Way back in 1958 I experienced the first stirrings of curiosity at the wonders of the child's meaningless babblings and the gradual emergence of his coherent speech. I marvelled at the child's capacity to imitate sounds, and gradually meaningful words. Then, would come independent sounds and speech. My own child had started uttering sounds and words, and I followed his development with great interest, and was thrilled at everything new that he uttered. Gradually he made himself and his needs felt and understood. It was as if he had access to a new world of his own. He was more and more content to utter meaningless talk and seemed to play with a permutation and combination of new sound patterns. It was at this time that I myself started taking notice of other children around me, and their constant chatter and words. The gradual concepts that they formed intrigued me. Comparisons started creeping in slowly. It was at this time that I noticed that when all of us at home used the same word to mean the same object the child picked up the word fast. The 'Ball' was the universal 'Ball' and everyone referred to it as such. But when it came to 'Milk' the questions were varied in my own home. They were either 'GAKHIR Khaba'?, 'DUDU Khaba' or 'DOODH Khaba'? For a long time when the child had to make a reference to milk he just gestured, while
he referred to many other objects by using specific word sounds. This happened in the case of other objects too.

This was the time when I first became conscious of the fact that one word for an object was not of the same significance for the child as two or three different words for the same object. In the latter event the child seemed to have a greater difficulty in forming a concept than in the former one. It came to me as a surprise however, that the child nevertheless conquered this difficulty, even if it did involve time.

Unfortunately, at this juncture I lost the thread and trend of vocabulary that was in the process of being built up in my own home. I had to be away from home and my child for over a year and by the time I returned his speech was almost fully formed. He had then just celebrated his third birthday. I had missed out on the fun of hearing meaningless chatter turn into meaningful words. My sister had weaned him out of 'Baby talk' into the world of Nursery Rhymes and near-adult talk. One fact however registered in my mind. There was hardly anything the child could not utter at the age of three.

In the years that have followed, the little infant and his chatter has always intrigued me. There was another significant fact that made itself felt. Many couples amongst
my friends spoke the same language at home. Many of my Assamese friends again spoke a lot of English in their homes. Sometimes, the servants used another language. The child exposed to this kind of multilingual verbalism seemed to manifest its effect in his vocabulary. I had at various times asked myself the question whether bilingualism in the home front made any difference to a child's quantum of vocabulary as against monolingualism. But I kept putting off the issue and have for a long time managed to shelve the question.

To be truthful, all Indian homes by and large offer a multilingual affect to the child. There is hardly any child who hears only one language being spoken at home or outside. Especially in this North-Eastern region of India, at least Khasi, English, Hindi, Assamese and Bengali are freely spoken. So, it is not possible to find any child who has not at any time in his vocabulary development and concept formation heard more than his mother tongue alone. True, Meghalaya being basically built up of a matriarchal society, the mother has a more important role in the home than perhaps in any other society. I have therefore picked for my study a set of children both of whose parents speak Khasi, and another set whose mothers all speak Khasi, and fathers a different language. The first set constitutes my monolingual group, and the second set constitutes my bilingual group.
Marriage customs are perhaps not as rigid in Meghalaya as in other parts of the country. As such, one comes across a greater number of families where interprovincial marriages have taken place. Moreover, being a matriarchal society the wives of such marriages invariably remain in Meghalaya, and with their own parents. As such, the chances of these families moving out of Meghalaya were remote. I could thus ensure that the number of cases under study did not dwindle. It is for this reason that I have chosen Meghalaya for my study, as one comes across more parental bilingualism here than anywhere else in this region.

Much as I have had co-operation from all the families that have continued in offering me help throughout my study, I have met with resistance at the outset when I have tried to worm my way into families in order to be trusted, tolerated and liked by my infant cases. People have shut the door on my face and have been suspicious of my motives for conducting such a study. In fact, in some homes I have been asked whether I 'came from the Government', and if not, what business I had to delve into the speech patterns of children. As a result of this and many other difficulties (that will be mentioned in the course of my work) many of my initial cases have petered out. But from the cases left, I have found valuable material.
This study is confined to a quantitative assessment of vocabulary acquisition in the monolingual and the bilingual child, and does not presume to tackle related phonetic, morphological or syntactic issues.

After so many years, I have tried to air the nagging question that had been shelved in my mind for so long. I have arrived at answers which I have tried to put up in my conclusions as best as I could.

In this, I remain truly indebted to my guide, my one time teacher and Counsel Dr. K.P. Bora who has inspired me with confidence at every step that I have taken. Many a time, since I first took up my work in 1975 have I stumbled, and he has guided me along the right path.

Shillong, November, 1979. D. P.