

# **BILINGUAL FIRST LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

**GENESEE & NICOLADIS (2005)**

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# CONTENTS

Introduction to BFLA

Development fo two languages simultaneously

Morphosyntax

Lexicon

~~Phonology~~

Communicative competence

Code-mixing

Conclusions

# INTRODUCTION TO BFLA

- **Simultaneous VS Successive BFLA**
- Cut off point at 2 years old (DeHouwer 1995) → varies from researcher to researcher
- This paper focuses on simultaneous bilingual acquisition

There are theoretical and empirical reasons for distinguishing between simultaneous and successive forms of bilingual acquisition → neuro-cognitive state or maturational level of the brain is different!



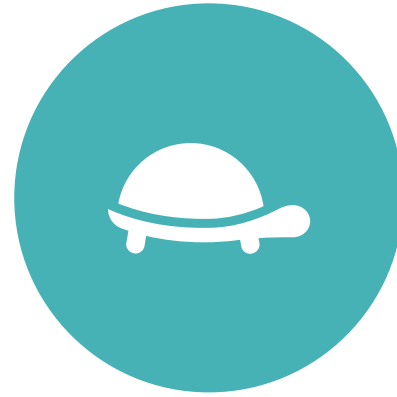
# BILINGUALISM

- Bilingual skills reside on a **continuum**
- **Being bilingual does not mean that one is equally skilled in both languages.**
- **EXAMPLE:** *a child in the US, acquiring Vietnamese and English, might have superior language skills in Vietnamese compared with English. Over time that balance might change as the child becomes more embedded in the U.S. educational system, for example, her English skills might become stronger than her skills in Vietnamese.*
- Bilingual child's skills can vary **by language domain** (i.e., syntax, semantics, lexicon, phonology, and pragmatics)
- Knowledge might not be equally distributed (able to label an object in one language but not in the other)

When bilinguals are said to have skills in one language but not in the other, they are often referred to as having (language) dominance in one linguistic system!



A MAJOR QUESTION IN BFLA RESEARCH: IS THE LEARNING PATH DIFFERENT FROM THAT OF MONOLINGUALS?



IS IT SLOWER?



ARE THERE DIFFERENT PATTERNS OF DEVELOPMENT?

HOWEVER, comparisons between simultaneous bilinguals and monolinguals have real world consequences!

- STUDY OF BFLA STARTED WITH DIARIES OF RESEARCHERS OBSERVING THEIR OWN CHILDREN'S BILINGUAL ACQUISITION

### Ronjat (1913)

- Son Louis' acquisition of French and German
- Showed remarkable progress in both languages
- Each parent spoke only one language to him
- **No confusion of two languages**

### Leopold (1949)

- Daughter Hildegard's acquisition of English & German
- Each parent spoke one language to her
- A stage where she used words from both languages in the same utterance
- **Confusing the two languages?**
- **Functioning as a monolingual?**



Does BFLA strain a child's language learning capacity?



Does BFLA lead to delays and impaired language development?



Bilinguals will be socio-cultural misfits (Diebold, 1968)



At risk for academic failure (Macnamara 1966)



Might result in impaired cognitive development (Bialystok 2001)



We see considerable heterogeneity among BFLA learners

There are numerous factors that can affect BFLA:

1) Same factors as monolingual learners

2) Bilingual specific factors

- Language combinations
- Differences in amount
- Consistency
- Context of language exposure

# THE DEVELOPMENT OF TWO LANGUAGES SIMULTANOUSLY

- Unitary language system hypothesis

“In the **first stage** the child has **one lexical system** which includes words from both languages. ..., in this stage the language development of the bilingual child seems to be like the language development of the monolingual child... In the **second stage**, the child distinguishes **two different lexicons but** applies the **same syntactic rules** to both languages. In the **third stage** the child speaks two languages **differentiated both in lexicon and syntax...**”

Volterra and Taeschner (1978, p. 312)

# THE INTERACTIONAL DUAL SYSTEMS MODEL



This model assumes bilinguals develop distinct linguistic systems for each language



Those two systems interact → interdependent



Interdependence could accelerate and/or decelerate speech and language development relative to that of monolinguals (Paradis et al., 2011)

- Bialystok (2001) noted a **cognitive advantage** in terms of executive control functions, such as activation, selection, attention, inhibition, and organization of information (problem solving, planning) in bilinguals compared with monolinguals
- Gildersleeve et al. (2008) however, in a group of Spanish-English bilingual 3-year-olds found that overall consonant **accuracy** (how well children produce speech sounds) was **lower** in bilinguals than in monolinguals.

