



## POSUDEK OPONENTA BAKALÁŘSKÉ PRÁCE

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Studijní obor: **Anglický jazyk a literatura (dvouoborové studium)**

Název práce: **Stereotypes about bilingualism**

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### **Short characteristics of the thesis**

The thesis presents a case study of 10 children who grow up in eight different families in Europe (two of the families have two children) and who either due to their upbringing or family structure are bi- or multi-lingual. Specifically, the thesis focuses on children who classify as simultaneous bilinguals, that is, they have been learning two (or more) languages from birth (or at least prior to age three).

Drawing on the field data collected from and about the children, the study aims to demystify some of the stereotypes commonly associated with bilingualism and bilingual upbringing. The stereotypes under discussion include: language acquisition of bilingual children (i.e., bilingual children do not acquire any of the two languages), socialization (i.e., bilingual children do not belong to any of the two cultures), speech production (i.e., bilingual children may very often stutter), competency skills (i.e., bilingual children are excellent translators).

The theoretical input introduces bilingualism and its global scope, a number of established classifications of bilingualism, as well as a presentation of selected views on bilingual upbringing and its outcomes.

Empirically, the thesis claims to have collected questionnaire data from the children's parents enquiring about upbringing strategies and language acquisition of their children. Collection of speech recordings of casual interactions in which bilingual children spoke with their family members is also reported.

Including the List of References, the thesis totals 52 pages, no Appendix nor an electronic copy of the data reported on are included.

### **Overall assessment**

It is most notable that the author managed to engage with a number of participants who were willing to share their experiences and contribute to the project. Collection of authentic data forms an essential part of any applied linguistic study therefore the combination of questionnaire surveys and speech recordings was certainly appropriate. In its final draft, however, the thesis has failed to capitalise on its potential. More seriously, the analysis undertaken is of an overall poor standard. The main shortcomings include:

1. The enquiry into the actual research question is delimited very vaguely. The author sets out to explore four stereotypes that are commonly associated with bilingualism and bilingual upbringing. It is, however, nowhere stated on what



- grounds the author selected the four stereotypes addressed. Considering the amount of literature and richness of the debate informing this topic, grounding of the four selected stereotypes is more than desirable;
2. A grave omission is the absence of methodology and of any evidence documenting the questionnaire design, the process of collecting speech samples and the ethics of observations. It is surprising that while the author clearly declares to have used all of these processes, she fails to document them in the thesis. This is a great shame, especially as the data reported provide such a rich material and a clearer research design could have induced a more informed analysis and interpretation of the data collected;
  3. The description of the research subjects is not very systematic. Table 1, p. 15, could have been expanded to include more sociolinguistic categories (age, place of birth, residency, schooling information, etc.) and details on the observations undertaken (e.g., length of observation, what kinds of interactions, etc.). The lack of systematicity is also manifested throughout the text when the research subjects are introduced into the arguments on a rather anecdotal basis. This for example applies to Oliver, who at one point of the thesis gets excluded from the analysis as he is suspected by his mother to have a hearing problem;
  4. Zero presentation of data from which the pie charts and claims surrounding these have been produced. For example, on p. 39 the author states, "Figure 7 illustrates that four of the examined children fully understand only one culture, mostly the culture where they have lived most of their lives. Five of the children understand both cultures without difficulty and recognize the differences between them". On what grounds has the understanding of cultures been determined? In other words, what questions were posed in the questionnaire to enable such conclusions?
  5. The individual sub-sections – each addressing one of the four stereotypes – have been developed to differing degrees of detail in that they vary considerably in length. While the first stereotype spans across 16 pages, the third one ("Bilingual children may very often stutter") is discussed only on one page. Despite that, the author concludes on p. 50 that "The stereotype that bilingual children stutter was proven completely wrong". A very strong claim in the context of the analysis undertaken and data presented.
  6. The framing of the individual stereotypes discussed and the quality of the arguments made in support of a particular position seem to be problematic. For example, on p. 37 the author frames the discussion of the cultural belonging (Stereotype 2) as follows:

"Very often people think about bilinguals as someone who has no identity and no cultural attachment. Language has no power whatsoever to influence a person enough to make them feel that they lack any identity. Factors which can make an individual feels lacking identity may be for example the city where the individual was born, environment, family heritage, friends, tradition, or bad memories. Of course, language is also an important influencer because when one does not understand the language, one cannot fully understand the culture and people from that country. But every single person identifies with something".

This introduction creates a conflicting starting point for any sustained argument to be made. The opening also demonstrates that the final text would have benefited from more diligent editing.



Overall and despite all of my reservations, I have a great appreciation of the author's initiative to address such a living issue and report on some of the realities observed. I also value the multi-lingual interlinear translations and the author's skill to reproduce data originating in diverse cultural and language backgrounds.

Areas for discussion:

- 1) Please address the key points raised (i.e., methodology and data analysis)
- 2) Discuss the implications of your study in the context of bilingual upbringing and education in Europe.

Práci **doporučuji** k obhajobě.

Navrhovaná klasifikace: **dobře**

30. 05. 2019

Datum

Podpis