

### Abstract

This paper presents the data analysis of bilingual acquisition of Spanish and Galician by children aged 2;10-4;1 years. This study forms part of the authors' research project on the development of a linguistic test for detection of communicative limitations in children. A communicative approach integrating all the linguistic data from a pragmatic viewpoint was employed: the use made of the two languages by the subjects observed was analysed with regard to speaker age, context, addressees, intentions, activities and materials used to stimulate communication, the initial language and topic of the utterance sequence, and whether communication was spontaneous or elicited by the researcher. The analysis of the data throws light on the strategies used by the bilingual child for choosing between one language and another, and of children's capacity to apply these strategies in particular situations.

## 1. Introduction

Until recent years, neither context nor praxis were considered in studies of second language learning or of individuals' usage of more than one code. Since then, the emergence of sociological and communicative approaches stressing the importance of linguistic diversity has led to a substantial change of scene, not only in practical areas such as language teaching and the evaluation of degrees and aspects of bilingualism, but also in basic research on (multiple) language acquisition and its place in child development. This paper aims to contribute to recognition of the relevance of pragmatic considerations such as addressee identity or context for understanding the true extent of bilingual language acquisition in a bilingual environment.

## 2. Theoretical framework: the advantages of a pragmatic approach to the study of communicative disabilities

An integral, communicative approach to the process of language acquisition, with its recognition of the importance of contextual and interactional factors, necessarily leads to reappraisal of the concepts of bilingual competence. Attention is now focused on diversity, on variation among particular cases, rather than on a hypothetical uniform ideal. Rejection of the categorical concept of normality opens the way for a realistic view of language as a system comprising a multiplicity of codes with different communicative values and effects, and makes evaluation of the degree of acquisition of first or subsequent languages a question of assessing the individual's fluency and capacity in a spectrum of different communicative situations. Linguistic development or competence must be measured in terms of the achievement of communicative and interactional goals

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rather than strictly in terms of the degree to which a standard set of rules has been mastered.

In the specific field of language acquisition by children, empirical studies concerning a variety of different languages and based on acquisition data for numerous individuals have highlighted the notion of diversity and the need to take context into account. Their findings imply not only the relativization of the concept of the normal course and pace of language acquisition, but also limitation of importance of uniformity in general. The central aim is now to determine the variables affecting cognitive and communicative development, bearing in mind that the cognitive process is interwoven with intentions and with situational and interactional expectations. We therefore adopt a communicative, pragmatic, functional point of view, regarding language as an intrinsically social tool for interaction (cf. Fernández Pérez 1996 and 2000-2001 and Codesido García 2001).

As a consolidated field of linguistic research, pragmatics is defined in the first place with regard to what it specifically studies: "those aspects of language use that are subject to systematic variation according to social context" (McTear and Conti-Ramsden 1994: 2). Thus pragmatics is concerned with linguistic utterances as related to the external factors that endow their context with form and meaning. Consequently, the analytical methodology of pragmatics handles both linguistic data and the external setting that grounds those linguistic facts proper use and interpretation. It considers continuous rather than discrete variables, and leads to explanations of a functional and probabilistic nature, and to the evaluation of utterances in terms of their appropriateness and communicative efficacy (Escandell Vidal 1996: 232-233). Finally, as regards its objectives, pragmatics is characterized by what it is not: for full understanding of the intrinsic complexity of language, a study of disciplines such as grammar, phonology or neuropsycholinguistics is not enough; the postulates and methods of pragmatics are also needed for precise explanation of linguistic behaviours and processes that depend on language being used in specific spatiotemporal and sociocultural contexts.

Pragmatics has two distinct facets. Firstly, it constitutes one of the four levels that make up the internal structure of a language. Just as phonology and grammar are concerned with their own particular groups of linguistic elements (phonemes in one case, morphemes and phrases in the other), so pragmatics is concerned with specifically communicative entities and their mutual relationships.

