

THE BENEFITS AND CHALLENGES OF RAISING A  
CHILD BILINGUAL:  
views of Finnish-English bilingual families living in  
Finland

Master's Thesis

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Tiivistelmä – Abstract <p>Tämän Pro Gradu-tutkielman aihe on kaksikielisyys ja lasten kasvattaminen kaksikielisiksi. Tutkielmani perustuu seitsemään kaksikielisen (suomi-englanti) Suomessa asuvan perheen haastatteluun. Perheiden elämäntilanteet olivat hyvin erilaiset, joten sain haastatteluista paljon monipuolista tietoa, jota pystyin vertailemaan.</p> <p>Tutkielmassa on käytetty laadullista tutkimusmenetelmää, sillä se toimi tässä aiheessa hyvin ja sen avulla oli mahdollista saada kaksikielisten lasten vanhemmilta myös konkreettisia esimerkkejä muun muassa lasten kielen käytöstä sekä kaksikielisyyden hyödyistä ja haitoista. Pääaino on kaksikielisyyden hyödyissä ja haasteissa, sillä niitä ei ole suomi-englanti kaksikielisten perheiden kohdalla vielä tähän mennessä tutkittu kovin paljon.</p> <p>Haastatteluiden perusteella kaksikielisyydestä löytyy enemmän hyötyjä kuin haasteita. Esiin tulleita hyötyjä olivat muun muassa työnhaussa kielitaito on hyödyksi työmarkkinoiden kansainvälistymisen takia ja avoimempi suhtautuminen toisiin kulttuureihin.</p> <p>Haasteet, joita perheet ovat kohdanneet lasten kaksikieliseksi kasvattamisessa, ovat olleet melko vähäisiä. Joitakin haasteita on kuitenkin ollut. Esimerkiksi monilla vanhemmilla, etenkin englannin natiivi-puhujilla, on ollut joskus hankalaa pitää kielenkäyttö johdonmukaisena. Eli, jos tavoitteena on, että toinen vanhemmista puhuu lapselle aina englantia, niin hän käyttäisi mahdollisimman vähän suomea.</p>	
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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The title of my master's thesis is “The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual: views of Finnish-English bilingual families living in Finland. I chose this topic because I have been interested in bilingualism for a long time and wanted to explore it in more detail. Even though bilingualism has been researched quite a bit from various angles, not that many research studies have been conducted about Finnish-English bilingual families. That is why I wanted to do research on that type of families in particular and focus on the benefits and the challenges of raising a child bilingual that they have faced. In order to study this, I conducted seven interviews. It is important to study this topic more because there are parents who are considering raising their children bilingual, but are not sure how to do it or whether it is beneficial for their child in the first place. This research study aims at giving that type of parents the opportunity to find out more about raising bilingual children by providing them with the opportunity to read about the experiences of seven parents who have raised their children bilingual.

Most of the parents that I interviewed are native English-speakers, so this study will emphasize their experiences and views on bilingualism and what it is like to raise children bilingual in Finland where Finnish is the main language. They will also share the challenges and benefits that they have noticed by using concrete examples.

Some research has been done on the role of the English language in Finland. According to Leppänen et al (2011:26), there are at least three roles that the English language has in Finland. They argue that the most common situation where English is used in Finland, is where the people who are communicating with each other do not speak the same native language. They continue to say that especially youngsters in Finland use English quite regularly in their everyday-lives because of its popularity in media. Young people are so used to using and hearing English that they no longer consider it a foreign language. Thus, according to them, the role of English in the Finnish youngsters' lives is quite strong nowadays. When I analyse the interviews I will take into consideration the fact that all seven families that took part in this study live in Finland and that the other language that they use is English.

I have chosen to use the qualitative research approach and conducted seven semi-structured interviews. That way I was able to receive more detailed and extensive answers to my questions and I could also add some concrete everyday examples of the children's language use to this research study. I have interviewed seven parents from different families to get their opinion on bilingualism and raising children bilingual. This research study might be interesting and helpful especially for other bilingual families who live in Finland and who speak the same languages, but most aspects of the study can be applied to different languages and countries as well.

I thought that the best way to analyse the data that I received from the interviews was to use the qualitative and thematic analysis method. After transcribing the interviews, I divided them into five themes and analysed the data by focusing on one theme at a time and connecting the answers to certain themes. The themes gave the analysis a clearer and more logical structure, so it will be easier to follow.

There are many different definitions for bilingualism and usually the definition that is used depends on the purpose or the situation. Baker (2006:2) also points out that making a distinction between a monolingual and a bilingual person is a complex process and multiple things need to be taken into consideration before choosing a particular definition. "A person may be able to speak two languages, but tends to speak only one language in practice. Alternatively, the individual may regularly speak two languages, but competence in one language may be limited." (Baker 2006:3). In this study, I will keep in mind the the complexity of the definition process when I refer to bilingualism or bilingual people.

In my thesis I will first introduce the main theories of bilingualism and raising children bilingual. By providing an overview of different background sources I will explain bilingualism and the different definitions that it has. I will also mention a few techniques that have been used by parents when raising bilingual children and the effects that bilingualism might have on the children. After introducing the background literature I will go into more detail about how I have conducted the research and what my research questions are. I will also provide a list of interview questions. In my results and discussion chapter I will discuss my findings thoroughly. By analysing the information that I got from the interviews and I will compare the results and answer

the research questions.

## **2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

This study draws on previous research done on the topic that focuses on both the benefits and the challenges of bilingualism. In this literature review the different definitions of bilingualism will be presented first. Then the different techniques and the process of raising bilingual children will be discussed. After that, I will discuss the benefits and challenges of raising children bilingual based on previous research. I will also discuss code-switching in more detail because it is one of the most common challenges that parents of bilingual children face.

### **2.1 Bilingualism**

Baker (2006:2) points out that making a distinction between a monolingual and a bilingual person is a complex process. He states that the first thing that should be taken into consideration is the “distinction between bilingualism (and multilingualism) as an individual possession and as a group possession.”. He continues on to say that another distinction should also be made between language ability and language use. Often, even though a person is able to speak two languages, they only use one of them in their everyday life. It is also possible that one of the languages is stronger even though the person both of them daily. (Baker 2006:3).

When discussing minimal and maximal bilingualism or native-like and minimal competence in bilingualism, Baker (2006:8) uses a trawling metaphor to emphasize the negative effects of the two extremes. “Trawling with too wide a fishing net will catch too much variety and therefore make discussion about bilinguals ambiguous and imprecise. Trawling with narrow criteria may be too insensitive and restrictive.”. He thinks that one of the reasons why making a clear distinction between monolinguals and bilinguals is impossible is because the definition of bilingualism varies based on the purpose of the definition. (Baker 2006:8).

Hamers and Blanc (2000:6) define bilingualism as “the state of a linguistic community in which two languages are in contact with the result that two codes can be used in the same interaction and that a number of individuals are bilingual”. It is very difficult to provide only one correct definition because all the definitions mentioned before raise questions, such as, what is meant by native-like competence or by minimal proficiency in a second language. (Hamers and Blanc 2000:7). Döpke (1992:2) mentions another aspect of bilingualism that makes it harder to define who is and who is not bilingual. She says that it is very rare that a person is equally fluent in both languages. One of the languages is always stronger. That is why she thinks that even if a person speaks one language more fluently than the other, he or she can still be called a bilingual.

In the present study I am following the more restrictive approach to bilingualism and focus on the speakers of two languages who can speak, use and switch languages fluently, or who at least have the resources to become fluent speakers in two languages because they are or have been raised by parents who speak different native languages. In this study, the two languages that are used in the families that participated in this study are Finnish and English.

## **2.2 Raising a bilingual child**

Usually raising and "teaching" a child to acquire two languages and ultimately become bilingual starts at a very early age, when the child has not yet started to speak at all. In this chapter, I will discuss the different methods and strategies that parents of bilingual families can use at home and outside of home in order to raise their child bilingual. I have divided this chapter into two parts: family language policy and ways of raising children bilingual outside of home. First, I will discuss family language policy and its different effects on a child's language acquisition. I will also include some other methods that parents can use at home. After that I will talk about the different methods and strategies for encouraging a child to acquire a second language outside of home.

### 2.2.1 Family language policy

In this section, I will focus on the family language policies of bilingual families where two languages are used every day at home. When the parents have different native languages, they need to make certain decisions concerning the language or languages that will be used in the family, such as which language the parents will use when talking to each other, their children and when the whole family is together. In these situations the easiest and most commonly used technique to help a child acquire two languages is to talk to the child in one's native language from early on. This is also called the one-parent-one language approach or OPOL. In her book *Bilingualism* (1995: 193) Suzanne Romaine defines the OPOL approach as follows: “The parents have different native languages with each having some degree of competence in the other language. The language of one of the parents is the dominant language of the community. The parents each speak their own language to the child from birth.

According to Baker (2000:44-45) the OPOL approach helps the children not to mix the languages and to know when to use the two languages. “Experts on bilingualism have traditionally placed stress on the importance of keeping the context of children's languages compartmentalised.”. When the parents speak different languages with and to the child, he or she will most likely eventually automatically acquire both languages. Barron-Hauwaert (2011:38-39) agrees and also adds that consistency is key in the one-parent-one language approach. However, Thomas (2012:55) argues that there are also some risks with this rule. She says that some parents might sometimes have difficulty knowing whether it is better to follow the OPOL rule very strictly or to be more relaxed about it and at least sometimes letting the child decide themselves which language to use. According to her, if a parent follows this rule very strictly, the child might start to resent the language. On the other hand it is also possible that if a parent is not strict about it, the child may stop speaking one of the languages altogether. So, it appears that it is not always easy for the parents to find the best strategy that works well for their child.

Another way for a child to become bilingual that Raguenaud (2009:21-23) brings up is the one language-one environment (OLOE) strategy. It means that the parents and the children only speak one language at home and another language outside of home. In other words, the language chosen

to be used depends on the environment where the conversation occurs.

In addition to those two most popular strategies, Grosjean (2010:206-208) mentions three other strategies for raising children bilingual, even though they are nowhere near as popular as the first two. The first strategy consists of starting with only one of the languages and using it at home in every situation. After a few years, the second language will be used as well. He calls it the "one-language-first" -rule (Grosjean 2010:207). He says that this strategy helps the child to reach a certain language skill level in one of the languages before acquiring the second one.

The second strategy that Grosjean (2010:207) mentions, consists of using a certain language at a specific time of day or the week. Just like the OPOL strategy, this one is also supposed to help the children compartmentalise the two languages by linking them to specific times. The third strategy uses the idea of compartmentalisation of the languages as well, but this particular strategy just links a specific language to a certain topic or person. This shows that there are many different strategies for raising children bilingual that parents can choose from and the choice is often the most crucial factor in the language acquisition process.

