

Heritage Language Learners Video Transcript

Module 1

Valerie: Have you ever wondered why your “Koda” child seems to be different from other children? Shanna and I will explain more about this. So, welcome to the land of “Koda” children where we will discuss how they juggle between two languages being used at school and at home and how language acquisition works for them.

Firstly, it is important to understand that your Koda child is a heritage language learner just like other bilingual children, but they are not quite same. We will explain why.

Shanna: When Valerie talks about the heritage language learners (HLL), you probably thought to yourself, “Wait a minute! What’s the difference between HLL and second language learners (L2)?”

Well, Valerie explains that the term “HLL” applies broadly to anyone who grew up using a different language with their families, other than the dominant language of where they live in. For example, with the Italian family living in the United States, they speak Italian in their homes, but use English outside their households, in school or anywhere else. Just like your Koda children speaking English outside their households but use ASL at home.

Whereas, with the second language learners (L2), they are different from your Koda children, in a way that they grow up using the dominant language of their society and learn a second language later.

Valerie: Now we will discuss about Koda children being in Elementary school. It is important to know that the main strengths of these heritage language learners (HLLs) like yours are usually listening and signing when compared to their reading and writing skills. It is necessary to build upon their strengths as it relates to the areas they need to improve.

So, get started planting literacy when your children are in Elementary school.

The most Koda children are stronger in their receptive skill instead of listening. Right? Of course, yes, their parents are Deaf! But does it mean they aren’t smart? No! It simply means they are unique.

Now, how we can help to pull up their skills? The parents like you need to be more involved and be advocate for these Koda children when working with their teachers.

Their teachers will need to be more creative in accommodating to their different learning styles.

Remember, by using their receptive skills will help with their reading skills. So, these parents should ask their teachers about the reading materials being used in the classroom and try to replicate these materials in their homes. So that they can sign aloud these words and concepts to their children to ensure that they get exposed to the information in both languages.

It is important to understand that ASL will be stronger with these Koda children before they start school. However, when they spend a full 8 hours every day in school, their English skills will advance more. In the entire course of a Koda child's life, the skills in both languages will compete against each other.

The parents will need to balance and to make sure that their children remain strong in both languages. So, the name of game here, is to be involved with their teachers and ask what they teach their children in school on any given day. Parents can include what they learn at school, in home, to ensure they get the same exposure to the concepts in both languages, ASL and English.

Now, when it comes to their speaking skills as it relates to their writing skills, the research has shown that once Koda children acquire reading skills, they will advance their writing skills. Their listening and speaking will grow along with their emerging overall literacy skills.

It is important for parents to always advocate for their Koda children. Often Koda children are ignorant and unable to explain themselves. Parents can step in and educate their teachers about their own heritage background.

Be involved in supporting their literacy skills to make sure they are on par with their peers. Again, spending 8 hours in school every day will ensure their English skills and be on par with their ASL skills. Don't worry.

Shanna: Val discusses how children acquire English through speaking, reading, writing, and listening at the school, while at home ASL. We are aware they are bilingual, right? Using two different languages. But did you know that they are also bimodal users?

Being bimodal users means, for example, in English language, it has its own different ways (or modalities) of expressing itself through reading, writing, speaking and listening. These modalities are same for all spoken languages through the world.

For example, in French language, it has the same modalities of reading, writing, speaking and listening in its own language.

Your Koda children speak English with its own modalities, just like any other spoken languages, but when they use ASL, they use a different modality: their hands!

This is what makes your Koda children different from any other bilingual children that use the same modalities when they speak French, Italian, or any spoken languages. Not only these

children are bilingual, but they are also bimodal. It is important for you to remember this fact and consider about how you can support their language acquisition as they grow up.

It is important for parents like you to understand how the language acquisition works. It is developed through four inputs. I will explain each of them here.

The first input is timing. Valerie shares that when Koda children go to school, they get exposed to English for 8 hours, all day, and use ASL only at home. So, the timing impacts their acquisition. Because your Koda children usually start out stronger in ASL when spending most of their time at home before enrolling school. When they start school, they acquire English far more.

The second input to think about is setting. Think about where they acquire their languages when growing up in different environments. Consider how they use language at home, being casual with their parents and friends, when comparing to how they use language at the school, an academic setting, and or being in different settings.

Another important input to their language acquisition is the quality. Think about what kind of exposure to the information your Koda children get. At home, it is often about the casual conversations with their parents, asking each other ordinary questions. But at school, teachers and students don't converse casually. The conversations at school revolve around the academic concepts. The quality of language depends on not just the level of register, but also about the quality of information itself.

The last input is using the modalities. We've discussed this previously. Koda children speak English at school using different modalities than what they use at home. They juggle between two different languages and two different modalities for expressing them.

These inputs impact children and their language acquisition growing up.

Do you want to make sure they grow up with a strong ASL skills? If so, then you must consider the quality of conversations you want to have with your Koda children. Check out what your children learn at school and talk about them in ASL at home. Take your Koda children and socialize them with other Deaf children or take them to Deaf clubs. These are just some examples that you can do to make sure your children are on par with their bilingual acquisition.

Valerie: Right, Shanna. Inputs are so important to know especially when they advance to middle or high school. There are two different kinds of language acquisition, sequential or simultaneous (acquiring both languages at same time).

Remember when we discuss about how Koda children tend to have a strong ASL skills by time they enter school to acquire English.

You probably would notice the change in your child when English becomes more dominant than ASL. You may find yourself feeling like you are “losing” your children. But if you continue to plant the seeds of knowledge about their language and culture.

If you come from a strong Deaf family, then make sure to include them to different family events, or nearby Deaf events. Find out if your Deaf friends have Koda children too. Make sure your Koda children hang out with other Koda children so they can relate their same “Koda” experience to each other. Often their hearing friends don’t understand what it is like to have Deaf parent(s).

Maybe if, you as a parent, notice your child is struggling and isn’t sure how to relate yourself to your child’s experience, being as a Deaf person, then you could bring in your Coda friend as a “support system,” for your child to vent.

Your Coda friend could become someone your child could share and relate their experiences to. This would help your child to have a stronger self-esteem and to know that they are ok. There is nothing wrong with being a Koda. Talk about their identity and make sure they know who they are.

Understandably, as a Deaf parent, I would want for my child to continue learning English and to interact with peers. If I visit my child’s school and get involved with their activities, then I could expose myself as a Deaf person and my culture to my child’s teachers and peers. They learn how to interact with me, and we develop collaborative relationships.

Remember it is so important for your Koda children to have a strong confidence and an ability to juggle both languages without one surpassing over other.

Shanna: I want to add that it is important for parents to discuss with their Koda children when they enter high school and or take ASL in college class. Talk with them about how these ASL courses are being taught. It is designed for second language learners who have nothing to do with Deaf people or their culture. They are simply there to learn second or third languages.

Koda children is not a second language learner. They are not just bilingual; they are also bimodal users. So, teachers and other students would probably criticize them, and disagreements would occur. So, their parents should support them by talking about how ASL isn’t “one size fits all” concept as it has its own accents so that they can let it go and be with the flow. It is important for them to understand that sometimes teachers teach ASL at basic level and that they need to understand that these ASL courses are designed for second language learners.

By having these conversations about what to expect at high school and or post-secondary college, will help them to be more prepared for life. Alternatively, by not having the conversations or any feedback, they will struggle by time they go to college. You don’t want your children having to deal with disagreements, self-esteem issues, struggles with others,

whatnots. Have these kinds of conversations with them will ensure their smooth transition through life.

Valerie: Thanks for watching and we hope you learn something new about your children and their journey in education system.