More generally, pragmatics also constitutes a particular kind of overall approach to linguistic phenomena, an attitude that runs vertically through all levels of linguistic analysis and makes possible the integration of linguistic structure and pragmatic rules. It invites investigation of the influence of context on language use, and at the methodological level promotes the collection, transcription and analysis of linguistic data in a way that allows both the description of linguistic behaviour and the design of therapeutic strategies. As one of us has written previously,

"In view of the essential nature of the phenomena of language, the methodological basis of pragmatics and its empirical bent, the only possible approach is a communicative one. It is clear that the only way to apprehend and experiment with languages is in the course of their use, in the course of pragmatic interaction; this is the arena in which possibilities and drawbacks may be detected." (Fernández Pérez 1996: 208).



For our present purposes in this paper, it is this broader concept of pragmatics that is most relevant in its emphasis on the need to take the situational side of communication into account. This is what is captured by the definition given by Escandell Vidal (1996: 13-14):

“by pragmatics we understand the study of the principles that govern the use of language in communication, that is, the conditions that determine both the choice of a particular utterance by a particular speaker in a particular communicative situation, and its interpretation by its receiver.”

The conception of communication as an interactive process between two parties, the speaker and the receiver(s), is incompatible with an account of linguistic ability as a strictly intrapersonal, monologicistic phenomenon for which the affected child's language is the sole source of information. This view must be replaced by an interpersonal, dialogistic account in terms of two or more participants in a dyadic relationship, one of them being the child and the other(s) his addressee(s), whose linguistic behaviour may influence the linguistic behaviour of the child. In the words of McTear and Conti-Ramsden (1994: 176),

“Communication is an interactional, interpersonal process, and as such it involves as a minimum two people: the dyad. Thus, we can no longer view communication disorders in children from an intrapersonal perspective, trying to find out what is wrong with the child's communication so that we can help that child overcome it alone. We need to consider the important roles significant others play in facilitating or constraining communication, because the effects are always bi-directional, from child to significant other and from significant other to the child.”

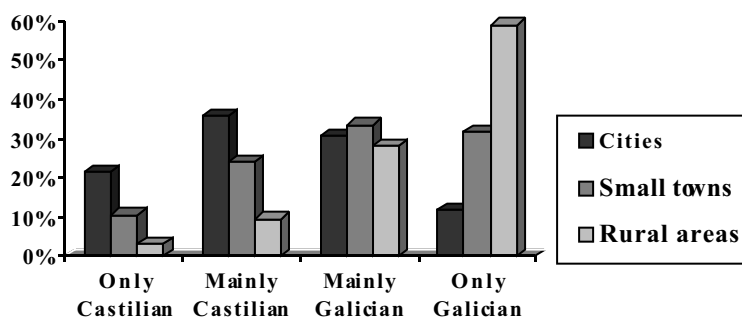
### 3. The sociolinguistic context in Galicia

For a study of the acquisition of language by children, the sociolinguistic context in which they are immersed is especially relevant in communities in which two or more languages coexist, as in Galicia. In this kind of situation it is necessary to take into account the language employed in the child's home and whether or not it coincides with the language used at school. In addition, factors such as the social prestige of each language and its prevalence in the community must be considered (2).

2- Many scholars, among them Lambert (1981), Cummins (1983) and Baker (1997), have highlighted the importance of these factors for achievement of additive bilingualism, an objective we regard as desirable in any bilingual community. This notion of additive bilingualism is based on sociopsychological criteria, referring to cases in which bilingual speakers consider the use of more than one code to be a social and cognitive asset. The opposite situation is subtractive bilingualism.