### **2.2.2 Ways of raising children bilingual outside of home**

One way for parents to help their children acquire a second language outside of home is by putting them to a daycare or school where the language that is used is not the same as the home language. There are, for example, foreign language schools and immersion programs in which children use a second language most of the time and that way acquire a second language. Baker (2006: 213) mentions two different education types used at school that can support the children's language acquisition of two languages. The first type is an education or a schooling system that is bilingual, so two languages are used almost at all times and the second type is a monolingual education or schooling system that is meant for children who speak a minority language at home. The latter education type is called transitional bilingual education which "aims to shift the child from the home, minority language to the dominant, majority language." (Baker 2006: 213). The strategy that is used in this type of education is called "mainstreaming" or "submersion". It

means that the teachers and the students only use the majority language, which is not their home language, in the classroom. (Baker 2006: 216).

Baker (2000: 14) mentions that other ways parents can help their children to acquire a second language are hiring a nanny or a babysitter who speaks a different language or having playdates with children who speak another language. The most important factor is that the child hears, speaks, reads and writes in another language as much as possible and from as young age as possible.

### **2.3 The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual**

I have divided this chapter into three parts: The benefits of raising a child bilingual, the challenges of it and a more detailed description of code-switching. This way I am able to make a clear distinction between the two sides of bilingualism. However, in some cases, some of the the benefits and challenges can be seen as both simultaneously. That is because parents and researcher sometimes view the same things from different perspectives. This is also sometimes the case with code-switching.

#### **2.3.1 Benefits of raising a child bilingual**

Most of the effects of bilingualism on children have proved to be positive. For example, in his book, Baker (2000:1-5) emphasizes the importance and the benefits of raising children bilingual. He points out that being bilingual most likely affects the child's identity, social arrangement, thinking, education, employment and travel. Many other researchers have come to the same conclusion. For example, Bailey, Osipova and Genesee (2016:11) list the same advantages in their book. They also add that the children's bilingualism has a positive effect on their parents' lives as well by often having a closer relationship with the children and knowing that their children will have a better chance at being successful in the more and more globalised world.

Baker (2000:1-2) argues that one of the most important advantages to raising children bilingual is its positive effect on the relationship between the parents and the children, especially in bilingual

families. Bilingual children are able to communicate in both of their parents' native languages. Parents often hope to be able to speak to their children in their first language because they are usually able to express themselves better in that language. The common language often creates a stronger bond between the parent and the child. Raguenaud (2009:75) agrees that when children are able to speak both of their parents' native languages they automatically feel a lot closer to their parents, because language is a very important part of bonding. It also keeps the children's extended family closer, because they are able to talk, for example, with their grandparents. That way the languages are a tool to maintain family and social relations.

Baker (2000:4-5) also mentions the fact that being bilingual helps to connect with people around the world while traveling, for example. Being able to connect with more people from different cultures often enables bilinguals to understand and tolerate different cultures better than monolinguals. The reason for that is because language is an important part of a culture, so when a person can speak two languages, he or she can most likely also feel more connected to different cultures. Wei, Dewaele and Housen (2002: 2-3) agree that being bilingual often offers people life experiences that monolinguals do not get to experience. “ bilingualism provides the opportunity to experience two or more cultures more directly, to participate and become involved in the core of a culture, and to appreciate the different systems of behaviour, rituals, religious traditions, beliefs and values, histories, and literatures. “

Raguenaud (2009:76) argues that bilingualism also has a positive effect on the child's academic skills. Studies have shown that speaking two languages helps the brain to multitask, memorize and learn new things more easily. Bilingual children also tend to be more global-minded from a young age, because they have usually been surrounded by at least two different cultures their whole life, and that way they have learned to understand and appreciate different cultures.

One of the most important positive effects that bilingualism has on children and their lives in the future according to Raguenaud (2009:79) is having the type of versatile language skills that help bilinguals stand out from monolingual applicants in the job market. Today when the job market is more global than ever before, a second language is often required when applying for a job. The people that have been raised bilingual can speak two languages fluently, which often helps them

to find a job more easily than monolingual. Bilinguals also have better opportunities to work abroad. Wei, Dewaele and Housen (2002:2-3) have come to the same conclusion. They think that employers value bilinguals' skills, especially in the international job markets. " With the dramatically increased amount of information available, and the ease of delivering it around the world, bilinguals may have become more important in the employment market. "

### **2.3.2 Challenges of raising a child bilingual**

There are also some possible negative effects of bilingualism on children. Fernald (2006:19-30) compares monolingual and bilingual infants' competences of "distinguishing between the ambient language and another language they have never been exposed to". The results show that monolingual infants distinguish characteristics of their native language better and faster than bilingual infants. According to Fernald, one possible reason for this is that bilingual children "hear less speech in either languages than monolingual infants hear in the single language they are exposed to" (Fernald 2006:24). However, this language delay does not last very long, because bilingual children usually catch up to other children within a year or two. Dewaele, Housen and Li (2003:13-14) have come to the same conclusion. They say that even though there might be some delay in a bilingual child's language development in the early stages because of less input in one language, the child will be able to reach the same language skill level as the monolingual child in a couple of years.

A challenge that many parents of bilingual children also face, especially in bilingual families, according to Thomas (2012:66), is that at some point, usually in the early years, bilingual children tend to start rejecting one of the languages. They start speaking and answering in only one of the languages at all times no matter who they are speaking to and where. That often leads to the parents worrying whether the other language will never get to fully develop. It has been shown, however, that more often than not this phase will pass and the child will stop rebelling against one of the languages and continues to use both languages.

### **2.3.3 Code-switching**

Another effect that has sometimes been viewed as negative is code-switching or language-mixing. Code-switching means that a person, usually a young child, uses words from two or more languages in one sentence. Barron-Hauwaert (2004:11) mentions that code-switching often occurs when a child is using words or nouns that are familiar to him or her. The child might know the word for a certain object in one language and the name for another object in the other language. The reason for this might be the fact that young children usually learn and use nouns more often in the early years than adjectives or verbs. Nowadays code-switching is a very well-known aspect of language acquisition in young bilingual children's language development, and thus parents of bilingual children often consider it as normal.

Muysken (2000:2) has also done research on code-switching and adds that it is no longer viewed as a result of limited proficiency in a certain language. He has noticed that even bilinguals with nearly native-like proficiency in both languages code-switch at times, which shows that it is not something about which parents of bilingual children should worry.

## **3 PRESENT STUDY**

### **3.1 Research questions**

The aim of this study is to explore the benefits and challenges of raising a bilingual child with the help of seven interviews of parents of bilingual children. I am also going to investigate some of the reasons why parents decide to raise their children bilingual. My study focuses on the following research questions:

1. How do parents raise their children bilingual?
2. Why do parents decide to raise their children bilingual?
3. What are the benefits and challenges of raising children bilingual?

With the first research question I am trying to find out how parents in bilingual families raise their children bilingual and whether they have used or are still using certain types of techniques or strategies to help their children acquire two languages. In this research study I am focusing on the techniques that are used with children who speak both Finnish and English and who live in Finland. I want to know if those specific languages and the families' environment has affected the parents' choice of strategy.

The second research question helps me to discover the reasons behind the parents' decision to raise their children bilingual. In every family that participated in this study, the parents had made a somewhat conscious decision to raise their child or children bilingual. I am interested to see why they made that decision and if it was easy to make.

The third research question is the most important one because it is the topic that I am focusing on in this research study. The seven families are all already bilingual in a way because the parents speak two different mother tongues. One of the parents is a native English-speaker and the other one is a native Finnish-speaker. They also live in Finland where Finnish is the majority language. I want to find out if these factors have affected the way the parents view bilingualism and the types of experiences they have had with raising their children bilingual. I am interested to know the

both sides of bilingualism; the benefits and the challenges that it brings to the parents, the children and the whole family dynamic.

### **3.2 Data**

I have collected the data for this study by conducting seven semi-structured interviews in February and March of 2017. Each interview lasted for about 30 minutes. The interviewees are parents of bilingual children who speak both Finnish and English, and who live in Finland. In each family one of the parents is a native English speaker and the other parent is a native Finnish-speaker. The interviews were done either via Skype or on the phone because I wasn't able to arrange face-to-face interviews with them. The reason for that was because the interviewees lived in different parts of Finland. I recorded and transcribed all parts of the interviews to make the analysing process less complicated and more accurate.

In order to ensure that I collected the data in an ethically correct way, I contacted the participants via email and asked if they would like to take part in this research study. All seven people agreed to be interviewed voluntarily. Everyone of them also gave me permission to record the interviews and before asking any of the research questions I asked them if I could use their interviews in my research. They all agreed. Thus, I was allowed to quote some of their answers, but I have kept all seven of the participants anonymous by not using their names or their family members' names. I have also not provided any information about them in this study that could make them less anonymous.

The table below provides a clearer and simpler presentation of the basic background information of the seven families interviewed for this research study.

**Table 1:**

	<b>Number of children</b>	<b>Ages of the children</b>	<b>Mother tongue of the mother</b>	<b>Mother tongue of the father</b>	<b>Parent interviewed</b>
<b>Family one</b>	1	2	Finnish	English (Canadian)	mother
<b>Family two</b>	3	2, 3 and 4	Finnish/English (Scottish)	Finnish	mother
<b>Family three</b>	1	2	English (American)	Finnish	mother
<b>Family four</b>	7	1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 13 and 15	English (American)/Finnish	Finnish	mother
<b>Family five</b>	2	16 and 19	Finnish	English (New Zealander)	father
<b>Family six</b>	3	7, 11 and 13	English (American)/Finnish	Finnish	mother
<b>Family seven</b>	8	3, 5, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18 and 19	English (American)	Finnish	mother

The families' children's ages vary from 1 to 19 years, but I focused mainly on their earlier years in the interviews. In some situations the children's ages didn't have an effect on the answers such as, when I asked about the reasons for having decided to raise the children bilingual. The only time the children's age had an effect on the answers was when the parents talked about the benefits and the challenges that they had noticed over the years. Obviously, the parents with older children had had more time to observe their children and how being raised bilingual had affected them.

There is a native English speaker in every family. The only father that I interviewed is the father in family five. All other interviewees were mothers. Most of the native English speakers are

Americans, but I also interviewed parents who come from or have strong connections to Canada, New Zealand and Scotland.

I interviewed six mothers and one father. The only reason for that is that because I did all the interviews in English I preferred to interview the parents who were native English speakers or who were fluent in English in order for them to be able to express themselves well in English. The reason why I did not interview the mother of family five is, because she is not a fluent English speaker. This gave me the opportunity to focus on the English-speaking parents' perspective and to find out what it is like for them to raise a bilingual (Finnish-English) child in Finland.

For the analysis of the research data, I used the qualitative and thematic analysis method. I transcribed the whole interviews, which made it quite easy to raise some themes from the interviews that I would also use in my analysis. I analysed the data by dividing it into four themes: The families' language policies and language use, Reasons for raising a child bilingual, Ways of raising a child bilingual and The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual. These themes helped me find the similarities and the differences between the answers I received during the interviews and made the analysis process more logical. After analysing the interviews, I was able to start linking it to results from previous studies and compare them in order to find answers to my research questions.

