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## Meisel, J. (2019). *Bilingual children: A guide for parents*. Cambridge University Press

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Meisel, J. (2019). *Bilingual children: A guide for parents*. Cambridge University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1017/9781316850329>

Reviewer: Amanda Battistuzzi, University of Ottawa, Ottawa, Ontario, Canada

Meisel intends for this book to be a use-as-you-need resource for parents looking for research-based guidance on raising a child bilingually. He uses years of professional counselling experience and academic work as a faculty member on bilingualism to write this book. He admits to being pro-bilingualism, and the information he offers supports his belief. This book uses UNESCO's definition of bi- and multilingualism: "the use of more than one language in daily life" (UNESCO, n.d., as cited in Meisel, 2019, p. 2). A main argument of this book, nuanced with research and anecdotes, is that early and adequate exposure to the target languages is all it takes for children to become bilingual.

This guide is relevant for a variety of audiences: parents who speak separate languages, parents who speak the same language but are living in a place where another language is the majority, parents who speak separate languages but communicate at home in a third language, and so on. There are a variety of examples, summarized from the body of research, that reflect different family structures, living situations, social contexts, and immigration statuses, making this book applicable for a range of audiences. There is a comprehensive index of concepts and languages, which may be of interest to parents looking for language-specific guidance.

The book's eight chapters are presented by the author as independent of each other, however there are references in the later chapters to information discussed in preceding ones. While it is possible to read the chapters as-needed or out of order, better understanding would come from reading the book from beginning to end. Each thematic chapter is divided into the same sections: 1) an outline of problems or worries identified by parents in requests for counselling and the solutions Meisel offers, 2) summaries of research results which inform the answers to problems in section one, 3) practical aspects and guidelines, and 4) further reading suggestions. The repetitive structure of the chapter formats and the text boxes makes the book digestible and easy to follow.

The author suggests that sections one and three of each chapter may be the most pertinent to parents who are looking for practical guidance, without wanting to know the research therein. While these sections may be the most practical to parents, reading the chapter as a whole, he claims, is not necessary.

The eight chapters each detail a different theme related to bilingualism in raising children. The first two chapters differ from the rest in that they are an introduction to myths and facts in bilingualism and an outline of language acquisition in infants and toddlers, respectively. The remaining six chapters (e.g., chapters three through eight) then cover a range of themes related to perceived issues for parents.

Chapter 3 discusses ways that children differentiate linguistic systems, outlining alleged risks of childhood bilingualism. This chapter offers a discussion of the oft-heard phrase "One Person, One Language", which Meisel notes is a helpful framework but encourages parents to be flexible if the situation requires it. The takeaway here is that it is most important to talk with and talk to your child in meaningful interactions.

In Chapter 4, the discussion surrounds how children mix and switch languages, addressing the concern that children will fuse languages together, have excessive mental strain, or be unable to separate the linguistic systems. Bilingual children and adults exhibit similar behaviours when code-switching and operating in bilingual contexts, meaning there is no evidence that notable confusion exists between languages for children learning two languages.

Chapter 5 offers advice for parents when they notice that one of their child's languages is stronger than the other and suggestions on how to strengthen the weaker language. Meisel reassures the reader that "the weaker language is delayed, not deficient" (Meisel, 2019, p. 142) and this does not mean language acquisition is no longer happening.

Chapter 6, reflective of the book's applicability to a wide audience, discusses language acquisition for children who are in a trilingual or more environment. He summarizes research based on tri- or multilingual families, and concludes that three languages, or more, are not too much for children to manage. The author discusses that it is possible for children to achieve multiple native competencies, depending on "the quantity of exposure in meaningful interactions" (Meisel, 2019, p. 163), among other factors.

In Chapter 7, Meisel describes critical age periods (3.5-4 years old and 6-7 years old) and "sensitive phases", which are windows of opportunity for language acquisition (notably grammar). This chapter also deals with the question of successive bilingualism - the process of becoming bilingual for children who were not exposed to multiple languages from birth. He encourages parents to make use of any language learning opportunities for their children, even if target language exposure did not start in infancy.

Finally, Chapter 8 explicitly looks wider than the mechanics of language learning itself and recommends learning more than one language from early on is an asset for bilingual people in a variety of ways. Interestingly, it is in this last chapter where Meisel stresses the most the value of being bilingual in how it leads to being able to participate in the social world of more than one language. Much of this guidebook occupies itself with multilingual families, in multilingual settings, but it is only in this last chapter where he emphasizes how being bilingual means children have the opportunity to live multicultural lives and "[be] at home in two communities" (Meisel, 2019, p. 240).

While it is clear that this book is well-researched, the citations are not included in-line, meaning accessing further reading in reference to a specific piece of the chapter would be difficult. There is a reference list of "Primary" and "Other Sources" at the end of the book, but they are not divided by chapter or topic. However, this book is not intended for a purely academic audience, but for parents who are interested in practical information with more sound information than other guides that may be freely found on the internet. This book holds true to this intention by providing accessibility to the topic while maintaining rigour. For this reason, it is a worthwhile read for any adult looking for support in raising bilingual children.

### References

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