as math, history, etc, rather than language courses (Li, 2007).

In addition, Krashen (1997) suggests several characters of the best bilingual programs which are “ESL instruction, sheltered subject matter teaching, and instruction in the first language”. He states that bilingual education has a progressive series of steps which depend upon the language proficiency of the students themselves. Students firstly have to take a language course and a core course. As their language ability improves, the percentage of language courses can be reduced or almost be canceled when students reach an advanced level. This progress is much the same as transitional bilingual education mentioned above. From the characteristics of bilingual education, parents can have an idea of dealing with the relationship between first language and second language. These theories can help them design an initial structure of bilingual education at home.

Definition of Bilingual Education Discussed in this Thesis

After discussing some aspects of bilingual education, the author would like to mention the definition of bilingual education discussed in this thesis, which is “bilingual parenting in a foreign language” (Liu, 2006, p.8).

Before talking about the definition of bilingual parenting, some terms related to this term have to be defined, such as “bilingual parents” and “bilingual families”. A Bilingual family is “[a] family with at least one member whose first language is different from the first languages of the other family members” (Karamat, 2004, p.4). However, the same term may have varied definitions in different situations. In the thesis *A Feasibility Study of Bilingual Parenting in a Foreign Language in Bilingual Chinese Families*, Liu (2006) writes that “Chinese bilingual parents” are “Chinese

parents who can speak a second language other than Chinese,” and “Chinese bilingual families” is defined as those “Chinese families that have at least one parent who is bilingual” (p. 8) However, Chinese parents might be unfamiliar with the concept of bilingual parenting in a foreign language, Liu (2006) mentioned that:

[T]he practice of one or both parents in bilingual families speaking a foreign language as well as their native tongue to their infants in daily family communicative settings in order that the baby can acquire both languages in a sub-conscious manner.

Even those parents who are familiar with this concept may debate whether or not to apply bilingual education at home. Under this circumstance, Johnson, Renee and Shurts Kristina, who themselves are bilingual parents and have been raising their own children in English, German and French, have created a website and intended to provide encouragement and support for bilingual parents using bilingual parenting in a foreign language (Liu, 2006). The website is

<http://humanities.byu.edu/bilingua/index.html> and named *Bilingual Parenting*.

Johnson Renne and Shurts Kristina (1999) want to help parents raise their children bilingually by providing some relative information, solutions for some of the problem typically encountered in bilingual parenting and so on. The website is just like a collection of information on bilingual education which lists many books, articles, and newsletter and internet sites on bilingual education. It also conducts a survey for families who want to share their experience with others. This survey serves as a communication platform on which families can communicate with each other and

exchange their opinions on raising children bilingually. It is a good website from which parents can get useful information.

Experts think highly of bilingual education. For example, Greene (1998) states that “bilingual education helps children who are learning English” (p.2) and Kenner (2005) posits that “bilingual families are overwhelmingly determined that their children should succeed” (p.287) In addition, the advantages of bilingual parenting prove that bilingual parenting in a foreign language is a good way to teach children language. As Barton notes that “[T]he family is an ecological niche in which literacy survives, is sustained and flourishes” (Kenner, 2005, p.288). Kenner (2005) quotes the definition of “eco-system” posited by Holland and Lucas (1990, p.1) in thesis. The term means “a group of species that depend on each other” (Kenner, 2005, p.288).

According to Kenner, by forming a “literacy eco-system”, bilingual families can benefit both children’s literacy development and dynamic interaction among family members. Bilingual parents can also save their children time and effort in foreign language study in their later lives, because children can spontaneously acquire two languages in their early years just like they acquire their mother language (Liu, 2006).

In addition, Liu (2006) states that “[b]ecoming bilingual is more than own two languages”. Children can not only use two languages to communicate, but also comprehend the cultures of each language. Liu (2006) offers Baker’s (2004, p.2) list of advantages of bilingual education. Communication advantage implies that learners have wide opportunities to communicate in two languages. Learners can experience multi-cultures through bilingual education. Bilingual education can also raise

learners' self-esteem and security in identity. Besides, there are cognitive advantages, curriculum advantages, and economic advantage and so on.

