BILINGUAL SUCCESS STORIES

Around the World

Author of ***Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability***

Parents Raising Multilingual Kids Share Their Experiences and Encouragement

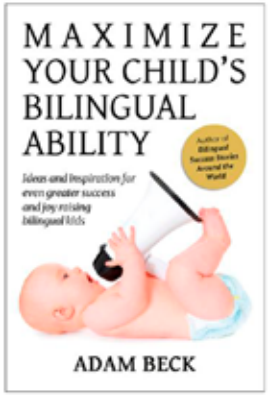
ADAM BECK

Foreword by
Dr. Annick De Houwer of HaBilNet

"The engaging book you're about to read focuses on parents who are successfully raising children who are fluent in a minority language spoken at home. The book tells the stories of 26 families from across the globe, from China through Poland to California, representing scores of minority languages, from Mongolian in Denmark to Hindi in the United States. The stories tell of dedication, effort, perseverance, and love—love for minority languages, and, above all, for the children who speak them."

From the Foreword by Dr. Annick De Houwer, Director of HaBilNet

Bilingual Success Stories Around the World is a real-life roadmap to greater success and joy for any parent raising bilingual or multilingual children. Written by Adam Beck, in the same empowering spirit as his influential first book *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*, this practical, worldly-wise guide features the success stories of a wide range of families and details the kinds of attitudes and actions that can enable your family to enjoy the same sort of rewarding success. The focus of this book is on the *actual practice* of raising children to acquire active ability in more than one language, conveyed through the revealing experiences of parents who are now succeeding admirably at their bilingual or multilingual aim. Read this book for ideas and inspiration to help you realize your own family's joyful success story!



BILINGUAL ADVENTURES

Support for More Success Stories

"I don't remember how I discovered Adam Beck's book *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*. What I vividly remember, though, a few pages into the book, is the feeling that I was holding a gold nugget. It was the book I had been searching for for a long time. Previous books or information on raising bilingual children that I had found were too academic to be truly helpful on a day-to-day basis. My oldest child was 5 and I was really struggling with our bilingual journey. I needed real-life advice, not a lecture on the latest discoveries on brain development (fascinating, but it had led me nowhere). Alongside great tips to apply every day, the book is a source of enthusiasm and perseverance, which in my opinion is the reason why Adam's work differentiates itself from the rest of the literature on the topic. I recommend it to anyone who wants to raise their child bilingual. Half of the work in raising bilingual children is to keep going no matter what. On days where the motivation or energy dwindles, I open the book and recharge. The best way I could describe it is a down-to-earth, fun, invigorating guide full of optimism that will leave you feeling like you can move mountains."

—Elise in the U.S., originally from France

"Adam's book *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability* is the best thing I've ever read about bilingualism. I love how practical it is, not just focusing on the different studies and data on the subject, but giving the reader a lot of practical ideas on what to do and how. It's so thorough, I've read it more than once. I can't recommend it enough. His forum, The Bilingual Zoo, has allowed me to get in touch with other families in similar situations as my own. This helps immensely, not just because we can share what works for us and the different resources we use, but because it allows us to feel like we aren't alone on this journey. This forum is my go-to online place whenever I have any free time. His blog, Bilingual Monkeys, has also helped our family with different ideas and resources. I've checked it many times for inspiration or resources."

—Raquel in Spain

"I've read a number of blogs about raising bilingual kids and Bilingual Monkeys is the best! As I'm a thorough person, I read every single post, from the very beginning, and I felt as if you were speaking directly to me. So I've followed the progress of your kids and your parenting and it's been eye-opening and inspiring. Taking your blog as a whole, I'm struck by your reverence for life itself, your carpe diem attitude, and your exuberance, joy, and creativity. I like your sense of humor and how your blog posts are interspersed with light comic relief, while also getting across the serious messages and research that you've done. In terms of the impact, well, it has been life-changing for me as you've encouraged me firstly to not give up hope, then to persevere."

—Vaishali in the UK

"The Bilingual Monkeys website is such a wonderful resource and I'm grateful I found it at the beginning of our bilingual journey. Your book, especially, gave me a path to follow and motivation that it can really work. I also feel like I have tools to use when our minority language needs a boost. There have been so many times that I have gone to the forum to look up certain issues or checked the website for specific articles. I pass on the link to both the website and book to anyone who will take it! Thank you, Adam, for being such a practical and positive leader in the bilingual community!"

—Heidi in Germany, originally from the U.S.

"I read Adam's book and also communicated with him personally about my concerns involving speech delay in my bilingual son Jack (3.5 years old, Russian and English). Adam's knowledge and dedication to the subject was very impressive, and proved to be very helpful for me. I followed his advice, and now our son is fluent in both languages. I think Adam's work is extremely important, and I will support him in whatever he does, since I believe that without language you cannot access the treasure of cultural traditions."

—Elaine in the U.S., originally from Russia

"I have two fully bilingual children (German/English, 5 and 3) and besides my own efforts as a parent, I owe that exclusively to you. Honestly, if I hadn't stumbled across your work, I wouldn't have started raising them that way. I'm not a native speaker of English,

so I always thought it would be 'impossible,' yes, 'inappropriate' for me to even attempt raising bilingual children. I read a few books and articles on the topic of child bilingualism, but it was reading your book, specifically, that gave me lots and lots of practical ideas when I didn't even know where to begin. It gave me perspective. It encouraged me. And it was reading stories of other parents in similar circumstances at The Bilingual Zoo forum that made me understand that my own language skills don't have to be a deal breaker. Your book *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*, the forum, and your blog, taken together, give me a sense of community, a feeling of being understood and not alone. And while I'm still very aware of my own limitations, I walk this journey together with many others and my children's language skills continue to thrive. So thank you for being out there and for doing what you're doing!"

—Angelika in Austria

"I came across your book when I was pregnant with my daughter. I used your book for a post graduate project on bilingualism, for my personal life, and for my work supporting bilingual families, children in schools, and teachers. I have recommended your book, blog, YouTube channel, and other resources to everyone I have encountered on this path. Thanks so much for your hard work in this quest. Infinitely grateful, amigo!"

—Silvia in Scotland, originally from Spain

"Adam's books and advice have made an amazing impact on our entire family. I started reading his work before I gave birth to my daughter almost five years ago, and have been following him ever since. My daughter is now trilingual (Italian, English, Spanish) like her mom, and is now learning to read in all three languages as well. With the guidance of Adam's wisdom, my husband, who studied Spanish in school but never became fluent, now speaks Italian at an intermediate level and is also working daily on his Spanish. We will continue to implement Adam's advice with our son, who will turn 1 in a couple of weeks. Thank you, Adam, for all that you do; you are a gift to the world!"

—Bruna in the U.S., originally from Italy

BILINGUAL SUCCESS STORIES
Around the World

Parents Raising Multilingual Kids Share Their Experiences and Encouragement

ADAM BECK

Author of *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*

Bilingual Adventures
Hiroshima, Japan

Bilingual Success Stories Around the World
Copyright © 2021 by Adam Beck

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without written permission from the author, except for the use of brief quotations in a book review or article.

