

## Children's Culture Shock in the Multilingual Family

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### Abstract

This article is a study about the phenomenon of children culture shock in countries all over the world. It talks about the symptoms of culture shock, the problem that might be in concern by children whose parents have a different cultural background. The goal is to show a problem that might be in concern by children who have a different cultural background, the sources of the problem, and the strategies that parents apply to minimize children's culture shock. Parents in the multilingual family background from around the world are chosen randomly as the subjects. By using method of Netnography written language, it is expected to provide a valid data. The result, showed that nowadays, parents are worried to push their children to learn more than one language. They are afraid that it would make their children get stuck in the symptoms of culture shock. To reduce the impact of culture shock, 'one person-one language' could become an option. In sum, there are mixed marriage families who have different native language and cultural backgrounds are eager to have multilingual children. Some others are in fear that their children will experience delayed speech because they learn more than a language at early age.

**Keywords:** multilingual; mixed marriage; culture shock, delay speech

### I. INTRODUCTION

A multilingual Family is a term of a family who has the ability to understand two or more different languages. Usually, multilingual also called as bilingual and it often gains positive benefits such as having vastly different sociocultural experiences (Curd-Christiansen:2016). Even though it looks interesting, yet, in reality being a multilingual family is not easy. There are a lot of confusion and obstacle, such as culture shock.

Culture shock was declared by Oberg (1960), the symptoms and the process of adapting to a new and different culture. Beside Oberg, there are several different thoughts about culture shock by other experts. For example, Guthrie (1975) preferred to call culture shock as 'culture fatigue' as one of the synonyms of culture shock, which different with Smalley (1963) who focused on the effect of language shock for example children difficulties in communication. Whereas Byrnes (1966) focused on the 'role shock' as the part of culture shock. Another argument comes from Bock who described culture shock as an anxiety reaction due to not having the ability to grasp, control,

or predict the behavior of other people (1970). Although there are lots of terms about culture shock, this term might be a traditional and certain development term, and who experienced this term might feel inadequate or weak, and suffering from types of mental illness (Naeem, 2015).

The reaction of culture shock could give the numerous changes because of an exposure to a replacement culture. Children maintain culture shock in various ways; start from physical and emotional, signs of cognitive and social interactions; and it would give a strong shock effect if the children push to understand and master the changing of each language in the primary time. While, there is a different thought that kids could do adaptations simply and also could replace each language and each culture separately. Yet, kids typically have a harder time than adults. Children would study harder to understand the mechanisms of each language and this could lead them to feel stress in early age.

In daily interaction, culture provides an implicit framework for people to learn, behave, interpret, and

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analyze others' behavior toward it. Cultural setting in every country set own identity as a dominant and remarkable sign. In general, culture divided into three base levels: first, family, second, instructional non-secular (neighborhood), and third, social and national levels (society and country). Although not every child from a multilingual family ill experience all the symptoms, almost all children would **severing** in some part of the symptoms, for example depression, anxiety, and feelings of helplessness (Mio:1999).

Solomon (1994) found out the similarly of emotional psychological reaction to the confusion, ambiguity, value conflicts, and hidden clashes that occur as a result of fundamentally different ways of interacting socially between cultures; the disorientation would affect some bad condition, such as a state of affairs frustrations, anger, depression, anxiety and it leads to the explosion of bad feeling (Black et al., 1999; Harrison 1994; Winkelman, 1994).

Within this framework, this study is conducted to answer three research questions related to the children's culture shock in a multilingual family, namely: (1) What problem might be in concern by children who have a different cultural background? (2) What are the sources of the problem? (3) What strategies do parents apply to minimize children culture?

To answer three research questions, this study below shows some aspects of theories as parameters to investigate the information of the result, to answer the related problems of children's culture shock.

