

Natural Interpreting Competence in a Multilingual Child

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Abstract

Natural interpreting competence of a single Slovak/English/German balanced trilingual child from 0;03 to 8;01 years (read 3 months to 8 years and 1 month) was studied in our previous article *The skill of natural interpreting in a trilingual child* (2021). This study is focusing on the interpreting skills in the former child's two years younger sibling at the age of 5;11. As in the previous case study, here too we draw from the assertion that the skill of natural interpreting is an "innate skill which can be acquired without formal training and is developed through guidance and practice" (Hornackova Klapicova 2021, 38; Harris, 1978) and that "natural interpreting can occur within different combinations of languages" (Hornackova Klapicova 2021, 38). Natural interpreting refers to a procedure followed by bilingual and multilingual children whereby messages articulated in the source language (SL) are reformulated in the target language (TL). The aims of this study are a) to affirm that the errors committed in the process of interpreting do not cause misinterpretation of SL messages in the TL; and b) to compare the skill of natural interpreting in two balanced trilingual siblings with parallel social and academic upbringing considering the types and number of errors produced by each child on the same test. This paper should contribute to the fields of translation and interpreting studies and bilingualism by showing evidence for the assertion that a multilingual child with a strong social and academic support can become a sophisticated interpreter in multiple language directions.

1. Introduction

Bilingual and multilingual individuals evolve the ability to decode SL messages and encode them in the target language as they improve their linguistic competence in each language. This specific skill designated as *natural interpreting* (Álvarez de la Fuente and Fernández Fuertes 2015a and 2015b; Hornackova Klapicova 2021) refers to "the translation done by bilinguals in everyday circumstances without special training for it" (Harris 1976). Another definition describes natural interpreting "as the sum of an innate ability parallel to bilingualism and a communicative function in a familiar context" (Álvarez de la Fuente and Fernández Fuertes 2012, 98). Natural linguistic and cognitive skills, metalinguistic awareness, appropriate instruction and substantial exercise play an important role in the development of natural interpreting competence in bilinguals (Hornackova

Klapicova 2021; Harris 1976; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991). Since metalinguistic awareness or the ability to perceive the grammatical and semantic structures of language evolves distinctively in each child, there seems to be an interplay between metalinguistic maturity, bilingual proficiency, and natural interpreting proficiency (Hornackova Klapicova 2021; Harris and Hakuta 1991; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991).

Nevertheless, it is the message and not the structural or semantic properties of the SL text which ought to be encoded in the TL text (Hornackova Klapicova 2021; Harris 1980, 6). Malakoff (1991) and Seleskovitch (1976) point out to the communicative nature of the interpreting activity, whereby the interpreter ought to analyse and comprehend the meaning the SL text and consequently synthesise the message in the TL text. Therefore, natural interpreting involves four operations: a) understanding of the words and phrases in the original source-language text; b) understanding of the meaning of the original SL message; c) encoding of the message in the TL; and d) assessment of the appropriateness of the TL text (Hornackova Klapicova 2021; Malakoff 1992). Grosjean (2013) remarks that the input mechanisms of the SL (for perception) and TL (for production) are activated during interpreting, while the output mechanism of the TL is exclusively operating.

Most studies on the natural interpreting competence in bilingual and multilingual individuals (Harris 1976 and 1978; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991; Malakoff 1992; Grosjean 1992, 2001, and 2013; Álvarez de la Fuente and Fernández Fuerte, 2012, 2015a, and 2015b; Seleskovitch 1976; Ronjat 1913; Nida 2002; Bialystok 2004; Hornackova Klapicova 2021 and others) show that bilingual children are capable of interpreting SL messages into the TL in multiple directions as a result of their natural linguistic, cognitive, and communicative competence and metalinguistic skills. These findings support Harris's (1977) claim about the ability of natural interpreting in bilinguals. Contextual meaning in the interpreting process and the connection between understanding the meaning of the source text and its reformulation in the target language as well as the level of metalinguistic awareness play an important role in the individual's performance of natural interpreting. Bilingual and multilingual children with a higher level of metalinguistic awareness are likely to have a higher level of language skills (Malakoff and Hakuta 1991, 148). However, children are able to convey meaning in the TL accurately despite the absence of a conscious awareness of the specific differences between two language systems. The meaning of the SL text may be embedded in a TL sentence containing syntactic and literal translation errors (*ibid.*, 150). Malakoff and Hakuta (1991) carried out two studies of translation and interpreting to show that elementary-school students are capable of providing good written and oral translations. The results of their studies confirm that the participants were extremely good translators and interpreters and made few errors in both language directions and the errors were usually in sentence structure and not in meaning (*ibid.*, 154). However, translation and interpreting from Spanish into English was more efficient which reflected English dominance. Low