Published by Bilingual Adventures

For inquiries, contact Adam Beck:
adam@bilingualmonkeys.com

First Edition, 2021
Paperback: ISBN 978-4-908629-10-5
E-book: ISBN 978-4-908629-11-2

For my parents,
and parents everywhere

Contents

Contact Information 1
Key Terms 1
Foreword: Kudos to the bilingual family story collector! 3
Introduction 5

The Early Childhood Years **11**
1. Single Parent Nurtures Early Multilingual Success 13
2. Music Inspires Joyful Engagement and Progress 21
3. Intentional Efforts Empower the Journey Even Before Birth 29
4. Non-native Family Takes Baby Steps Toward Bilingualism 39
5. Parent Makes Success Possible with Own Language Learning 47
6. Good Teamwork and the Key Roles Both Parents Play 55
7. Non-native Parents Immerse Their Home in the Minority Language 61
8. Persistence Drives Development of a Less Common Language 71

The Primary School Years **81**
9. Early Discouragement Is Transformed into Trilingual Success 83
10. Strong Actions and Expectations Sustain the Minority Language 91
11. Commitment and Creativity Overcome the Odds and Tears 101
12. Passion for the Minority Language, Compassion for Our Children 109
13. Love of Books and Reading Fuels Language Ability and Literacy 117
14. Minority Language Family Still Faces Challenging Conditions 125
15. Progress Grows Over Time, From Failure to Failure 131
16. Non-native Speaker Keeps Up Efforts at Home and Abroad 139

17. Building Community and Boosting the Success of Many Families 147
18. Creative Projects Promote Language Use and Greater Progress 157
19. Perseverance Amid the Dominance of the Majority Language 165
20. Bilingual Success and Children with Developmental Differences 175

THE TEENAGE YEARS AND BEYOND 183
21. When the Larger Arc of Success Is a Freely Bilingual Family 185
22. 7 Languages in a Family of 5 (Plus a Secret Language in the Past) 193
23. Engaging Children in the Minority Language with a Playful Spirit 201
24. Four Children and Two Different Paths Toward Multilingual Ability 207
25. Nurturing Good Relationships Alongside Language Ability 213
26. Handing Down Bilingual Success, From Generation to Generation 221

Final Thoughts 231
Quick Finder 234
Acknowledgments 237
About the Author 239
Postscript 241

Contact Information

Many of the parents featured in this book have provided contact information so that readers may reach out to them directly. When it's available, this information—which was current at the time this book was published—appears at the end of each family's story.

Also, please feel free to contact me personally if I can be of further support beyond my books, my blog, my forum, and my social media pages. I'm always happy to hear from parents and I'd be glad to cheer on your family, too, toward even greater success and joy.

adam@bilingualmonkeys.com

bilingualmonkeys.com (blog)

bilingualzoo.com (forum)

youtube.com/bilingualmonkeys

facebook.com/bilingualmonkeys

@bilingualadventures

@bilingualmonkey

Key Terms

As used in this book, the "majority language" is the main language of a particular country or community; the "minority language" is the language that is not used as widely within that country or community. While "minority language" will generally be used in the singular in this book, please consider it shorthand for any number of minority languages within a family. In the same way, "bilingual" will often refer more broadly to multiple languages, whether two, three, or more, thus also embracing the terms "trilingual" and "multilingual" under the "bilingual" banner.

Foreword: Kudos to the bilingual family story collector!

by Annick De Houwer, PhD
Director, the Harmonious Bilingualism Network
(habilnet.org)

With few exceptions, children everywhere learn the language that is used at their preschool and school. Things are different for any other language children may hear at home. Regardless of how important that language is in the world at large, it is at a disadvantage. Compared to the language used in school and public life (the local "majority" language), children may have trouble developing any other language they hear at home. Locally, that language is a "minority" language.

You won't get far with English, the world's global language, in the French-speaking Walloon region of Belgium—few people will understand you, and you can't apply for any social benefits or pay your taxes in English. In Wallonia, English is a minority language. Children who hear English at home in Wallonia may not learn to speak it and may only speak French, the majority language. While their English-speaking parents may understand French, their English-speaking grandparents and other relatives often do not. This is often heartbreaking for all involved. The English-speaking parents may feel ashamed towards their own parents in Britain for not managing to raise children who can speak with their grand-

parents. Parents may also feel resentful towards their children for not speaking their language, and when the children grow up they may in turn blame their parents for not making sure that they learned to speak (and read and write) English. These families are not experiencing harmonious bilingualism.

Fortunately, harmonious bilingualism, where family members are all happy with how things are working out with regard to language, is quite attainable. We know from research that many parents who speak a minority language at home with their children can and do raise bilingual children who are able to understand and speak both a minority and a majority language. The engaging book you're about to read focuses on parents who are successfully raising children who are fluent in a minority language spoken at home.

The book tells the stories of 26 families from across the globe, from China through Poland to California, representing scores of minority languages, from Mongolian in Denmark to Hindi in the United States. The stories tell of dedication, effort, perseverance, and love—love for minority languages, and, above all, for the children who speak them.

Of course, the stories in this book did not magically appear out of nowhere—they were collected by Adam Beck, himself a parent in a bilingual family in Japan. For many years, Adam has been working with and for bilingual families everywhere, through his website, forum, books and more. He managed to gain the trust of countless bilingual families worldwide. It is much to his credit that so many families allowed him intimate access to their bilingual family life.

Not only did Adam manage to collect many in-depth bilingual family stories. He weaves those stories together into one big story showing how, thanks to a lot of loving work from parents, children can grow into confident and happy users of several languages. Kudos to the bilingual family story collector!

Rixensart, April 2021

Introduction

If you're reading this book, chances are you have a deeply felt desire to experience as much success as possible on your bilingual journey with your children. The success stories in these pages, shared by a wide range of families in many parts of the world, reveal the kinds of attitudes and actions that can help empower your family to enjoy the same sort of rewarding success. In other words, the focus of this book is on the *actual practice* of raising children to acquire active ability in more than one language, conveyed through the lived experiences of parents who are now succeeding admirably at their bilingual aim.

While every family is, of course, very different, the fact remains that the fundamental challenge of raising bilingual children is largely the same, no matter the location or languages or lifestyle. In a nutshell, it involves providing effective support for the family's minority language throughout the years of childhood.

Effective support for the minority language means that the child receives ample exposure to this target language, whether from parents or other sources of input, and feels an organic need to use that language actively.

The more language exposure the child receives, in interactive and engaging ways, and the more need the child feels to use that language actively, the more success can be experienced as the bilingual journey proceeds.

(This may not always be an overt need, however. Some parents with obvious proficiency in the majority language are still able to "condition" their children to use the minority language by nurturing a feeling of need through the emotional bond that

they establish in this language, as certain stories in this book demonstrate.)

Therefore, the two "core conditions" for raising a bilingual child with active ability in the minority language are *exposure* and *need*, for without effectively satisfying these conditions, the child will likely not receive enough exposure, or feel enough need, to develop capable and confident ability in this language.