From the experts' high opinion on bilingual education and the advantages of bilingual education, parents do not have to worry about whether bilingual education is good or not for children's language development. On the contrary, parents have more confidence to raise children bilingually.

Theories of Second Language Acquisition

It is not enough for parents to have confidence to raise children bilingually. In order to encounter different situations in the process of applying bilingual education at home, parents should know some theories of second language acquisition and theories of children's language acquisition. Therefore, in this chapter, the author will discuss some theories of second language acquisition (SLA).

Many experts think highly of the understanding of second language acquisition. For example, Fillmore and Snow (2002) and Hamayan (1990) note that better understanding of second language acquisition can benefit mainstream teachers when they teach culturally and linguistically diverse students (Reed & Railsback, 2003, p.15). Because students with different cultures may have different understanding of the same language and different ability of acquiring a language, those theories of second language acquisition can help teachers design their teaching plan and deal with the problems caused by diversity. This same idea can be applied by parents who want to apply bilingual education at home, because these theories can explain the problems

in the process of bilingual education at home and provide some solutions of these problems.

According to Brown and Eisterhole (2004), there are two processes of second language acquisition: transfer and interlanguage. “Transfer refers to the fact that the first language may affect learning at all levels: sounds, grammar, words, and appropriacy” (p.83). For example, verbs in English have the third person singular, while verbs in Chinese do not. It is common that Chinese children forget to change verbs into the third person singular when necessary. This is a process of transfer during which learners’ first language affects their second language. The other process called “[i]nterlanguage is a language system that differs from both L1 and L2. It is an approximation, a stage on the way to a second language” (p.84). For example, in this process, it often happens that children will combine two languages in one sentence, such as “给我个 pen.” (Give me a pen.) These two processes are common in second language acquisition. The author thinks the reasons of these phenomena are those first, learners’ proficiencies of first language and second language are different at beginning. Their first language is better than their second language, so they are likely to use first language if they are not forced to speak in second language only; second, learners’ limited second language forces them to express in second language. So when they can not find some words in second language to express themselves, they use their first language. If children learn more second language, their ability of using second language will be improved and they will come across these processes.

After studying the research related to second language acquisition, Reed and Railsback concluded that there are five stages of second language development. They designate first stage as the “silent/receptive or preproduction stage”. The period of this stage can last from ten hours to six months, during which students can get five hundreds “receptive” words (they can understand the meaning of the words, but they may not use them correctly) and new words that easy to understand for themselves. In this stage, students are not able to speak the language but can use physical responses to indicate “yes” or “no”. Teachers must wait for students until they are ready to speak. The second stage is called the “early production stage” which can last an additional six months after the initial stage. During this stage, students’ vocabulary can be developed to about one thousands receptive words. They can speak in one- or two-word phrases, and express their understanding by giving some simple words or phrases. The third stage is the “speech emergence stage” which may last up to another year. In this stage, students can develop approximately three thousands words and use short phrases and simple sentences to communicate. Students are able to use dialogues, simple questions and answers during this stage. Although students may use more extended syntactical constructions, they often struggle with grammar and this can impede their communication. The fourth stage, “intermediate language proficiency stage”, usually lasts for another year after the third stage. Having learned at least six thousands words, students can make complex statements, state opinions, ask for clarification, share their thoughts, and speak at greater length. The last stage is the advanced language proficiency stage, which can take from five to seven years to

attain. Students can develop some specialized content-area vocabulary and can participate fully in grade-level classroom activities. There are seldom grammar errors and vocabulary is comparable to native speakers of the same age. (p. 20).

Although these five concepts show a value picture of the learning process, the author thinks Reed and Railsback ignore the influence of the first language. For example, in the first stage, students can not be completely silent, because students may understand what they hear but are unable to express themselves in their second language. In this situation, students may strongly desire to express their understanding of the second language by using the first language. As the “interlanguage” process states, students may combine two languages together. In the author’s opinion, on one hand, the first language helps students to learn the second language; on the other hand, the first language slows down students’ speed of learning the second language. Therefore, parents should not ignore children’s first language’s effect on learning second language, such as paying more attention to the differences between first and second language to avoid children making mistakes.