frequency of source-language intrusion errors manifested the separation of the two languages. Malakoff and Hakuta (1991) conclude that target-language proficiency seems to be a decisive factor in translation and interpreting efficiency (*ibid.*, 157).

The question of natural interpreting in bilingual and multilingual children has only recently begun to be studied on pairs of languages including Slovak, with the first document being *The skill of natural interpreting in a trilingual child* (Hornackova Klapicova 2021). This article seeks to continue the discussion of natural interpreting through an analysis of a case study of experimental interpretations of a balanced trilingual child who had been acquiring Slovak (as mother tongue), German (in kindergarten), and English (from caretakers and friends) simultaneously. The results of our investigation display that the child was capable of reformulating the SL messages in the TL accurately and the structural or lexical errors committed in the process of interpreting did not induce misinterpretation of the meaning of the source text in the target language.

The present study advocates the belief that bilingual and multilingual children receiving sufficient support from the linguistic environment by which they are surrounded can become quite proficient interpreters by virtue of their metalinguistic awareness, linguistic competence, and cognitive skills, without being subjected to formal instruction in interpreting.

2. Aims of the paper and research methodology

This article is meant to contribute to the fields of translation and interpreting studies and bilingualism focusing on the particular case of natural interpreting of a single Slovak/English/German balanced trilingual child Paul at the age of 5;11 and 7;01. We study the question of natural interpreting skills in the participant. This study aims at a) affirming that the errors committed in the process of interpreting did not cause misinterpretation of SL messages in the TL; and b) comparing the skill of natural interpreting in two balanced trilingual children with parallel social and academic upbringing considering the types and number of errors produced by each child on the same test. We will also seek the answer to the following research questions: 1. What types of errors (structural, lexical, semantic, etc.) did the participant produce in the TL sentences? and 2. Did these errors had an impact on the accurate interpretation of the SL message in the TL?

The findings on the natural interpreting competence in the participant were acquired through an analysis of data collected by the researcher from the child's production of interpreting on an experimental test. Examples of the child's interpretations presented in this paper are transcribed in the CHAT format. By experimental interpretations we mean those situations in which the participant was requested to provide interpretations of sentences prepared by the researcher. The term natural interpreting is

applied to indicate all forms of restating source-language sentences in the target language orally.

2.1 Data collection and selection

We analysed the participant's multidirectional production of interpretations on an experimental test created by the researcher. The experimental test contained complete sentences to be interpreted by the participant. The researcher used this strategy considering Catford's theory of meaning (1965), "who argues that the meaning of a source-language unit may be fully captured in an equivalent target-language unit only at the sentence level" (Hornackova Klapicova 2021, 42; Malakoff, 1992). The participant was expected to provide sentences in the TL containing coherent sentence structure and meaning. The test included the interpretation of idiomatic expressions, whereby the participant was first required to apprehend the meaning of the SL text and reformulate it with a synonymous idiomatic expression in the TL. The sentences involved topics, lexicon, and forms within the range of knowledge of the participant.

The test contained 44 interrogative sentences (including direct and indirect questions) which the participant was asked to reformulate in the TL. It was carried out in multiple language directions, Slovak (SL) → English (TL), English (SL) → Slovak (TL), Slovak (SL) → German (TL), German (SL) → Slovak (TL), English (SL) → German (TL), and German (SL) → English (TL). The age of the participant during Test 1 was 5;11 years. The source-language text included "Yes/No" questions and "Wh-" questions in present simple, present continuous, present perfect, past simple, past continuous and future simple tenses. On average, it took the participant 21 minutes to complete the tasks on Test 1 in one language direction.

The aims of the experimental test were a) to show the participant's capacity to comprehend the meaning of the SL text and his ability to encode the SL message in the TL accurately using the appropriate lexical equivalents and structural forms in different language directions; and b) document the types and number of errors committed during the participant's interpreting activity and assess whether these errors may have induced misinterpretation of the SL message in the TL.