Exposure and need, then, form the deepest thread that stretches throughout this book, tying together the varied lives of these bilingual and multilingual families. None of the families in this book are "perfect" when it comes to the two "core conditions," but they have each satisfied these conditions to a sufficient degree so that the children have been able to develop active ability in the minority language. Being "perfect" in our efforts is not only impossible, it's unnecessary for experiencing significant success.

The joy of success

While this book emphasizes the general idea of success as enabling the child to grow toward using the minority language actively and freely, to me, a successful outcome alone is not enough for a bilingual journey to truly be called a "success story." As I've stressed in my writing over the years, the process itself should also feel as joyful as possible for both parent and child. In other words, our larger goal is not only success at language acquisition, but language acquisition through joyful experiences. Again, there is no perfection when it comes to success or joy; our aim should simply be to maximize both to the extent we realistically can.

Thus, the success stories in this book not only point toward how families can experience success in their goal of bilingual development, they also highlight the idea of making the daily process itself as joyful as we can manage. Ultimately, it is this joy—and the general well-being within the family it brings—that makes the longer journey not only more pleasurable but also more productive when it comes to nurturing language acquisition.

My own story

My own story as a parent of bilingual children has been blessed by the sort of success and joy being realized by the families in this book. I share that story, as well as my experiences as a longtime teacher of bilingual children, in my book *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*. When I wrote that book, my children were 11 and 8; today they are 17 and 14. For me and my family, the bilingual journey is now largely over, and my main goal has been accomplished. This doesn't mean that I'm lounging in my hammock just yet; I continue to pursue the efforts I can to advance their bilingual ability. But it's also true that, as children grow older and become more independent, our time with them, and our influence on their lives, shrinks sharply. Looking back, I'm grateful that I was able to make the most of their younger days when this time and influence were most abundant.

Over the years I've been privileged to cross paths with many families out in the world who hold a bilingual or multilingual aim, intersections that have come mainly through virtual interactions at my blog, Bilingual Monkeys; my forum, The Bilingual Zoo; social media; email; and video chats. And though, in most cases, I haven't had the opportunity to meet the parents and their children in person, the truth is, I've gotten closer to many of these people than I have to the people around me in "real life." The distinction, I think, is the fact that, even though these friends out in the world and I lead very different lives, our bilingual goal for our children is such a central and meaningful part of our being that we feel a direct kinship on this deeper level. At the same time, the kinds of daily challenges that this goal brings, and the emotional ups and downs that are part and parcel of the process, enable us to connect in ways that often feel far more significant than our interactions with others in our more immediate surroundings.

It was through these friendships, and through the experiences that parents have shared with me, that I became fascinated by the story of each family I encountered, how each family is so uniquely different and yet the elements for success and joy at this aim are so profoundly similar. Eventually, then, I became determined to capture at least some of these appealing stories in a book that could offer encouraging examples for other families undertaking the same fulfilling mission.

Developing this book

In all, I was able to interview over 40 parents, most individually but some as couples. About half of these in-depth interviews took place in person and about half were conducted virtually. During the fall of 2019 I traveled through Europe and enjoyed short homestays with a number of bilingual and multilingual families. It was a marvelous opportunity to spend time with the parents and children in their homes, meetings that not only provided a wealth of material for this book, they left me with glowing memories.

In fact, after that trip, I had hoped to take further trips out into the world, to meet as many families in person as I realistically could... but the coronavirus pandemic which erupted just months later made this impossible. And so, like the rest of the world, I turned to online avenues, like Skype and Zoom, to continue conducting interviews. (Since most of the interviews were done pre-pandemic, the content of the book doesn't generally reflect the pandemic conditions that have affected these families in various ways. Language exposure out in the community, and from travel, has obviously been curtailed, but many parents have mentioned a bright silver lining in the fact that they have been able to spend more quality time with their kids, and put more emphasis on the minority language, while at home amid this time of restrictions.)

I very much regret not being able to include the full story of every family I spoke with, but, of course, the needs of the book itself had to be taken into account, including the need to keep the book to a reasonable length. I remain deeply grateful to all these families, however, whether or not their story appears in the final version. All of them have experienced much success and joy in their journeys and it was an honor, truly, to speak with them so personally about their lives.

The stories that make up this book were selected based on a range of factors that include:

- the family's location
- where the parents are from originally
- the family's languages

- the ages of the children (in the book, children's ages are noted in years and months at the time the interview took place, such as "3.9" or "11.5")
- the family's particular circumstances
- aspects of their experience that highlight important principles

Of course, a book like this is unable to represent every country or language or situation, but I have sought to offer as wide a range of families as I realistically could, given the natural constraints of this task. Along with families that might be considered more "traditional" when thinking of bilingual families—such as an international couple with two different native languages—there are also the stories of families in which the parent or parents are non-native speakers of the minority language, a single parent raising a multilingual child, a bilingual child with special needs, and more. I realize that readers may wish that I had included other scenarios as well, but I ask for your understanding with regard to this daunting challenge of being as "inclusive" as possible in a book about families across the world. Perhaps a second book along these lines can continue to expand our perspective of the world's bilingual and multilingual families.

Writing this book

The 26 stories in this book have been arranged in a roughly chronological fashion, from families with younger children to families with older children (who may also have younger children). The intent behind this structure is to convey the broad sweep of bilingualism, from birth to the older teenage years—and even, finally, into multiple generations—so that readers not only gain insight into the ongoing efforts and progress within the day-to-day lives of bilingual families, they also glimpse the greater arc of the bilingual journey itself, in its entirety, and how success and joy can serve as the through line of this years-long experience.

These stories are necessarily "snapshots in time" of the particular moment when I interviewed the parents about their experience. Since the day these interviews were conducted, the children and

their language ability have naturally continued to grow and new challenges have arisen. For the most part, though, I have consciously avoided revising these "snapshots" with updates from months later because, of course, since the lives of these families are constantly evolving, such revisions could carry on without end. In some cases, though, I do include brief follow-up comments in my afterword that concludes each account.

In writing these stories, I drew on the transcripts of the recorded interviews, sometimes seeking further information in subsequent exchanges. The quoted portions have been taken directly from these transcripts, with light editing as needed, and the final version of the text for each family's story was approved by the parents. (In some cases, parents asked that I use pseudonyms for the names of family members, to help protect their privacy, but the stories themselves are frank and factual accounts.)

As the writer, my intention was to strike an effective balance between allowing the story to "tell itself," for readers to draw their own conclusions, while also emphasizing and expanding on certain points that I believe are particularly important to highlight, including in my short afterword. At the same time, I tried to make each story concise and engaging so that busy parents will find the text accessible and enjoyable to read while benefiting from the wealth of relevant, real-world information that the book contains.