“Despite the acquisition of two languages, bilingual children do not appear to be ‘remarkably delayed nor remarkably advanced’ relative to that of monolingual children” (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1996, p. 264)

- DO THE TWO LANGUGES DEVELOP AUTONOMOUSLY OR INTERDEPENDENTLY ?



**Interdependent development**  
= one language influencing the development of the other language

- Would result in different patterns or rates of development from monolingual children
- Research compares the development of bilingual children to that of monolingual children acquiring the same languages



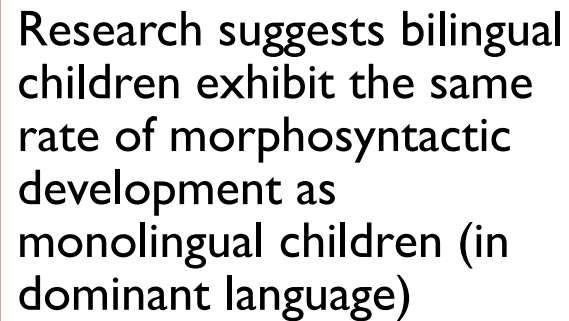

# MORPHOSYNTAX

Unitary language system  
hypothesis and morphosyntax  
in BFLA

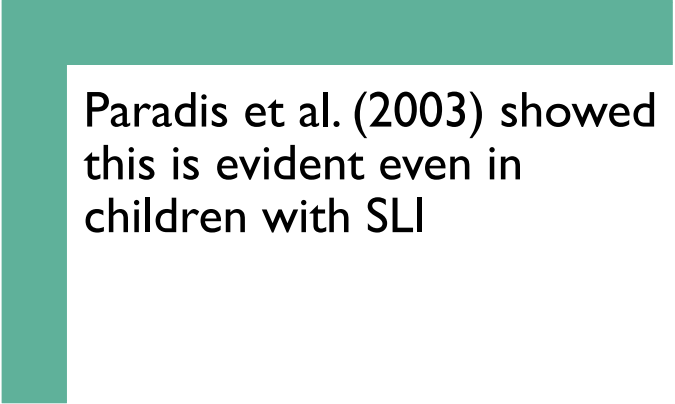
- *BFLA learners acquire language specific properties of target languages early, similar to same-aged monolinguals*

## Paradis & Genesee (1996)

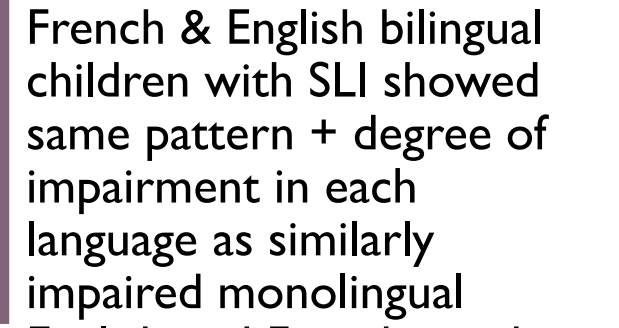
- 2–3-year-old French and English bilingual children
- Used finite verb forms earlier in French than in English
- Used subject pronouns in French only with finite verbs, in English with both finite and non-finite verbs
- Placed negatives after lexical verbs in French (“n’aime **pas**”) but before lexical verbs in English (“do **not** like”)
- **Same patterns as their monolingual peers**



Research suggests bilingual children exhibit the same rate of morphosyntactic development as monolingual children (in dominant language)



Paradis et al. (2003) showed this is evident even in children with SLI



French & English bilingual children with SLI showed same pattern + degree of impairment in each language as similarly impaired monolingual English and French speaking children of same age

- There is evidence for **cross-linguistic transfer** of morphosyntactic features from one language into the other


#### Döpke (2000)

- English and German bilingual children used VO word order much more in all clauses in German than native speakers of German
- German uses both VO and OV, while English uses VO
- Overgeneralization of the VO order

- **Language dominance** as a factor influencing the cross-linguistic transfer

#### Matthews and Yip (2003)

- Cantonese and English bilingual children
- Asynchronous development of the two languages as a factor
- Specific structure (e.g. relative clauses) normally acquired earlier in one language (Cantonese) will be transferred into the language where this structure is normally acquired later (English)