### **3.3 Semi-structured interviews**

Semi-structured interview is a data collection method used in qualitative studies. It is used especially for research that focuses on the participants own experiences on the topic being studied.

In her book Anne Galletta (2012) defines a semi-structured interview as a data collection method that incorporates "both open-ended and more theoretically driven questions, eliciting data

grounded in the experience of the participant as well as data guided by existing constructs in the particular discipline within which one is conducting research.” (Galletta 2012:45). She then continues to give instructions for constructing one's interview protocol for semi-structured interviews. Galletta (2012:46-54) encourages the researcher who is using the semi-structured interview method to divide the interview into three segments: the opening segment with very open-ended questions that focus on the interviewee's own experiences, the middle segment with more specific questions that are more related to one's research questions, and the concluding segment that revisits the statements made in the first segment and makes theoretical connections. She argues that, even though the aforementioned interview protocol and the number of segments within an interview is not fixed, it would help the researcher to plan the interviews and the interview questions.

The reason why I chose to conduct semi-structured interviews for this study is because I wanted to focus on the parents' own experiences on raising children bilingual and bilingualism in general. Semi-structured interviews were the most convenient way to do it because they offer the interviewees space to elaborate on the topics and share their experiences more freely. I did, however, have some questions and themes prepared to make sure that I was able to receive answers to my research questions.

As Galletta (2012:45-54) had suggested, I divided the interviews into different segments or themes which made the interviews more structured, logical and easier to analyse once the interviews were over. I also followed Galletta's advice and planned the interviews and some interview questions beforehand, but also left room for questions that I could ask during the interviews if needed.

### **3.4 Interview questions**

The interviews were semi-structured which means that I asked a number of pre-decided open questions, but I also raised some follow-up questions when needed. I chose this interviewing method, because it helped me to receive the information I need and to collect enough data to analyse.

There were a few themes in my interviews and the questions. First, I asked questions about the families' backgrounds, such as the number, sexes and ages of the children and every family member's mother tongues. The ages of the families' children varied from 8 months to 19 years, which gave me a more versatile perspective on how parents raise their child/children bilingual at different stages of their lives and how the parents feel about it.

The second theme that was raised in my interviews and the questions was the family language policy in each family. I asked questions about different situations and what language the children and the parents use in those particular situations. I also asked what language is used when talking to a certain family member or someone outside their family. These questions helped me compare the families to each other and to find out how their family language policies affected the parents' views on the benefits and challenges of raising their child/children bilingual.

The third theme in my semi-structured interviews was the ways and techniques that the parents used or are still using for raising their child/children bilingual. I first asked them a more general question and after that I asked more specific ones, such as, if they used any books or films etc. in both languages and other similar questions to get a broader idea of how the parents raised or are raising their children bilingual.

The last theme was what the topic of this thesis is: The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual, according to the parents that I interviewed. I asked the parents to mention and describe actual moments or situations where they have felt that the children's bilingualism has been a benefit or a challenge. I also asked them to list and describe the benefits and challenges of raising

their child/children bilingual that they had faced so far. If the children were old enough I also asked if the parents had noticed any benefits or challenges of being bilingual that their children had experienced at school. I asked the parents to share their opinions on how they think that bilingualism will affect their children's lives in the future and whether it will be a benefit or a hindrance to them. By asking the questions I was able to receive specific descriptions of real life examples of the benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual.

#### **4. INTERVIEWS WITH SEVEN BILINGUAL FAMILIES**

In the analysis I will first talk about the backgrounds and the language policy and the language use of the seven families that I interviewed. I will mention the most relevant facts, such as, the number of children and their ages, the mother tongues of the parents and I will also mention which parent I interviewed for this study. The background information will give an idea of what the families are like and it will be easier to notice some similarities and differences that the families have with each other. I have divided the language policy and language use section into two parts: at home and outside of home, in order to emphasize how different environments, situations and people affect the families' language use and the children's language development.

In the second part of the analysis I will discuss the reasons for why the parents had decided to raise their children bilingual or how they ended up doing so without actually putting much thought into it before their children were born. The next part of the analysis focuses on the different techniques and strategies that the parents have used, are using or have planned on using in the future to raise their child or children bilingual.

The fourth part of the analysis is all about the benefits and challenges that the parents have had with raising their children bilingual and how they think being bilingual will affect them in the future. I will then analyse what might have been the reasons for why some parents had less

challenges than others. After that I will go into more detail about the children's language development and their code-switching. I will use some concrete examples and analyse how acquiring two languages at the same time has affected the way they use the languages.

#### **4.1 The families' language policies and language use**

In this first section of the analysis, I will talk about the language policies and the language use of the seven families that participated in this research study. I have divided it into two parts: "At home" and "Outside of home" in order to provide a clearer way to show how the language use of the families and the children differs in various environments and with different people.

##### **4.1.1 At home**

In this first part, I will talk about the families' language policies and how they use language at home. I will try to emphasize how the children's language use differs depending on the situation or the family member or members to whom they are talking. I also asked the parents to mention some of the possible reasons why the family members use English and Finnish at home the way they do. That helped me analyse how the children's language use at home might affect their level of fluency in the two languages.

In family one there is only a two-year-old child. The mother's mother tongue is Finnish and the father's mother tongue is English and he is originally from Canada. Both parents are able to speak both Finnish and English fluently. At the moment the mother speaks Finnish to their daughter and the father speaks English to her. Their daughter answers in both Finnish and English, but she still mixes the languages. The parents speak both Finnish and English to each other depending on the situation. The parents have thought about switching the home language to English if their daughter goes to a Finnish-speaking daycare and school. They think that if both of the parents spoke only English to her at home, she would be able to use both Finnish and English fluently.

When she starts school or daycare, if she goes to a Finnish speaking daycare and school, we have thought of changing our home language completely to English. So, because the mainstream language Finnish would be so strong then in her life because she would get that from everywhere, so we want to make sure that her English is strong as well. (Mother of family 1)

There are 3 children in family two and they are 2, 3 and 4,5 years old. The mother of the family is bilingual herself, because her own father is from Scotland and speaks only English. She speaks both Finnish and English. The father of the family speaks Finnish as his mother tongue. The mother speaks English to her children as much as possible, but the children usually answer in Finnish. The children also speak Finnish to each other. The father speaks Finnish to the children. The parents speak Finnish with each other. If the family is doing something together they usually speak Finnish, but the mother speaks English to the children. The mother is planning on starting to ask the children to speak mostly English to her when they are older. She was raised that way herself and thinks it's a good way to get her children to speak more English.

The language policy at my house was that we answered in the language that our parents asked us. So I'm going to try and do that same thing with my children because otherwise they won't be using English here in Finland much. (Mother of family 2)

There is only one child in family three and he is two years old. The mother's mother tongue is English and she is from the United States. She is not able to speak Finnish that well yet. The father is a native Finnish-speaker. The mother speaks English to their son and the father speaks Finnish to him. Their son mixes Finnish and English when he is speaking to his parents. The parents mainly use English with each other. They have recently started using more Finnish, however, so that the mother could improve her Finnish.

Family four is quite big. There are seven children in the family and their ages are 1, 3, 6, 8, 10, 13 and 15. The mother is from the United States and she is bilingual. She speaks both English and

Finnish, but she considers English as her mother tongue. The father's mother tongue is Finnish. The parents had initially decided that the mother would speak English to their children and the father would speak Finnish to them. The two oldest children have severe dyslexia and other challenges, so the parents thought that it would be better if the mother would only speak English to their children when it is convenient and they are not in a hurry. So, the main home language is Finnish.

My intention was to speak in English, but what I often do is just to make sure that the communication flows, because we have different children with different type of challenges, so I will speak in English and then I'll say the same thing in Finnish. Sometimes it goes the other way, but I try to use both languages now at this point. And I figured that it's better than nothing. (Mother of family 4)

There are two children in family five and they are a bit older than the children in the other families. They are 16 and 19. The father is from New Zealand and he is a native English speaker and the mother's native language is Finnish. The father speaks English to their children and the mother speaks Finnish to them. The 19-year-old son speaks Finnish to both of his parents, but the 16-year-old daughter speaks English to her father and Finnish to her mother. The children speak Finnish to each other. The parents use Finnish when they are talking because they think that they should speak Finnish in Finland.

My wife and I use Finnish because this is Finland and we started speaking Finnish together as soon as possible because I obviously wanted to learn to speak it. We were able to change the home language from English to Finnish quite quickly. (Father of family 5)

Family six has three children ages 7, 11 and 13. The mother was raised in the United States, but she is bilingual. She considers her English to be a bit stronger than her Finnish. The father's mother tongue is Finnish. The mother speaks English to their children and the father speaks Finnish to them. The only time when the mother switches to Finnish with them is when they are

doing homework. The children answer in English when they have to be quick, but if it needs a longer explanation or it is related to school they answer in Finnish. They always speak Finnish with their father. When the whole family is together, both languages are used.

Our languages are pretty mixed up. My husband will speak in Finnish. I will speak in English. Sometimes the kids will answer back in Finnish and sometimes in English and sometimes using both languages in a sentence. (Mother of family 6)

The mother said that the oldest child seems to be the most comfortable with speaking English. He speaks English the most and the youngest child's English is not as strong, but he does not have any problems with speaking it if he has to.

I find that the oldest, his language skills are the strongest, being that we've had this kinda like rule that you always speak English to the younger ones and you always speak English to the baby. He has always spoken English to the younger two until recently. So the youngest one, he hasn't had that, or he's not so-called forced or required to speak English to the younger one because he's the youngest. (Mother of family 6)

Family seven is the biggest of all the families that took part in this study. There are eight children in the family and their ages are 3, 5, 9, 12, 14, 17, 18 and 19. The mother is originally from the United States and her mother tongue is English. The father is a native Finnish speaker. Their home language is English. Both of the parents use only English at home. The children speak English to the parents, but they use Finnish with each other most of the time because Finnish is a stronger language for them.

So, even though my husband is a Finn, we speak English with our children, my husband and I speak English to each other and the children speak English to us. (Mother of family 7)

All of the parents that I interviewed considered their children to be bilingual, even though they were more fluent in Finnish than in English. The main reason for that is probably because their children hear and use Finnish more in their everyday life. The families in which the children were almost equally fluent in both languages were the ones in which the other parent did not speak any Finnish at home. That is because the children were sort of forced to use only English when talking to that particular parent. Based on the interviews, it seems like if both parents used a lot of Finnish at home or the English-speaking parent did not expect the children to answer in English, their children were more likely to only be able to understand English, but they would probably not be able to speak it fluently.

#### **4.1.2 Outside of home**

This second part focuses on the children's language use outside of home, i.e. at school and with friends etc. I also wanted to find out how much the fact that the families lived in Finland affected the children's language use outside of home. It was interesting to see how much the country that the families live in affects the children's language use and their level of fluency in the two languages.