In short, I have done my best to create the most practical, empowering book of "success stories" I could for parents with a bilingual or multilingual aim. From my experience with *Maximize Your Child's Bilingual Ability*, however, I recognize that no book can be all things to all people, particularly when it comes to such a broad subject like raising bilingual children. Still, I hope this book will resonate with you and leave you with lingering value that can make a difference in your own journey with your family. If the stories that follow can enhance the success and joy that you experience with your children, to even a modest degree, it will have served its purpose and I, along with the families that have generously shared their experiences with us, will be very pleased.

With my best bilingual wishes,

Adam Beck
Hiroshima, Japan

The Early Childhood Years

The first stage of the journey involves providing as much exposure to the minority language as possible, from as early as possible, with the main aim of "conditioning" the child to communicate in that language once he or she begins to speak. While a child can develop proficiency in an additional language at any age—languages can be acquired consecutively rather than simultaneously—when parents are able to make the most of the first few formative years, these proactive efforts can establish a firm and active foundation in the target language which may then be more smoothly sustained through the subsequent years of childhood.

1

Single Parent Nurtures Early Multilingual Success

- Marisa is originally from Spain and now lives in the U.S.
- She is a professor of Spanish at a university in the state of Virginia.
- A single mother, she has a daughter, Laura, who is 3.2 years old.
- Their majority language is English and their minority languages are Spanish, German, and French.

This book begins with the story of a single parent nurturing four languages with a 3-year-old child. The success that Marisa is experiencing with Laura is an encouraging example for all parents, no matter the make-up of the family, because the overarching truth is that *any* family can experience a great deal of success at a bilingual or multilingual aim over the years of childhood as long as there is sufficient persistence.

In fact, this is the basic "secret" to success that underpins the whole experience: persistence from day to day, and perseverance over the years. There may be vast differences among the families in this book, and out in the world, but what unites us in our aim is the determination to keep going, to keep trying, to persevere for the payoff.

And remember, there is *always* a payoff to perseverance.

Dreaming of a bilingual child

Marisa first dreamed of being a mother, and raising a bilingual child, when she was just 12.

She had begun learning English not long before, and liked the language, but she was growing up in Spain and assumed she would live there in the future, too. "I thought Spanish would be the majority language and English the minority language," she recalled.

Marisa is from a family of teachers who are monolingual in Spanish, and Marisa herself was monolingual until the day she began studying English at the age of 11. She quickly took an interest in the language and made strong progress through middle school and high school.

She then majored in English in college and imagined that she would eventually become a teacher at a university in Spain. "I didn't want to be a high school teacher because those kids would have killed me!" she explained with a laugh, among the many trills of laughter that grace her fluent English.

However, in her last year of college, one of her professors suggested that she teach Spanish in the U.S. for a year to further strengthen her English ability and make her more marketable after returning to Spain.

So Marisa went to the U.S. in 1996.

And still lives there today.

Pursuing a new career path

While Marisa enjoyed her first teaching assignment, at a small college in Illinois, she realized that she needed more formal training in teaching Spanish if she wanted to continue in this field. "I had studied to be an English teacher," she said. "I had never taught my native language. My students would ask about things and I was like, I have no idea how to explain that!" So she went on to enroll at a large university in Illinois, where she earned her MA and PhD in Hispanic Linguistics with a certification in Second Language Acquisition and Teacher Education.

In 2005, Marisa then moved to Virginia to become a professor of Spanish at a university there.

And in 2016, Laura was born.

Giving her daughter a multilingual gift

Because her parents don't speak English, Marisa was determined to foster her daughter's Spanish side. "She had to bond with my mom," she said, the resolve evident in her voice. "And she could only do that in Spanish."

Spanish, then, is the main minority language, and her highest priority: the aim is "native level" ability in this language. At the same time, Marisa has been eager to give Laura an early start in other languages, too. The initial impulse for this, though, differs from the deeply felt desire she holds to hand down Spanish as a heritage language.

"German and French began from a more practical perspective," she explained. "Because I'm a single mother, I was thinking, 'Oh my god, oh my god, how am I going to save money for her college education?' Then somebody told me, 'Did you know that college in Germany is free?' And I said, 'Free? You just got me at free!'"

Marisa, in fact, studied German when she was younger, though she hadn't used this language in some time. German thus became the second minority language. And French, though she speaks little of this language herself, became the third as she hopes to send Laura to a school, from kindergarten, which includes both Spanish and French as part of its curriculum.

While some people express surprise that a 3-year-old is actively acquiring four languages, wondering if this is too many, Marisa maintains a healthy perspective on their multilingual journey. She stressed that English and Spanish are their main two languages and need the strongest proficiency. At the same time, as long as Laura continues to enjoy her experience of German and French, Marisa will nurture her progress in these languages as well, to whatever level can be achieved. "The more proficiency she can get in these languages, too, the better for her," she said.

Though introducing German and French may have been prompted by more practical concerns, Marisa has come to view the value of her daughter's emerging multilingual ability in a broader light. "Foreign languages have opened a lot of doors for me and I want to give my daughter that same gift. And the best time to begin learning them is when she's little."

Emphasizing their minority languages

Ever since this journey began, Marisa has been very consistent about speaking to Laura in Spanish and (sometimes) German. She has also actively supplemented the language exposure from her own speech with input from other speakers of Spanish, German, and French. Along with input from her family in Spain—at a distance and in person during return visits—she has arranged for students from her university to interact with her daughter in these languages.

At the same time, Marisa has proactively sought to emphasize books, music, videos, and other resources in these minority languages while mindfully limiting the influence of English inside the house.

"The only English she hears at home comes from the alarm system, twice a day, when we turn it on and off. I even wanted to change this to Spanish, but it didn't have that option!"

In addition to the daily efforts she makes to nurture her daughter's development in Spanish, German, and French, Marisa also takes full advantage of her long vacations as a university teacher and returns to Spain twice a year—for about two months in the summer and one month in the winter—so Laura can spend time with family members and benefit from the immersion of these visits.

Trusting her acquisition of English, too

Meanwhile, Laura attends daycare from 8:30 to 3:30, so is also immersed in English for many hours each day. The teachers have told Marisa that, initially, her daughter tried to communicate in Spanish but has since come to use English. Marisa, though, is still unsure how well Laura speaks this language because she will rarely use it in her presence.

"I'm her Kryptonite," Marisa laughed. "The moment I'm around, English is gone. She doesn't speak it, even when everybody else is speaking it. Oh, every now and then she'll say a word in English when I'm there, but it's very limited. And when she says a word in English, she's then nice enough to give me the Spanish translation in case I didn't understand!"

While Laura is surely becoming more conscious of the fact that her mother is proficient in English, too, Marisa hasn't yet experienced any difficulty in maintaining their communication in Spanish.

She attributes this to the emotional bond that she has established with her daughter in their minority languages, especially in Spanish.

At this point, too, she isn't concerned about Laura's English side because she trusts that the ongoing exposure she's receiving in this language at daycare, and at school in the future, will fuel satisfactory development.

Overcoming moments of doubt

Marisa admits, though, to having had moments of doubt when it comes to the minority languages.

"The difficult part of this is that there's no immediate feedback," she said, pointing out how the first couple of years, before the child starts to speak, can be a psychological test for first-time parents. "We've become used to wanting immediate results, but language acquisition isn't like that."

