



Early Trilingual Language Acquisition of Spanish, English, and French by a Two-Year-Old American Child

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Abstract

Several factors have been shown to be important to trilingual language acquisition and active trilingualism including language exposure (Chevalier, 2015), input load (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021), interlocutor language (Wang, 2008), use of the minority language in the household (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021), and parental language strategies (Ronderos, Castilla-Earls, & Ramos, 2021). This case study investigates the language development of a two-year-old American toddler who has grown up since birth in a trilingual language environment of Spanish, English, and French. The child's language use was observed in his natural environment from age 2;0 to age 2;4. Particular attention was given to the influence of language exposure patterns and parental language strategies on trilingual language development. The findings indicate that the child is growing up with rich exposure to all three languages and that his parents are following practices that promote language development. Additionally, the findings suggest that he is developing active trilingual language abilities, though he does seem to favor English over French and Spanish for spontaneous language production.

Keywords case study, language acquisition, multilingualism, trilingual, trilingualism, active trilingualism, language exposure, parental language strategies

1. Introduction

Being bilingual or even multilingual is common in many parts of the world. How languages are acquired or learned varies greatly. Language acquisition can result in various levels including native-like, competent, or working knowledge (Barnes, 2006), and it can result in active trilingualism in which the individual can actively use all languages in question or passive trilingualism in which the individual can understand but not necessarily produce all languages (Chevalier, 2015). There are multiple contextual factors that influence trilingual language acquisition such as language exposure (Chevalier, 2015), input load (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021), interlocutor language (Wang, 2008), grandparent language (Braun, 2012), and parental language strategies (Quay, 2012; Ronderos, Castilla-Earls, & Ramos, 2021).

1.1. Influence of Language Exposure Patterns

Language exposure encompasses such elements as home languages (Quay, 2012), number of sources and exposure to language (Chevalier, 2015),

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interlocutors and interactions (Wang, 2008), and status of the language (Chevalier, 2012). The amount of exposure can affect the level of trilingualism achieved (Chevalier, 2015).

A rich exposure with consistent input to a language can promote active language use (Döpke, 1992) with consistent output from a child (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021). Conversely, a dearth of language input in the minority language can impede that language's lexical development (Mieszkowska, Luniewska, Kolak, Kacprzak, Wodniecka, & Haman, 2017).

The language or languages used in the home, both child-directed language (Quay, 2012) and parent-to-parent language (Barnes, 2006), can greatly affect language development. Speaking the minority language in the home has been shown to promote active language use (Chevalier, 2015) even when a bilingual context is provided by caregivers (Quay, 2012).

Not using the majority (community) language in the home has shown to have a positive impact on active multilingual development by children (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021). In her study, Chevalier (2012) found that the child who did not use the community language at home developed active trilingualism, while the child who did use the community language at home with one of her parents showed a low level of active trilingualism.

It is not just parents, however, that play a role in language development. Grandparents can also play an important role in language acquisition (Cantone, 2019; Zhan, 2021). Although trilingual children will not always conform to the monolingual code of grandparents (Zhan, 2021), grandparents who do not speak the community language can serve as motivation for trilingual language practices (Braun, 2012; Braun & Cline, 2010) as well as an important source of home language exposure and input (Braun, 2012).

1.2. *Influence of Parental Language Strategies*

Parental language practices also play a role in trilingual language acquisition and can contribute to language maintenance of home language (Ronderos, Castilla-Earls, & Ramos, 2021). One popular practice is the One-parent-one-language (OPOL) approach in which a child will acquire one language from one parent, a second language from another parent, and a third language from the community (Chevalier, 2015). Consistency with OPOL seems to produce output in children that is consistent with the language of the parent (Chevalier, 2015; Wang, 2008). However, this strategy is not always successful, and children often develop varying levels of multilingualism (Chevalier, 2015; Döpke, 1992). It seems that only speaking may not be enough for the development of active language abilities, and if a parent does not insist on the child using the language, the result may be passive language ability (Volterra & Taeschner, 2007).

