EDITORIAL

Promoting family bilingualism in Australia

I would like to report briefly on a few initiatives which have been taken recently here in Australia to promote the establishment, maintenance and fostering of family bilingualism. It is estimated that about one in eight Australians is bilingual, but there is also, unfortunately, evidence that a significant number of parents do not pass on their own language to their children, so that the children grow up to be English monolinguals.

Workshop on bringing up children bilingually

On Saturday, 4 August 1990, the Language and Society Centre, which is one of the constituent centres of the National Languages Institute of Australia and is based at Monash University in Melbourne, organised a workshop on ‘Raising children bilingually’ for parents and educators. Melbourne is a city in which about 100 languages are spoken, and in which about 23% of the population speaks a language other than English in the home, so there are many parents raising or wanting to raise their children bilingually.

The workshop dealt with many of the questions and issues concerning a bilingual upbringing, e.g. does a bilingual upbringing enhance a child’s intellectual development, what are the best methods for raising a child in two languages, do you have to be a native speaker to raise your children bilingually, how does the community benefit from bilingual children? Four speakers addressed these and other related issues. In his talk Being Bilingual in Australia Professor Michael Clyne presented evidence that bilingual children may have intellectual advantages over monolingual children. Dr Anne Pauwels discussed some of the advantages and disadvantages of Raising Children Bilingually in a Mixed Marriage. Dr Susanne Döpke provided many useful suggestions on How to Help Your Child Acquire the Minority Language. She has kindly put some of these suggestions into the form of an article for this issue of the BFN. The fourth speaker was the BFN Editor whose talk was entitled Becoming Bilingual as an Infant and Staying that way through to Adulthood. There were lively and fruitful discussions with the 60 or so parents who were present.

An interesting aspect of the workshop was that there was a section specially for children. Eleven children, aged from 3–11 years, attended, with the languages represented being German, French, Spanish and Polish. The children were asked various questions about their language use and what they saw as the advantages and disadvantages of their bilingualism. They also interviewed each other on what it is like to speak two languages. At the end of their workshop the children taught each other to count to five in their respective languages.

Participants judged the workshop a great success and it is hoped that it will become an annual event.

BFN Editor interviewed on Radio National

Every weekday morning, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation presents a one hour radio programme called Offspring which covers every conceivable topic which could be of interest to parents. It is broadcast nationally to every part of Australia and has about a quarter of a million regular listeners. On 28 August 1990 Kel Richards, the presenter of Offspring, interviewed me for almost half an hour about various aspects of bringing up children bilingually. Most of the questions covered were similar to those with which the BFN regularly deals with. There was an enthusiastic response to the programme; and I received almost a hundred letters from listeners seeking further information, particularly about the BFN. A follow-up programme on bilingualism is planned for later in the year.

Information booklet for parents

In 1989 I was asked by the Australian Advisory Council on Languages and Multicultural Education (AACLAME) to write a 50-page report entitled The Sociolinguistic Aspects of Bilingualism: Bilingualism and Society which was to be used as the basis for an information booklet for parents. A booklet which condenses this review of the available research into 16 pages has now been produced and is being made available free of charge to interested parents. The booklet, entitled

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GROWING UP BILINGUAL IN THE USA AND PUERTO RICO

Alicia Pousada

Alicia Pousada is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Puerto Rico in Rio Piedras, Puerto Rico. She also serves as Co-ordinator of English as a Second Language in the English Department, College of Humanities, UPR. Her husband Félix Ojeda Reyes is a historical investigator in the Institute for Caribbean Studies at the UPR. They live together with their son Gabriel in Trujillo Alto, Puerto Rico.

My son Gabriel was born in the Bronx and spent the first two and a half years of his life in the State of New York. From the outset, my husband and I decided that he would be raised bilingually. I had been raised in a small town outside of New York City by bilingual parents of Spanish origin. My husband was raised in Puerto Rico and acquired most of his English proficiency as an adult in New York City. We agreed that being bilingual had helped us both socially and professionally, and so we embarked on the adventure of equipping our son with bilingual skills.

By training, a sociolinguistic and professor of English as a second language, I had fairly clear ideas about what I wanted to accomplish with Gabi and how it would be carried out. My husband and I discussed the different facets of the task ahead of us and considered different approaches. We agreed that his role would be as primary model for Puerto Rican Spanish, while mine would be as primary model for General American English. We also agreed on a policy of supporting the weaker language in any given setting. As we knew that we would be living in Puerto Rico in the foreseeable future, we had to devise a family language policy that would be adaptable to life on either the continent or the island.

... being bilingual had helped us both socially and professionally, and so we embarked on the adventure of equipping our son with bilingual skills.