#### a. The Stages and Symptoms, of Culture shock

The stage or symptoms related to how children pass their first step or the early stages of disorientation. In the first stage, the child could be unable to tolerate any eye contact, and sometime, the child would be afraid of strangers and have extreme anxiety reactions. As the next step, children may be able to tolerate some culture yet, they still unable to play with society (friends). Many kids explode culture shock with plenty of anger, and they might be more sensitive. Through this point, children seem to feel difficulty to find out an alternative object. In the last step, when children's culture shock decreases, they able to listen and accept the method,

and begin to become curious once ahead, more than before, and check out how know to understand some words within the new language. (刘娟:2002)

#### b. The Way to Reduce the Concern Problem

A multilingual child would deal with good or bad news, especially for a person who related to multilingual children. Jeon (2014) wrote that the good news as the end of children's culture shock, while the bad news is the beginning steps of how parents should be taught the children in e better way through a child's difficult time. The following square below measure suggestions for parents to assist ease the manner for his or her children:

- Parents the best way to train parent's patience is more listening to the children and doing much communicating with children than before.
- Making time in a case of disorientation, no matter the age of the child, adults (parents) sometimes underestimate children's understanding.
- Creating a safe zone for kids to control their anger, anxiety, negative feelings, their unhappiness day, or other bad things that could affect children. And make sure that the safe zone won't be displaced in inappropriate places outside the house.
- Parent is expected to have as much as a possible time for the children. Parent also needs to be careful and not leave their kids with sitter or nanny in any situation. Giving the best time for children (quality time).
- Parents should not deny the existence of disorientation. They need to accept the children condition and get rid of a perfectionist thought about children.
- Parents create as much stability term as possible. Parents need to speak to each other and found out what the kids want regarding what is new and completely different in children's mindset to create stable terms based on children's questionnaire answers.
- Parents could make children feel protected by help children to interact with new society and help them to make a friend as soon as possible by organizing the child's playtime and let kids playing outside the house.

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Not only that, but parents could also bring a child of their friends together.

- If parents feeling that the child or families are not adjusting to the new set over six months. Parents should not hesitate to search out what is the effective media and term that could help the child. There is no shame or stigma to seeking outside counseling, and parents should find an accomplished way within a few hours with an objective rule, and trained professional. The thing that needs to remember, parents necessarily come to see the expertise in the progress of children's stress; the school counselors are there to help parents, so parents should not worry too much.

- Throughout this point, parents cannot expect themselves to be the truest person.

- Parents would remain to be flexible, and keep a sense of humor or fun.

#### c. One person—one language

The term of one person—one language explain how two different languages, flows at the same time, with the same frequency and capacity (Ronjat:1913). The purpose is to give good expectations to the kid toward the use of two different languages, without any disturbance from other family members. (Guerra, Snijders, te Velde, & Baerends, 1998)

#### d. Parental Concerns

Dopke (1992) declares that, a child who grows in a multilingual way is greatly influenced by the role of their parents. And both of parents and child share related factors:

- First, the parents must consistent and being strict to take control of their child from misunderstanding way when their child understand and use inappropriate language.

- Second, children have their own choice beside their side toward the use of the languages to encourage children to speak the heritage language to their extended family, peers or friends, and other people in the community.

Parents no need to feel worried because there is no correlation between multilingualism or monolinguals

in language development, the typical or atypical speech-language is not related with a clinical condition, all the factors could come from various factor based on the kid itself, and every kid are different (Summer:2014).

## II. METHOD

To accomplish the objective of this study, the parents of multilingual family backgrounds from around the world are chosen as the subjects. A questionnaire was given to a small number of bilingual couples. To address the homogeneity, all the participants are at the same background multilingual family, or mixed marriage family. Thus, it can be concluded that all the participants face the same problem. For the detail, the example subject of this study are; Swedish-Polish who live in Polish, and Indonesian-Indonesian who life in Australia. Netnography is chosen as the method of this research. Netnography is an online research of ethnography, it also uses a specific set of research methods such as data collection and analysis. The main reason for that was merely because of the difficulty in accessing the expatriates due to their geographical locations around the world. Interviews would be troublesome to conduct over the phone because of the various locations of each expatriate. It would be nearly not possible to interview every person at a time which might have suited each participant and therefore the main advantages of Netnography giving help in collecting data and the results obtained will be compared with some related studies that already mentioned in the introduction.

To answer the questions researcher has grouping parents' answers who active in a multilingual parents' online forum that mainly from around the world. Thus, the bloggers used English as their international and their foreign language for asking and sharing about children problems in the multilingual family.

## III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

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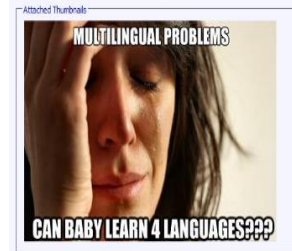
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### A. The problem that Might be in Concern by Children who Have Different Culture Background

First world problem? Sorry couldn't resist 😊



*memes from online forum*

This meme shows a crucial issue about multilingual problems, like what already stated; can a baby learn four languages and how do children learn four languages? Language is identical with culture, one language brings one culture, and of course, it means that four languages also bring four cultures. Nowadays, multilingual parents would be worried to push their children to learn more than one language, they are afraid to make children stuck in culture shock, by the fact culture shock is a little bit scary for parents to decide children become multilingual.

