

The background is a vibrant purple with various abstract shapes and patterns in shades of orange, blue, and pink. There are white dashed lines, solid lines, and swirls scattered throughout. The text is centered in a white serif font.

Barriers & Bridges to Bimodalism: For parents and professionals

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Bilingualism

Knowing two (or more) languages.

ASL and printed English
English and Spanish
LSQ and printed French
Arabic and Hebrew

Bimodalism

Knowing two languages, using
two modalities (one visual, one
aural-oral)

ASL and spoken English
LSQ and spoken French
Chinese and CSL



The term “bimodal” has been around for decades, but became more popular as hearing technology boomed and became more mainstream in the 90s/early 2000s

Old Myths

- “Signing delays talking.”
- “Deaf kids should only learn one language at a time.”
- “Learning more than one language causes ‘language confusion.’”
- “You don’t need to sign because your kid’s technology is so advanced.”
- “If you don’t sign fluently all the time, your kid won’t learn sign language.”
- “If you sign and talk, your child won’t develop a full language.”



What we know now

- “Signing DOES NOT delays talking” (Tang 2014, Higgins et. al, 2023)
 - The flip side is true too: Talking DOES NOT delay signing
 - “Deaf kids DON’T HAVE TO learn one language at a time.”
 - “Learning more than one language DOES NOT cause ‘language confusion.’ (Williams & Heinlein, 2013)
 - “You CAN sign EVEN THOUGH your kid’s technology is so advanced.”
 - “EVEN if you don’t sign fluently all the time, your kid CAN learn sign language.” (Lieberman et. al, 2022)
 - If you use languages WITH INTENTION, your child CAN develop full languages.
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Why do myths live on?

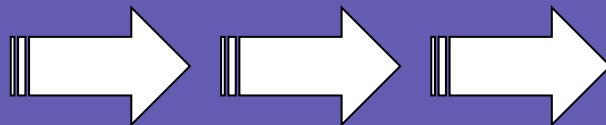
Professionals and lay people are
STUCK in old ways of thinking.

But WHY???

Because people have big feelings
(and deep seeded biases) about deaf
kids and language, which encourages
problems and discourages growth.

- * **Assimilation** (deaf should be “like us.”
“This is America. Speak English”)
- * **Fear** (“adults can’t learn ASL, it’s too hard”)
 - * **Medical view of deafness** (deafness
should be “fixed”)
 - * **Chronic, low expectations** of deaf kids
 - * **Fear of ASL extinction**
 - * **Simply not knowing any better**
 - * **Status quo** (“this is how it’s been”)

Problematic thinking





Provider bias is real and confusing

“...audiologists were 11 times more likely than SLTs [SLPs] to report linguistic confusion...

*ToDs ~11 times more likely than SLTs to report reduced proficiency in English and the home language because of bilingualism.

ToDs and SLTs...play a key role in bilingual parents' decision-making process.

There is a need for specific training and interprofessional learning to ensure parents receive consistent evidence-based advice.”

Wright, Stojanovik, & Serratrice, 2022



The Bilingual Brain

The (hearing or deaf) brain doesn't care WHAT language(s) it gets or HOW (meaning, which modality) .

It only cares about getting least one FULL and robust language to “feed it the good stuff.” More languages? Great!

Brains have been learning multiple languages for centuries.

Brains are brains.

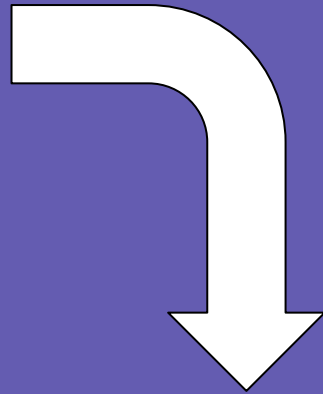
The Bilingual Brain

Like with hearing children learning two spoken languages, the Deaf brain can learn two languages in two modalities from a young age, simultaneously, and with some notable trends:

- ***Uneven development** (dominance of one vs. the other)
- ***Slower development** of one or both languages
- ***Code mixing** (language mixing, mode mixing, etc.) – using two languages in one sentence

Here's the good news:

- * Uneven development
- * Slower language development
- * Code mixing



ARE :NORMAL, EXPECTED

ARE NOT:

“LANGUAGE CONFUSION,” or
PROOF SOMEONE “MESSED UP”

Bimodal development of CODAs

Children of Deaf Adults who grow up with signing Deaf parent(s), and in the larger hearing society, develop bilingual-bimodal language similar to Deaf bimodals.



Small but solid body of research that shows Deaf kids that sign before getting cochlear implants follow similar language development in both ASL and English.

[Davidson, Lillo-Martin and Chen Pichler \(2014\)](#), [Goodwin \(2016\)](#), [Palmer \(2015\)](#)


HOW ?

*I don't exactly know...

*Because everyone is different..BUT there are some trends and evidence...



...emerging evidence suggests acquisition of two or more languages is possible for this population (Crowe, 2018) but quality and quantity of access to both languages is critical (Waltzman 2003, Yim 2012)



Sorry. Size does matter...

If one language gets the majority of the “air time,” the other cannot thrive.

Don't blame the plant...it just didn't get the sunlight it needed.