Another practice that affects language acquisition is parental discourse style (Chevalier, 2015; Döpke, 1992). An instructive approach to communication and interaction seems to support language development (Chevalier, 2015). That is, parents who are aware of their role as language instructors seem to enhance the language acquisition of their children.



Döpke (1992) found in one instance that a bilingual child was more apt to use English, her father's native language (NL), and not German, her mother's NL. In the study, the child's father used more child-centered discourse and played, read, and sang frequently, seeming more cognizant of his function as language teacher. Her mother mainly employed commands and refusals. In this case, child-centered language appears to have promoted language acquisition as it was correlated with more accelerated language growth and increased language production.

1.3. *Significance of this Study*

Although the study of trilingual language acquisition and development has received more attention over the years (e.g., Albin & Gershkoff-Stove, 2016; Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021; Brito, Sebastián-Gallés, & Barr, 2015), it is still not as robust as the study of monolingual or bilingual language acquisition and development (Mieszkowska, Luniewska, Kolak, Kacprzak, Wodniecka, & Haman, 2017). While there are similarities between bilingualism and trilingualism, trilingualism is not equivalent to bilingualism (Brito, Sebastián-Gallés, & Barr, 2015) and should be investigated as a phenomenon in its own right (Braun & Cline, 2014; Wang, 2008).

This study examines the early trilingual language acquisition of David (all names are pseudonyms), a two-year-old American child who has had consistent exposure to three languages since birth: Spanish, English, and French. Even though the circumstances, details, and factors of multilingualism vary greatly by individual, this topic is significant because multilingualism is a reality for children the world over. This case study is grounded on several questions related to David's nascent language development. What are the language exposure patterns that David experiences on a daily basis? What are the parental discourse strategies used by his parents? How do they influence his trilingual language acquisition? Is his language development indicative of future active or passive trilingualism?

2. Methodology

In this case study, David's language exposure patterns were examined through his daily interactions with his father, his mother, his older sibling, and his grandparents. Parental discourse strategies were also examined from his interactions with his father and mother. David was videotaped nearly every day in naturalistic settings. Each video lasted from two minutes to 15 minutes. Audio recordings of David's language were also made using the voice memos program on a smartphone. Finally, field notes were taken when spontaneous moments did not allow for the camera or audio recorder to capture the language incident. Daily journal entries were made to describe the researcher's observations, reflections, thoughts, and perceptions.

David is the middle child of three. He was born in the United States and has been naturally acquiring English, Spanish, and French since birth. He traveled to Honduras as a baby (age 0;6 to 0;8). Other than his one trip out of

the country, he has remained in the United States. David was age 2;0 when the study began.

David has had exposure to several language environments including the home (English, Spanish, and French), his paternal grandparents' home (English), church (English and Portuguese), and his maternal grandparents' home (Spanish). His mother is 29 years old. She was born in Honduras. She is a native Spanish speaker with limited English proficiency. David's father is 32 years old. He is a native English speaker who speaks English, Spanish, and French.

The family has three children in total including the oldest son (8;8), David (2;0), and the youngest son (0;4). David's older brother, Antonio, is a native Spanish speaker born in Honduras. He speaks both Spanish and English. His paternal grandmother is a native English speaker. His paternal grandfather is a native Dutch and English speaker. His maternal grandparents are both native Spanish speakers.

David's father speaks exclusively in French with David. He mainly speaks in English with his older sibling but does use Spanish at times. His mother speaks mostly Spanish but usually includes some basic English in her communication with David. His mother speaks Spanish and some limited English with his older sibling. Together, David's mother and father generally use Spanish to communicate and interact with each other. David's paternal grandparents speak only English with him and with his parents. David's maternal grandparents speak only Spanish with him and with his parents. Speaking another language beside the community language is viewed by all as a positive and something to be valued; All the family members are encouraging and supportive of the bilingual and trilingual abilities of the family.