She mentioned a friend who she felt gave up on his bilingual aim too soon because this friend didn't think his efforts were paying off.

Her understanding of language development, though, hasn't shielded her from experiencing similar feelings. "I'm a linguist and I know how this works, but I'm also a mom and so at some point the mom brain takes over the linguist brain and I get worried about things that I know I shouldn't be worried about."

At one point, Marisa herself nearly gave up on the idea of nurturing German and French. A student had come to her office to read German books to Laura, but the little girl was running about and making a mess instead. "I thought, 'What the hell am I doing? She's not even paying attention.'"

But Marisa understood the value of this early language exposure, and trusted that these efforts would indeed eventually pay off. "My linguist brain won out over my frustrated mom brain," she said. "And now, now is when I'm starting to see the results."

Marisa reports that Laura's ability in Spanish is quite good for her young age, and she also has growing ability in both German and French. In fact, this multilingual journey with her daughter is also enabling Marisa to improve her own German and French at the same time.

Experiencing the journey as a single parent

Asked about her experience pursuing a multilingual aim as a single parent, Marisa said that it might have been a "different scenario" if a partner had been present and speaking English every day, which could have diluted Laura's exposure to Spanish and the other languages and potentially undercut her need to actively use them.

"Spanish is definitely her strongest language. When she wakes up in the middle of the night, it's all Spanish. It comes naturally to her at this point. I haven't had any issues with her not speaking the minority language." She added with a laugh, "But I don't know if I should tell people, 'If you want to raise a bilingual child, don't get married! Stay single!'"

As for the downsides of her experience, Marisa mentioned the challenges of being a single parent, in general, but said that this hasn't really presented any particular difficulties when it comes to Laura's language development. On the contrary, as she noted, it seems she has been able to emphasize the minority languages very effectively during these early formative years of her daughter's life.

Making the process engaging and enjoyable

Sharing some advice for other parents with a bilingual or multilingual aim, Marisa said, "Be very, very persistent. It's like learning to play an instrument. You have to keep going to see the results."

She acknowledged, though, that, as parents, we sometimes have a hard time judging how persistent we should be, and particularly if the child is showing some resistance to our efforts. This is why, she went on, the child's experience of the learning process must also be engaging and enjoyable. Without enough engagement, enough enjoyment, persistence becomes too pushy.

While Marisa is deeply pleased with her daughter's multilingual progress to date, she also recognizes that there will likely be challenges ahead as English grows more dominant in Laura's life. Still, she pledged to do her best to advance their minority languages, adding with a laugh, "I'm happy to continue being the English Kryptonite!"

AFTERWORD: I spoke with Marisa again during the pandemic and she told me that because Laura had not been attending school—and, consequently, had not been receiving that daily exposure to English—she decided to permit a bit more English at home. Marisa's action in this way is a good example of how parents must remain flexible and evolve in their efforts as their circumstances evolve…and this has been true of so many parents, worldwide, since the outbreak of the coronavirus in early 2020. At the same time, Marisa's decision is also a good example of how such choices should be carried out in thoughtful and strategic ways. In her words: "I only speak English when I'm wearing my baseball cap. And she's pretty good with that. If she feels like speaking a little English, she asks me to put it on. She never starts speaking in English on her own. In fact, if I happen to say an English word without the cap, she says to me in Spanish, 'Mom, you need the cap! You're speaking in English!'"

Contact & Resources for Marisa

✉ mariaisabel.martinezmira@gmail.com

📖 *En tu Medio: Intermediate Spanish* (co-author of this Spanish textbook published by Wiley and Sons)

2

Music Inspires Joyful Engagement and Progress

- Richard is originally from the Czech Republic and his native language is Czech. He is a professional pianist and piano teacher at a university in China.
- His wife, Xingxing, is Chinese and grew up speaking both Mandarin and a local Chinese dialect. She is a professional singer of opera and other genres of music as well as a music teacher at the same university.
- Their daughter, Lada, is about to turn 3.
- Richard speaks Czech, their minority language, to Lada; Xingxing uses Mandarin, their majority language. The couple communicates with one another mainly in English.

Music is an important part of the success story of every family in this book, with music in the target language used both actively, through singing songs together, and passively, through playing music in the home and in the car.

For Richard and Xingxing, though, music serves as the main engine for their multilingual lifestyle and their multilingual aim for their daughter Lada, who is nearly 3. Music is not only a powerful source of exposure to their multiple languages, and has played a pivotal role in the strong start to their journey together, it is also a means of cultivating Lada's interest and joy in these languages.

Richard in the Czech Republic

As a boy in the Czech Republic, Richard attended a school with an emphasis on the arts and music. His love for music grew out of this early exposure at school along with the influence he experienced at home. "It was a pretty big house," Richard said, explaining that it was divided into three units for different generations of the family. "And in my grandmother's apartment, there was a piano so I also played piano there."

His grandmother not only set a musical example, she was a multilingual speaker herself. "She knew five languages, but she didn't know English," Richard said. "Nowadays I think it would be hard to find anyone who speaks five languages but can't speak English!" As a child, his grandmother was trilingual in Czech, Slovak, and Hungarian, then also learned German and French.

Richard admits that he didn't take after his grandmother when it came to language learning, at least early on. "I first started to learn German when I was 11, but I didn't enjoy it so I didn't learn anything. When I was 14, I started to learn English. My English probably got to an advanced level when I was 23 or 24. I was living with people from other countries at my university and I was often with them."

He continued, "I also learned some Spanish because I had a roommate from Mexico. I got really interested in Mexico and we traveled there to do a music project together."

He then turned to his wife and smiled. "I never thought of learning Chinese until I met Xingxing," he said, noting that he has reached an "upper-intermediate level" and uses Chinese on a daily basis when at work and out in the community.

Xingxing in China, New Zealand, and Germany

Half a world away, as Richard sat playing his grandmother's piano, Xingxing was playing the piano, too, in a large city in southwestern China. "In that area we spoke a dialect," she said. "It's actually close to Mandarin, but it has different tones. At school, we had to speak Mandarin so, basically, I grew up with two languages."

"So I started my piano lessons when I was 10," she said, "and my lessons were progressing really well." As she grew, however,

her hands remained small and so her piano teacher recommended that she begin singing lessons instead.

Xingxing started learning English in school at the age of 13. At 17, she took part in an exchange program that brought her to New Zealand to complete her last year of high school. After graduating from high school, she continued her education in New Zealand at a music school then began singing and training at an opera house there. Eventually, she earned a scholarship that enabled her to study overseas and because she had developed a passion for German art songs—even winning a singing competition in this genre—she decided to go to Germany.

Xingxing spent nearly four years in Germany studying music and becoming proficient in German during this time. "I was almost finished with my studies," she said, "and I was taking advantage of all the possible opportunities to sing, going to singing competitions and auditions. I saw the poster for an international singing competition in the Czech Republic and I signed up. Then I just hopped on a train and went there."