The first problem comes from the Swedish-Polish couple who will have their first child. This couple decided to use one parent's language and add English for the third language. Yet, there are two problems; first, the husband does not understand Swedish. If she wanted to talk in Swedish to her child, she would pick the Swedish at first and then translate it into English to make her husband understand what she was talking about. Second, they probably would stay in Switzerland which makes the kid have to learn German. Though, she is afraid it would make the kid confused. Mix marriage will bring the main different culture, not only language but, there is also another factor such as habits, traditions, and it is a fact that different cultures also could lead a different way to solve a problem. When a child born in a multilingual family, a Swedish child will not only learn how to speak the language accurately but also learn the tradition of community codes' behavior that cannot be translated directly while in Poland learning the language it is not easy as it thought, there is a fact that foreigners claim to have difficulty reciting a few simple words in Polish. This is

because of the large number of consonant letters in one word and the existence of a tongue bending system which is quite complex in pronouncing words per word.

The second problem comes from Indonesian-Indonesian couple who live in Australia with 4 years old girl and 7 years old boy. Both parents are native speakers of Indonesian and none of them have born in a multilingual family. Yet, the father is speaking English well because he is already working there for a long time, while his wife cannot speak English well. So she ends up speaking Indonesian at home to the children, different from her husband who uses both languages. The result showed that both children speaking English well, they learn it from father and society and it proved by the way the children speak English. It sounds 100% a native speaker. The points that found out in this case are; children could learn language by hearing and socializing although the mother is not speaking in English all the time; children who master a language from society would also master the house country culture' background; there is a minus point from the children side, first, English remained to be the first language even though Indonesian is both parents' culture. Second, English is the dominant language and Indonesian is a second language, when the children come to Indonesia the children refused to talk to anyone except mother and father, and they are also asking for going home to Australia. At this point, this phenomenon could have happened because the children lost their familiar sign which is English, and afraid to speak Indonesian. After all, they are not comfortable in using the language despite the father and the mother always speaking Indonesian at home.

Culture deals with many points, start from the whole pattern of life, complex, abstract, and broad rules, and many aspects of culture also determine communicative behavior. It is normal if a mixed couple would probably think that teaching many languages to their kids in early age would affect kids' speaking ability or socializing ability. Whereas, societies, friends, and the school also influenced children's language ability stronger than parents influenced.

### B. The Sources of the Problem

When the closer attention is taken by the writer, some parents who also the bloggers afraid of mixed languages would give a bad effect on their mixed

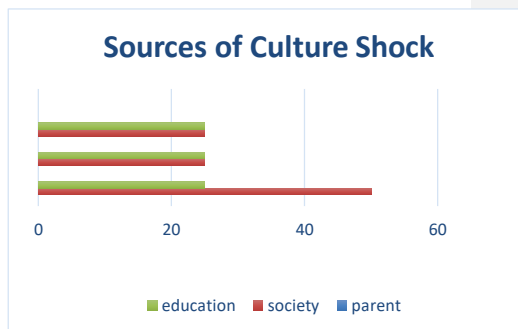
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marriage family, they afraid it would affect the development of children such as speech delay, anxiety, individuals and others. Raising multilingual children of course related with some sources problem:

1. Internal Problem, when culture shock arising from the parents. It can be caused by parents for being inconsistent at applying their native language or it might be parents' fear of their children may have a speech delay or being confused. This fear may not be unsubstantiated and become a thick wall for parents.
2. External Problem is culture shock arising from outside the family members. Society and environment be one of resources. Being aware of what environment or hometown society gives to the children because the language used in the surrounding environment also shapes the character of the child. Parents should be more careful of culture shock; children might be getting worse because of the neighborhood. For example, the child experienced a delayed speech, but the environment giving bad words or bullying. The child will become insecure and afraid to socialize.
3. The learning method is inconsistent.
4. There is a big gap distinction between language needs (both parent's native language) and other special educational (intellectual, academic, and non-academic physical) need multilingual children, often together without a range of common children's special educational needs.
5. Parents are not identified and looking for the data of criteria for children's language needs, the lack of time to identifying the most sensitivity to cultural diversity than to language diversity.
6. School concerns or websites (online media) include positive statements about the value and importance of multilingual but there is little evidence of the classroom activities for multilingual children.
7. The teacher is not giving special concern to the multilingual children.
8. Parents lacked specialist teachers to work with multilingual children and a little connection between teacher and multilingual children.
9. Responsibilities of bilingual or multilingual support in their community linked and made communication with bilingual parents.