Other important theories of second language acquisition are Steven Krashen’s theories. The author of this thesis offers some description of Krashen’s theories in the hope of helping parents in the process of teaching English to their children at home. According to Schütz (2007), Krashen’s theory of second language acquisition consists of five main hypotheses. The most fundamental one is the “Acquisition-Learning hypothesis”. In this hypothesis, there are two independent systems of second language performance, which are “acquired system/acquisition” and “learned system/learning”.

The former one is an unconscious process during which second language is acquired without formal instruction. It is similar to the situation that children learn their first language through the interaction in daily life. The latter one literally means a process of formal instruction and students learn some knowledge of a language, such as grammar, pronunciation and so on (Schütz, 2007). According to these two systems, it seems that home is a suitable place for children to acquire language, because home is more comfortable than the formal classroom. It is better for parents to create a relaxed situation for children to acquire language through activities like casual talks and such kind of daily communication.

Krashen's Monitor hypothesis is also useful in understanding second language acquisition. This hypothesis explains that learning "monitor" acquisition through planning, editing and correcting. When learners have enough time, they will pay more attention to use what they learn at school to correct what they acquire during daily life (Schütz, 2007). For example, learners will use the grammatical rules to edit their language structures, or the correct pronunciations they learn at class to correct their vague pronunciations they acquire in daily life. However, the role of learning might be limited in second language performance. In Krashen's opinion, the monitor just performs as a corrector to "correct deviations from 'normal' speech" and polisher to "give speech a more 'polished' appearance" (Schütz, 2007). That is to say, parents have to provide more opportunities for children to acquire language, not just to learn language. Thus it is important to understand the difference between acquisition and active learning if home learning is to be successful.

The Natural Order hypothesis suggests that the acquisition of grammatical structures follow a predictable “natural order”, which seems to be independent of the learner’s age. Some grammatical structures of a given language are acquired early during childhood, while others late during adulthood. However, Krashen does not think it is necessary to design a language program syllabus based on the natural order and he rejects grammatical sequencing when the goal is language acquisition (Schütz, 2007). Therefore, parents do not have to pay more attention to grammar of a second language. It is better to teach second language in a very natural way without achieving any purpose, such as requiring children to remember some grammatical structures.

The next hypothesis of Krashen is input hypothesis. Explained by Schütz (2007), this hypothesis focuses on “how the learner acquires a second language”. According to Brown (2000), input hypothesis means language acquisition can take place when learners’ current ability can not reach the level of comprehensible input (Shannon, 2003). Therefore, the only concern of the input hypothesis is acquisition. When a learner is exposed to a second language input that is beyond his/her current stage, the acquisition takes place and he/she can make progress along the natural order. In order to ensure each learner receives input appropriate to his/her current stage, Krashen believes that natural communicative input is the key to designing a learning plan (Schütz, 2007). Based on this theory, parents should provide some learning materials or conduct some activities beyond children’s current abilities. With some high level instructions, children may have more motivation to study.

The last theory of language acquisition in this study is the Affective Filter Hypothesis, which illustrates Krashen's opinion that a number of "affective variables" play important roles in language acquisition. These variables promote the process of second language acquisition, such as motivation, self-confidence and anxiety (Schütz, 2007). When students have motivation and feel confidence, they will learn a language better. On the contrary, they will have difficulty in learning when they are anxiety. Krashen expresses opinion that a successful learner has to have a good deal of motivation, self-confidence, a good self-image, and a low level of anxiety to acquire a second language. If these are not met, the affective filter might be raised and a mental block may be formed to prevent comprehensible input from being used for acquisition (Schütz, 2007).