Figure 1: Usual language in different environments in Galicia

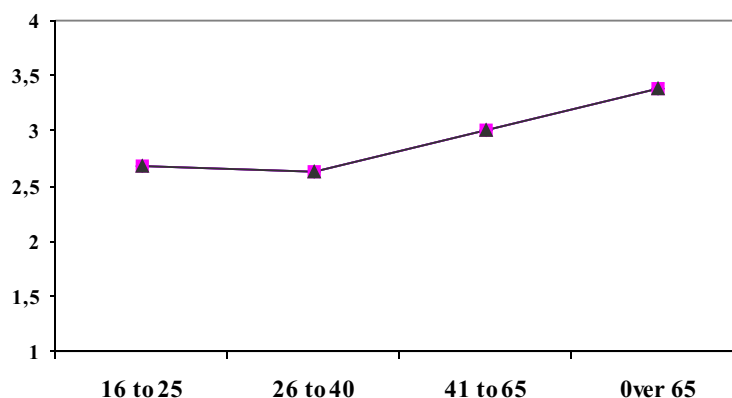


Source: Seminario de Sociolingüística 1995.

In Galicia, the distribution of the two languages in contact, Galician and Castilian Spanish, is not homogeneous but depends on the subject's age and environment, among other factors. Quantitatively, the usual language of the majority is Galician in rural areas and Castilian in urban areas (cf. Fig. 1).

The other variable with a major influence on whether Galician or Castilian is spoken is the age of the speaker, Galician being the majority language in all age groups except in those who are under 25 years old. In this latter group there is a tendency towards a bilingualism in which the first language is in most cases clearly dominant, especially when the first language is Castilian. By contrast, attitudes to Galician have become markedly more favourable in recent years as a result of efforts to promote its use in circles from which it was once totally excluded, notably public administration, the mass media and education. Furthermore, attitudes towards Galician become more favourable the younger the age-group in question, in spite of its being least used by the younger age-groups. The steps taken have therefore been successful in raising the social status of Galician, but after 15 years of the Linguistic Normalization Act been approved, its use have not yet increased. In fact, analysis of intergenerational transmission (on which the vitality of a language largely depends) shows that Castilian is increasingly the language employed by parents with their children (cf. Fig.2)

Figure 2: Means of linguistic usage with children depending on the age

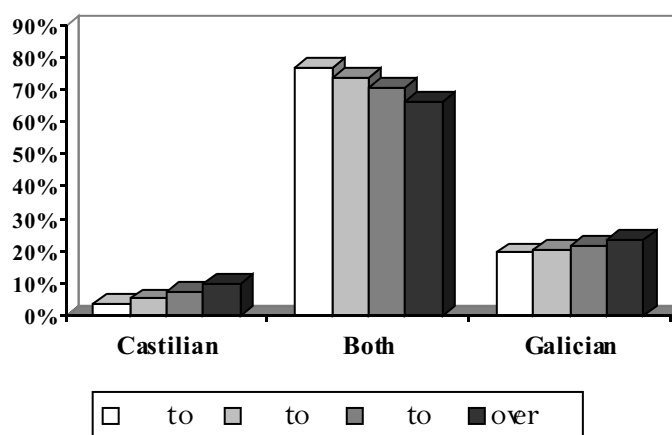


Scores range from 1 (only Castilian) to 4 (only Galician) Source: Seminario de Sociolingüística 1995



In bilingual communities, the language transmitted from parents to children is of such importance that Siguán and Mackey (1986: 56) write of “family linguistic politics”. In Galicia there appears to be a general intention to guarantee that both the languages of the community are acquired right from the start, at home (cf. Fig.3).

Figure 3. Opinions on which language should be taught spoken at home by age group



Source: Seminario de Sociolingüística 1995.