Table 1 Source of Culture Shock



Parent has a big role than education and society, both of education and society still give impact to children's braveness. They could be the reason why children have culture shock. A family concern, education, and society support the most necessary globe to protect children from culture shock effect.

### C. Strategies to Minimize Children Culture Shock

Children culture shock could decrease by parents' concern to their child. Parents do not need to worry too much if two native languages are never giving any problem for children to learn. Children brain one different special than an adult. For instance, teaching children to speak more than one language could make delay speech. Yet, there is no evidence for it. As it believes there is no concrete research mention that a delayed speech would affect multilingual children learner ability in catching up the language. It is just something that people say to each other and so it has become an urban myth. It is a previous old tale that during the approach of the language, a child would have a delay in language development, there's no information to support this idea in anyplace. Even today some professionals scientists believe in children brains. Expert also giving the assumption that children's brain is not to be monolingual and bilingualism may not lead to language delays. However, there is no concrete evidence that human beings are programmed to be monolinguals. (Summer:2014). Being bilingual be one of the best gifts you can give your kids. For minimizing children culture shock parents must work to expose children 24/7 for both languages. For example language A is from mother and language B from father besides

language C comes from their environment. Every mixed marriage couple want their children to master two languages or more ( $A+B=AB$ )/ ( $A+B+C=ABC$ ). This Strategy or plan could help them make it come true:

1. Language A and B. Speak by both parents.
2. Language A and B. Therapy in the home, parents should be asking for someone help to teach language culture, in this part grandparents are the best chosen, they could take a role as a culture teacher.
3. Language A or B. Home media. Giving children fun media for example cartoons, kids' movies, games, serial kids channel.
4. Language A or B. School. Parents must choose a special school for bilingual or multilingual children.
5. Language A or B. Additional ways to strengthen: Learning by the cultural communities helped (festivals, church, parades, traditional events, party.)
6. Language B. Additional ways to strengthen: such as learning in the outside environment (library, supermarket, friends, social media).

As a parent, it is normal to feel afraid of something that could harm the kids, but in some reason, parents must be the strongest one who believes and make sure that two or more different culture won't give any big problem, and last, parents should found out a fun and easy methods to give the children master more than one culture equally although there is always a problem in raising kids in culture different background.

#### IV. CONCLUSION

##### CONCLUSION

Culture shock is a reaction to the new culture. Culture shock is a normal and predictable phenomenon, although those experiencing it may feel that they are inadequate or weak, even believing that they are suffering some form of mental illness. Culture shock as an emotional and psychological reaction to the confusion, ambiguity, value conflicts, and hidden clashes, children exhibit culture shock in assorted ways, from physical and emotional signs to cognitive and social indicators. In daily communication, Culture provides an implicit framework within which people

learn to behave, in this case, both parents have a different cultural background which gives impact to the children. Some of the parents believe that delayed speech is one of the impacts. Meanwhile, a mixed marriage couple and expatriate couple would dream about having multilingual children. Parents and society around them must know the stages, or symptoms, good news and bad news of culture shock, to help ease the way for children. Parents must be practice and patient prepared for a tough six months with parent concern in one person-one language. Children could understand and recognize more than one language, their brains are born to be multilingual. Therefore, dreaming about having multilingual children could come true as long as a parent does not push children too hard, and using the correct method for example language A (mother) and Language B (father) come together and take a turn in doing communication with their children, not only that, parents also could add Language C which from society or school, as we know nowadays children learn more than one language in their school. For the first, children would be confused, it is true, they need time to recognize what language the parents use. It is no big deal, be consistent, and stick on what you already choose is the key to having multilingual children.

##### SUGGESTION

This article is applicable to mixed marriage couple or expatriate couple who live in a country with the different host culture, and a parent who suffers from children' culture shock. Other than that, this article could be applicable as a supporting source for another researcher.

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