From the theories reviewed above, acquiring a second language requires a very unconscious environment. In this environment, children can acquire a second language rather than learning a second language. This situation is similar to the one in which children learn their first language. Brown and Eisterhold (2004) suggest that teachers should treat students as children who are learning their first language when teaching them a second language. The reason is that, in Brown and Eisterhold's opinion, students get through similar cognitive processes of acquiring the first language when they are acquiring a second language (2004). For example, students acquire their first language through interaction with parents, relatives or people around them without paying more attention to some linguistic rules of the language. It

is highly recommended that parents create a natural teaching environment, just like daily life, for children when they teach a second language to their children.

Theories of Children's Language Acquisition

Since some scholars suggest treating second language learners in a similar manner to children learning their first language, and this thesis aims at helping parents teach their children English at home, it is necessary to review relevant theories of children's language acquisition.

Tricia (2004), the author of *Theories about how young children acquire and develop language*, discusses theories about children's language acquisition.

According to this article, young children are proficient communicators during the first three years of life. They use "the hundred languages of children", such as body languages, painting, drawing and mark-making, and so on. Young children's language development is influenced by parents and older children who listen and attend to their expressions and who use and model appropriate language themselves. That is to say, home is a good environment for children to learn language.

There are four main theories that influence the way practitioners in early childhood education and care settings think about language development. Chomsky proposed a term "Language Acquisition Device", which is a kind of biological mechanism in the brain that humans are born with. According to Tricia (2004), the theory of "Language Acquisition Device supposes that the ability to learn language is inborn, that nature is more important than nurture and that experience using language is only necessary in order to activate the LAD". In this case, Aitchison posits that

children need only be exposed to relatively small amounts of language firstly, and then they unconsciously perceive how language of this type works (Liu, 2006). This is good news for Chinese parents who want to raise children in a foreign language, because although the language input is minimal, it still can make children know a series of rules of language (Liu, 2006).

As we all know, children are better language learners than adults. Lennerberg's Critical Age Hypothesis can explain this phenomenon. Gass and Selinker (2001, p.35) note that this hypothesis claims that there is an age-related point. If children learn a second language beyond the point, it is extremely difficult for them to reach the same level as their native language. (Age, n.d.). As Liu notes, "[d]uring this period, the innate language faculty is available and language learning proceeds easily, swiftly and without external intervention. After this period, acquisition becomes difficult, and for some individuals, it will never be fully achieved" (2006). Liu (2006) also posits that acquisition occurs before critical acquisition, and it is important to expose children English at critical age if parents want their children to acquire it.

Piaget studied the development of children's understanding. In his opinion, "[e]ach child builds on the previous stage of cognitive development, increasing the child's ability to solve more complex problems)" (Hughes, 2008). Maturation plays an important role in children's increasing capacity to understand their world, according to which children can undertake certain tasks only when they are psychologically mature enough ("Piaget", n.d). He argued that cognitive development

takes place before language and language is just the representation of the world and the thought, but not the development of thinking (Tricia, 2004).

Vygotsky focuses on the relationship between the development of thought and that of language. He thinks different languages might impact how a person thinks (Tricia, 2004). Humanities' abilities, including thought, language, and reasoning process, develop through social interaction with others, mainly parents who represent the culture. (Sólrún, 2008) "So Vygotsky's theory views language first as social communication, gradually promoting both language itself and cognition" (Tricia, 2004). This theory emphasize that role of parents is crucially important for language acquisition.

The above theories present varying ideas of children's language acquisition. These ideas often conflict in some aspects. For example, Piaget argues that cognitive development comes before language acquisition, while Vygotsky thinks that language promotes cognition development. Chomsky gives parents more confidence for applying bilingual education at home because, as Chomsky posits, children have a "Language Acquisition Device" which enable them have an ability of acquiring language unconsciously. With a minimal amount language input, perfect output will come out. Children also can acquire more than one language at the same time without difficulty. The role of parents, emphasized by Vygosky, is very crucial in the process of children's cognitive development. As what Vygosky states, language development affects thinking development and itself is realized through the interaction between parents and children.

Studies on Previous Successful Cases

Many researchers conducted some case studies of bilingual parenting. Liu (2006), for example, has already done some case studies on successful bilingual parenting. Here, the author will review Liu's case studies.

