

## **Bilingual Language Acquisition in Children Exposed to a Signed and a Spoken Language from Birth**

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**ABSTRACT:** Divergent hypotheses exist concerning the types of knowledge underlying early bilingualism, with some portraying a troubled course marred by language delays and confusion, and others portraying one that is largely unremarkable. Three French & English young bilinguals were compared to an extraordinary group of bilinguals: three hearing children acquiring a signed and a spoken language, Langue des Signes Québécoise (LSQ) & French. The Results showed that both groups (1) achieved the classic milestones in each language at approx the same time, and followed the same course as monolinguals, (2) exhibited comparable rates of lexical development in each language over time, (3) differentiated between their two lexicons from their earliest use of words (signs) in each of their languages ("translation equivalents"), (4) altered their language choice depending upon interlocutor's language ("interlocutor sensitivity"), and (5) produced language mixing rates that reflected parental mixing rates. (6) LSQ-French children produced signs & words simultaneously, but they were highly patterned. We conclude that the young bilingual's capacity to differentiate between its two languages is in place prior to first words, and we hypothesize that this capacity may derive from mechanisms that enable the establishment of early phonological representations<sup>1</sup>

1. Petitto, L. A. Katerelos, M., Levy, B. G., Gauna, K., Tétreault, K., & Ferraro, V. (1999, submitted). Bilingual signed and spoken languages acquisition from birth: Implications for the mechanisms underlying early bilingual language acquisition.

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