Right from the beginning, we began to speak and sing to Gabi in both languages, although we gave more emphasis to the Spanish since otherwise his exposure would be minimal in the primarily English-speaking area in which we were living. My parents co-operated by addressing him in Spanish, and we also made sure that he was exposed to Spanish television along with English television.

Gabi went through the usual stages of cooing and babbling, and at nine months produced what we felt was his first “legitimate” word — látu (la luz = the light). During the next four months he learned a half dozen words, evenly divided between Spanish and English. At the age of 13 months, he took his first trip to Puerto Rico. We were there for only three weeks, but this was enough to prompt the learning of another half dozen new words in Spanish. When we returned to New York, he truly began to use language to obtain and comment about things that interested him. Spanish was his strongest language at that point.

When he was 18 months old, we started him two mornings a week at a local nursery school where the language of instruction was English. As a result, he learned a great many words and expanded his passive vocabulary in English. At about the same time, he began staying with an Ecuadorian babysitter three days a week, and under her care added a few more Spanish words to his vocabulary. By 20 months, his passive vocabulary in both languages together was over 50 words. His active vocabulary consisted of: látu (la luz = the light), mamá, papi, dede (Haydee = his sister), too-too (train), oh-oh, bye-bye, re’ (reloj = clock or watch), fain (train), fuck (truck), bue’ (abuelo, abuela = grandpa, grandma), awa (agua = water), más (more), wow-wow (dog), caca, pipi, various names of friends, and a few idiosyncratic words that didn’t fit into either language system.

When Gabi was 21 months old, his babysitter changed, and he began staying with a Puerto Rican family two days a week while I worked part-time. In this environment, both languages were used interchangeably, and he went through a period of code-switching between English and Spanish. At about the same time, his father travelled to Puerto Rico several times on business, so the linguistic environment changed slightly in his absence with more English than usual. English language television watching went up at this time as well.

... he understood hundreds of words in Spanish and English, although he was not aware that they belonged to two different systems.

In 1986 when Gabriel was two-and-a-half years old, we moved to Puerto Rico. By this point, he was in the midst of a verbal explosion. He understood hundreds of words in Spanish and English, although he was not aware that they belonged to two different systems, and he often mixed them in amusing ways. We enrolled him three mornings a week in a Spanish-speaking nursery school where he picked up numerous words in Spanish related to the school domain and proceeded to forget some of the English words he knew for the same items. He was a bit confused at first at the change in linguistic situation, since he’d apparently evolved a sociolinguistic rule that adults were spoken to in Spanish and children in English, and here it seemed to work in reverse. Nevertheless, he adjusted within a month and became quite loquacious in Spanish, stringing words together into phrases and sentences. While he continued watching English language television and listening to English records and tapes, he began to disfavour English oral production.

... he’d apparently evolved a sociolinguistic rule that adults were spoken to in Spanish and children in English.

Gabriel was thoroughly acclimatised to life in Puerto Rico by the time he was three years nine months old. At that time he was admitted to the UPR nursery school where he stayed until he was five years old. He became aware that we spoke two languages, and he referred to them by name. His Spanish came into full blossom, and his English went into partial hibernation. He followed English programmes, books, and conversations with ease, but rarely used English in speaking. In fact, when we insisted, he protested and would say that he didn’t want to talk like that.

On the other hand, he often asked me for “classes”, by which he meant English practice. At those times, he would happily and unhesitatingly use English. He was apparently in a state of flux and sorting out attitudes and preferences. Our approach at that time was to provide him with all the English resources possible without pushing him to use them. Our hope was that with time he would learn to be comfortable with both of his languages.
Indeed, this was what happened, although it took a two-
and-a-half month trip to New York to effect the final change.

When Gabi turned five, he and I spent the entire summer
with my parents in New York. Gabi participated in a day
camp and spoke only English. The first week, he tried to use
his Spanish and found that it didn’t get the expected results,
so he switched to English. A period of extensive code-
switching followed, which settled into English monolingual
usage two weeks later. My family co-operated again, this
time by addressing him in English only.

Ironically, when we returned to Puerto Rico at summer’s
end, he refused to speak Spanish for the first week or so, and
then did so with a peculiar accent. However, a week or two
of playing with his Spanish monolingual friends brought
him back to Spanish. He has, however, developed the conscious
habit of speaking to me in English only and to his father in
Spanish only. This now facilitates a one parent—one language
approach for us which was not planned or truly feasible for us
at the beginning.

My husband and I plan to send Gabriel to New York every
summer to maintain and further develop his English. It is
clear to us that this technique has worked very well with our
son. The base we established with the English language
materials at home plus the stimulus of active interaction with
English-speaking children has resulted in considerable
fluency in English (not quite native but rapidly approaching).
His Spanish development is completely native and on
target for his age.

