Bilingualism and Speech & Language Delays

Speech and Language Disorders
Learning two languages will not cause your child to have speech or language delays. Bilingual children develop language skills just as other children do. For example, children exposed to multiple languages in childhood learn language at the same rate as children exposed to a single language. As such, children all over the world learn more than one language without developing speech or language delays.

Additionally, there is no scientific evidence that children with developmental disabilities or specific language impairment cannot learn more than one language (Paradis et al., 2003.) A child with speech and language difficulties will benefit by being surrounded my family members who are confident in their use of language so that he or she has positive language role models.

Advantages of Bilingualism
The Associated Press reports that approximately 66% of the world's children are raised bilingual. The advantages of being raised bilingual include cognitive benefits such as improved general reasoning, social sensitivity, cognitive flexibility, increased metalinguistic awareness (the ability to think and talk about language), and increased rate of language assimilation and retention.

Family Culture
Language is an integral part of cultural identity. One of the biggest advantages of being raised bilingual is that a child obtains greater exposure to two or more cultures. Knowledge of a family's native language helps to pass down the family's cultural heritage to future generations. It is important for caregivers to use the language they are most comfortable with when interacting with children, as this helps to facilitate and foster social and language growth.

Strategies for Supporting Bilingual Language Development
• Being bilingual is a skill, and in order to do it well children need lots of practice in the home, which caregivers can help to provide.
• Caregivers should use the language they are most comfortable with in order to give children a good language model.
• Promote reading and other types of entertainment (DVDs, music) in both languages.
• It is not uncommon for children to resist speaking in their home language once they become proficient in English. Accept their responses in either language and continue using your home language when you speak to your child.

Resources
http://www.asha.org/public/speech/development/BilingualChildren.htm
http://www.literacytrust.org.uk/resources/practical_resources_info/308_bilingualism_faq
http://www.buzzle.com/articles/benefits-of-being-bilingual.html