Children might be more likely to incorporate structures from their dominant into their weaker language

# LEXICON



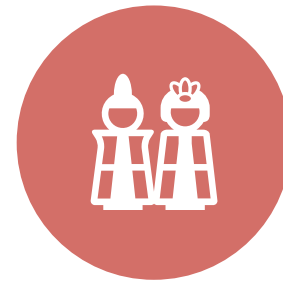
Bilingual children produce first words at same age as monolingual - 12 months (Genesee 2003)



Other milestones in lexical acquisition are also similar



Rates of vocabulary acquisition within the range of monolinguals (Pearson et al 1993)



The distribution of lexical categories similar to monolinguals (Nicoladis 2001)

# MUTUAL EXCLUSIVITY PRINCIPLE

= an assumption that new words refer to new things

- Assumed that monolingual lexical acquisition is guided by this principle
- **Translation equivalents** acquisition violate this principle

## Pearson et al. (1995)

- Reported bilinguals producing translation equivalents as soon as they begin to speak
- Their number increases significantly after the age 1;5
- Translation equivalents violate mutual exclusivity, suggesting that children have distinct lexical systems



# PHONOLOGY



# COMMUNICATIVE COMPETENCE

Bilingual children face same **communication challenges** as monolingual children:

Production of target-like language forms that are comprehensible to others

Getting one's meaning across when language acquisition is incomplete

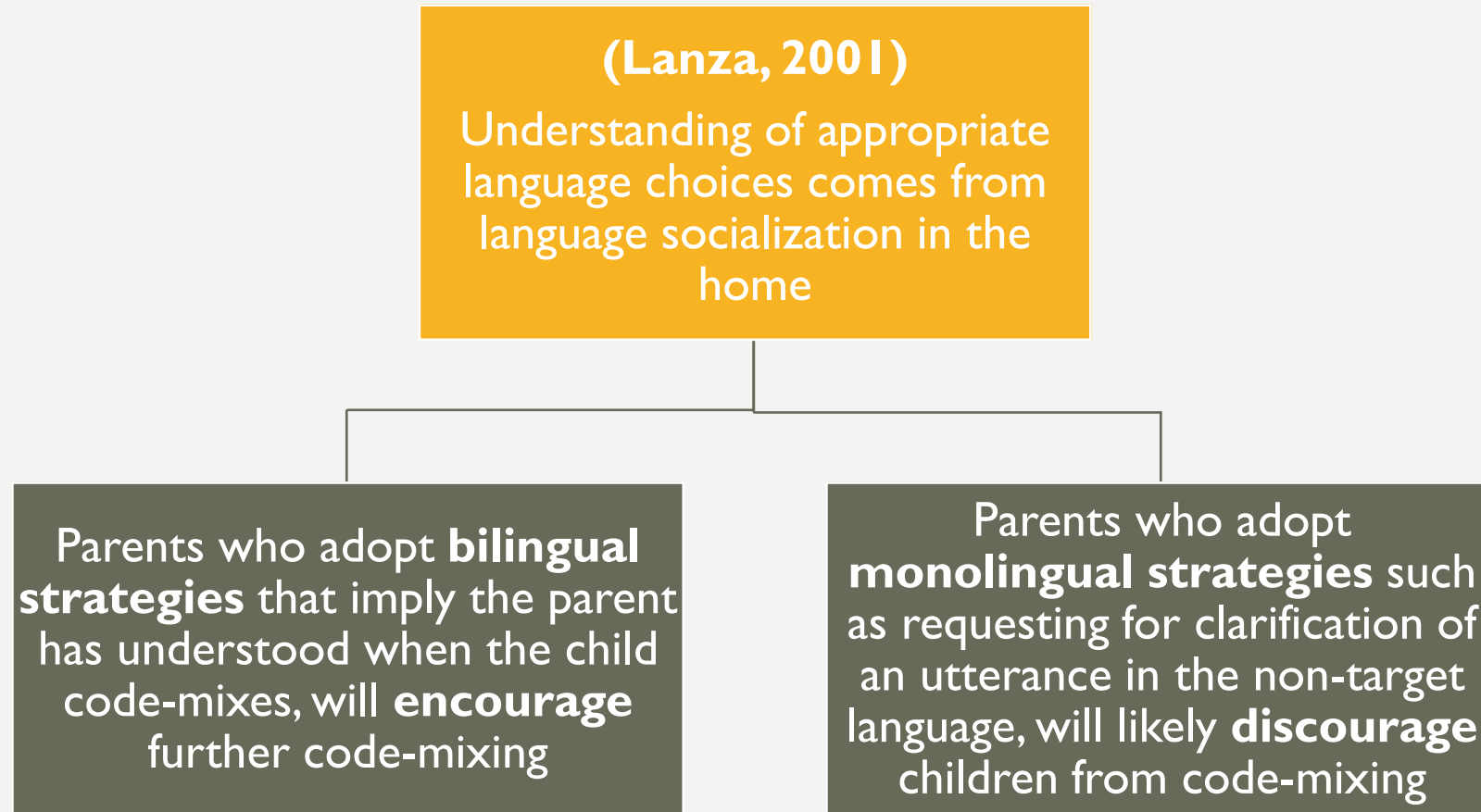
Use of language in socially appropriate ways