2.2 Data range

The collected data include the production of interpreting in three languages actively spoken by the participant: Slovak, English, and German. The child started acquiring Slovak (as mother tongue) and English (from native speakers of English) from birth and German at the age of 1;00 from native speakers of German. The data from the participant's interpreting activity was collected during the experimental test at the age of 5;11. The collected material contains 264 interpretations of sentences in multiple directions. The child was recorded in a naturalistic setting at home.

Type of interpreting	Language direction	Age	Number of interpretations
Experimental	Slovak → English	5;11	44
	English → Slovak		44
	Slovak → German		44
	German → Slovak		44
	English → German		44
	German → English		44
TOTAL			264

Table 1. Data range collected in form of diary annotations, audio-recordings, and video-recordings

3. The main sources of linguistic input

The participant was being raised in a multilingual and multicultural social and academic environment, which played an important role in his language development. The child was acquiring all three languages (Slovak, German, and English) simultaneously from an early age in natural speaking environments from native speakers. The participant was receiving significant support from family, friends, and educators.

Slovak was spoken to him by his parents and relatives and English was spoken to him by English speaking caregivers from birth. German was spoken to him by educators, friends, and other native speakers of German from year 1;00. The child was acquiring German in kindergarten for three years. He was exposed to German for approximately 4 to 5 hours a day in kindergarten, to Slovak for approximately 3 to 4 hours a day when interacting with his parents and his sister, and to English for approximately 2 hours a day when interacting with his English-speaking caregivers and teachers of English.

Slovak was spoken to the child by both parents, his sister, his grandparents and other relatives and friends; German was the language commonly used in kindergarten in the morning and sometimes with friends in the afternoon and on the weekends; and English was used by American caregivers and teachers of English for approximately two to three hours a day in the afternoon during the school year. There were times, for instance in the summer, when the child was mostly exposed to one language (Slovak). However, the child was often communicating in all three languages even during summer holidays and other longer holidays, for instance, Christmas or Easter. The family generally used their mother tongue (Slovak) at home; however, code-switching commonly occurred especially in communication between Paul and his sister Stephanie and occasionally with his mother.

The participant's main interlocutors and sources of linguistic input were the following:

Mother – her mother tongue was Slovak but she also spoke English, Spanish, German, Czech and Italian fluently. She was a university professor. She used Slovak, English, and German when interacting with Paul.

Father – his mother tongue was Slovak and he also spoke English and Italian. He used Slovak to communicate with Paul. He was manager at a chemical company.

Sister – her mother tongue was Slovak. She was two years older than Paul. She frequently switched between Slovak, German, and English when interacting with Paul.

Teachers – the participant's teachers were native speakers of German and native speakers of English. They used their respective mother tongues in communication with Paul in kindergarten and at home.

Caregivers, playmates, and cousins – Paul had Slovak, German, and English-speaking caregivers and playmates. While in Austria, he spoke English and German to his caregivers and playmates on a daily basis. When in Slovakia (in the summer time, during holidays, and on the weekends) he spoke Slovak to his Slovak playmates and cousins.

Grandparents and other relatives – most of the participant's relatives were Slovak. He visited them on a regular basis. Slovak was the common language used in interaction between Paul and his grandparents and other relatives.

Educational materials – the participant was exposed to German, English, and Slovak through various types of educational materials in kindergarten and at home.

Television, DVDs and other sources of audio and video recordings – Paul listened to Slovak, German, and English audio recordings. He watched videos and cartoons in Slovak, English and German and often also in Czech.

Songs, rhymes, children's literature and skits – Paul was often actively engaged in activities including singing, reading, acting, and other types of artistic performances involving the use of English, Slovak, and German.

All three languages spoken by the participant were positively valued and emotionally and academically supported by his parents.

The participant reached proficiency in Slovak, German, and English by virtue of receiving substantial linguistic input in all three languages in natural speaking environments. The social and academic background of the participant enabled him to develop multilingual competence and skills in natural interpreting.

4. Results and discussion

Table 2 provides examples of errors made in the participant's interpretations on the experimental test.

