



Praxis für
Stimm- und Sprachtherapie

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Short information:
Multilingualism and
related developmental
speech and
language disorders

MULTILINGUISM AND RELATED DEVELOPMENTAL SPEECH AND LANGUAGE DISORDERS

Insecurity in the use of language, poor vocabulary, faulty sentence construction, poor knowledge of grammar, poor reading and writing skills, limited joy to speak, impaired comprehension, isolation – the above and many more symptoms can be observed in children and adolescents who grow up in a multilingual environment and who have not had the chance to acquire at least one language completely.

Some scientists refer to above symptoms list as “incomplete language acquisition”. What is meant is the phenomenon, that children, whose mother tongue originates from another language than the one spoken in the environment they are living in, often do not possess sufficient knowledge of their native language as well as of the language of their environment. This leads to immense problems as regards education and working life.

This language disability has to be seen separately from other language disorders, which require speech and language therapy and are due to difficulties in language acquisition. (L. Jedik, 2001, University of Munich). Here it is not about children who perfectly master their mother tongue and now experience transitory difficulties in acquiring the language of their environment. These children described above experience disabilities in both languages.

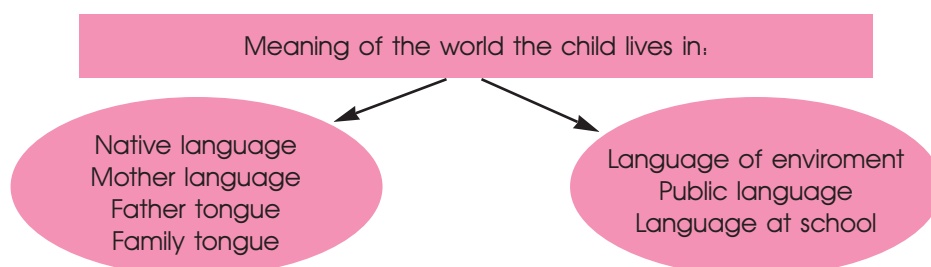
A SPEECH AND LANGUAGE ASSESSMENT OF BOTH LANGUAGES shows in most cases:

- limited vocabulary in both languages
- problems as regards the understanding of words, sentences and texts in both languages
- insufficient acquisition of grammar in both languages
- low joy to speak

The promotion of one language with the help of speech and language therapy as well as the consultation of the parents as regards the other language are basic means for the development of both languages.

To be able to acquire the language of their environment sufficiently, the children must have sufficient knowledge of their mother tongue.

These language deficits are caused by the fact that the mother tongue has been neglected at home, in the kindergarten and at school. To neglect the mother tongue never helps with the acquisition of the language of the environment. Often families try to speak more of the language of their environment to speed up the learning process. However, both languages have to become of relevance to the children, also to allow for the emergence of an interest in learning and the joy to use languages and to speak. None of the languages must be ignored!



BILINGUALISM IS A CHANCE!

Normally, a child in a bilingual surrounding easily acquires the second language – and this even better and more complete than later at school. Bilingual children often are more articulate and fluent than monolingual children.

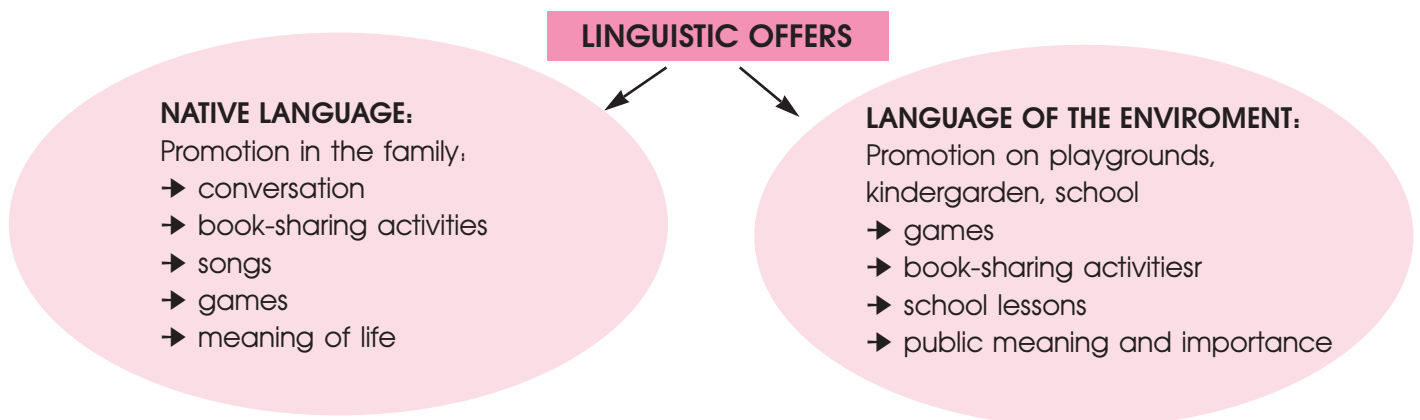
ADVICE FOR MULTI-LINGUISTIC LANGUAGE ACQUISITION:

- If both parents speak different languages, each parent should consistently use their mother tongue when talking to the child.
- If both parents speak the same language, then this language should become the family language. This happens naturally in most cases. When talking to babies for instance, most people automatically use their mother tongue as emotional information and not facts are conveyed.
- If parents are bilingual, a family language should be determined when sitting together at the table or playing, so that everybody understands each other and no family member is isolated. It is advisable to choose as family language the language that is not the one of the environment, because the child learns the language of the environment in a natural contact with the environment anyway (playmates, playgrounds, nurseries, preschool, school). In this way a family language that is foreign to the environment represents the necessary balance.
- If a child acquires both languages at the same time, it is important that these two languages are equally spoken and listened to. For instance in the case of a Turkish mother who looks after the child all day long and a German father who is only at home over the weekends, (all of them living in Germany), the German friends and environment of the child will create the balance between the two languages.
- The child has to be aware of the fact that the second language can be useful to him/her. A child living in Germany with his Spanish speaking mother will only see that the family, grandparents and other children do speak this language as well when travelling to Spain. It is at this point that the child can see the usefulness of being bilingual and will find it more joyful to use the two languages.
- Also the social acceptance of the language plays an important part concerning the willingness of the child to speak this language publicly. If the child gets the impression its parents try to hide their origins due to social disapproval, then the child will refuse his / her native language. To promote bilingualism it has to be accepted as such.

MULTILINGUISTIC DEVELOPMENT – MORE CHANCES? – HIGHER RISKS?

The child needs more linguistic offers in both languages!

Children who get the chance to acquire two or more languages possess clear advantages! Normally, they acquire these languages more profoundly than they would later at school. Simultaneously, these children have to manage a lot more. Two languages have to be acquired. This means, it is necessary to provide the child with a comprehensive linguistic offer in his/her native language (e.g. Turkish, Greek, Spanish etc.) as well as the language of his / her environment (e.g. German, English etc.)



Further information about this topic: Department for Speech and Language Disorders, Prof. Dr. M. Grohnfeld, Department Multilingualism: Dr. Vassilla Triarchi-Herrmann