Family one speaks mainly Finnish in Finland because most of their friends and relatives are Finnish-speakers. However, they do have quite a few Canadian friends in Finland as well and they speak English with them. When they are visiting relatives in Canada or calling them, they use English because most of the relatives from the father's side do not speak Finnish.

My husband's side of the family speaks mainly English and my side of the family speaks Finnish and most of our friends speak Finnish. So, more Finnish here. We use Finnish more in our everyday life.(Mother of family 1)

The two-year-old daughter does not go to daycare or school yet, so most of her interaction outside of home occurs at the park or when visiting friends. All of her friends speak Finnish, so

she does not hear or speak almost any English in Finland outside of home.

Family two has the same kind of situation where they use Finnish almost all the time outside of home because most of their English-speaking friends and relatives live in Scotland and they do not see them often. All three of the children also go to a Finnish-speaking daycare and school. The only times when the children get to hear and speak English outside of home is when the mother's sister is visiting or when they call her father. The mother's father speaks only English, so the children have to speak English in order to be able to communicate with him. They understand everything he says to them, but they sometimes have difficulty replying to him in English. That is why they usually speak Finnish to him and the mother translates what they say.

My dad. He speaks to my kids on the phone in English. My dad phones every week, so they do hear him on the phone regularly. But my children speak Finnish to him.

(Mother of family 2)

Family three's situation is a little bit different because the mother is not able to speak Finnish that well. In Finland, even though most of their relatives and friends are Finnish-speakers, they sometimes have to use English, so that the mother is able to understand everything and express herself better. Their two-year-old son is still too young to go to school or daycare, so he spends most of his time at home with his grandparents from the father's side when the parents are at work or at school. The grandparents speak Finnish with him. The parents and their son speak English with the mother's side of the family, because they do not know any Finnish.

My son has just started speaking, but we can already tell that he speaks more Finnish. This is because he spends a lot of time with his grandparents. They take care of him while I'm at school, so they speak Finnish to him. (Mother of family 3)

Family four speaks Finnish most of the time outside of home because the children go to a Finnish-speaking daycare and school and all of their friends speak Finnish. The only time when

the children get to hear and speak English in Finland outside of home is when the mother's sister is visiting.

Generally Finnish, but then the older kids do occasionally like when my sister comes over they will try to speak in English. (Mother of family 4)

Just like all the other families, family five uses almost only Finnish outside of home in Finland. Both of the children go to a Finnish-speaking school and all of their friends speak Finnish. The father has some English-speaking friends and the 16-year-old daughter sometimes speaks English with her friends for fun.

I have some English-speaking friends and my daughter has some Finnish-speaking friends and they speak English together because they want to. But probably 90% of all our lives outside of home is conducted in Finnish. (Father of family 5)

Family six uses English outside of home only when they are talking to their American relatives from the mother's side. Other than that, the children speak Finnish at school and with their friends and relatives from their father's side.

If we are dealing with my family, I have a brother, so with him we talk in English, but with everybody else we speak Finnish.(Mother of family 6)

The mother speaks English to the children even outside of home and they answer in either English or Finnish.

If I'm with the kids in the store, I speak English to them. It depends on the situation, do they answer back in English or do they answer back in Finnish. (Mother of family 6)

In family seven, the home language is English, so the children have learned Finnish outside of

home. They have learned Finnish at school, with friends and relatives and by spending time outside. The mother says that the only reason why the children speak Finnish so much, is because they live in Finland where Finnish is used everywhere.

The fact that they've learned Finnish is because we live in Finland. It's not because of the language that we have spoken at our home. Then they've learned the Finnish from visiting with people and relatives, in the park and they are going to a Finnish-speaking school. (Mother of family 7)

All of the families use a lot more Finnish outside of home than English. The main reason for that is that all of the children go to a Finnish-speaking daycare or school and most of their friends and relatives in Finland speak Finnish. Finnish is the majority language in Finland, so it is not a surprise that most of the interaction outside of home is in Finnish. Even though English is a majority language in the world and a so-called *Lingua Franca*, it is still a minority language in Finland. According to Döpke (1992:2), one of the languages that a bilingual person speaks is always stronger. That is because the person's living environment and life situations etc. One of the two languages is used more than the other. That is why a person who speaks one language more fluently than the other language can still be called a bilingual and it is also quite clearly the reason why Finnish is the stronger language for the children of the seven families.

#### **4.2 Reasons for raising a child bilingual**

In this part of the analysis I will first present the reasons why the parents of the seven families decided to raise their children bilingual. After that I will try to find the similarities and the differences in the parents' answers. I will then compare the answers with previous research done on the topic in order to find some of the main reasons why parents decide to raise their children bilingual.

The parents of family one decided that they would raise their child bilingual because they knew

how much knowing two languages would benefit their child's life in the future. The mother thinks that giving their child the possibility to become bilingual is a gift for their child. Using the word "gift" as a metaphor for raising a child bilingual shows how much the mother values bilingualism.

It was really a no-brainer because I think it's a great opportunity to learn two languages at once. It really opens up many more possibilities and opportunities in life. It's kind of a rich gift that you can give to your child. Also, the opportunities in working life, being able to travel, being confident in two languages, educating yourself. The world is open. (Mother of family 1)

The main reason why the parents of family two decided to raise their three children bilingual is quite practical. The mother's father and other relatives who live in Scotland do not speak English, so her children have to know English to be able to communicate with both sides of the family. The mother was also raised bilingual herself, so she thought it was a natural decision to raise her children bilingual as well.

My children have to be bilingual to be able to speak to my dad. And also, I have all my other relatives in Scotland who obviously don't speak Finnish. So it'll be easier to communicate with them if they are bilingual. That's one of the biggest reasons and the other one is that I've been raised bilingual and it's very, it's sort of natural to me. So I always knew I would speak English to my children. (Mother of family 2)

The parents of family three had heard that it would be wise and quite easy for them to raise their child bilingual. Because unlike monolingual parents, they were already using two languages, so it would be natural for their child to hear and use two languages daily.

It was a natural decision and it's easy. My mother tongue is English and my husband's is Finnish. We thought it was normal. We were also advised to do it that way. (Mother of family 3)

The mother of family four had been raised bilingual herself, so she had seen how beneficial it is to be fluent in two languages. That was why the parents wanted to raise their seven children bilingual. They also have relatives in the United States who do not speak Finnish, so the children would be able to communicate with them better if they were bilingual.

We definitely planned on raising them bilingual and you could say that it's still our goal. I was brought up bilingual and I have seen the benefits of it, like it's really great to have two languages that you are fluent in. Plus I think it helps with learning a lot of other things. But also we have family in the United States that, for example, my grandparents who don't speak Finnish and it would be nice if they could communicate at some level. (Mother of family 4)

The father in family five said that the reason why he and his wife raised their two children bilingual was because he was not a fluent Finnish-speaker. His mother tongue is English, so he wanted to be able to speak to his children in English and express himself better.

It felt silly to speak to them in a language that I didn't know very well. I wanted to sound and feel like myself when I talk to my children. (Father of family 5)

The mother of family six was raised bilingual and she had noticed how great it is to know two languages, so she wanted her three sons to be able to share that same experience. She said that if her children are bilingual, they would be able to communicate with their English-speaking grandparents and other relatives in the United States.

Being that I was raised bilingually in the U.S. When I moved to Finland and married a Finn, I realised the great benefit of knowing two languages. I was able to communicate with my grandparents and friends and other family members without having a language barrier between us. I want my boys to experience the same thing that I did, which is that when they go to the States, they have a language in which they can communicate with their grandparents and other family members. That's

the biggest reason. (Mother of family 6)

Because the children of family six are U.S. citizens, the mother thinks that they should be able to speak English.

And another reason why this was such a big deal to me was because I never want that to happen to my own child. That they carry a U.S. passport, but they can't speak English. Also another big factor that only emphasized my first thought that I will speak only English to my kids. (Mother of family 6)

The only reason why the parents of family seven decided to raise their children bilingual was because they are from different countries and they have different native languages. They thought that it is normal for parents from different countries and who have different mother tongues to raise their children bilingual.

Just for the plain old fact that I'm from the U.S. and my husband is from Finland.  
(Mother of family 7)

The parents of each family felt like raising their children bilingual was a natural decision. The main reason why parents who were bilingual themselves wanted to raise their children bilingual was because they had noticed all the benefits that being bilingual has. They wanted their children to experience the same thing. The reason why the parents of the other families decided to raise their children bilingual was because the other parent was not a fluent Finnish-speaker. They wanted to be able to speak to their children in their own mother tongue. They all also had relatives who could only speak Finnish or English, so they wanted their children to be able to communicate with all of them as well.

### 4.3 Ways of raising a child bilingual

This part of the analysis focuses on the different types of techniques and strategies that parents use in order to raise or try raise their children bilingual. In the interviews I asked the parents to mention the techniques that they have used or are currently using and the reasons why they chose those particular techniques. First, I will present the parents' answers to those questions and then I will try to find the most common techniques and strategies for raising children bilingual by analysing the answers and comparing them with previous research.

Both of the parents of family one speak their own mother tongues with their two-year-old daughter at the moment. The mother has started thinking that they might possibly change their home language to English at some point because she thinks that the One Parent One Language rule is not enough. She thinks that by changing the home language to English and by expecting their daughter to answer in English as well, she would become more fluent in English.

We've decided that I will speak Finnish and my husband will speak only English. But because we live in a Finnish-speaking country and environment, so it might not be enough to just have that OPOL rule. So, I think we are definitely going to change our home language to English at some point. We will expect our child and our future children to speak English and answer in English as well. So, later on our home language would be completely English. (Mother of family 1)

In addition to the OPOL rule, they also have most of their books, music and movies in English. They have received a lot of books from Canada, so they read them to their daughter in English. The father also sometimes translates the Finnish books into English when he reads to her.

We have movies and music in both languages, but definitely more English. It's good that she gets to hear as much English as possible because she can hear Finnish everywhere. I'd say that it's 80/20. 80 percent of the music is in English. We have gotten a lot of English books from Canada. She has a lot of Finnish books, too. And

sometimes when my husband reads to her before she goes to bed, he might read the Finnish stories in English, because he wants to stick with English. (Mother of family 1)

The parents in family two also use the One Parent One Language rule because the mother was raised the same way and it worked well. The mother speaks English to their three children and the father speaks Finnish. The mother does not expect the children to answer in English.

Yeah we have the One Parent One Language technique. The reason for why I chose to use the OPOL rule was because it was clear to me and I had been raised that way and it worked for me. I never thought about it before. I just thought that that's the way you do it. It's clear for the kids. (Mother of family 2)

They have books, movies and music in both languages, but the mother often tries to find English versions of them, so that their children would hear more English.