However, the requirements of doing that in two languages exceed those that monolingual children face!

- **Making appropriate language choices** (w/different interlocutors) is fundamental to bilingual communicative competence
- BFL learners shown to possess such competence:
  - Able to use the two languages with correct parent who speaks it during the one- and two-word phase (Nicoladis & Genesee, 1996)
  - Adjust their language use when interacting with unfamiliar interlocutors (Genesee, Boivin & Nicoladis, 1996)



How do young bilingual children know which language is appropriate?



- **HOWEVER**, language socialization cannot explain children's performance with unfamiliar interlocutors where prior experience and knowledge are lacking!




### **Comeau, Genesse & Lapaquette (2003) :**

- An unfamiliar interlocutor spoke with children in 3 sessions
- Interlocutor changed the rate of mixing from 15% to 40% and back to 15%
- Children were able to make **appropriate language choices + match rate of mixing**

#### **RESULT:**

Bilingual children can track language choices by their interlocutors and can alter their language choices accordingly (by changing languages in the turn after the interlocutor does)

**Responsive to feedback** about appropriateness of their language choices



Children always translated utterance after unfamiliar interlocutor asked for clarification: "What?" (Comeau & Genesee, 2001)



Wouldn't change languages if reason for breakdown in communication was for other reasons

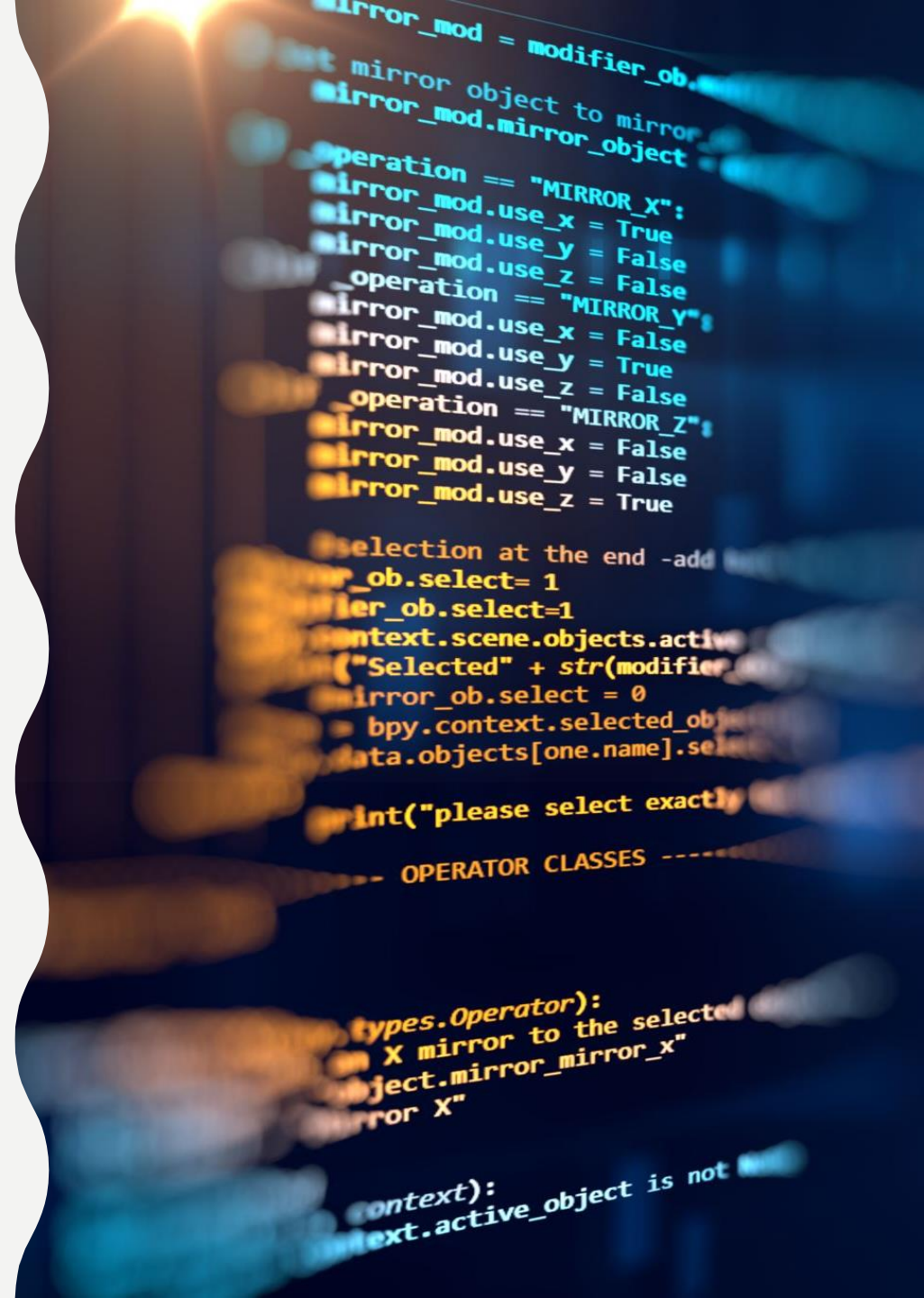