"That's how we met," Richard said, explaining that, because Xingxing was one of the winners of the competition, she was then invited on a tour of 12 concerts, with Richard serving as an accompanist for the performers. "We were together for over a week of concerts, so that's how it started. If she hadn't gotten that award, we wouldn't have gotten together."

He added with a grin, "So like I always say, she actually won *me* in that competition."

While the couple hadn't initially planned on making a new life together in China, during a visit to Xingxing's family four years ago, they received some job offers and decided to stay. And not long after, Xingxing became pregnant with their first child. "It all happened so fast," Richard said. "And now here we are."

Four languages from birth

There may have been some uncertainty about where in the world they would live, but Richard felt no ambivalence over the language he would speak to Lada. He explained: "Here or there or anywhere, I wanted to use my own language with my own child. I just felt like I couldn't imagine talking to her in any other language. Czech is

part of my whole upbringing. When I talk to her, I want to give her something of my own childhood and my own childhood is Czech. Everything is related to that; all of my childhood emotions are actually in the Czech language. Czech is me. So I wanted to share it with her, no matter what."

Czech, then, is the minority language and exposure to this language is mainly Richard's responsibility, which he has taken on with a proactive spirit. Xingxing, whose Czech is still limited, speaks to Lada in standard Mandarin. And Xingxing's mother, who lives with them, often takes care of Lada while talking to her in the Chinese dialect that Xingxing acquired as a child. Xingxing speaks with her mother in this dialect while Richard and Xingxing continue to use mostly English as their shared language. Richard also uses some Mandarin with Xingxing and a blend of both Chinese tongues when communicating with his mother-in-law, who speaks no English.

Thus, in this multilingual setting, and with additional input in Mandarin from preschool each day, Lada has been receiving exposure to these four languages from birth.

While Lada hasn't yet turned 3, Richard and Xingxing report that she is already actively using Czech with Richard and Mandarin with Xingxing. However, Richard shared a cautionary tale when he told me, "I'm pretty much with her any free time I have, and she responds to me in Czech. But this year I had a lot of concerts and I was out of the house much more often than before. So it happened that I was away for over two weeks, when before that the longest was like five days. When I came back I was really surprised because it was the first time she spoke to me in Chinese, but then she soon switched back to Czech. When she tells me something in Chinese, I keep speaking to her in Czech and then she speaks Czech again. So I'm trying to keep it strictly in Czech between us."

Music and other proactive efforts

Toward that end, Richard has sought to play the most active role he can in his daughter's young life, despite his busy professional activities. And he has come to realize, he said, that "no matter how hard and time-consuming it is," his efforts to spend substantial time with Lada are paying off in two fundamental ways: not only are his actions having a positive impact on her language develop-

ment, they're also creating priceless memories and a deeper bond as parent and child.

As one example, he mentioned a recent role play game—a shopping role play—where he was the shopkeeper and Lada was the customer. As they happily engaged in this pretend play together, Richard was pleased to find that Lada could chirp away in Czech to navigate their interaction.

Xingxing added that Richard's penchant for actively playing with Lada in such ways has impressed other Chinese parents when they see the two of them together. Perhaps his efforts, then, are not only impacting his own family, this positive influence extends to other families as well.

Naturally enough, since Richard and Xingxing are both musicians, music has also been a central force in his efforts to engage Lada in Czech. "We're musicians and music is important to us," Richard said. "I play Czech songs on the piano all the time, since she was small, and it's just amazing how many songs she can remember. Chinese songs as well. She also loves to dance. She'll dance to any kind of music."

"Yeah, even when I was singing the national anthem!" Xingxing said.

"The Chinese anthem," Richard explained. "It's like a march, a fast march. We went to perform at the consulate and during the rehearsal—Lada was about a year and a half then—she ran onto the stage when we were playing the anthem and started jumping around!"

Beyond pursuing his own efforts at home to promote Czech, Richard is taking steps to connect with other Czech speakers in their area. "I made a chat group for Czech and Chinese parents and I reached out to as many people as possible. We already have almost 50 members." He said the family hopes to move to the city center in the near future, which will make it more convenient to meet Czech speakers in person.

Meanwhile, they also engage in regular video chats with his mother in the Czech Republic and make month-long visits to see Czech family and friends every summer. "Last summer I was very surprised because her Czech was even better than I thought," Richard said. "She impressed everybody by singing Czech songs and I think she was really happy that she could finally get some response because when she sings Czech songs to Chinese people,

they're like, 'What's that?' But with the Czech people, they were calling out, 'Look at her! She's singing!' And she kept singing and singing to everybody. She was singing like crazy!"

At the same time, their travels in China and overseas regularly involve musical performances by Richard and Xingxing at Czech consulates and other events involving the Czech community. Such professional activities naturally reinforce the personal aim they hold for their daughter's bilingualism and bicultural identity by expanding her experience of the minority language, beyond family and friends, in stimulating ways.

Positive feelings toward the target language

For Lada, music apparently not only serves as an important source of language exposure and engagement, it nurtures her positive feelings toward the language itself. As Richard told me, in describing his outlook for all his efforts with his daughter, "I think it's important that you do it with love. I try to approach it with love and make it a nice experience for her so she has some positive emotion, it's always connected to some positive emotion."

For children in general, it's this positive emotion, this positive spirit, toward the target language that lies at the heart of sustainable and harmonious progress. Through the loving, playful efforts we make each day, we gift our children with joyful experiences that not only profoundly deepen our bond, these interactions promote a lasting passion for their minority language side and propel them forward on a productive path that can stretch a whole lifetime... and even, perhaps, reverberate long afterward in the lives of their own descendants.

AFTERWORD: In late 2020, I received an email from Richard which explained that he and Xingxing had become separated from Lada for two months because of the pandemic. In January 2020, before the outbreak of the coronavirus, he and Xingxing had traveled to the Czech Republic to record a CD, intending to stay there for only three weeks, while Lada remained in China with her family. However, Richard and Xingxing got caught up in the travel bans at that time and it wasn't until March that they were able to return to China. Richard reported that not only was this a trying experience emotionally, after their return Lada would only

respond to him in Chinese. However, Richard continued to speak Czech to her and Lada gradually began communicating with him in Czech once again. Despite the initial shock he felt, Richard was evidently able to summon the patient persistence necessary to overcome this unexpected obstacle on their family's multilingual journey.

Contact & Resources for Richard & Xingxing

- richardpohl@sina.com
- xingxingsoprano@sina.com
- richardpohl.net
- xingxingsoprano.com
- WeChat ID: richardpohl
- *Magical Songs* (album of songs from the Czech Republic, China, and other countries)

3

Intentional Efforts Empower the Journey Even Before Birth

- Victor and Olya live in the U.S. state of Iowa, in a small city where the population is largely monolingual. While both have lived in the U.S. for a number of years, and speak fluent English, Victor is originally from Brazil and Olya is originally from Ukraine.
- Victor works remotely for a large language testing company, and Olya works in human resources for an insurance company. At the same time, they produce children's books and other language learning resources for families and educators through a company they founded, called Linguacious® (linguacious.net).
- They have two children: a son, Dylan, 3.5 years old, and a daughter, Isabella, 10 months. Victor speaks to the children in Portuguese, Olya speaks to them in Russian, and the couple communicates with one another mainly in English.