We have everything in both languages and everytime they watch TV or a movie I try to put it in English. I try to find everything for them in English because they hear Finnish so much. We listen to music in both languages. And the books are in both languages. It depends on who's reading. They have their favourite books in both languages and if they want us to read a certain book they know who to go to. (Mother of family 2)

When their son was born, the parents of family three thought that speaking in their own mother tongues would be enough for their now two-year-old son to acquire both Finnish and English. They feel like it is natural for them.

We didn't research how to raise your child bilingual. We just thought that if we speak to him naturally and umm yeah and expose him every now and again to like TV shows in English and Finnish then I think that would be good enough for now.

Outside of that we haven't really thought about it. (Mother of family 3)

Their son gets to use and hear Finnish as often as English. The parents have been very successful with being consistent with the OPOL rule.

I think equal amounts of books in Finnish and English. But here at the house, in our apartment we have mostly English books and when he goes to his grandparents' house there's mainly Finnish books. When he watches TV with me we watch English language shows and when he's with his dad they watch Pikku Kakkonen. But when he gets to choose, he likes to watch videos that are in English. (Mother of family 3)

In family four the parents try to use the OPOL rule, so the father would speak Finnish and the mother would speak English, but they have not been very consistent with it. The mother does read to the younger children in English and sometimes she tries to get the children to speak English to her by asking questions about the story and then repeating it in Finnish.

Sometimes I will read books in English, but I will.. just to make sure that they will understand.. after I've read a page then I kinda sum it up into Finnish, because I want to keep them with the story and so that they don't lose focus. Then I might ask them like "Did you know what this word meant?" and then I'd explain what it meant. (Mother of family 4)

Because their children do not always quite understand what their mother is saying, she tries to use different objects and her hands to make it easier for the children to understand her. When they are not in a hurry, the mother tries to make the children speak English to her, but they do not always have time for that.

I would use an object or something that I could point to. So, I would use my hands a lot, like I would point to the shoes and I would say, "Could you put your shoes on?".

So, it becomes very concrete so that if they don't quite understand a word they can look to see where I point and then they can most likely figure out the meaning. In certain situations yeah I do kinda force them to answer in English and I help them or like prompt them if they don't know a word, I'll give them the word. But usually I'm just so busy that I can't do all that. (Mother of family 4)

The mother also tries to watch English videos with the children, so that they get to hear English and learn the basic vocabulary. Other than that the children watch videos and listen to music in both languages.

They will and they can watch Youtube videos or if they watch some documentaries or something.. they watch them in English or in Finnish. And sometimes I will find them like something like Youtube videos in English, just so that they can kinda like practice. For example, they have watched videos that have very day-to-day type of vocabulary and things that they most likely have heard at home as well. (Mother of family 4)

In family five the parents used to use the OPOL rule, so the mother spoke Finnish to their two children and the father spoke English. The father used quite a lot of English when the children were younger and they have been able to use English with their English-speaking relatives. However, nowadays the father is already quite fluent in Finnish, so he does not use English with the children that much anymore, which has reduced the use of the OPOL rule. The parents do not think that they need to put that much effort into raising their children bilingual anymore because the father thinks that their children get to hear and use English enough at school and in their everyday life.

Just always speaking English to them and when they were young, obviously reading books to them in English. And teaching them songs, nursery rhymes. They are very important. And the kids have been to New Zealand. My son twice and my daughter once. So they've met my side of the family and have been able to communicate with

them in English. (Father of family 5)

When their son was younger, the parents tried to use different types of techniques to get him to address his father in English because the father felt like it was important to be able to speak to his children in his native language, but after a while he did not think that it was that important anymore because he himself had started to be able to express himself in Finnish well enough. Now their son speaks Finnish with both of his parents.

My wife particularly tried to motivate our son to speak English to me all the time by promising.. through bribes basically. I did try at one point to.. like I wouldn't answer him if he spoke to me in Finnish, but that didn't work. (Father of family 5)

When the children were younger, both of the parents of family six spoke English to them. The father eventually ended up speaking Finnish to them, but the mother still speaks only English to them.

In the beginning when the kids were smaller we both spoke English, because it was fairly simple, but when they grew, my husband switched to Finnish because his vocabulary wasn't broad enough to continue the conversations as they grew. So, basically I'm the one who upkeeps the language at home. (Mother of family 6)

Most of the books that family six has are in English and the mother used to only read to them in English. She even translated the Finnish books to English. The children are now old enough to watch Youtube videos on their own and they watch videos in both languages.

I only read in English and if there was a Finnish book, I translated it before I read it. All our books that we have at home are basically in English. And if they're watching videos on Youtube, it doesn't matter if they're in Finnish or in English. They follow along. (Mother of family 6)

The parents of family seven thought that it would be easiest to use only English at home. If the children start mixing Finnish and English, the mother tries to help them find the words in English. She wants to be as consistent as possible at speaking only English to them and expecting the children to answer in English.

We kind of decided that English would be our home language and it felt very natural the entire time. Then maybe the second thing would be that with the children, when they are speaking to me and they are speaking and using sentences with both Finnish and English, we'll try to think together what are the Finnish words in English. That's the one consistent thing that I've tried to do with the kids. (Mother of family 7)

The mother used to only read books to their eight children in English and she would translate the Finnish books into English, but now she reads the Finnish books to them in Finnish. She started to feel like she did not have enough time to put that much effort into using English. She thought that it would be better to use English in situations where it is natural.

I also read to the kids in English. I do read to them in Finnish too, but I speak to them in English. We have books in both Finnish and English and in the beginning I would always try to translate everything into English, but after a while I just stopped. So, I will read to them in the language that the book is. Any videos they watch, it doesn't matter which language it is. They don't pick one over the other. They are equally comfortable with both. (Mother of family 7)

The biggest difference between family seven and the other families is that the children learned Finnish outside of home. They learned it by hearing it everywhere. They also go to a Finnish-speaking school, so their Finnish is very strong.

They heard Finnish in the beginning in the playground, playing with other young children and people in the park. Our extended family, like my husband's side speak

Finnish when we would visit them. Basically family and friends around them and being social outside the home. And of course I could say the radio because we used to listen to the radio a lot. (Mother of family 7)

Every family except family seven used the One Parent One Language rule, so one of the parents spoke English and the other one spoke Finnish to their children. They all felt like it was a very natural way to help their child acquire two languages. Most of the parents also read books in the language that they spoke to their children. Some of them even translated Finnish books into English and vice versa in order to be consistent with the OPOL rule. Barron-Hauwert (2011:38-39) says that consistency is the most important factor in the one-parent-one language approach, so the fact that the parents use the same language in every situation is almost crucial.

According to Baker (2000:44-45) the OPOL approach helps the children to separate the languages from each other and thus help them avoid mixing them too much. “Experts on bilingualism have traditionally placed stress on the importance of keeping the context of children's languages compartmentalised.”. The reality, however, is not always as simple as some experts and researchers claim it to be. As some of the parents in this research study mentioned, raising children bilingual is usually a lot more complicated and making the OPOL approach work requires a lot of work and effort, especially from the English-speaking parent. It is often difficult for them to stick to using only English when every other family member speaks Finnish, especially when the parent is able to speak Finnish almost as fluently as English.

Family seven is the only family that uses a strategy that Ragueanaud (2009:21-23) calls the One language-One environment method where all family members speak one of the languages and the children learn the other language outside of home. In family seven the home language is English and the children use Finnish outside of home with friends and they also go to a Finnish-speaking school. The parents of family six also tried to use that strategy, but when their children were older, the father was not fluent enough in English, so they switched to the OPOL technique. Both parents in family seven are fluent in English, so they have been able to stick to the One language-One environment strategy, even though their oldest children are already teenagers.

#### **4.4 The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual**

I have divided this chapter into three parts: The benefits at the moment, The benefits in the future and The challenges. That way I am able to focus on all parts in more detail and emphasize the differences between the benefits and the challenges at different stages of the children's lives. I also wanted to find out what kinds of benefits of bilingualism the parents have already witnessed and how they think the children will benefit from being bilingual in the future.

##### **4.4.1 The benefits at the moment**

This first part focuses on the positive effects of bilingualism that the parents have already noticed in their children's lives. In the interviews, the parents were asked to mention all the benefits that they think bilingualism has at the moment and why they think that knowing two languages has made their children's lives easier or better compared to monolingual children.

The mother of family one says that she can already see how being bilingual is affecting her two-year-old daughter's life in a positive way. The mother thinks that being able to understand both Finnish and English broadens their daughter's worldview because there is no language barrier and she is able to listen to different types of media content in two languages.

She doesn't need subtitles and when we go to Canada, she understands what people are saying. I think that's a huge benefit. It's like a totally new, big world that opens up for her, even now already. And whenever she starts watching movies later on, she can watch English-speaking movies and she won't need subtitles or.. and it's the same with music and books. Like we don't need to limit all these books or music. It's not that limited, or limited to only Finnish which is a small language. Or not that many people speak it. (Mother of family 1)

Their daughter is also already able to have small conversations with people when they are in Canada because she understands almost everything people say to her.

You don't have to go and translate to her. In Canada people would come and speak to us or speak to her directly and she can understand and respond. She might respond in English or she might respond in Finnish or she might mix the languages, but she'll know what the other person is saying. Like that's a huge benefit. (Mother of family 1)

In family two the biggest benefit of being bilingual that the parents have already noticed in their children's lives is that they are able to communicate with members of both sides of the family. They can talk to the father's side of the family in Finland in Finnish and the mother's side of the family in Scotland in English. The mother also says that because English is spoken almost everywhere in the world, their three children can get by almost anywhere because they can speak English. The children do not go to school yet, because the oldest child is only 4 at the moment, but the mother thinks that because they learn English at home, it will be easier for them in school as well.

In our family the biggest benefit is obviously having a language to communicate with my relatives. And obviously English is the biggest language in the world so if you can speak English you can sort of manage anywhere. And you get it sort of for free when it's spoken at home. You don't have to work for it. So it's at least one subject in school that's a little bit easier. (Mother of family 2)

The mother of family three also says that at the moment the biggest benefit of being bilingual is that her two-year-old son is able to communicate with both sides of the family. There is no language barrier because their son can already have short conversations in both Finnish and English and he understands what people say to him in both languages.

An advantage is that he is able to communicate with both sides of the family. That's the main thing right now that both sides of the family can understand him and communicate with him. (Mother of family 3)

In family four, the seven children are not as fluent in English as the mother would have hoped. She still thinks that one noticeable benefit that having learned and heard English at home is that it helps them in school when they study English. They already know the grammar and have a wider vocabulary than the other children who come from a monolingual family.

I think that bilingualism has a lot of benefits. That's why I'm kinda sad that we're not able to do it as much as I would like in an ideal world. But that said, I think that the fact that they do study English at school, you can definitely see the benefit of bilingualism when they start studying it. You can tell that they do have like a base. They have something to start from, instead of like having to start from zero.  
(Mother of family 4)

The father of family five mentioned that being bilingual does not only mean that their children can speak two languages, it also means that they are able to feel more connected to two different cultures. Therefore they have more people with whom they can identify.