This suggests children can **use feedback as cues** for the appropriacy of their language choices

# CODE-MIXING

- 1) INTRA-utterance mixing = use of elements from two languages in the same utterance
- 2) INTER-utterance mixing = use of elements from two languages in one conversation

- Can be of phonological, lexical or morphosyntactic in nature
  - Adult bilinguals often code-mix, for specific purposes
  - **BUT!** Child code-mixing often seen as a sign of **confusion and incompetence**



# GRAMMATICAL PROPERTIES

## OF CODE MIXING

Children tend to mix languages in a part of an utterance where both grammars are in agreement and fit well together

The main difference from adults is the still developing (nature of the grammatical constraints will change)

Grammatical constraints in code-mixing reflect the child's level of grammatical development

Code-mixing, even in child speech, is **grammatically constrained**

# FUNCTIONAL PROPERTIES

WHY DO BILINGUAL CHILDREN **CODE-MIX?**

There are multiple explanations:

- Gap-filling
- Context Sensitivity
- Pragmatic and Symbollic Functions
- ...and more



# GAP-FILLING

Code-mixing serves the purpose of filling in the gaps in the child's knowledge

- It's a way for a child whose languages are **still developing** to express themselves using all the resources it has
- More likely to code-mix when using the **less proficient** language
- Lexical knowledge in both languages is rarely equivalent

## **EXAMPLE:**

- a child might use a word from English when speaking French, because it doesn't know the appropriate word in French