Table 1
Information About the Subject

Child	David
Age	2;0 to 2;4
Data	Video recordings, audio recordings, field notes, journal entries.
Parents Follow OPOL	Yes/No. Father is consistent with OPOL; though the mother consistently uses Spanish, she is prone to use some English in communication
Quantity of Input	Input in all languages. More input from community language (i.e., English) which includes the older sibling and parental grandparents
Parents Communicate in Community Language	No
Array of Sources in Minority Languages	Yes/No. Father is the sole exposure to French. Mother and the older sibling, interactions between mother and father, and interactions with mother's family provide exposure to Spanish

The researcher in this case study was also the father of the subject. The researcher can, therefore, be considered a participant observer in this case



study. While there may be inherent bias in the fact that the researcher is both the observer and parent, as Wang (2008) emphasizes, parents, because they live with their children, have greater access to spontaneous speech and can provide a valuable perspective to the context of language use of their children. This case study used triangulation protocols in that the same linguistic events were examined from multiple points of observation (e.g., observations, field notes, audio, and video recordings). The video recordings were an important component of the data collection for the case study as video offers an effective means for studying those whose linguistic abilities are still developing (Stake, 1995). They also allowed for validation of personal observations and corroboration of consequent analysis.

3. Findings

3.1. Language Exposure Patterns

The language exposure that David received varied greatly by language. While his exposure to French was quite limited, being only that of his father, his exposure to both English and Spanish was quite robust (See Table 2). English was the community language, the language of his paternal grandparents, and the preferred language of his older sibling. Spanish was the language used by his mother, in parent-to-parent communication, in parent-to-older-sibling communication, and the language used by his maternal grandparents and other family members.

Table 2
Sources of Language Exposure

Source of Exposure	Language
Mother → Child	Mostly Spanish, Some English
Father → Child	French
Older Sibling → Child	Mostly English, Some Spanish
Older Sibling ← → Mother	Mostly Spanish, Some English
Older Sibling ← → Father	Mostly English, Some Spanish
Mother ← → Father	Almost All Spanish, Occasional English
Maternal Grandparents → Child	Spanish
Paternal Grandparents → Child	English
Community	English

Language exposure was not always a monolingual event. At times, several interlocutors of various languages spoke with David in the same interaction, providing input in two or three languages. This exposure to multiple languages was seen one day when David (2;4) was at his paternal grandparents' house. He was playing with a homemade goo while seated at the kitchen table. However, it was getting late, and it was time to leave.

Mother: [To David] David, ¿Estás listo? ¿Ya nos vamos?
(David, are you ready? Let's go?)
David: [To Mother] No!
Mother: [To Grandmother] Tell him in English.

- Grandmother: [To David] David, are you ready to go?
 David: [To Grandmother] No, I doh wanna.
 (No, I don't want to.)
 Mother: [To Father] Dile en francés.
 (Tell him in French.)
 Father: [To David] David, t'es pret? On va partir?
 (David, are you ready? Are we going to go?)
 David: [To Father] No!

Here, David heard the interlingual synonyms for “Are you ready?” first in Spanish, then in English, and finally in French. While language exposure from his father and grandparents were monolingual in nature, David's mother, in addition to Spanish, provided some input in English.

These language exposure patterns from his father, grandparents, and mother were the norm, that is, only French from his father, only English from his grandparents, and mostly Spanish with some English from his mother. Typically, the English provided by his mother was only a few basic utterances before switching to Spanish or codemixing by adding a few English words to her Spanish.

One day, for example, David (2;3) and his parents were sitting at the kitchen table looking at ads for the supermarket. His mother asked him if he loved certain foods as she pointed to the pictures. David then found a picture of a rotisserie chicken.