I think something that is very important that it's just not a language, it's a whole culture. If you're from a different culture from the country in which you live, when you're speaking your language and just being yourself, you're in fact importing that whole culture to them. And I think that is something that they get a lot from. It just make you feel like a part of a community. (Father of family 5)

For the children of family six one of the most noticeable benefits of being bilingual at the moment is the fact that English lessons are quite easy for them at school. The mother says that her children are ahead of everyone else because they already know most of the things that are taught. They do not have to spend as much time doing English homework as others do either.

I think that the biggest benefit is now in school when they study English. They've realised how much they have gained or are ahead of everybody else. And it's actually been even at home a big benefit. They don't need to study English as much

as their peers do. (Mother of family 6)

Just like some of the other parents, the mother of family six mentioned another benefit which is being able to communicate with both sides of the family. There is no language barrier between the family members who speak English or Finnish because the children are almost fluent in both of the languages.

When we travel to the U.S. they realise that they understand everything that's going on and they can communicate with everybody. They're not totally lost then in the country or with the visitors that we get from America. We have visitors fairly often, friends or relatives, and they are able to communicate and understand the conversations and catch onto jokes and stuff like that. I don't have to translate to them what happens. (Mother of family 6)

The mother of family seven mentioned the exact same things as the mother of family six when she was talking about the current benefits of being bilingual. She said that the most important benefit is the fact that her children are able to communicate with all of their relatives in the U.S and in Finland. They do not get to see their American relatives very often, so it makes it more important for her that when they do see each other, they are able to understand and communicate with each other.

Probably the biggest thing has been the fact that our children have been able to have, develop a relationship with their relatives in America, whether they've come to visit here or we've gone to visit them. They're able to communicate with them immediately and that's been a really positive thing, because they don't get to see them very often. (Mother of family 7)

The mother also said that the children who are old enough to go to school have noticed that English classes are a bit easier for them than they are to their classmates. The mother thinks that the reason for that is because their home language is English, they had learned English before

they started school.

The kids say that English is easier at school. So, it's fun that there's one class that is a lot easier. But that doesn't mean that they've gotten perfect grades either. English is not easy, even if you know how to speak. But many of them have felt that it's been easier. (Mother of family 7)

The most important and noticeable current benefit of being bilingual that all seven parents had noticed is being able to communicate with family members from both sides of the family. They all have relatives who speak only Finnish or English, so in order for the children to communicate with them, they need to be bilingual. As the father of family five said, the children are also able to identify with the cultures of both of the parents, because language is an important part of culture. Both Baker (2000:1) and Raguenaud (2009:75) agree that bilingualism bonds families. They say that being able to speak their parents' native languages helps them feel a lot closer to their parents and their culture.

The parents with children old enough to go to school all said that English classes have been easier for them than for their peers. Since the children have been hearing and speaking English from an early age, they are ahead of everyone else who have to start from almost zero. However, that seemed to be the only benefit the children had noticed in school. Other school subjects are just as challenging or easy for them as they are for monolingual students.

#### **4.4.2 The benefits in the future**

In this second part of the "benefits and challenges of bilingualism section", the parents were asked to think about their children's future and how being bilingual will affect them in a positive way. For example, the parents were asked to think about their children's future careers and life in general and if they think that it would be an advantage to be able to speak two languages fluently.

The mother of family one thinks that being bilingual is a benefit internationally. Traveling, working and even living abroad will be easier for her daughter in the future because she will be able to speak two languages fluently.

In the future, maybe this international aspect. She's free to go anywhere she wants to. She has a dual-citizenship. She's a Canadian citizen as well. So, she has really doors open to go to Canada anytime and even live there. You also have confidence which is important. There are no limitations. (Mother of family 1)

In family two, the mother hopes and believes that being bilingual will help her children learn other languages more easily. She also mentions the fact that even though many young people in Finland are quite fluent in English, they are not always brave enough to use the language. She hopes that being raised bilingual will help her children be braver and use the language more.

I'm hoping that it'll make it easier for them to learn languages in school. Maybe they'll have more opportunities in the future and they'll be braver when they are abroad. I think that the problem is that in Finland there are a lot of people who speak English very well, but the problem with most Finns is that they don't always have the courage to use it, so I'm hoping that my sons will be more relaxed about it. (Mother of family 2)

The benefit that the mother of family three emphasized was that by knowing two languages, her son will have a tool to connect with two different cultures or worlds. He will be able to identify with both of his parents' cultures and that way he will have a broader worldview than what the other monolingual people might have.

I think that he will have a better understanding of two worlds. (Mother of family 3)

The mother of family four talked about how she thinks that nowadays people are able to access a lot of information from around the world and a lot of it is in English. By being bilingual and able

to speak and understand English and Finnish, her children are able to learn more about the world and what is happening. She thinks that it broadens their view of the world.

I think the Internet is such a big part of our life today and the truth is that if you are able to find information in English it provides a broader space of information. You can for example read your news in Finnish, but you can also go and find global news in English and you can kinda compare different aspects, for example, you're not just tied to your local news and you can see what other people are saying around the world. I think it broadens your world. (Mother of family 4)

The father of family five also mentioned that knowing English and Finnish helps his two children to access media more easily. He also mentioned that being bilingual might help them in their future careers because it is a way to stand out from other applicants.

If you live in a country, non-English-speaking country, it's quite helpful if you can speak very good English if you want to travel, if you want to for instance to pursue a career in business. And also you are perhaps more able to access media in English. (Father of family 5)

Just as the mother of family two said, the father of family five believes that being bilingual might help his children learn other languages more easily. He thinks that the fact that a bilingual person might need to use two languages every day, his or her brain could work in a more effective way compared to monolinguals.

I don't have anything to back this up, but I think it perhaps, like if you can speak two languages well and this is from my own experience, then you will find it easier to learn a third or a fourth language. And I think it teaches your brain from a very early age to think in a way to make connections that perhaps what everybody isn't able to do. (Father of family 5)

The same benefits of being raised bilingual that most of the other participants mentioned as well, were mentioned by the mother of family six. She said that she believes that it will be easier for her children to live and work abroad because they will most likely not have a language barrier.

They will understand both languages in both countries. I believe that when maybe someday they will live in America or go study or work there... I think it will have an effect on them in their education and their future career in some ways. (Mother of family 6)

The mother of family seven brought up the fact that she does not think that knowing any two languages is necessarily a positive thing, but if one of the languages is English, it is a benefit. She believes that because English is such an important language globally, having learned it at a young age might open doors for them to one day work abroad.

Maybe it would give them a sense of confidence in situations where they would be a little bit different or they may seem to be different. I think that someone can be bilingual in Russian and Portuguese and that may not be a positive thing for your work life. But of course, if you have English, that's a definite benefit. And of course the fact that they've learned English may open up possibilities outside of Finland for possible jobs. (The mother of family 7)

All seven of the participants that I interviewed thought that it is very beneficial to have been brought up bilingual, especially if one of the languages is English. Being bilingual could make it easier for the children to pursue a career in another country and live abroad in the future. According to Raguenaud (2009:79) one of the biggest benefits of raising children bilingual is that they will have "a competitive advantage in the workplace" in the future. Wei, Dewaele and Housen (2002:2-3) agree. " With the dramatically increased amount of information available, and the ease of delivering it around the world, bilinguals may have become more important in the employment market. "

Some of the parents think that nowadays knowing two languages might broaden their children's worldview and understanding of different cultures. Baker (2000:4-5) agrees that being able to speak two languages helps their children connect with people from around the world and who come from different cultures. He also claims that bilinguals might be more tolerant of different cultures and less inclined to racism.

#### **4.4.3 The challenges**

The only challenge that the parents of family one have faced so far with raising their two-year-old daughter bilingual, is that she mixes the two languages often. The mother worries that people do not always understand what her daughter is saying because of that. She sometimes has to be an interpreter to make sure that her daughter can be understood. However, she knows that it is just a phase that young children of bilingual families often go through.

I think sometimes the only thing is that some people might not understand her because she uses both languages. So, sometimes I think that I have to be translating. So, she may not be understood as easily as, if she only had one language. So people are sometimes like guessing what language she's speaking now, what is she gonna say. (Mother of family 1)

The mother of family two said that her oldest son who is four years old might have some sort of a language disability because his language development has been slower than normal. She is not sure if it is because he is raised bilingual or if it is just an individual thing. However, she does suspect that the fact that he is bilingual might emphasize his disability in some way. Because of that, the parents decided to speak more Finnish at home, so that her oldest son could practise his Finnish and at least have one language that is strong. That is why the children are not able to express themselves in English very well, even though they understand it almost perfectly.

There is a chance that my son has some difficulties with languages. He doesn't speak

properly. He has problems with sounds and if he is speaking Finnish, it probably isn't as noticeable as in English. His problem is probably highlighted because he's bilingual. (Mother of family 2)

The mother also mentioned a smaller challenge that she has faced because her children are raised bilingual, which is that other Finnish mothers do not always talk to her. She has noticed that when she speaks English to her children outside of home, other mothers start to think that she is a foreigner who does not understand Finnish, even though that is not the case.

Another disadvantage with bilingualism as a parent is that when I'm with my kids alone and my husband isn't with me, I speak English to them at the park or in the shop and other moms won't communicate with me because they think I won't understand them. That's a very concrete problem. So, I find myself explaining myself a lot. (Mother of family 2)

The mother of family three said that she and her husband have not had or noticed any problems with raising their son bilingual. Their son is only two years old, so that could be a reason for that. The mother also mentioned that both her and her husband's side of the family is very supportive, so she knows that if they did face any challenges, they would receive help.

I think I have a lot of support on both ends, like my husband and his family. I think they are understanding with all the complications. (Mother of family 3)

Family four has had quite a lot of challenges with raising their seven children bilingual and it is mainly because of the fact that two of the oldest children have severe dyslexia and they have some difficulties with language in general. The parents had initially planned to use the OPOL rule with the children, but once they found out that the oldest children had dyslexia, they decided that it would be best for them to just focus on one language. The other children do not have any problems with language, but because the mother speaks so much Finnish to the oldest children and they only speak Finnish, the younger children do not speak English very much either. The

mother herself was raised bilingual and her parents did not have any problems, so she thinks that her children would be more fluent in both languages if the oldest children did not have any language disabilities.

Two of our oldest kids.. they have severe dyslexia which really affects on the model of how they've been able to like show to the other kids. And we've had to, like with them originally I spoke only English but at some point I felt like I also needed to use Finnish at some times because we needed to have some language that we would get through with. You could say that in our family it's been more challenging than perhaps in the family that I grew up in. (Mother of family 4)

The father of family five mentioned that the only challenge that they had faced was when they were trying to get their son to address the father in English. Eventually the parents just stopped trying to get him to answer in English. The reason why the father does not think that it is such a big deal is because he understands Finnish quite well. Their 16-year-old daughter, however, does speak English with her father. The father thinks that probably the biggest challenge that parents of bilingual families could face is getting their children to address their parents in the same language they address the children. The father thinks that because English can be heard everywhere and it is such an important language in the world that their children will learn to speak it anyway. When asked if he or his wife had had any challenges with raising their children bilingual.