Language direction	Type of error	Source-language text	Target-language text
Slovak → English	word order	Vieš, ako sa volám?	Do you know what is my name?
	source (verb)	Vieš skákať na trampolíne?	<i>Weiss</i> du springen auf ein Trampolin?
	semantic addition	Je tvoja mama američanka?	Is your mom American <i>girl</i> ?
	semantic addition/ noun (wrong equivalent, semantic narrowing)	Je na Floride teplo?	Is in <i>America</i> hot or cold?
	tense/word order/semantic addition	Bol si včera unavený?	<i>Have you been</i> yesterday <i>sleepy</i> or tired?
English → Slovak	source (interference in phraseological unit)	Do you know what my name is?	Vieš, čo je moje meno?
	source (modal verb)	Can you jump on the trampoline? Can you swim?	Môžeš skákať na trampolíne? Môžeš plávať?

		adverbial of time	Where were you last week?	Kde si bol <i>predvčerom</i> ?
		noun (wrong equivalent)	Is your mom German?	Je tvoja maminka <i>nemčina</i> ?
Slovak German	→	article agreement/verb	Čítaš si teraz knihu?	Tue ich gerade <i>eine</i> Buch <i>schauen</i> ?
		borrowing (from English)/repetition (subject)/semantic addition	Je moja mama američanka?	Ist meine Mama <i>American</i> Mama? <i>Nein!</i>
		ungrammatical deletion (es)/noun (wrong equivalent, semantic narrowing)	Je na Floride teplo?	Ist in <i>Amerika</i> heiß?
		borrowing (from English)	Videl si moje klúče?	Hast du gesehen meine <i>keys</i> ?
		verb (antonym)	Kedy pôjdeš domov?	Wann kommst du nach Hause?
German Slovak	→	borrowing/case	Ist dein Papa schon zu Hause?	Je tvoj tatinko <i>schon</i> už <i>domov</i>doma už?
		source/ungrammatical addition	Hast du schon deine Schuhe an?	Máš už <i>tvoje</i> topánky <i>na sebe</i> obuté?
		source/word order	Hast du meinen	Si moje meno povedal?

		Namen gesagt?	
English German	→ ungrammatical verb form/case	Do you have a brother?	<i>Habst du ein Bruder?</i>
	word order	Can you speak Slovak?	Kannst du sprechen Slowakisch?
	ungrammatical addition/semantic addition	Is your mom American?	Ist deine Mama <i>eine Amerikaner</i> oder nicht?
	case (possesive pronoun, noun)	Did you say my name?	Hast du <i>meine Name</i> gesagt?
	ungrammatical verb form (past participle)	Did you eat all the strawberries ?	Hast du alle Erdbeeren <i>geessen...gegessen</i> ?
German English	→ source/number of nouns	Welche Farbe sind meine Haare?	Which color <i>are</i> my...is my hair?
	noun/verb	Wie viele Finger hast du?	How many <i>toes...</i> fingers <i>have you?</i>
	semantic addition	Wann können wir noch einmal sprechen?	When can we talk <i>together</i> again?

Table 2. Examples of errors in interpretations

Most errors committed in the participant's interpretations were caused by interference from the source language and by inattentiveness caused by the high speed with which the child was reformulating SL sentences in the TL.

Interference seemed to be the most common ground for many lexical and structural errors. For instance, when interpreting the sentence *Do you know what my name is?* from English (SL) to Slovak (TL), interference occurred on the phraseological level *Vieš, čo je moje meno?* [literally *Do you know what my name is?*], which is not the appropriate phraseological expression used in Slovak. However, when interpreting the same sentence from German to Slovak, the participant chose the appropriate expression in the TL, *Weiss du, wie ich heiße?* (SL) → *Vieš, ako sa volám?* (TL). It seemed to be easier for Paul to interpret the sentence in the direction German (SL) to Slovak (TL), since the sentence elements in German are synonymical of the sentence elements in Slovak (TL). However, in the direction English (SL) to Slovak (TL) interference could easily occur given the fact that the SL sentence (in English) contains elements (noun and verb) which are different from the elements in the phraseological unit in the TL (Slovak).

Sometimes ungrammatical addition occurred in the TL sentences as a result of SL interference. For instance, in the Slovak sentence *Máš už tvoje topánky na sebe obuté?* (TL) the possessive pronoun *tvoje* [*your*] and the prepositional phrase *na sebe* [*on yourself*] are redundant. They seem to be literal interpretations of the SL (German) sentence *Hast du schon deine Schuhe an?* [*Do you already have your shoes on?*].