- David: [To Mother and Father. He holds up the ad for both to see]
 Chicken!
 Mother: [To David] ¿Hay chicken allí?
 (Is there chicken there?)
 David: [To Mother] No, chicken est là! [Points to fridge]
 (No, the chicken is there!)
 Mother: [To David] Esto es chicken también. [Points to ad and begins
 singsong] Pollo, pollo, pollo! Diga, “pollo.”
 (This is chicken, too. Chicken, chicken, chicken! Say, “chicken.”)
 Father: [To David] Dis, “poulet.”
 (Say, “chicken.”)
 David: [Points to chicken in newspaper ad] Dat poulet.
 (That's chicken.)
 Father: [To David] Oui! C'est un poulet!
 (Yes! That's a chicken!)
 David: [Smiling, points once again to the picture of the chicken] Poulet!
 (Chicken!)
 Mother: [To David] ¿Y la gallina? ¿Dónde está la gallina?
 (And the hen? Where is the hen?)
 David: [Crosses arms] N'est pas là!
 (It's not there!)
 Father: [To David] Ce n'est pas là? Où est la poule?
 (It's not there? Where is the hen?)
 David: [To Father] Il est là! Ouside! [Points to window]
 (It is there! Outside!)



Here, in the typical exposure pattern, we can see that David received a great deal of exposure to Spanish from his mother, even though she did use some English in the beginning. David only received exposure to French from his father. Interestingly, David responded to both his mother and father with a mixture of French and English.

3.2. Parental Language Strategies

3.2.1. One-Parent-One-Language

David's father was very purposeful in his language practices and strictly adhered to the OPOL approach. All input in the interactions with David was in French. In addition, his father began insisting that David also use French to speak with him. At times, when David spoke in English or Spanish, his father simply repeated the utterance in French. Other times, his father pretended not to understand in an attempt to elicit a response in French. David's father occasionally spoke French to the older sibling, Antonio, when David was present even though he does not speak French. This can be seen one day when David (2;3), his father, and Antonio were playing on the trampoline in the backyard. David seemed frightened when Antonio, who was much taller than David, jumped next to him on the trampoline. Whenever Antonio jumped higher and closer to David, David gave him directives in French.

- David: [To Antonio] Saute pas! Saute pas, Antonio!
(Don't jump! Don't jump, Antonio!)
- Antonio: [To David] Ok, ok. [Continues jumping]
- David: [To Father] Say, "Saute pas, Antonio!"
(Say, "Don't jump, Antonio!")
- Father: [To Antonio] Saute pas, Antonio.
(Don't jump, Antonio.)
- Antonio: [To David] Ok, saute pas, Antonio. [Stops jumping]
(Ok, don't jump, Antonio.)

Here we can see that David started speaking to Antonio in French. David's father also spoke in French. Interestingly, Antonio, who is bilingual in English and Spanish, started to respond and even speak in French to David. He also subsequently started using French to start a game on the trampoline by saying, "Un, deux, trois, commence!" (One, two, three, start!) after hearing it several times from his father.

In general, David's mother provided language input in Spanish, but she did, at times mix English and Spanish. However, because of her limited English proficiency, she often switched to Spanish. One day David (2;1) was trying to open a package of muffin snacks.

- Mother: [To David] Good morning, David.
- David: [Trying to open a snack] hep me.
(help me.)
- Mother: [To David] ¿Qué quieres, cariño?

- David: (What do you want, dear?)
 [To Mother] Abi.
 (Abri.)
 (Open.)
- Mother: [To David] ¿Quieres que te lo abra?
 (You want me to open it?)
- David: [To Mother] Yes.
- Mother: [Opens package]

Here David's mother greeted him in English but then switched to Spanish. David followed her lead and switched from English to Spanish. While his mother did not explicitly use Spanish, her limited English meant that she only provided a small amount of English input.

3.2.2. Parental Discourse Styles

David's mother and father seemed to have different parental discourse styles when interacting with David. His mother acknowledged herself as the caretaker, saying it was her job to take care of the kids. During the day, she took care of the infant son and David. She also cared for David's older brother when he arrived home from school. David's mother gave him a bath, let him help with the cleaning and other household chores, listened to music, and watched television with him. She did not frequently engage in play or literacy activities, using more directives than play language.