This tendency toward bilingualism would be of no concern if it affected both traditionally Galician-speaking and traditionally Castilian-speaking families to the same extent, and if it were paralleled by similar trends in other social arenas. Of the latter, school is by far the most important, being (with the exception of the family) the most important socializing environment, especially now that some children spend more time at school than at home. But Galician schools are far from exercising the role that, in view of their importance for socialization, they might properly play in the maintenance of Galician among those for whom it is their first language (the majority in rural areas) and in its promotion as the second language of those whose first language is Castilian (the majority in urban areas). In fact, the current educational system is ill-equipped for the achievement of these goals. The legislation in force stipulates that Galician should be used in schools in at least two subjects, but it makes no reference to a role as the usual linguistic vehicle of teaching. The establishment of this status would appear to be essential for the introduction of Galician in the urban environment and its maintenance in rural areas with a view to achieving a more balanced bilingualism in the former and reducing the risk of subtractive bilingualism in the latter (3).

To sum up, the process of linguistic normalization still has weak points, but at the same time considerable progress has been made, a situation typical of times of change such as the present. What is now needed is the

3- Subtractive bilingualism is a result of the members of minority linguistic groups being obliged to learn the socially dominant language before acquiring full competence in their own, as in educational programmes of linguistic submersion.



adoption of measures that promote the consolidation of the incipient bilingualism without harming either of the two languages of the community. In this sense when considering social bilingualism we should take into account the individual bilingualism, in other words, we have to observe the role played by each language during the acquisition process. There are several aspects to consider in this process: home environment, playschool and type of interaction. In relation to this point we ask ourselves which one is the first language, the one usually spoken at home or at playschool. Should the playschool be considered the most important setting in order to determine the relevance of one language in spite of the other?

## 4. Study design

### 4.1. Subjects

In the main project we studied some 50 children aged 2;10 - 4;1 years attending three public playschools located in Santiago de Compostela (population about 100,000) and a private playschool some 28 km away in A Estrada, Pontevedra (population about 15,000). From the total number of subjects we have selected 9 of them, aged 2;10 - 4;1 years (4).

### 4.2. Techniques and method

The study is based on an analysis of videotapes of natural communicative situations arising during the study sessions. The videotape is a suitable medium in view of its reliability and its combination of good sound quality with the visual images that are essential for a communicative approach emphasizing the importance of situational factors and non-verbal communication. Playschools were chosen as the setting in view of their children's homes. For each session, the school in question was visited by two researchers. All recordings were made during usual school hours.

Our pragmatic communicative approach aims to take into account the entire set of contextual factors affecting the recorded speech acts. The playschool teacher was always present during recordings: we wished our work to disrupt the children's normal everyday activity as little as possible, partly so as to minimize any destabilizing influence it might have, and partly because we reasoned that the more natural the setting, the more fruitful would the recording sessions be. The function of the first few sessions was considered to be that of accustoming the children to our presence and to the cameras. Likewise in the interests of maximizing the children's familiarity with us, each playschool was always visited by the same pair of researchers. None of the researchers was a relative of any of the children studied.

4 Following the international conventions adopted in the studies of child language, the current age of each child responds to the following parameters: years;months.days (Cf. below Sample nº 1: @Age of BRE: 2;11.20).



Since 1996, recordings have been made at each centre every 2 weeks with a view to monitoring the children's development. To ensure acquisition of a representative sample of the children's language without tiring them, each session lasted about 30 minutes. In order to acquire data on both expression and comprehension skills, we concentrated on recording dialogues. These included both spontaneous conversation, with a view to joint evaluation of phonic, grammatical, lexical and informative aspects of the children's speech from a pragmatic viewpoint; and dialogue prompted by the presentation of the child's toys, picture books, and instruments designed to evaluate specific semantic areas such as food, animals or the home. These latter include card packs (AA. VV. 1997), poster packs (Armstrong and Ainley 1988; Busto Barcos 1995) and pop-up books (Yuste and Aznar Serrano 1996). The researchers usually addressed the children in the language in which the children, or a majority of them, addressed the researchers. That was generally the same language they use at playschool. ta transcription and analysis

### 4.3. Data transcription and analysis

As in other studies of children's language, we analysed our recordings using the CHILDES pack (MacWhinney 1995), which comprises a system for transcription and encoding (CHAT) and a set of programs for efficient objective analysis of the transcriptions (CLAN). There is a specific convention we have used in our samples, which has to do with second language use. Every time we use the @s right after a word, we are meaning that this word belongs to a second language. Related to this, and in order to make the samples reviewing easier, there is a main line -@Language- at the beginning of every transcription that refers to the main language of the whole interaction (E.g., *cas*, for Castilian Spanish, or *gal*, for Galician). So, every time a child uses a different language (either Castilian Spanish or Galician), we consider it as a second language production.