The first case is about a girl named Qiaoqiao, whose parents are teachers in Shandong University in Jinan, China. Her father, Dr. Zhang, is an associate professor of English who can speak English fluently, and her mother was an English major in the university. Zhang started to speak and read English to Qiaoqiao even before she was born. Zhang believed that Qiaoqiao's sensitivity of language was developed due to her early exposure to English. After Qiaoqiao was born, Zhang spoke English to her 80% of time, while he spoke both English and Chinese most time. Qiaoqiao's mother occasionally speaks English to Qiaoqiao. With this background, Qiaoqiao can understand her parents' English and reply in Chinese or in very rudimentary English. In Qiaoqiao's case, she is a passive bilingual, which Liu defines as "the children being raised bilingually can understand L2 much spoken to them, but will prefer to respond in their mother tongue" (2006). According to Liu (2006), passive bilingual is caused by the poor and limited foreign language input, because Chinese parents can not reach the level of native speakers. However, it is also an achievement for Chinese parents.

The second case study cited in this project is the case of Mariana, whose parents are native English speakers who speak Spanish as a second language at home. Neither parent is fluent in Spanish, however. Every day, Mariana's parents talk only in Spanish to each other and Mariana for sixty to ninety minutes. In addition, Mariana's

parents made a concentrated effort to increase her exposure to Spanish. They encouraged her to watch Spanish television programs, gave her opportunities to play with Spanish-speaking children, and at the age of five enrolled her in a bilingual kindergarten. What's more, Mariana's parents began to teach Mariana to read the language when she was only 1 year 11 months old. The results of this experiment were good. Mariana can communicate in well Spanish; her English was just slightly superior to her Spanish. This level of language acquisition is called a balanced bilingual. Marianna is fluent in the two languages. The success of Mariana's parents lies in the multiple resources for Mariana's Spanish input.

The last case cited in this project is about a girl named Beichen from Shenzhen, China. When she was 3 years old, she already had an English vocabulary of nearly 1,600 words. She could easily understand the stories on "Disney Magic English" and all English programs for children on Hong Kong English TV. She could also understand native English speakers. The reason for Beichen's good English proficiency is because the entire family's effort to educate her. "Her dad talks to her 100% in English; her mum talks to her 20% in English, 80% in Chinese. Her grandma sometimes reads English stories to her" (Liu, 2006). It is easy to find in this case that the entire family made great efforts to help Beichen acquire English. The large exposure of English results in Beichen's good grasp of English.

According to the three cases above, parents all tried their best to increase the children's exposure to a second language, such as multiple second language input, talks in second languages, and so on.

CHAPTER 3

CASE STUDIES

The previous case studies discussed above are successful and representative studies, which are difficult for average Chinese families to follow. The reason average Chinese families find it difficult to apply bilingual education is not because of the limitation of parents' English ability or the way in which children are exposed to English, but because parents do not have enough time to teach their children English. Therefore, most parents have to make use of any spare time to expose their children to English. The following case studies conducted by the author are from average families. The parents in these families all have jobs and do not have much time to teach their children at home. By interviewing the parents from three families (Guiding Questions, See Appendix 1), the author found some practical methods of teaching children English at home.

Ranran's Case

Ranran is a five-year-old boy, whose parents are teachers of Foreign Language College at South Central University for Nationalities in Wuhan, China. His father is an associate professor of English, and his mother is a lecturer of English. Due to the busy work, Ranran's parents do not have a plan for teaching their child Ranran English at home. Ranran began to learn English when he was in kindergarten. However, when Ranran's parents found that Ranran mispronounced some words he learned in kindergarten, they decided to correct Ranran's English when necessary.