David's father was more instructive in his interactions, seeing himself as a collaborator in play and learning. With David, he read, played games, jumped on the trampoline, did puzzles, ran around the yard, told stories, drew, painted, and played pretend. This view as a collaborator in play is seen one day when David (2;4) was playing pretend with his father. David had just told his father *ven* (come) and brought him by the hand to his bedroom.

- David: [To Father] Ven.
 (Come.)
- Father: [To David] D'accord.
 (Ok.)
 [David leads his father to his bedroom]
- David: [To Father] Go sleep. Please, papá.
- Father: [To David] Je ne te comprends pas.
 (I don't understand you.)
- David: [To Father] S'il te plaaaaât! Go sleep!
 (Please! Go to sleep.)
- Father: [To David] Ah! Dors, papá?
 (Ah! Sleep, Daddy?)
- David: [To Father] Yes, dors!
 (Yes, sleep!)
 [Father pretends to sleep. David laughs]

Here, his father insisted on French. David began his interaction in English, but his father forced him to use French. When he said he could not understand, David then switched to French to say "please" but continued in



English. When his father asked him in French if he meant sleep (dors), David affirmed and then repeated in French without being asked to do so. It appears the insistence of David using French did not inhibit their playtime together.

3.3. *Language Production as Evidence of Language Development*

During this case study, David's language development progressed in complexity and magnitude, from a one-word stage (age 2;0) to a multi-word stage (age 2;4) in Spanish, English, and French. At age 2;0, David was still in the one-word stage. He also produced many nonsense words and sounds. He pointed to many of the things that he wanted. Examination of the video recordings and field notes revealed that he used more French at this stage than English or Spanish.

At age 2;1, David was frequently communicating with one-word utterances, but he had begun to produce multi-word sentences in English and French. David demonstrated comprehension in all three languages by pointing to the objects and following commands when prompted. For example, when asked in English, French, or Spanish where a certain animal or object was located, he correctly pointed to it. He also correctly followed commands in English (e.g., come here, wait, don't hit your brother), Spanish (e.g., siéntete (sit), abre la boca (open your mouth), dámelo (give me it), ven (come here)), and French (e.g., arrête (stop), bouge pas (don't move), bouge (move), viens (come here)).

At age 2;2, David was counting to three in English and French (Un, deux, fois [un, deux, trois] (one, two, three)). He also started increasing his use of multiple-word utterances, stringing words together in short phrases. He began to ask where someone had gone in English by adding the person's name and "go" after the word "where." For example, "where Daddy go?" "Where Antonio go?" "Where Mommy go?" At this age, David also began to speak more English than Spanish or French.

At age 2;3, David spoke predominantly in English with not only his older brother and grandparents but also with his mother. He continued to consistently demonstrate comprehension in all three languages by pointing to objects and following commands. His linguistic output continued to show preference for English.

At age 2;4, he was answering yes/no questions and consistently using multi-word utterances. He also repeated all words in whichever language that someone prompted him to speak. Analysis of the video recordings revealed that David used more English than French and more French than Spanish in spontaneous speech. In addition, the English used appeared to be more complex and developed (i.e., using more questions, commands, and subject-verb sentences) than his French which consisted of many more noun phrases and fewer questions or commands.