### 5. Discussion

Detailed observation of the contextual factors influencing the choice of language by the bilingual subjects studied suggests the following considerations:

- Importance of school in the child's everyday life: number of hours he/she spends in there, which kind of interaction he/she maintains with either peers or teacher, etc.
- Language of child's counterparts (peers and teacher): higher presence of Castilian Spanish or Galician.
- As a result of considering the aspects mentioned above, check in each case if the language usually spoken at home is on top or under the language mainly spoken at playschool.

The first language is Castilian in six cases and Galician in three (MAN, IRE and ART). In general, since 2;10 years, the children start their communication sequences in their first or family language, later switching in response to the researcher. In Sample 1, for example, IRE uses Castilian at first but clearly switches to Galician in



response to the researcher's use of Galician. This happens even if the child has to fall out with his/her usual language.

*Sample nº 1:*

@Begin

@Participants: PIL Pilar Otero Interviewer, BRE Breixo Child, ANA Ana Child, IRE Irene Child.

@Age of BRE: 2;11.20

@Age of IRE: 3;0.05

@Age of ANA: 4;1.28

@Sex of BRE: male

@Sex of IRE: female

@Sex of ANA: female

@Date: 14-ENE-1998

@Location: Santiago de Compostela

@Situation: playschool

@Activities: symbolic play and naming

@Stim: book with pictures

@Language: gal

\*IRE: yo@s quiero@s ese@s. (I want this)

%act: points to the picture

\*ANA: yo@s quiero@s ese@s gato@s. (I want this cat)

%act: she also points

\*PIL: quieres@s este@s gato@s? (Do you want this cat?)

\*PIL: pero éste gato é desta casa eh@i! (But this is the house's cat, ah!)

\*ANA: <e>[\*] mío@s. (It's mine)

%err: e = es \$PHO ;

\*PIL: é o gato da casa. (It's house's cat)

\*IRE: eu quero ese can. (I want this dog)

\*PIL: esto é un can?

\*IRE: <<eu quero este> [/] # <eu quero este> [/] # eu quero este> [>]. (I want this, I want this, I want this)

%add: PIL

%act: she points to the one she wants

@New Episode

\*IRE: yo@s tengo@s un paxa(ro) # eu # o paxaro ten Ana ## <na casa> [>]. (I've got a bird, me, Ana's got the bird, at home)

@New Episode





\*BRE: <eu tam(én)>[//] yo@s también@s! (Me also, me also!)

@End

The same switch occurs, probably with greater awareness of its desirability, in Samples 2 and 3, in which ART (the youngest of all these children) speaks Castilian to YAG and Galician to the researcher. This is a very interesting case because ART is a “family bilingual” (Pérez Pereira 1990): his father talks to him in Castilian and his mother in Galician. This situation reflects prevailing attitudes (cf. Fig. 3).

Until a few months prior to the time Samples 2-3 were recorded, ART spoke only in Galician, no doubt because he spent most of his time in the company of his Galician-speaking mother. But now he appears to be aware of the desirability of adjusting to the code used by his addressee (whether child or adult), especially when his speech acts direct or appeal.

*Sample nº 2:*

@Begin

@Participants: MON Montse Interviewer, ART Artai Child, YAG Yago Child

@Age of ART: 2;10.20

@Age of YAG: 3;0.21

@Sex of ART: male

@Sex of YAG: male

@Date: 5-DIC-1997

@Location: A Estrada

@Situation: playschool

@Activities: symbolic play and naming

@Stim: pictures of animals

@Language: gal

\*MON: mira unha vieira ! (Look! There's a shell!)