The challenges were perhaps when we tried to get my son to speak to me in English. But to me that didn't have to really be a big deal. I know some English-Finnish speaking families do try very hard to get the children to address them in English. That must be more of a challenge I'm sure, but that hasn't been a thing for us because I was able to understand them when they would speak Finnish and kids notice that. (Father of family 5)

The father also elaborated on why it might be difficult for his son to start addressing him in

English. He thinks that the main reason is the fact that he is used to speaking Finnish to his father, so it would feel uncomfortable and unnatural to change the language all of a sudden.

If you're accustomed to speaking one language with somebody or someone you see everyday or very often, but you actually know another language as well, you can say "Hey, let's speak the other language", but it feels very uncomfortable. (Father of family 5)

In family six the biggest challenge for the mother has been being consistent with the OPOL rule. She sometimes feels like it would be easier to just speak Finnish to her children because everyone else speaks Finnish at their home. She knows how important consistency is in raising children bilingual, so she rarely switches to Finnish. She also tries to ask her children to address her in English most of the time.

Probably the biggest challenge is upkeeping the language. I could get really lazy with it that I would just switch everything to Finnish. Meaning that I know the language. But I find it has to or I have to keep my point of view and keep my stance on it that "Yes, I will speak English to you and yes, you will have to answer in English". (Mother of family 6)

The challenge that her oldest son has had to face in school because of his bilingualism has been learning Swedish. He is 13 years old and it is the first time that he has to actually learn a foreign language. He could already speak English when his English lessons started in third grade, so he never had to put much effort into learning English. He is just now starting to learn how to learn a language at school.

Our seventh grader has started studying Swedish. I think his biggest problem is that he has never had to learn a language, so now in seventh grade he has to learn a language while his peers have already or they already know how to learn a foreign language because they have started learning in third grade. That's kinda difficult for

him to grasp that you cannot learn your Swedish words in one night. In this respect I do see that studying Swedish has been a lot more work for him than for his classmates. (Mother of family 6)

The mother has also wondered whether her three sons will ever be completely fluent in either one of the languages because they are bilingual and use two languages in their everyday life instead of just one. She has worried that because they do not get to use a certain language as much as monolinguals do their language skills might not fully develop in either one of the languages. She does believe, however, that being bilingual is more beneficial for her children than being monolingual.

Sometimes I think that "will one of these kids be fully competent in neither Finnish or English". That thought has crossed my mind, like if they're not fully competent in one language and not fully competent in another. Like do they feel like they're only half and half. But I think that time will tell and I think that there are more benefits to knowing two languages than there are to knowing just one language. (Mother of family 6)

The mother of family seven has had the same kind of a challenge as the mother of family six. She has also sometimes struggled to only speak English to her children and to expect them to always speak to her in English. She mentioned that other parents of bilingual families that she knows have also struggled with being consistent with the language. Because the children are surrounded by Finnish-speaking people they sometimes feel like they need to put a lot more effort into trying to get their children to switch to English when they are talking to the English-speaking parents.

I've tried to be consistent in having the kids speak only English and that's been a continuous thing. So, I'll admit that at times that's been kind of a challenge. I know some other families that I have spoken to that are in the same situation. Sometimes they can get kind of tired of having to work at it and then they end up slipping into the language of the country and then their children aren't that strong in the other

language. It is kind of a challenge to keep up with speaking with the children in English. (Mother of family 7)

The biggest challenge that the parents of most of the families have had with raising their children bilingual has been being consistent with the One Parent-One Language rule. The English-speaking parents are the only ones with the problem because the Finnish-speaking parents are speaking the majority language of Finland, so it is not difficult for them to get their children to address them in Finnish. The children's Finnish is stronger because they use it more in their everyday life outside of home, so it usually feels more natural for them to speak Finnish even with their English-speaking parent, especially if they are fluent in Finnish. The only parent that has not had any problems with consistency is the mother of family three because she is not able to express herself well in Finnish. So, she would not be able to switch to Finnish even if she wanted to. Therefore, their two-year-old son is "forced" to always speak English with his mother in order to communicate with her. The other English-speaking parents are fluent or nearly fluent Finnish-speakers, so they have the option to speak Finnish to their children and the children are able to communicate in Finnish with both of their parents.

The families two and four had faced even bigger challenges with the OPOL rule because they had children with language disabilities. The parents of both of the families had become worried that speaking two languages at home would make it more difficult for the children to develop their language skills. They came to the conclusion that it would be better to focus on only one language at first, so that their children with the language disabilities would be fluent in at least one of the languages. That is why the English-speaking parents decided not to always speak English to their children.

Even though none of the children of family six have any language disabilities, the mother still worries a little bit that her children might not be fully competent in either one of the languages because they are bilingual.

#### 4.4.4 Concrete examples of code-switching

Even though the main focus in this study is on the parents and especially the English-speaking parents of the families and their views on bilingualism and language development, I also wanted to add a part to this research study that focuses on the language development of bilingual children, and especially the code-switching, that occurs at some stage. I think that it is relevant to my topic and it also shows how the parents view code-switching and other phases in their children's language development. I asked the parents of the seven families how their children's language skills had developed at different stages of their life. I also asked them to provide some concrete examples of their children's language use so that the effects of bilingualism on the children would be more noticeable.

After presenting the answers that I received from the parents, I will analyse the answers and try to find out how being bilingual affects children's language development. I will compare the answers with some previous research in order to determine whether being raised bilingual hinders or facilitates children's language development.

The mother of family one said that her now two-year-old daughter started speaking Finnish first, but she started saying English words quite soon after that. She even started saying some words in English before she learned the equivalent for them in Finnish.

Her first words were in Finnish, but it didn't take very long for her to say things in English as well. Her first English word was "ball". And in the beginning a few words were only in English, like "pallo" came much later. She was saying "ball" everytime for a long time until she learned the Finnish equivalent. (Mother of family 1)

Her daughter soon also started saying the same word in both languages. She would first say the word in Finnish and then repeat it in English.

At some point it was very clear that she started to learn the words in both languages, like one of those words was ” kukka ”, ” flower ” . Like she would know and repeat both of them. She knows that this one item or thing has two words, or you can describe it with two words and she would say the English word and the Finnish word. (Mother of family 1)

The mother said that because her daughter is still only two years old, she does not seem to fully understand that she is speaking two different languages. She has started to realize that she is supposed to use one word with her mother and another with her father.

She's still so young that she doesn't separate the languages yet, but there have been instances, for example, we were walking outside a few weeks ago and then she said “rock”. And I asked “Mitä?” And she's like “rock, kivi”. “Isi sanoo rock”. And I'm like totally amazed. A two-year-old knows the difference between what mom says and what dad says. (Mother of family 1)

Because her daughter cannot separate the languages from each other yet, she code-switches a lot. She sometimes uses both languages in a sentence without realizing it.

She code-switches all the time, like she would say “ kato samanlainen pink” or “It's tuolla takana”. So, it's really a mix. (Mother of family 1)

Even though the children of family two do not get to hear English quite as much as the child in family one, the mother of family two has also noticed that her three sons have started to realize that they are speaking two different languages. Sometimes when they are talking to their mother, they might use some English words, even if the rest of the sentence is in Finnish. That indicates that they do have some understanding of the languages and know that they are supposed to use English with their mother.

The first time I realised that one of my sons was starting to understand the language

was when he said “a pupu”. Stuff like that. He's starting to think about the languages which is very important to me. My oldest son sometimes uses a few words of English when he's talking to me and he doesn't do that with my husband. So he is making some connections, like he is starting to know what language to use with each person. (Mother of family 2)

The mother of family three thinks that the fact that her two-year-old son started speaking at such a young age could be because he is being raised bilingual. He started speaking both languages almost at the same time, but his Finnish still seems to be a little stronger.

People say that it's surprising that he's speaking at such a young age. He started just before he turned one. He was saying words in.. there were some words in Finnish and English. That's one thing that I've noticed. (Mother of family 3)

The mother also mentioned that her son is already sometimes able to connect a certain language to his mother and father. For example, he usually knows that he needs to say something in English when he is speaking to his mother. He sometimes says something in Finnish and then repeats it in English.

Our son sometimes answers questions in the same language that they were asked in. You have to prompt him sometimes because like he'll.. sometimes my husband asks him in Finnish then he'll say something in English and vice versa. It's really funny that way. But my son seems to know which language to use. For example, when he speaks Finnish and says something to me, he switches to English. Like last night he said: “Äiti leikkimään. Äiti let's play”. (Mother of family 3)

Their son has been able to make connections with the languages and to learn which words to use for certain things or with certain people by listening to his parents. Even though the mother always calls herself “mommy” he still calls her by the Finnish equivalent “äiti” and the opposite happens with the father. He calls him “daddy”. The parents were not expecting that to happen, but

they soon realized that he must have just made certain connections based on what his parents called each other.

He actually calls me “äiti” and he calls my husband “daddy”, but I think it's really funny, because he was probably around seven months old when he first said “äiti” and um I was really surprised then because I've always like said like “Mommy does this” or “Mommy does that” but I think it's because other people have called me “äiti” so he picked it up. And “daddy” because I call my husband that. (Mother of family 3)

Just like the children in families one and two, their son mixes the languages quite often as well.

He does use, like in one sentence he code-switches a lot. So sometimes he would say like “By car papalle ja mummulle” and like “leikkimään outside”. They're still short sentences. (Mother of family 3)

Family four has had a different experience with the children's language development than family three. Each one of their seven children had started speaking later than usual. The mother said that she and her husband thought that it could be because they are raised bilingual. The mother had read and heard that bilingual children sometimes start speaking a little later than monolinguals.

For the oldest ones it was quite slow. Originally we were thinking if it was because of the bilingualism because they hadn't been used to that, but later obviously, I'm sure like from my own experience at home.. I noticed that often they would start to speak a little bit later, but then when they would start to speak they would have both languages. So it perhaps slowed it down a little, but I don't think it's like a permanent issue. (Mother of family 4)

The two children of family five used to mix the languages a lot when they were younger, but that phase did not last long. The father was not worried about the code-switching because he had read about it and knew that the children would eventually learn to separate the languages from each

other.

They mixed languages and I think that's something that all children.. I used to work in like, they're called language baths, I read into a lot about children who live in two-language families and they all do that. Our kids did that too, but stopped really quickly. (Father of family 5)

The father thinks that because his 19-year-old son never speaks to him in English, but his 16-year-old daughter does, his son's English is not as strong as his daughter's. He said that the reason for that is the fact that the more a person uses the language the more fluent he or she is at speaking it. He also mentioned that the only time that his son speaks to him in English is when his son wants something.