Table 3
Words Used in Spontaneous Speech According to Language

Age	Spanish	English	French	
2;0	Ven	Daddy	Ça	
	Aquí	My turn	Ça va	
	Agua	All done	Là	
	Sí	Cookie	Plus	
	Oto [otro]	Outsai [outside]	Un	
	Bebé	Choos [shoes]	Deux	
	Mamá	Open	Fois [Trois]	
	Papá	Please	Baby	Manteau
		Whatayadoin? [What are you doing?]	Whatayadoin? [What are you doing?]	Écureuil
		Bubble	Bubble	Manger
		Hep me [Help me]	Hep me [Help me]	Bleu
		Milk	Milk	Jaune
		Fall	Fall	Pas là
		Where go? [Where did it go?]	Where go? [Where did it go?]	Bébé
		Where are you?	Where are you?	Pas ça
		Stop it!	Stop it!	Chocolat
		Juice	Juice	Paille
		Fire	Fire	Lait
				Cerf
				Mouche
				Froid
				Chaud
				Merci
			L'eau	
			Ot [autre]	
			Loup	
			Où est?	
2;1	Abi agua [abre agua]	Boken [broken]	Feu	
	Otro	Car	Le bébé là	
	Cushara [cuchara]	Whahappen? [What Happened?]	Viens	
	Uno	I dohwannit [I don't want it]	Mechant loup	
	Caho [carro]	Go Daddy	Cochon	
	Más	Sowi [sorry] Daddy	Sowi [sorry] Daddy	Bonjour
		Open agua	Open agua	Froide
		Gain [again]	Gain [again]	Chaude
		Open door	Open door	Ici
		All done	All done	Sale
		Baby fryin [crying]	Baby fryin [crying]	Oui, ça va
			Paille pas là	
2;2	Leche	Out please	Ot fois [autre fois]	
	Abi leche [abre leche]	Gimme [give me]	S'il plaît [s'il te plaît]	
	Dos	Open door Papá please	Rouge	
	Shusha [escucha]	He no wannit [He does not want it]	Chat	
	Gato	I see you	Piquant	
	Chuchara [cuchara]	Baby do it	Baby do it	Chien
		Daddy turn	Daddy turn	Bleu paille
		Car coming	Car coming	
		Now you do it	Now you do it	



		I love	
		Blue	
		Lelo [yellow]	
		Black	
		Geen [green]	
2;3	Antonio fue	Sorry dinosaur	Mechant ribbit [mechant grenouille]
	Luz	Dinosaur is sleepin	Ça, ça, et ça.
	Cuchara	Papá, where you go?	Bleu ciseaux
	Fue la luz	Where Antonio car go?	Oiseau pas là
	Eshusha [escucha]	Go trampoline	Saute pas
	Deci no	Help me!	Ai-moi! [Aide-moi!] S'il te plaît!
		Baby no wannit [Baby doesn't want it]	
		Antonio boke [broke] it	
		Where shoes go?	

Not all utterances fit into a single column following a single linguistic code. David codemixed (Hoffmann & Stavans, 2007) several utterances, blending linguistic elements from different languages within a sentence. He mixed English and French (Le bébé fryin [le bébé crying], Where est ça, Papá?, Glasses à moi, Chaud milk, Where is hibou go? [Where did the owl go?], and Where aller?), English and Spanish (Está rainin [está raining] and Glasses ah mia [glasses son mias]), and Spanish and French (Où est agua?). In all, there were more instances of codemixing English and French than any other combination.

Throughout the study, David continued to demonstrate comprehension by pointing to objects and following more complex commands. He also began to demonstrate language development and comprehension by asking and answering questions in all three languages. David started the study with an apparent preference for French and ended up showing a preference for English. Despite his apparent preference for English, by the end of the study he was able to change his language depending on the interlocutor and the context of the interaction.

4. Discussion

This study examined the language exposure patterns and parental language strategies encountered by David, a nascent trilingual two-year-old child, and his subsequent trilingual language development. In the beginning of the case study, David had an apparent preference for French. A list of words used in spontaneous speech (see Table 3) reveals that he had acquired more French than English or Spanish by age 2;0. He was even recorded using French with non-French-family members (e.g., his mother, his grandparents, his older sibling).

