

National Organization of Mothers Of Twins Clubs, Inc. SUBJECT: Private Language of Multiples
 RESEARCHER: NOMOTC
 DATE: November 2000 – October 2001

PURPOSE: The purpose of this study was to investigate the phenomenon of a private language among multiples.

METHOD: A questionnaire was printed in NOMOTC’s Notebook and a National Mailing. This survey was to be completed by a parent of multiples

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A total of 445 surveys were received and broken down as follows:

Type of multiple:	Twins	421	Triplets	21	Quadruplets	3
Multiple type:	Identical	133	Fraternal	294	Unknown	18
Gender:	Male	161	Female	133	Both	148
Premature birth:	Yes	55%	No	45%	Unsure	0.5%
Developmental delays:	Yes	10%	No	88%	Unsure	2%

The ages of the multiples ranged from 3 mo. to 27 yr.

The majority age percentages were as follows:

18-23 mo. – 14% 24-29 mo. – 10% 30-35 mo. – 9% 3 yr. – 14% 4 yr. – 11%

Just over half (51%) of the multiples did not have siblings. While 32% had older siblings, 11% had younger siblings, and 6% had both younger and older siblings.

Mothers reported their multiples began talking anywhere from 2 months to 4 years of age. The majority started talking at 12 months (17%), followed by 18 mo. (12%), 15 mo. (9%) and 24 mo. (8%).

RESULTS

1. Over two-thirds of the mothers indicated all multiples began speaking at about the same time (68%). Approximately 12% indicated there was a 1 month difference between when the multiples started talking. 10% indicated a 2 month difference, and 4% indicated a 3 month difference. The greatest difference between multiples was 2 ½ years.
2. When asked if their multiples have/had their own private language (twin talk), 47% of twin mothers answered yes and 53% answered no. 50% of the triplet mothers answered yes to private language while 10% answered no. All the quad mothers and 40% of triplet mothers did not indicate an answer.

3. Many mothers commented that their multiples seemed to “sign” or gesture to one another through non-verbal interactions and some mothers thought it was done ‘telepathically’. One mother said, “They not only have their own language but their own body language as well”.
4. Mothers indicated that the private language consisted of a combination of : sounds & words (26%), sounds & gestures (21%), sounds, words & phrases (16%), sounds, words, gestures & phrases (10%), words & phrases (9%), and words & gestures (5%).
5. The majority of multiples began using their private language at 12 mo. (23%). Followed by 18 mo. (11%), 10 mo. (9%), and 24 mo. (8%).
6. When asked if the mothers noted if there was a “spokesperson” for the multiples, 45% said yes, 40% said no, and 15% did not know.
7. A greater percentage of multiples that have their own language use it most commonly when they are alone (42%). However, 24% of the multiples use their twin talk all the time, while 19% use it with family members only, and 12% use it with family members and their multiple only.
8. Of the mothers indicating their multiples used twin talk, over half stated that no one else could understand the language (55%). 21% of mothers only could understand the multiples, while 5% of the siblings only and 4% of fathers only could understand the multiples. Also, 5% of mothers and fathers indicated they both could understand the twin talk.
9. The majority of multiples that use twin talk also spoke English (78%). Only 18% spoke only twin talk. Higher order multiples noted only one or some of the multiples could communicate in English.
10. Most of the mothers indicated that they did nothing when the twin talk developed (83%). 15% of the mothers did contact a speech or medical professional.
11. Several mothers commented on their frustration and pain of watching their multiple try to communicate with other children/adults. Most of the time, children ran away laughing and adults would stare blankly at the multiples. Most people did not try to figure out what the multiples were trying to say.
12. When asked about negative effects on the multiples ability to communicate once they start school, 5% said yes there were negative effects, 38% said not negative effects, and 57% said their multiples had not started school. Only 4% of multiples were noted to have negative effects on their relationship with family and/or friends because of their “twin talk”.
13. The majority of mothers indicated that the private language of the multiples was ongoing (55%). Some indicated the private language/twin talk disappeared by 36 months (15%), and by 30 months (9%).

CONCLUSION

Around one-half of the mothers of multiples indicated that their multiples did have some type of private language or twin talk. A large percentage of mothers (83%) did not seek help when twin talk developed. Only 4% of multiples were noted to have negative effects on their relationships with family and/or friends because of their “twin talk”.

Is it a true private language or just a developmental delay in speech causing the multiple’s utterances to sound foreign? Results from this survey and other research studies are divided on this issue. Whatever position you believe, twin talk does happen. And speech and language problems happen in 30% of twins and higher order multiples. And there is a two-thirds greater risk for boy multiples to have speech and language delays. Therefore, it is imperative that multiples be screened for language delays at or

before 3 years of age. The sooner they begin therapy, the sooner the delays will be detected and the sooner they will be using normal language skills.

Most multiples communicate in proper English language (or whatever language is spoken in their home) by the time they reach kindergarten. One mother said, "It seems as though the twin talk decreased as their English language increased".