Interference from the SL was also manifested in inverting the word order, for example, in the TL sentence (in Slovak) *Si moje meno povedal?* [*Did you say my name?*] the order of the verb and object is inverted presumably due to the order of the elements in the SL (German) sentence *Hast du meinen Namen gesagt?* [*Did you say my name?*]. Inappropriate word order was also documented in subordinating clauses (in English and German), for instance, *Do you know who is my best friend?*; *Do you know what is my name?* or in sentences containing modal verbs followed by lexical verbs (in German), for example *Kannst du sprechen Slowakisch?* [*Can you speak Slovak?*] This type of errors was not committed in all cases, but rather the appropriate word order was applied in other instances, for example, *Weiss du wie ich heiße?* [*Do you know what my name is?*] *Am I a boy or a girl?* *Bin ich ein Bub oder ein Mädchen?* [*Am I a boy or a girl?*] It appears that sentence structure errors were generally due to interference from the source language.

Interference was also manifested when the number of nouns in the SL and TL did not correspond. For instance, in the sentence *Which color are my...is my hair?* interpreted from German (SL) to English (TL), the interpreter first transferred the plural form of the verb *sind* [*are*] in German (SL) agreeing with the plural form of the noun *Haare* [*hair*] but promptly corrected himself and provided the correct form of the verb *is* in the TL sentence.

The wrong gender of nouns or articles was observed in sentences like *Ist meine Mama eine Amerikaner oder nicht?* [Is my mom American or not?] and *Tue ich gerade eine Buch schauen?* [Am I looking at a book right now?] These types of errors may have been caused by the interpreter's insufficient knowledge of the TL's grammar.

Errors in the grammatical case of articles, nouns, pronouns, and adjectives were observed especially in the Slovak sentences and occasionally in German sentences. For instance, in the TL sentence *Je tvoj tatinko schon už domov....doma už?* interpreted from the German SL sentence *Ist dein Papa schon zu Hause?* [Is your father already at home?] the adverbial of place *zu Hause* was substituted by *domov* with the inappropriate case ending followed by the appropriate case form *doma*. Again, the child was aware of his mistake in the TL sentence and corrected it immediately. The wrong case was observed in the TL sentence *Hast du meine Name gesagt?* [Did you say my name?] interpreted into German from the original English sentence *Did you say my name?* The appropriate case forms of the possessive pronoun and the direct object in the German sentence would be *meinen* and *Namen*. These errors also seem to be resulting from the interpreter's insufficient knowledge of the structural forms in German.

Borrowing occurred rarely and when it did, the interpreter often supplied the appropriate synonym from the TL immediately after a borrowing was used. Borrowing from English to German sometimes occurred even when the source language was Slovak. *Hast du gesehen meine keys?* In other situations, the participant borrowed a word from the source language. This seemed to happen in order to provide a quick interpretation. Nevertheless, the child often corrected himself and after a short pause used the appropriate equivalent in the TL. This showed the interpreter's choice to formulate an accurate interpretation over providing a fast interpretation.

Semantic addition was observed in instances when the interpreter was not sure whether his choice was the most accurate one, so he added another synonym to provide a more precise interpretation. For instance, in the sentence introduced above *Have you been yesterday sleepy or tired?* interpreted from Slovak (SL) to English (TL) the adjectives *sleepy* and *tired* are used as synonyms to substitute the SL adjective *unavený* [tired]. They are, in fact, both acceptable in the TL sentence. Since there was no context to clarify, which of the two synonyms would be more appropriate in the TL sentence, it can be concluded, that the interpreter sought to provide as accurate interpretation as possible and give the recipient of the TL text an opportunity to understand the SL message better. A similar situation occurred when interpreting the SL (German) sentence *Wie viele Finger hast du?* into English (TL) *How many toes... fingers have you?* where the interpreter's first choice was to substitute the German noun *Finger* [fingers(s)] with the English noun *toes*. This choice was immediately replaced by the appropriate English noun *fingers*. Semantic addition often happened out of playfulness or creativity of the interpreter. For instance,

the SL sentence (in Slovak) *Prišiel už tvoj tatinko domov?* [*Has your dad come home yet?*] was reformulated as *Is your dad riding on your little tricycle home or not?* in the TL (English).