Ranran's mother told the author that it was Ranran's father who occasionally speaks English to Ranran. Besides, Ranran's father teaches Ranran Chinese from *Three Character Primer*, because they want Ranran to have some sense of Chinese culture. Ranran's parents bought Ranran *Sunny English*, which is a series of English learning materials for children. When they played the video of *Sunny English* for Ranran, they found Ranran would imitate the speech in the video, although he may not repeat fluently and clearly. During the interview, Ranran's mother said that Ranran could spot English words that he does not know the meanings of. For example, sometimes, parents do not want Ranran to know that they are talking about him, and they talk in English. Once Ranran's father told Ranran's mother that Ranran cried today, Ranran asked his mother, "Cry 是什么意思啊?" (What does cry mean?). This phenomenon, in the author's opinion, demonstrates Ranran can distinguish English from Chinese and he has the sense of English. Although Ranran's parents do not systematically teach him English, he is still sensitive to the language that is different from his native language.

Duxian's Case

The second family the author interviewed lives in Jingzhou, Hubei province. It is not a big city, according to the mother of the family, where the English training schools are not very good and the mother gave up the decision of sending her child to the training school when the child was two years old. Duxian, the son of this family, is four years old. Duxian's mother is a college English teacher, who exposed Duxian to English by immersion, before he was one year old. Before Duxian was three years

old, only his mother spoke English to him, and now his father occasionally speaks English to him. At the beginning, Duxian's mother told him some English words about color, but he did not response. After literally thousands of repetitions, Duxian is capable of indicating the different colors represented in the pictures in the book. He was capable of doing this after he was only one year old. Just like Ranran's parents, Duxian's parents are also very busy and they make use of every bit of their spare time to speak English to Duxian. One interesting method to teach Duxian numbers is to ask Duxian to count steps when they climb the stairs to the second floor in the building. Duxian's mother also reads English stories and teaches English songs to him. Plus the songs Duxian learnt in kindergarten, he can sing more than ten songs. Duxian's mother also bought Duxian some English videos for children, such as *Disney English*, *Hong'en Go Go English* and so on. In addition, Duxian began to watch the English programs in a children's program named *Tree of Knowledge* on China Central Television (CCTV) Children's Channel when he was two years old. Sometimes, Duxian would ask to watch these English programs.

Through those multimedia inputs of English, Duxian can do some simple dialogue with his parents. For example:

Parents (P): Do you like some water?

Duxian (D): Yes, I do. Thanks

P: Do you wanna go out with me now?

D: Yes. / OK. Wait for me.

P: What is this?

D: It's a kind of grass.

P: No, It's flower.

Sometimes, Duxian combines both Chinese and English when he speaks. For example, “你怎么不说 catch me 呢” (Why don't you say catch me?). However, at this time, his mother would request him to say the whole sentence in English, and he followed his mother to say the whole sentence several times. There are still times when Duxian does not like to listen to English stories, however, he does not refuse to listen when he knows the content.

Duxian's mother explains that the reason she exposed him to English at such an early age is because infancy was the best time to study language. Duxian's memory was good at this time in his life, and he would accept the language without asking why he was being asked to speak it. She also said that Duxian did not confuse English with Chinese, because when he started to learn English, his proficiency in English is some what comparable to his spoken Chinese. He can distinguish that there are two different languages and he was able to avoid mixing up these two languages.

Although now that he is 5 years old, Duxian's Chinese is obviously better than his English because of the exposure to Chinese. His response to English and his sense of using English, according to his mother, are better than other children at the same age. When asked to give some suggestions for raising a child speaking in a foreign language, Duxian's mother said it is better to expose children to English early. In her mind, although the result may not as good as expected, what children learn in their early years will be helpful in the future English study.

Gong Zihao's Case

Gong Zihao is a nine year old boy. His mother is an English teacher in middle school and also teaches part-time in an English training school. Therefore, like the parents from the two families discussed above, Zihao's mother does not have sufficient time to teach Zihao English. For this reason, she started to teach Zihao English at a later age when compared to the former cases. Zihao began learning English after he went to primary school. Zihao's mother teaches him English songs, plays English games with him and does some simple dialogues. She made use of every opportunity to speak English to Zihao. Zihao is in the third grade now and he knows words for color, number, animals and items. This vocabulary allows him to communicate in simple English. At school, Zihao is very confident because he can use words he has already learned at home in his lessons. Although Zihao's mother started to teach Zihao English at a later age than the children in previous studies, she suggested those parents who want teach their children English at home should start bilingual education early. Also, she believes it is better if both parents can teach children. Parents can stay with children when children are listening to the English tapes, watching English programs, and also can talk with children in English. It is believed that all these kinds of activities can arouse children's interest in learning English. She also stated that the English children learn at home can serve as the foundation of their future English study.