%add: ART

\*ART: que é ? (What's that?)

%add: MON

\*MON: unha vieira .(A scallop)

\*ART: unha vieira .(A scallop)

\*YAG: a ver # é unha conchita@s .(Let's see... It's a small shell)

\*MON: es@s una@s conchita@s de@s vieira@s # sí@s señorito@s . (It's a small scallop's shell, you're right)

%add: YAG

@End



Sample nº 3:

@Begin

@Participants: MON Montse Interviewer, ART Artai Child, YAG Yago Child

@Age of ART: 2;10.6

@Age of YAG: 3;0.7

@Sex of ART: male

@Sex of YAG: male

@Date: 21-NOV-1997

@Location: A Estrada

@Situation: playschool

@Activities: free play

@Language: cas

\*YAG: yo primero . (Me first)

\*ART: yo también@s . (Me too)

%add: YAG

@New Episode

@Comment: YAG and ART are playing with Lego

\*ART: te ayudo ? (Can I help you?)

%add: YAG

\*YAG: sí . (Yes)

%add: ART

\*ART: así no se pone # se pone así . (This not in this way, but in this one)

%add: YAG

\*MON: por qué ? (Why?)

%add: ART

\*ART: porque@s ten@s un@s buratiño@s . (Because it's got these small holes)

%add: MON

@New Episode

@Comment: the children keep on playing and suddenly ART falls down

\*YAG: &lt; te caíste &gt; [/] te caíste ! (You've fallen down!)

%add: ART

%act: YAG is laughing

\*ART: eu@s caín@s . (I've fallen down)

\*YAG: éste también está mojado . (This is wet, too)

%add: ART

%act: YAG shows ART a wet Lego piece



\*ART: a ver # déjame lo ver . (Let's see, let me see)

%add: YAG

@New Episode

@Comment: ART and YAG play and jump on the mats

\*ART: me caín@s . (I've fallen down)

\*MON: y te lastimaste ? (And have you hurt yourself?)

%add: ART

\*ART: caín@s . (I've fallen down)

@End

Finally, in spite of any bilingualism, the language first acquired clearly dominates the other, with which it continually interferes. In Samples 4 and 5, for instance, MAN uses utterances in which the verbs are Galician and all the other components Castilian, such as *y vai@s un ratón detrás de él y fai@s*. [and there's a mouse going behind him and it goes like that...]. Once again, does the playschool facilitate the dominance of Castilian Spanish over Galician?. This is, in our opinion, an important aspect to take into account in order to determine the child's first language.

#### Sample nº 4:

@Begin

@Participants: ANA Ana Codesido Interviewer, GAR Gara Child, GON Gonzalo Child, MAN Manuel Child, MAR Martina Child

@Age of GAR: 3;2.29

@Age of GON: 3;0.27

@Age of MAN: 3;2.21

@Age of MAR: 3;1.22

@Sex of GAR: female

@Sex of GON: male

@Sex of MAN: male

@Sex of MAR: female

@Date: 20-NOV-1997

@Location: Santiago de Compostela

@Situation: playschool

@Stim: talking about pictures and cards

@Language: cas

\*ANA: a dónde vas a la playa # Gonzalo? (which beach do you go, Gonzalo?)

\*ANA: y Martina? (and how about Martina?)