My son will never ever address me or he always talks to me in Finnish.

Occasionally, when he was little, I would always know when he had broken something or when he wanted a toy or something because then he would start the conversation in English to make me happy. (Father of family 5)

The three children of family six all used to code-switch quite a lot, but they do not do that anymore. They sometimes even mixed the grammatical features of the two languages.

They mixed languages when they were younger. I remember when one of the boys said "This house has two ikkunas". And also he put the plural form to the "Ikkunas". There was like a lot of that. (Mother of family 6)

Family seven is different from all the other families because their children started speaking English first whereas the children in all the other families uttered Finnish words first. The reason why Finnish came later was because the home language of family seven was English. The children learned Finnish when they started interacting with other children in the playground outside of home.

All of our children have spoken English first. They have started making sentences in English first. They may have known a few words in Finnish, like “anna” and “kiitos”, but they've typically just known a few words in Finnish and then the first language that they would speak completely would be English. Then they'd slowly start to learn Finnish. (Mother of family 7)

The children were code-switching until they were five. Sometimes they still mix the languages, but it is intentional. They usually mix the languages when they are not able to come up with the correct word in a certain language.

They mixed the languages from about the age of two to maybe five. But it's going more towards being very clear that they can tell one from the other. There are still situations, like the ones who come from grade school they mix the languages but it's not because they don't know the words, it's because they don't want to take the time to remember how to say it. (Mother of family 7)

All of the children of families that participated in this study started speaking Finnish first, except for the children in family seven. The other children usually heard Finnish more even if the English-speaking parent spoke only English to them. The reason why that happened is most likely because they all live in Finland and were usually surrounded by Finnish-speaking people. However, it did not take long for them to start speaking English as well. Sometimes they even knew the English word for something first and then later started using the Finnish word for it.

Every parent that I interviewed said that their children code-switched a lot when they were younger and had just started speaking and saying whole sentences. At that point they still were not able to separate the languages from each other. They did, however, later start to make some connections with the languages and eventually stopped code-switching. According to Barron-Hauwaert (2004:11), because of that nowadays parents of bilingual children are more relaxed about the code-switching.

Two of the parents that I interviewed said that all or some of their children started speaking a little later than usual and they wondered if it was because they were raised bilingual. The children did start to speak quite soon after. According to a research study conducted by Fernald (2006:24) bilingual children tend to start speaking later than monolingual children. One of the reasons why this is sometimes the case is because bilingual children "hear less speech in either languages than monolingual infants hear in the single language they are exposed to" . However, this language delay usually lasts for about a year. The child of family three started speaking earlier than children normally do, even though he is the "most bilingual" child of all the families that I interviewed. He is the only one whose English and Finnish are almost equally strong. That shows that it does not always mean that bilingual children will start speaking later than monolingual children, even though some research studies may suggest that.

## **5. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION**

In this research study, I had three research questions to which I tried to find answers based on the seven semi-structured interviews that I conducted and the background literature that I used. These were: "How do parents raise their children bilingual?", "Why do parents decide to raise their children bilingual?" and "What are the benefits and challenges of raising children bilingual?". In this chapter, I will discuss the research questions and present the answers that I found for them based on my research.

### **5.1 Ways of raising a child bilingual**

In each of the families that participated in this research study, there was a parent who was a native Finnish-speaker and a native English-speaker. It was interesting to notice that every family except family seven had decided to use the One Parent One Language rule (OPOL) which means that one parent uses English when communicating with the children and the other parent uses Finnish. It seemed to be a very natural way for the parents to help their child or children acquire two languages.

Most of the parents also read books in the language that they speak to their children. Some of the English-speaking parents have even translated Finnish books into English in order to be consistent with the OPOL rule. Barron-Hauwert (2011:38-39) says that consistency is the most important factor in the one-parent-one language approach, so the fact that the parents use the same language in every situation is almost crucial.

The family seven is the only family that uses the One language-One environment method, so all family members speak only English at home. The children use Finnish outside of home with friends and they also go to a Finnish-speaking school. The reason why they chose to use that strategy in particular was because they live in Finland where they would learn Finnish automatically, so the parents wanted to make sure that the children would also hear and speak English as much as possible.

Both strategies seemed to be effective, so it is quite impossible to say which one works best. The key to raising a child bilingual, so that they are able to speak both languages well, however, is consistency. Based on the interviews and previous studies, if the parents use a certain language all the time and expect the children to use a certain language when speaking to them, it is usually easier for the children to learn two languages. Consistency with language use helps the children compartmentalise the two languages which is helpful for them especially when they are just starting to speak. (Baker: 2000:44-45)

## **5.2 Reasons for raising a child bilingual**

My second research question was “Why do parents decide to raise their child bilingual?” Based on the interviews and the background literature that I used the reason for raising children bilingual depends on the parents and their children. Usually the main reason why parents want to raise their children bilingual is because they themselves are bilingual or the parents speak different native languages.

The parents of each family felt like raising their children bilingual was a natural decision. The main reason why parents who were bilingual themselves wanted to raise their children bilingual was because they had noticed all the benefits that being bilingual has. They wanted their children to experience the same thing. The reason why the parents of the other families decided to raise their children bilingual was because the other parent was not a fluent Finnish-speaker. They wanted to be able to speak to their children in their own mother tongue.

All of the parents also thought that there are many benefits to being bilingual, so they wanted to give their children the opportunity to be able to speak two languages fluently. They also had relatives who could only speak Finnish or English, so they wanted their children to be able to communicate with all of their family members.

### **5.3. The benefits and challenges of raising a child bilingual**

Based on the results of my research, the most important and noticeable current benefit of being bilingual seemed to be the ability to communicate with family members from both sides of the family. This study focuses on families with parents who have different mother tongues and in most cases also come from different cultures, so this benefit seemed to overshadow all the other benefits. All of the families have at least a couple of relatives who speak only Finnish or English, so in order for the children to communicate with them, they need to be bilingual.

All seven of the participants that I interviewed thought that it is very beneficial to have been brought up bilingual, especially if one of the languages is English. Being bilingual could make it easier to pursue a career in another country and live abroad in the future. Nowadays people who speak more than one language have better chances in finding a good job because the world is becoming more and more global. Wei, Dewaele and Housen (2002:2-3) have come to the same conclusion. They think that being bilingual provides a better chance at working in the more prestigious professions. Bilinguals often possess the type of language skills that are required in today's employment market.

It seemed to be quite difficult for some parents to be consistent with their language use, especially if they were bilingual themselves. Even the English-speaking parents often found it easier to speak in Finnish in some situations. That might have been one of the reasons why the children often used Finnish more and were more fluent in it than in English. The parents who were not bilingual, such as the mother in family three and the father in family five, did not seem to have any problems with consistency because they were not fluent Finnish-speakers and thus it was more natural for them to always speak English with their children. That might be the reason why the children in families three and five were more fluent and native-like speakers of both languages.

Language disabilities seemed to make raising children bilingual quite challenging for families two and four. The language disabilities and the parents' worry and fear that bilingualism might hinder the children's language development even more, caused the parents to focus on Finnish, so that the children would be able to speak at least one of the languages fluently.

A worry that some parents who are considering raising their children bilingual have, is that they think their children might start speaking later and that they might start code-switching and never become fully competent in either one of the languages. According to a research study conducted by Fernald (2006:24) bilingual children tend to start speaking later than monolingual children. One of the reasons why this is sometimes the case is because the amount that bilingual children hear a certain language is half of the amount a monolingual child hears the same particular language. However, this language delay usually lasts for about a year. Based on the interviews, none of the parents noticed that their children's language development suffered because of being raised bilingual. All of the children did code-switch quite a lot at the beginning, but they all stopped doing it when they were old enough to separate the languages from each other. All of the families also viewed it as normal, and were not worried about it. They knew that all bilingual children mix languages at some point. Barron-Hauwaert (2004:11) agrees that code-switching is now viewed as a natural stage of a bilingual child's language development.

Even though the parents of each family had faced some sort of challenges when raising their children bilingual, they all think that the list of benefits is a lot longer. They all agree that being bilingual is and will be very beneficial for their children in the future. According to the parents, they would recommend raising children bilingual, especially if the parents have different native languages because it is usually more natural and easy for them.

#### **5.4. Conclusion**

In this research study I focused on bilingual families and raising children bilingual. I conducted seven semi structured interviews to get more practical information on the topic. I also used some background literature to understand the main theories of bilingualism and language policies.

There were not many difficulties or problems with my research, although I would have hoped to find participant families with children that are a bit closer in age. It might have provided me with more information about what types of challenges the parents would have faced when raising bilingual children of a certain age and how being raised bilingual would affect their language development. The results could have also been a little different if the number of children of the

families would not have varied so much. I think that I would need to conduct more interviews and collect more data to explore this.

This topic could be studied further by, for example, focusing on how parents of bilingual families with children that have some sort of language disabilities could raise their children bilingual and whether the language disabilities would affect their language development in any way. I noticed that the parents of children with language disabilities seemed to be afraid that speaking two different languages to the child could delay their language development even more. It would be interesting to find out if there is any truth to that.

Even though the seven families all lived in Finland and they each had a native Finnish speaking parent and an English speaking parent, the interviews still provided somewhat different views on bilingualism and what it is like to raise children bilingual. One of the most interesting findings was the fact that it is very important to be consistent with the language use. Before I began my research, I had assumed that raising children bilingual would be fairly easy, especially when the parents speak different native languages. I was quite surprised to learn that it is not infact always so. Every family, parent and child is different and that is why they sometimes view bilingualism differently. That is also most likely the reason why the seven families had sometimes faced different challenges and noticed different benefits to bilingualism, even though their backgrounds were quite similar.

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## **Appendix 1: Interview questions**

- Are your children bilingual? If so, what factors made you decide to raise them bilingual? If not, what factors made you decide not to do so?
  
- What is the mother tongue of each family member?
  
- What languages do you usually use for communication at home? Why?
  
- What languages do you and your spouse use when talking to your children? Why?
  
- What language do your children use when they talk to each other? Why?
  
- What languages do you usually use for communication with relatives and friends? Why?
  
- What languages do you usually use for communication outside your home (at work, at school, in shops etc.)? Why?
  
- How have you raised your children bilingual? What kind of techniques have you used? Why did you choose to use those techniques?
  
- What kind of challenges have you had with raising your children bilingual?
  
- What have been the benefits of raising your children bilingual?
  
- How have your children's bilingualism/ language skills developed at different stages of their lives? If you have more than one children, have there been any differences between the development of their language skills? What has caused that?

- In your view, what kind of an effect has bilingualism had on your children's lives? How would you think it will affect them in the future?

- How are your children progressing at school? In your opinion, how does bilingualism affect your children at school? What languages do your children study and use at school? How does the school and the teachers take your children's bilingualism into account?

- How would you define bilingualism?

- *Can you mention examples of situations when you felt that bilingualism was an advantage/disadvantage for your children and for you?*