Discussion

Each of these three cases shares the same problem: Parents do not have enough time to maintain a consistent learning environment. Therefore, parents do not have regular times or activities that expose their children to English with a real consistency. Because of the time limitations, activities and other language experiences must be carefully chosen for efficiency. But, rather than “lessons” these experiences should be a part of family life. What parents can do is to make use of every opportunity in their daily life, such as, counting numbers when go upstairs, reading English stories, singing English songs, or just making simple dialogues. In addition, parents from these three families held similar opinions including the following two aspects. The first one is children have the ability of acquiring language while the second is they all agree to start to teach their children English early. The former opinion addresses Chomsky’s Language Acquisition Device theories. The latter opinion can be explained by Lennerberg’s Critical Age Hypothesis, because children have a critical period of acquiring language. However, each family has its own situations and the author will discuss as follows:

According to Ranran’s mother, she and her husband did not have the plan to take part in Ranran’s English study until they found that Ranran’s English pronunciations were not always correct. This probably relates to the transfer process mentioned by Brown and Eisterhole (2004). In this situation, Ranran’s parents decided to correct Ranran’s pronunciation and sometimes check Ranran’s homework. This phenomenon, in the author’s opinion, is a kind of parental involvement. According to Cotton and Wikelund (1989), parental involvement has many forms: parents can support their

children's schooling by attending parent-teacher conference; they can help their children's schoolwork, arrange children's study time, monitor their homework and be their children's tutors. In fact, children's study needs parents' involvement, because children can benefit from this kind of social interaction with parents. As what Vygotsky stated, it is through the interaction with parents that children's mental development can be improved (Sólrún, 2008). Cotton and Wiklund (1989) believe that: "parent involvement in children's learning is positively related to achievement" (p.3). They go on to note that children learn most when parents are more involved.

Therefore, although Ranran's parents just do some correct jobs or just act as supervisors, they actually help Ranran a lot in learning English.

In Duxian's case, a good way to teach numbers is to have the child count the steps while climbing up stairs. Duxian's mother told the author that when she taught Duxian, she tried to repeat the same points as frequently as possible, and use English and sentences to express these points. Her way of teaching Duxian English numbers is just a way of repetition. In Duxian's case, it is obvious that interlanguage acquisition is at work, as the example listed before "你怎么不说 catch me 呢" (Why don't you say catch me?). This demonstrates a common phenomenon noted by Brown & Eisterhole(2004) that "people learning a given language all tend to make the same errors" (p.84). It is an error because this sentence does not belong to any language. It is common because every beginner is possible to make it. However, there is no need for parents to worry about this kind of error, because it is just shows what children

learn and how they learn. The more second language appear in these combination sentences, the better they learn.

Except for the starting age at which English was first taught, Gong Zihao's case is somewhat similar to Duxian's case. The similarities shared by those two families are parents do not have enough time to teach children English; they used similar methods for English exposure including English songs, programs, simple dialogues and so on; their experience gave us similar suggestion parents should start to teach children English at early age. Beside, Zihao's case proves that applying bilingual education at home can help children do better in the future. He has more confidence and feels advantage in learning English because he knows he has learned more English than others. In the author's opinion, this is just like the "cognitive development" mentioned by Piaget. Children's understanding of the world comes first. Zihao's cognition spontaneously developed through the process of learning English by interaction with his parents. His view of the world surrounding him and his superiority in English developed while his language is being developed.

CHAPTER 4

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

From the chapter reviewing the literature of bilingual education and the chapter conducting case studies, the author of this thesis comes to the following conclusion: it is possible to begin an efficient bilingual education at home. Through multimedia methods and activities conducted between children and parents, children can acquire English easily and unconsciously. The author will review the reasons in the following part.

