1. Introductory remarks

Observations of the child learning two or even more languages simultaneously contribute to a large extent to the development of both linguistic and extralinguistic theories of language acquisition and language learning. Studies of such children are able to explain the extent to which acquisition of the first and the second language influences the individual and in which way the two or more communication systems are stored in his memory. Here the linguistic manipulation and creativity may be observed and appropriate models of linguistic competence may be made and tested. Working out the best models for explaining the child's ability to master any human language, based on a number of assumptions, is being accomplished by the study of their behavioral and verbal performance.

The ability to acquire any linguistic code seems to be naturally inherent in the child's nervous system. Lenneberg says that certain linguistic abilities are determined by natural endowments provided that the child is exposed to language. This means that he or she cannot only imitate but also generate the structures building his or her own model of the language, consisting of sets of rules and structures which are continually reconstructed and modified until, in the end, the model becomes identical with that of an adult speaker. According to Chomsky, a human being possesses a biologically founded innate capacity for language, i.e. the capacity to generate the infinite number of different utterances from the finite number of units and patterns.

2. Types of bilinguallity

The above considerations lead to the conclusion that the child exposed to more than one language will try to master new communication codes which make him become a bilingual or multilingual individual. It seems also evident that the level of bilingualism will depend upon several factors, and is not the same for every bilingual child.

Generally speaking, the majority of the bilingual or multilingual individuals, both infant and adult, represent the mixed type of bilingualism as they use different languages in different domains. See fig. 1 for a graphical explanation:

3. The multilingual child

This assumption is made on the basis of the author's study of his six-year-old daughter whose first language is Polish but who has alternately lived in Polish, German, and Dutch-speaking environments.
She came with both parents from Poland to the Dutch-speaking part of Belgium a year ago, possessing a good knowledge of Polish and the beginning of German grammar and vocabulary. From the beginning of her first language acquisition both parents have used almost entirely Polish to avoid retardation or confusion of languages. However, although Polish is used as the basic communication medium at home, German is spoken with frequent visitors, friends and their children. In this situation the child was able to internalize the basic German when listening to the talks, and especially during play with other children. During the first week in Belgium, she started to attend a kindergarten in which Dutch was the basic communication medium. From that time on, she gradually became bilingual. Within one month her proficiency in understanding and speaking Dutch very rapidly, and she was more interested in this language. This evokes the idea that she now sounds consistently whether she had not understood their proper meaning. She did not even when playing alone at home, talking to herself loudly. By the end of the third month her active Dutch vocabulary reached about 400 words and was nearly the same as in German. When speaking Dutch she had a tendency to rely on the same regularities for grammatical structures as they occur in German. Under the circumstances of her bilingualism, where the German grammar was well-established, no interference was observable in acquiring the Dutch grammar system.

During her first year of living in Belgium the linguistic situation was as follows: She spoke almost entirely Polish at home, Dutch to the best extent, and German at Dutch during her interaction with the children from the neighbourhood. At that time there were occasional shifts in language dominance, German and Dutch, which were caused by changes in the environment. This dominance of one language upon the other was observable during the vacations in Germany where she was obliged to speak German when playing with her companions. On her vacations she was also

in England and in Denmark. Although the time was too short to acquire the new language, she learned to differentiate one language from another and became more interested in learning new communication codes.

At the present moment of writing, she is now 5 years old. Her Dutch is used in socio-domains as the dominant language. As at school, the structures and the vocabulary of the new language were internalized faster, involving some conscious efforts. It could be observed in the beginning that German interfered with her Dutch, for the simple reason that she tried to derive most of the structures from German. This caused little language mixture. Neither confusion nor retardation of languages could be observed, since she was always exposed to the proper language in the proper situation. Her parents never mixed languages when talking with her, because they knew it could lead to emotional disturbance and, in consequence, produce a single mixed language which would delay the learning process.

To achieve full bilingual or multilingual abilities, it seemed necessary to the parents to develop all the skills in her first and the minority language before entering school.

Where a language other than a minority language is learned by the pre-school child at home, the only abilities in that language gradually developed are understanding and speaking. Since the abilities later are rarely utilized by the child as the basis for teaching reading and writing, they are not used for the development of the child in terms of his base language and related cultural values, severely limited.

According to the above, the girl was also taught reading and writing in her first language. In this case, knowledge of other languages, other than in other languages, as this language has more regular correspondence between sounds and letters.

4. Methodological hints for teaching the second language in the preschool age

For the child to be able to acquire and use the se
language he or she must first reach a certain level of proficiency in understanding and speaking his or her first language. For the same reason the child must then learn reading and writing in both his or her first and second language to keep up their equal prestige. Exposed to two or more languages without their skills and functions the child is able to internalize the positive value attached to all aspects of these languages as well as to language in general sense.

In order to be able to learn two or more languages without to much confusion the child should use different codes in different situations one or the other better motivated when a situation is a natural one. The parents mustn't interfere or make the child speak the given language in the given situation. A useful point of reference here is Grammar's formula. One person, one language.

This means that for the benefit of the child acquiring two or more languages at the same time one must use them in different contexts when the language spoken at home is different from the language at school extra efforts must be made to have the child accept the both languages equal in their prehistory.

The above observations are considered essential for the continuing development of full bilingual or multilingual abilities of any child.