Victor and Olya may have grown up on opposite sides of the Earth, but their mutual love of languages ultimately brought them together somewhere in between, in a small city in the American heartland. They both had studied German and shared a mutual interest in the mechanics of German grammar.

"Our first conversation on our first date," Victor said with a smile, "we were talking about cases in German."

Olya nodded. "I wrote my dissertation about German nouns and you were working on the gender of German nouns then."

"I somehow always saw myself married to a foreigner because of my interest in languages and cultures," Victor said. "I thought that marrying somebody from my own culture and language would be a bit boring."

Two separate paths eventually cross

Victor grew up in Brazil and did his undergraduate degree in Linguistics. At the time, he had a particular interest in indigenous languages. "I thought I wanted to work with indigenous languages of the Amazon and Australia for the rest of my life. Indigenous languages make European languages look like baby talk. The grammar is so much more complicated. You have to keep track of whether something is animate or inanimate, if it's a direct object or indirect object, and this affects the form of the word, the morphology. So I was like, 'This is nice.' I like that level of difficulty."

But at his university, he recalled, he had a professor who was studying indigenous languages in the field and had the peculiar habit of scratching at himself while delivering his lectures. "At one point, I decided to ask him, 'Are you okay? Why do you scratch yourself so much?' And he's like, 'Well, every month I visit a tribe and I'm there studying their language, but I come back full of ticks.' And I'm like, yeah, maybe I'll do my Master's in something else!"

Victor went on to earn his Master's degree in Computational Linguistics from a binational program in Germany and the Netherlands. After that, he came to the U.S. to pursue his PhD in Language Learning and Assessment at a university in Iowa. It was then that Victor met Olya.

Olya's journey to the U.S. was the result of a sister city relationship between her hometown in Ukraine and the city in Iowa where she came to reside. In Ukraine, she majored in Languages and Literature and studied English, German, and Spanish. After earning her undergraduate degree, she was invited to study in Iowa and entered an MBA program.

Although Olya decided to pursue a career path that was different from the language-related professions that she had

originally envisioned, like teaching or interpreting, she expressed joy at being able to revive her passion for languages in connection with the family's multilingual aim and their work creating language learning products for Linguacious. "It's really fun to bring that back because that interest has been there the whole time, just kind of sleeping a bit," she said.

Intentional efforts began before birth

Because of their longtime interest in different languages and cultures, it comes as no surprise that Victor and Olya have been very intentional about their multilingual aim for their own children. In fact, their efforts began not just at birth, but *before* birth. "We were invested in learning each other's languages," Victor said. "It was part of the courtship ritual, so to speak." Olya described the efforts she made to learn some Portuguese and Victor's efforts to learn some Russian, stressing how the language ability they gained has helped make life easier for them as a multilingual family.

The couple's proactive efforts then continued when Olya became pregnant. Intent on speaking to Dylan in their native languages after his birth, they first began doing so prior to his arrival with Victor addressing their not-yet-born son in Portuguese and Olya addressing him in Russian.

Research on the question of language input in the womb—such as the study "Language experienced *in utero* affects vowel perception after birth," led by Christine Moon and published in the journal Acta Paediatrica in 2013—indicates that pre-birth language exposure *does* have a measurable impact on the developing child. What's even more important, perhaps, is that the couple's earliest efforts to speak to their son in the two target languages enabled them to establish the new pattern of language usage that they felt suited their multilingual goal. In other words, this first step, taken before birth, no doubt helped pave the way for their routine use of these languages from the day Dylan was born, a transition that took the couple from speaking mostly English each day to a home where they consistently use Portuguese and Russian, too.

"For us," Olya said, "it was important to do this from day one and I feel like that was a very good decision. Since then I've talked to friends who tell me things like, 'I have a 4-month-old baby. I'm still speaking to him in English, but I'm going to start soon.' And that can be a difficult transition to make."

The couple's commitment to speaking the target languages extends beyond their own home as well. Victor told me, "We also agreed that we would never succumb to social pressure. Living here, there's very little multilingualism. If somebody looks at us in a weird way when they hear us speaking in other languages to our kids, we don't mind. We know we're investing in a very important goal. We're giving our kids an amazing gift."

"Sometimes, on the playground, people walk in on the situation where I'm talking to my kids in Russian," Olya said. "Initially, maybe they don't know how to react, there's some discomfort, but when I say hi and we start talking, they're okay."

"We take it as an opportunity to educate people about the benefits of bilingualism," Victor said. "The first time we meet somebody, we usually throw it out there from the very beginning: 'Hi, we talk to them in different languages, just so you know.'"

"And most will say they wish their kids were bilingual or trilingual," Olya added. "They say, 'Teach my kids,' and they're joking, but they wish that was the case."

While Victor and Olya would be happy if Dylan and Isabella eventually learn additional languages beyond these first three—Portuguese, Russian, and English—they also expressed some caution about expanding the children's exposure to other languages prematurely. Referring to Dylan, Olya said, "I wouldn't want to introduce too many languages at this point. I feel like there's a big difference between dabbling in a language and knowing a language and I think, for his age, three is plenty."

"When he turns 5, I think that's when we'll be more open to introducing a fourth language," Victor agreed. "Right now, our main goal is to really solidify the three we have at home."

Dylan, now 3 and a half, has become "very balanced in his trilingualism," Victor said. "He can talk away in all three languages."

The couple hopes that, eventually, both children will not only speak these languages well but be strongly literate in them, too.

Support from other speakers

Along with their own proactive efforts to use the two minority languages, Victor and Olya try to take full advantage of the language exposure that family and friends can provide. Their parents—particularly their mothers—have stayed with them for extended periods of time each year, with Victor's mother fortifying the children's exposure to Portuguese and Olya's mother making the same strong contribution in Russian. In fact, the six months that Olya's mother spent with the family after Isabella was born has apparently influenced Dylan's preference when it comes to communicating with his baby sister because he now uses exclusively Russian with her. "We don't know if that's going to continue," Victor said. "But it's interesting how just the amount of exposure makes a big impact."

In addition to these visits by family members, and regular online chats when they're apart, Victor was able to find a Portuguese-speaking woman to care for Isabella during the day while he and Olya are working and Dylan is attending his English-language preschool. "I'd much rather hire a Portuguese-speaking or a Russian-speaking nanny than somebody in the neighborhood just because they happen to be there," he said. "In fact, I'll pay more for that."

Beyond this caregiver for Isabella, the couple is also eager to connect locally with others who share their minority languages, inviting them, in a sense, to be a part of their family's special aim.

"Every time we meet speakers of these languages," Victor explained, "we ask them from the get-go, 'Would you please talk to them in Portuguese?' or 'Would you please talk to them in Russian? That would mean a lot to us.'"