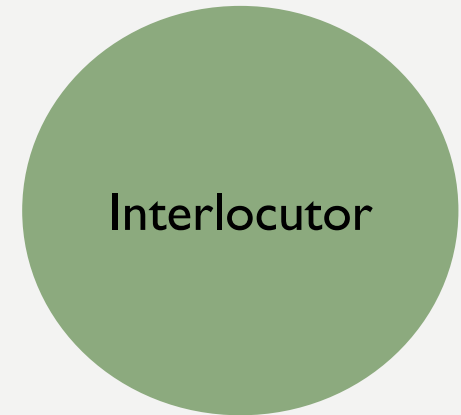
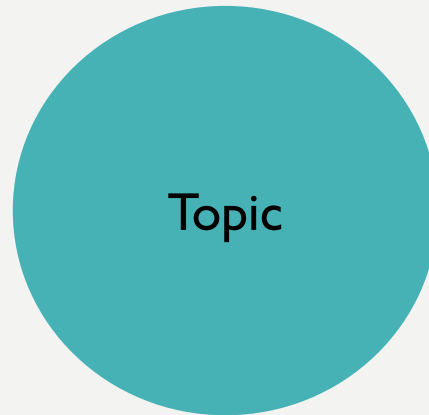
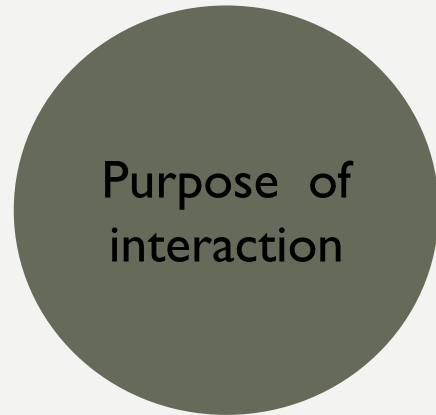
# GRAMMATICAL CODE-MIXING

- Grammatical gap-filling shows the same pattern (dominant language filling in the gaps in knowledge of the less proficient language)
- Using syntax knowledge of their dominant language to **bootstrap** into the grammar of the less proficient language
- Interestingly, when code-mixing grammar, children use functional words and inflectional morphemes from their dominant language with lexical words of the less proficient one and NOT THE OTHER WAY AROUND



# CONTEXT SENSITIVITY

CHILDREN'S CODE-MIXING SENSITIVE TO CONTEXT:



## **Interlocutor**

- in one parent one language homes, children tend to use each parent's preferred language with that parent more than with the other parent

## **Situational factors**

- Vihman 1998 concluded their 2 children's code mixing was sensitive to the presence of parents

# PRAGMATIC AND SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS

- Code mixing also associated with a variety of pragmatic functions and symbolic-identity reasons

**Lanvers (2001)**  
German-English speaking children used language to quote a parent or to make a topic shift



**Vihman(1998)**  
Estonian-English speaking children spoke both languages when playing because of dual identity, but Estonian prevailed when talking to parents who were the primary sources of input in that language

**Pan(1995)**  
Mandarin-English speaking children switched more often than parents, because they have different identity related to those languages - the parents tried to maintain their Chinese identity in an English-speaking country

- Phenomenon typical in bilinguals
- Examples include:
  - Deletion of grammatical markers (e.g. plural)
  - Decreased number of different words (i.e. speakers use the same group of words over and over)
  - Increased number of false starts, pauses, hesitations
- Unfortunately, these characteristics often are similar to a true **language disorder**, but shouldn't be confused!

# LANGUAGE LOSS/ LANGUAGE ATTRITION

**Language loss** occurs when the speech and language features of the first language are no longer utilized by the speaker because he or she hears and uses less of the first language over time

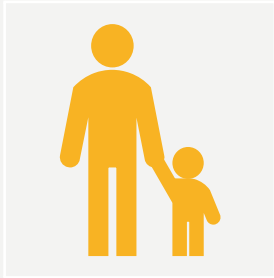
# CONCLUSIONS

## SIMILARITIES vs DIFFERENCES

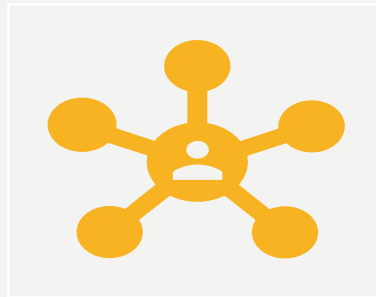
between monolingual and bilingual first language acquisition

- Bilingual children reach milestones within the same age span as monolinguals (e.g. first words, rate of vocab growth...)
- Much of the milestones depend on biological and cognitive maturation

- Differences in vocabulary size
- Bilingual children hear less of either language
- Bilingual children acquire additional skills to manage two languages for communication
- Differences due to transfer (dominant language influence, filling in the gaps in their knowledge...)



**BFLA** is an active process that draws on the linguistic, communicative and cognitive resources of the developing child (Genesee 2003a)



**BFL learners'** resourcefulness evident in:

- Code-mixing to fill lexical gaps
- Their transfer of morphosyntactic structures from one language to another in grammatically constrained ways
- In their competence in managing their two languages for communicative purposes



# THE END



THANK YOU FOR YOUR ATTENTION!