The wrong lexical equivalent was used in sentences like *Je tvoja maminka nemčina?* interpreted from English (SL) to Slovak (TL). The SL sentence was *Is your mom German?* The interpreter substituted the English noun *German* with the Slovak equivalent *nemčina*, which in the sense of naming a language it would be the appropriate equivalent; however, in this context *German* refers to nationality and the appropriate equivalent in Slovak is *Nemka*. The use of an antonym instead of a synonym was observed in the TL (German) sentence *Wann kommst du nach Hause?* [*When are you coming home?*] interpreted from the SL (Slovak) sentence *Kedy pôjdeš domov?* [*When are you going home?*]. The reason for choosing an antonym of the verb *to go* in the TL sentence could have been inattentive interpretation.

An inaccurate adverbial of time was used in the Slovak TL sentence *Kde si bol predvčerom?* [*Where were you the day before yesterday?*] interpreted from the English SL sentence *Where were you last week?* This error may have been caused by insufficient knowledge of the equivalents of adverbials of time across the three languages in question.

Occasional errors were documented in verb forms, i.e. in past participle forms and other verb forms. For instance, an ungrammatical past participle form of the verb *to eat* in German *geessen* [*eaten*] was first used in the interpretation from English (SL) to German (TL) *Hast du alle Erdbeere geessen...gegessen?* [*Did you eat all the strawberries?*]; however, the interpreter corrected himself immediately and supplied the correct form *gegessen* [*eaten*]. The wrong tense was sometimes used in the TL sentences, as in the sentence *Have you been yesterday sleepy or tired?* interpreted from Slovak (SL) to English (TL). It was not quite obvious whether this error was a result of interference, even though the source language was Slovak where perfect tenses are not used, or just the wrong choice of tense in the TL.

Compound prepositional phrases in German appeared to be a problem in some cases. For instance in the TL (German) sentence *Ist dein Papa schon in den Haus?* interpreted from the Slovak SL sentence *Prišiel tvoj tatinko už domov?* [*Has your dad come home yet?*] the prepositional phrase *in den Haus* was not grammatical, *zu Hause* would be the common phrase used in German.

Lexical approximation occurred a few times, such as in the example above where the SL (Slovak) verb *prišiel* [*has come*] was substituted by *ist* [*is*] in the TL (German) sentence. However, this shift did not induce inaccurate interpretation of the SL message in the TL.

In the following paragraphs, we would like to compare the findings from the present research to the findings from our previous research, where we analysed the production of natural interpretation in Paul's sister, Stephanie.

Even though Paul and Stephanie shared the same social and academic background, they differed in some variables, which may have affected the results on the experimental test taken by both children. The variables with differing values at the time of testing included: a) age - Stephanie was 7;10 years, Paul was 5;11 years; b) education - Stephanie had attended almost 2 years of elementary school where she had received formal education in German and other subjects, Paul had only attended kindergarten; c) age at which the children began acquiring Slovak (both children from birth), English (Stephanie at 1;01 years and Paul from birth), and German (Stephanie at 3;02 years and Paul at 1;00 years).

Paul and Stephanie did not provide exactly the same interpretations on the experimental test. Even though their TL matched 100% in some cases, for instance in sentences like *Liebst du Eis?* [Do you like icecream?]; *Do you like icecream? Do you have a brother? Vieš, ako sa volám?* [Do you know what my name is?]; *Bist du bereit?* [Are you ready?]; *Are you ready? Si pripravený?* [Are you ready?]; *Where do you live?* in multiple language directions, their TL sentences often differed in vocabulary choice, sentence structure and grammar. For instance, *Do you have your boots on?* (Stephanie) vs. *Have you put your boots on already?* (Paul); *I have drunked all of the milk what we have got* (Stephanie) vs. *Did I drink all of the milk.* (Paul); *Welche Farbe sind meine Haare?* (Stephanie) vs. *Welche Farbe sind meine Haaren?* (Paul); *Why is it outside so warm...cold?* (Stephanie) vs. *Why is outside so cold?* (Paul).