He advised, "All you have to do is put your hands together and say, 'Can you please do me a favor? Just always talk to him in this language. That would mean so much to me.' Most people are pretty nice and are willing to comply."

Not only does some assertiveness in this way help fortify the children's language exposure, it can also provide a positive influence on their attitude toward the languages themselves by highlighting the fact that there are speakers of Portuguese and Russian beyond the smaller circle of their own family.

To date, the family hasn't yet traveled abroad, but as the children get older, they look forward to taking trips to Brazil and Ukraine

to see family members and friends while immersing themselves in the language and culture of each location.

Creating resources for themselves and others

When it comes to books and other resources, Victor and Olya have mindfully emphasized their minority languages and actively sought to limit the influence of the majority language. Citing an example, Victor said, "That's one of the rules at our house: they can watch cartoons in our languages, but we never let them watch cartoons in English. It's always Russian or Portuguese—never English."

The couple has even taken up the challenge of creating their own resources after struggling to find appealing materials already on the market. Although the initial impetus for developing products was linked to the language learning needs of their own children, the couple's efforts for Linguacious, the company they founded, have expanded to include multilingual families worldwide through a growing number of products produced in a wide range of languages.

While Linguacious now offers children's picture books that include the *Little Polyglot Adventures* series (inspired by their own kids), the first product they created, a set of vocabulary flashcards with embedded audio, is designed to engage children in the target language through a variety of playful games. "I believe that if kids aren't having fun, they won't care," Victor explained. "They're not going to want to learn another language unless it's fun for them." The aim with our flashcards, he said, is to make "that first taste of the language" enjoyable and successful so that children will have positive feelings about the experience. "Because if the first experience is something they don't like, they're not going back to it. They're like, 'Yeah, I tried it and I hate it.'"

The Linguacious flashcards are now available in dozens of different languages, including endangered languages that no longer have many speakers like Irish Gaelic, Hawaiian, and the Alaskan language of Yup'ik. Victor said, "At the same time that we're trying to help families, it also works a little bit for language revitalization where we want kids to care about their languages and their heritage language—it's your culture, it's your parents' language."

Be intentional from the start

While Victor and Olya are still in the early years of their multilingual journey with their kids, their passion and talent for languages, along with the insights they've gained from fostering active trilingual ability in their young son, make their advice to new parents particularly useful to hear. Both agreed that being intentional about this aim, from the very start, is especially important for generating a positive and productive experience through the first few years.

"Yes, the keyword is intentional," Victor said. "Bilingualism won't just happen. You have to make it happen. It has to be intentional. I think having that conversation before the child arrives is crucial. That's when you still have time to think about these things, map out your resources, and make sure you have a bilingual plan. The sooner you have that plan in place, the higher your chances for success. If you're a busy parent, and on top of that you now have a baby to feed and you're waking up five times a night, you're not going to have time to map out those resources."

"Definitely start right away," Olya said. "It's much harder if you think like, 'Oh, we'll start when they reach a certain age.'"

"The other thing is for parents to model it," she continued, referring to the fact that some parents with a bilingual dream aren't consistently using the minority language themselves. "I've had friends who are speakers of the minority language and they complain about their 2 – or 3-year-old. 'He never speaks in Russian,' they say. Well, but neither do they."

"With English-speaking friends," she explained, "I still address Dylan in Russian. But I don't exclude them; I translate for them. I might say two or three sentences to Dylan and just give them a brief synopsis. I don't switch when speaking to Dylan, but I don't exclude other people, either. I always try to include them."

Any parent can produce success

Victor then offered his thoughts on the bilingual journey for parents who are native speakers, or capable non-native speakers, of the minority language, saying, "You should understand that you will be the most precious resource for your kids and a lot of the success you experience will have to do with you and your commitment. How

willing are you to put in those hours, make that time for them? Because it's a matter of time, right? You want to increase the amount of input that you give them and the frequency of that input. And sometimes there are these time slots that we don't think of as time we could be giving input in the language, but actually, it is. You don't necessarily need to have a dedicated one-hour slot, right?"

Providing a personal example, he said, "I drive Dylan to daycare every day and I pick him up. It's 10 minutes to daycare and 10 minutes back. If you rode with us, you would go crazy because we talk, talk, talk, talk. It's 20 minutes of language immersion right there. I don't care what we talk about. We talk about the clouds, or the car in front of us, but it's going to be in our language. Twenty minutes every day—if you add that up, it's hours and hours of input from an early age."

At the same time, Victor shared some words of encouragement for parents who have more limited fluency in the target language. "You can still be very helpful in terms of creating an interest in the language," he said. "There are a lot of things that you can do in the house. Like when you're brushing your teeth, you can do some vocabulary learning. You can have a reward chart. Every time they learn a new word and they can use it, you can give them a star and then you have your ice cream if you get 10 stars. So there are a lot of things you can do that are fun and playful to get the kids' ears and minds open to speaking another language."

He stressed that parents in this situation, with limited proficiency, will also need to be proactive about seeking out additional support for their bilingual aim from the local community and from resources online.

Victor emphasized, too, that all parents should take full advantage of "free advice from people who have been in the same situation. With bilingualism, the more issues you're having, the more you should be talking about them with others because the easier it'll be for you to find solutions."

"So at the end of the day," he said, "whether you're a native speaker, somebody with lots of fluency, or a limited speaker of the language, there's no excuse. If the goal is clear in your mind, there is a path."

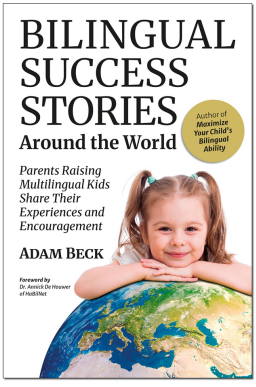
He added, "My mom always said, 'If you want to do something, there's a way. If you don't, there's an excuse.' So I think there's a

bright possibility for everybody, but it's going to be easier for some and harder for others."

AFTERWORD: Victor and Olya are both so mindful and proactive about their multilingual aim for their children, in every aspect of their life-style that's within their control, that their thriving success is not at all a surprise. Since this interview was conducted, their daughter is following in her older brother's footsteps and becoming just as actively and confidently trilingual. The word "intentional," which Victor and Olya stressed and which other parents will also emphasize, is one of the central traits shared by every parent in this book. Put plainly, the more intentional we can be in our actions from day to day, the more success we will experience over the years of childhood. And the deep drive that both Victor and Olya feel for being intentional about their actions, in order to maximize their children's progress, essentially ensured—even before embarking on this journey with their kids—that their vision of multilingual success would be realized.

Contact & Resources for Victor and Olya

- contact@linguacious.net
- linguacious.net
- @linguacious_llc
- @linguacious_llc
- *Little Polyglot Adventures* series (children's books available in 19 languages in both monolingual and bilingual editions)
- *The Boy Who Illustrated Happiness* (children's book)
- Linguacious Vocabulary flashcard games



Did you enjoy this sample?

Get the full 252-page book, available as a paperback or e-book, at Amazon or another bookseller.