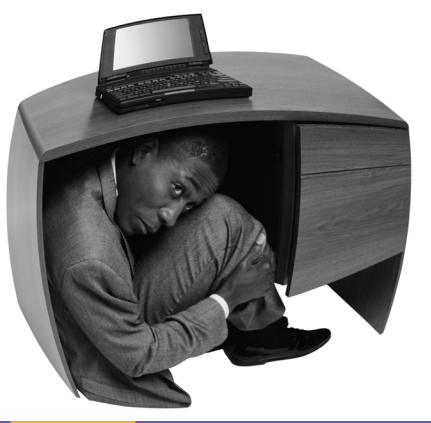


BUT, some exceptions

Children with additional challenges (neurological differences, medical complications, etc.) may not follow predictable bilingual-bimodal development patterns.

Depending on the child, it may be more beneficial to learn one language, or not introduce a second language until they have an established primary language.

Strategies for their bilingual language development may be different.



Wait, what about...



The big C...

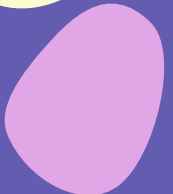
Code switching

The big S...

Sim-com

The big L...

Language separation





Code Switching



Using one language, then switching to another (with no blending). This requires fluency that children (and adults who are learning) don't have for a while*.

Ex: Signing at school, then talking or using a text app at Starbucks

Ex: Using Portuguese at home and English at school

*Studies are mixed (for hearing children getting constant fluent models of both languages) : Age 2.5 -4+ for true code switching







Mistakes we make about code switching:

- Expecting those who are not fluent in both languages to code switch
- Expecting children to code switch at very young ages
- Expecting those with social/pragmatic issues to code switch without support (teaching/cues/modeling)







Code mixing, code blending ("language mixing")

Examples: (spoken language in orange, ASL in pink gloss)

- **Wow!** LOOK...the car zoom CL:3/*car zooming down ramp*
- **Baby** CRY
- **I was like no way** I'M DONE WALK-OUT, and he was like LAUGHING. It was so embarrassing, but soooo funny!





Code mixing, code blending (“language mixing”)

“A uniquely bimodal phenomenon”

“...cross-linguistic influence occurs both from sign to speech **and** from speech to sign.”

“... bimodal bilingual children produce both speech and sign in ways unlike monolingual speakers or signers.

...’the bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person’ (Grosjean, 1989), but rather one person who exhibits complex interaction between two grammars.”

Code mixing, code blending (“language mixing”)

*It is **NOT SIM-COM (simultaneous communication)**: Using (intact or mostly intact) spoken English with signs (signs are usually in haphazard manner)

*It is **NOT CODE SWITCHING** Using one modality OR another depending on situation and communication partner

*It is **NOT BAD**. Even bilingual-bimodal, fluent, adults do it.





Code mixing/blending takeaways:



- It is **anormal** part of bimodal development
 - It is **not language confusion**
 - It does not mean a child has concerning gaps
- It does **not mean a child will never code switch or have two fluent languages**
 - It is a pooling of language resources to get a message out!



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“findings encourage a move away from a fractional view of bilingualism which focuses on separate proficiencies in separate languages and from pedagogies which aim to separate the use of sign and spoken language.

That is not to suggest that proficiency in both languages does not remain a goal, **but rather that we investigate the creative use of children’s full language repertoires to achieve such a goal.**

(Tang, Lam & Yiu K., 2014)

Language Planning for Bimodalism

We ask a lot of families in our language plans...

In creating these plans, do you consider families' barriers?

“You need
xx hours
of speech
therapy a
week”

“Pick times
of day to
only sign
and only
talk”

“You have
to always
separate
languages”

“You need
to become
fluent as
quickly as
possible”

Do they have the privilege needed to carry out the language plan?

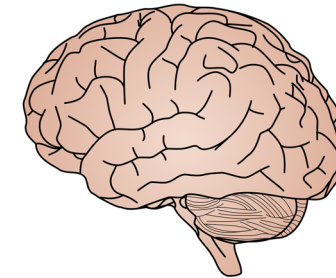
Language Planning for Bimodalism

When designing a language plan, remember:

- **Fluency is a spectrum— many parents are starting at zero**
- It is not always realistic to separate languages in real life, especially with mixed company and when a family is in early stages of language learning.
- Complete and constant separation of languages may ignore the advantages of translanguaging ...and can scare people away.

Language Planning for Bimodalism

- Learning a new language is full of privilege:



- Not all adults are capable of reaching the fluency needed to separate languages consistently. A more flexible model may be necessary.

- Learning to fill gaps in sign knowledge takes support and practice, but professionals rarely talk about this. Then parents feel inadequate

This is where we (the professionals) come in



- ★ Providing information & options is only part of our job
- ★ Recognizing and navigating families' barriers is just as important

*Connect families to SSPs immediately

*Transportation assistance?

*Funding assistance for ASL classes/programs

*Designing language plans that meet families where they are

*Bias helps no one. Facts, not feelings.

*Don't underestimate the deaf brain



“It was extremely important having [professionals] who supported my bimodal approach and did not cause me to feel that adding a focus on speech was detracting from what I’ve come to love about my son’s Deafness and community.”*

*insert any “approach”/language, culture, or lived experience

Takeaways



- ★ Quantity AND quality of each language are key when bimodalism is the goal
- ★ Bimodal development follows patterns similar to spoken bilingualism
 - “Language confusion” is antiquated. **Languages can, and do, positively interact. TRANSLANGUAGING IS OUR FRIEND.**
- ★ Families get a lot of mixed messages – Where does your bias come in?
- ★ Provide tools to help elevate families above barriers without judgement. Meet them where they are.



Thank you!

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