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- \*MAR: a la playa. (to the beach)
- \*ANA: a qué playa vas? (which beach do you go to?)
- \*MAR: a la pequeña. (to the small one)
- \*ANA: a la pequeña? (to the small one?)
- \*ANA: qué bonita! (how nice!)
- \*ANA: y Gara? (and how about Gara?)
- \*GAR: vou@s a la gande [\*]. (I go to the big one)
- %err: gande = grande \$PHO ;
- \*ANA: tú vas a la grande. (you go to the big one)
- \*ANA: y hay peces en la playa grande? (and are there any fishes in the big beach?)
- %act: Gara nods her head
- \*ANA: sí? (are there?)
- \*ANA: y este pez de qué color es? (and which colour is this fish?)
- \*MAN: <naranja> [>]. (orange)
- \*GON: <o@s meu@s é@s así@s> [<]. (mine looks like that)
- %act: he uses gestures to indicate fish's size
- \*ANA: naranja # es naranja este pez? (orange, is this fish orange?)
- \*MAN: sí. (yes)
- @New Episode
- \*MAN: yo tengo <un> [/] <un> [/] <un &cuen> [/] un cuento de Cenicienta y aparece un gato que se llama Lucifer. (I've got a book about Cinderella and there's a cat called Lucifer)
- \*ANA: en el cuento de Cenicienta? (in Cinderella's story?)
- \*MAN: sí. (yes)
- \*ANA: y cómo hace Lucifer? (and how does Lucifer go?)
- \*MAN: xxx y vai@s un ratón detrás de él y fai@s. [and there's a mouse going behind him and it goes like that...]
- %act: with his hands he imitates cat's movements
- \*ANA: y va detrás # le persigue, a que sí? (and it goes behind, it pursues him, does it?)
- @End

Sample nº 5:

@Begin

@Participants: ANA Ana Codesido Interviewer, BLA Blanca Interviewer, GON Gonzalo Child, MAN Manuel Child

@Age of GON: 3;0.12

@Age of MAN: 3;2.06

@Sex of GON: male

@Sex of MAN: male

@Date: 5-NOV-1997



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@Location: Santiago de Compostela

@Situation: playschool

@Stim: talking about pictures and cards

@Language: cas

\*MAN: un@s porco@s. (a pig)

\*GON: un <seldo> [\*]. (a pig)

%err: seldo = cerdo \$PHO ;

\*ANA: un cerdo e@s un@s porco@s eh@i # temos@s as@s dúas@s cousas@s Blanca no te olvides! (a pig and a pig; we've got both things, ah?. Remember that, Blanca!)

%add: BLA

\*MAN: un@s porco@s. (a pig)

\*ANA: un@s porco@s. (a pig)

\*ANA: e@s # que@s temos@s aquí@s outro@s +//. (and how about this picture in here... there's another..)

\*GON: xxx.

\*ANA: outro@s que@s? (another what?)

\*MAN: outro@s gato@s (another cat)

@End

## 6. Conclusions

Both sociolinguistic parameters (such as both parents' age and origins, or home environment) and pragmatic variables characterizing addressees, situation, communicative intention and other circumstances of the utterance are essential for evaluation of the child's development of each language as regards verbal ability and communicative skills such as the expression of orders, requests or wishes. They will undoubtedly be fundamental for a) determining whether acquisition is a balanced bilingual process or is dominated in the first place by just one code (in order to solve this dilemma we find it necessary to study each case separately), and b) the formulation of new proposals regarding the evaluation of communication by bilingual children during the early stages of acquisition, and the concomitant re-assessment of existing views on the desirability of simultaneous acquisition of two or more languages.

More generally, this study highlights the unquestionable importance of contextual factors and of the examination of particular cases for the study of language acquisition as a process of gradual development subject to setbacks and limitations that can only be explained in terms of interactional dynamics. To understand the final stages of the conquest of verbal skills is to understand the dynamics of their configuration through an analysis that takes into account the stimuli involved in each case. In other words, if the main linguistic stimuli come from home, then the first language will be the family one. On the contrary, if the main stimuli belong to the language spoken at school, sooner or later that will turn into the child's first language.



To sum up, we cannot say that in all cases the first language in the acquisition process is the same that the one usually spoken at home. It will depend upon the contextual factors mentioned above.

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