The differences in the production of each child's interpretations seemed to be the result of the following facts: a) Paul and Stephanie had different personalities. Paul's attitude toward interpreting was more playful and entertaining, he used more fill-in conversations and was more creative with TL vocabulary and expressions, while often adding his own words and interpretations; b) Paul needed less time to complete the tasks on the experimental test in one language direction (21 minutes in average) than his sister (25 minutes in average); c) Paul became tired, distracted, and uninterested more quickly than Stephanie and it was more difficult to motivate him. Stephanie was focused for a longer time. Her interpretations were more accurate - she just interpreted what she was asked to. Paul kept asking the next one to be the last sentence to interpret. Stephanie eventually also became tired but she pressed on. She was more obedient and persevering; d) Least but not least, the children also seemed to differ in their metalinguistic thinking and multilingual competence, which may have been related to their cognitive skills and the time of exposure to the languages in question.

Both children showed a high level of competence in all three languages as well as a high level of natural interpreting skills. They both produced very few literal interpretations, insertions of false cognates, or lexical intrusions. Numbers were easy to interpret while days of the week or adverbials of time were more difficult to substitute with the appropriate equivalent in the TL. SL messages were interpreted accurately on the lexical and structural levels.

As in the case of Stephanie, the quality of Paul's TL sentences was assessed with regard to being correct (with the appropriate vocabulary and sentence structure), partially incorrect (if a word or key concept was omitted or if the wrong sentence structure was inserted in the TL sentence), or wrong (if the TL sentence contained both lexical and syntactic errors) (Table 3). In the English-Slovak interpretations, 1 % were wrong and 7 % partially incorrect; in the Slovak-English interpretations, only 2 % were wrong and 10 % partially incorrect; in the German-Slovak interpretations, only 1 % were wrong and 6 % partially incorrect; in the Slovak-German interpretations, 1 % were wrong and 12 % partially incorrect; in the German-English interpretations, only 2 % were wrong and 7 % partially incorrect; in the English-German interpretations; only 2 % were wrong and 12 % partially incorrect.

Language directionAssessment		Value in %
English → Slovak	partially incorrect	7
	wrong	1
Slovak → English	partially incorrect	10
	wrong	2
German → Slovak	partially incorrect	6
	wrong	1
Slovak → German	partially incorrect	12
	wrong	1
German → English	partially incorrect	7
	wrong	2
English → German	partially incorrect	12
	wrong	2

Table 3. Assessment of the quality of the participants TL sentences

These results are comparable to the results of Paul's sister on the same test (cf. Hornackova Klapicova 2021, 60) and they confirm that the directionality of interpreting did not have a decisive impact on the quality of TL sentences in either participant and that natural interpreting is a strong skill in multilingual children.

5. Conclusion

The findings from the present case study should contribute to the understanding of natural interpreting competence in a multilingual child. In line with our previous study, it may be reiterated that a) the social and academic environment play an important role in the development of linguistic competence as well as in natural interpreting skills in a balanced trilingual child; b) the participant demonstrated a high level of natural interpreting regardless of the direction of languages; and c) the errors committed in the target-language sentences were mostly structural and occasionally intrusion errors, which did not induce inaccurate interpretation of the SL message in the TL.

The results of our study demonstrate that a child acquiring three languages in a multilingual environment became a competent interpreter by the age of 5;11 years, which was manifested through his ability to reformulate messages that were within his comprehension and vocabulary accurately in the TL regardless of the directionality of interpreting. The results of our error analysis show that the types of errors produced by the participant in the process of interpreting were predominantly structural and occasionally intrusion errors, which did not cause misinterpretation of the SL message in the TL. These results are similar to previous studies (e.g. (Harris 1976 and 1978; Malakoff and Hakuta 1991; Malakoff 1992; Grosjean 1992, 2001, and 2013; Álvarez de la Fuente and Fernández Fuerte, 2012, 2015a, and 2015b; Seleskovitch 1976; Ronjat 1913; Nida 2002; Bialystok 2004; Hornackova Klapicova 2021). The participant was also able to a) recognize the differences in grammar, vocabulary, and meaning between the SL and the TL; b) evaluate the equivalence of meaning in the SL text and in the TL text; and c) assess the appropriateness of lexical and formal elements used in the TL sentences.

To conclude, it may be stated that the participant in this present case study showed a high level of trilingual proficiency and metalinguistic skills, which was testified by the excellent quality of TL sentences produced in the course of natural interpreting.

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