This noticeable prevalence of French may have been since his father, the French-speaking parent, was home on paternity leave for three months starting when David was age 1;11 (Cantone, 2019). For three months, his father was constantly interacting and playing the entire day with him in French. This increased input, exposure, and interaction could be the cause of accelerated French development (Arnaus Gil, Müller, Sette, & Hüppop, 2021;

Chevalier, 2012). This development may also be in part due to his father's role as an instructor in interactive communication (Chevalier, 2015) and the amount of child-centered discourse and play language used (Döpke, 1992). Not only does his father play more than his mother, but he interacts with David in a variety of contexts (e.g., waking up, eating, taking a bath). In addition, his father adheres to the OPOL approach which could reinforce future active language ability (Chevalier, 2015).

David seemed to develop a preference around the age of 2:2 for English, at least in initiating his interactions. His English also seemed to contain an abundance of multi-word utterances, verbs, and questions suggesting that his English was becoming the most developed of his languages. Notwithstanding, he also did produce complex language (i.e., multi-word utterance, questions, verbs) in Spanish and French. This apparent growth of English may be, at least in part, due to the exposure and input to English from multiple sources and interlocutors (Wang, 2008) and the fact that it was the community language (Döpke, 1992). Whereas his father was the sole source of French and David's mother and maternal grandparents (and sometimes his older brother) were the only sources of Spanish, David received input in English from a myriad of sources (e.g., paternal grandparents, his older brother, community, radio, TV, movies).

Even though he had more input and interlocutors with whom to speak, he consistently produced less Spanish or mixed Spanish with one of the other two languages. This may be a result of the fact that his mother frequently mixed Spanish and English with him. In addition, she almost always accepted instances of language mixing instead of offering an interlingual synonym or forcing Spanish by pretending not to understand English which could result in passive language ability (Volterra & Taeschner, 2007). Nonetheless, David readily repeated words in Spanish. For example, when his mother told him, "Dile a papi que te abra." (Tell your dad to open it for you), he ran to his father and said, "Abi" [Abrí] (open).

Examining the evidence, David is clearly developing language abilities in all three of his NLs. He may prefer one or two languages (i.e., English, French), but he progressed from a one-word stage to a multi-word stage in all languages over the course of the case study. In addition, his demonstration of comprehension in Spanish, English, and French also developed, moving from pointing and following simple commands to asking and answering questions and following complex commands.

Therefore, even though David produced more English than French and more French than Spanish in spontaneous speech, the data suggest that, while David is becoming more dominant in English, he is developing active trilingualism. The extent to which his language abilities and knowledge will continue to develop into active trilingualism or result in passive trilingualism remains to be seen.

There are many questions that could be of interest to further study of David's trilingual language acquisition. How will his trilingualism develop in the future? Will future language exposure and parental language strategies be sufficient to continue developing active language abilities in the minority languages? Will his mother's acceptance of codemixing without forcing him to produce Spanish hinder his Spanish acquisition? Will lack of interlocutors



and varied input in French negatively affect future development? How will the start of school affect his trilingual language development?

There were limiting factors to this case study. One such limitation was the brief nature of this study. Though it was a start, to fully appreciate the complexity and nuances of David's language acquisition and development, more time would need to be devoted to observation and recording of data. Extending the study would most certainly reveal more information about David's language acquisition and development.

Also, because of his age and lack of metalinguistic awareness and expressive ability, the motives of his individual language choices were an enigma. It could not be known, for example, if his lack of linguistic production was based on a lack of awareness of linguistic equivalents, because of strong contextual cues overriding his previous knowledge, or simply because of personal choice. As his linguistic and metalinguistic knowledge increases, David will be more capable of explaining his motives and reasons for his language choices.

5. Conclusion

The data showed a rich exposure to language input in all three languages and an adherence to the use of the minority language either by language strategies (OPOL by David's father) or a linguistic necessity (monolingualism of David's mother). The findings indicate that David is on his way to successfully acquiring three languages. Although he demonstrated an apparent preference for English and ended up using English more than French and Spanish in spontaneous speech, he was able to understand and use English, Spanish, and French. This would seem to suggest that plentiful exposure coupled with consistent input in addition to parental language practices do indeed play an important role in trilingual language development.

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