First of all, parents have the ability of applying bilingual education at home. According to Liu's (2006) definition of bilingual parenting, parents can use the second language as well as their native language to communicate with their children in a natural way. Nowadays, many Chinese parents go to colleges and have studied English for almost ten years. They have the ability to communicate with their children in English at home. Even if parents can not speak English as well as native English speakers, they have the ability to improve themselves before they apply bilingual education at home. In addition, children themselves are good language learners. First, children are in the golden age of learning language. According to Lennerberg's Critical Age Hypothesis, there is a certain period during which children can acquire language easily and better than people in other ages. After this period, the ability of acquiring language declines.

Secondly, children are born with ability learn language. It is posited by Chomsky that human are born with a Language Acquisition Device. This term means a special biological mechanism in brain which enable children acquire more than one language and learn a second language better than people in other ages (Tricia, 2004). In this situation, parents who conduct a small amount of English input will realize children's perfect English output (Liu, 2006).

What's more, many advantages of bilingual education encourage parents to apply it at home. According to Baker (2004), owning two languages can improve learners' ability of communication, broaden their minds, raise their self-esteem and so on (Liu, 2006). In addition, based on Vygotsky's theory of cognitive development, children's thought, language and reasoning process can be developed through social interaction with others, especially parents (Ken, 2003). With this in mind, role of parents in the process of children's language acquisition is very crucial.

Since it is possible for parents to apply bilingual education at home, the author of this thesis has some recommendations for parents on how to apply bilingual education at home. According to the previous case studies and the case studies conducted by the authors, there are several suggestions as follow.

First, there should be a certain amount of English immersion. Parents in the case studies all try their best to expose their children to English. Although, they are all very busy, they conduct many activities to enlarge the input of English. No matter how much English is instructed, children can acquire a certain amount of it through parents' endeavor on common experience such as conversation, games, reading, etc.

Second, parents should create an easy environment for children to acquire English. Multi-activities are better than formal teaching methods. According to Krashen's theories of second language acquisition, children acquire language when they are in a natural situation. It is better for parents to provide some daily activities to arouse children's interesting motivate them, reduce their anxiety and so on. Such activities include talking casually in English, telling English stories, learning English songs, watching English movies, and so forth. Parents also can create some activities themselves, such as the method of teaching numbers in Duxian's case. In a word, a natural environment similar as the environment children acquire their first language is more important.

Finally, parents should pay more attention to the interaction with their children when teaching children English at home. According to Vygosky's theory, interactions between parents and children enable children to develop their cognition including their language (Sólrún, 2008). From this theory, it is easy to find that bilingual education not only enable children language ability, but also cultivate children's observation of the world surrounding them. Bilingual education is more than just speaking two languages, it also provides development of thoughts, view of the world and so on. Therefore, parents should create activities involves children and themselves in stead of one-way teaching, like the most formal courses in school do.

From what is discussed above, the author of this thesis wants to give parents who want to apply bilingual education at home a general idea of bilingual education. The author also wants to provide several recommendations to help them in applying

bilingual education at home. The limitation of this thesis might be that the teaching activities conducted in the process of bilingual education offered here are not comprehensive. The reason is that just several case studies cannot show the whole pictures of bilingual education at home and that several theories show here, though valid, must be carried out in context. Therefore, parents in average families have to be creative in designing their own methods based on their own situations. Understanding some of the theories, and studies shown in this work will help them to achieve great success in bring a bilingual education into their children's home environment.

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Appendix 1

Guiding Questions for Interviews

1. How old is your child?
2. When did you start bilingual teaching to teach your child? From the birth of your child or after one or two years?
3. What is your purpose of teaching your child in two languages?
4. How do you apply bilingual education? What methods do you use, such as telling story, singing English songs? Or just talking with your child in English?
5. How often do you speak English to your child? How many hours a day?
6. Who plays more important role in bilingual teaching in your family, father or mother?
7. Do you get some good results?
8. What frustration did you have? How did you get through it?
9. Could you give some suggestions to other parents who want to apply bilingual education in their families?