...The main point of all this is that children are amazingly
resilient and able to learn even within variable settings. The
history of Gabriel’s development thus far has been charac-
terised by disequilibrium resolving into equilibrium evolving
into disequilibrium again, and so on, with each language
moving into prominence for a time and then being nudged
out of first place by the other. Rather than cause dysfunc-
tion, this has brought about a healthy dynamic between
English and Spanish in his life. Gabriel can at the age of five
years three months speak in connected, precise discourse in
either language, and he has learned basic rules of language
 allocation and sociolinguistic appropriateness. We have
every expectation that this process will continue in the
future, although once again, there may be changes in specific
stages on the road to complete bilingualism.

We look forward to reporting again in a few years what has
happened to Gabriel. We would also welcome any letters
from parents who have questions or comments regarding
what we’ve reported here. Our address is:

Condominio Montebello Q-134, Trujillo Alto, PR 00760, USA.

BILINGUAL HUMOUR
RABBIT TO START CAR

In their book Culture Shock! Indonesia (Times Books
International, 1986), Cathie Draine and Barbara Hall
mention some of the pitfalls awaiting the learner of
Indonesian, particularly with words which sound
similar but have completely different meanings. For
example, they once asked the driver to get the kelinci
(= rabbit) to start the car. They should have said kunci
(= key)! They also tell of a friend’s problems with
distinguishing rumput (= grass) and rumput (= hair).
The friend was interviewing a prospective cook and
was trying to describe her husband. She wanted to
indicate that he was ‘mature’ (balding). With great
seriousness, she informed the cook that her husband
did not have much grass on his head!

Continued from page one

Bilingualism: Some Sound Advice for Parents, is written in
simple, concise language and answers many of the questions
which parents may have about bilingualism. It is hoped that
the booklet will reach many parents and encourage them to
raise their children bilingually. It is also hoped that it will be
widely read by teachers, health workers, etc., who have reg-
ular contact with bilingual or potentially bilingual children
and can exert considerable influence on them. Further infor-
mation on the booklet can be obtained from:
BUT WHAT CAN WE DO?
About strategies to motivate a young child to speak the minority language
Susanne Döpke

Being the parent of a bilingual child can be very exciting: everything this child says in the minority language has been learned from you. But it can also be very frustrating if the child does not want, or is not able to speak your language. I am not only a parent of a four-year-old German and English speaking Australian boy, but also a linguist interested in questions of early bilingualism. Thus I have spent much time looking at what other parents of bilingual children do in order to ensure that their children not only learn to understand the minority language, but also learn to speak it. Moreover, I have learned from them for the parenting of my own son, and I have tried out approved as well as innovative methods of “making him speak German”.

Motivating active bilingualism
In my opinion, the most crucial factor for the successful acquisition of active language skills in the minority language is that the child enjoys the interaction with the minority language speaking parent. That means, we should make sure that we play with the child, do activities which the child likes. If we, while we are playing with our children, really concentrate on the children and what they do (and forget about the ironing or cooking or whatever) we will fairly automatically express in words what our children are focusing on at the moment. Thus, what we say will make sense to them and be significant for them, and they will be more likely to remember the words and structures than when we are talking about what we are concerned with. Moreover, putting the children’s focus of attention into words gives them a model of what they might have wanted to say. Seeing (or better hearing) that the minority language is useful for their concerns will have a motivating effect.

“There is much less “magic” in the acquisition of a minority language than in monolingual language acquisition.”

This brings me to the second most important aspect of verbal interaction with our soon-to-be bilingual children: we need to be sensitive to their linguistic needs. What do they want to express? Have I provided the appropriate model? After all, my child will only be able to say in German what he has heard from me. There is much less “magic” in the acquisition of a minority language than in monolingual language acquisition.

So much for commonsense. But what if the children refuse to speak the minority language? What if their structural development in the minority language does not progress? What if the majority language is too far advanced already?

Dealing with language refusal
Let me tell you what I did when Christopher did not want to speak German to me. When he was just over two years of age and had many more English than German words in his repertoire, I too of the many occasions of him choosing an English word rather than a German word when talking to me, to point out that Daddy says *doll* but Mummy says *Puppe*, etc. I then asked him whether he could say *Puppe*, if necessary in a challenging way. If he could I asked him to repeat the German word after me whenever the situation arose, that is whenever he was attempting to talk to me about his doll (we did the same for everything he wanted to express). If he did not comply I assumed that he was not able to do so and allowed him to continue to use the English word, but checked occasionally for progress. Once he repeated or attempted to repeat my German model, I increasingly responded to the English item offered by him with the request to repeat the German equivalent after me. Once he used the German term spontaneously, I expected him to always use it. If he did not, I would remind him that he had used a “Daddy word” and would ask him for the appropriate “Mummy word”. That worked in most cases. If he did not, I would tell him the German word once more, asking him to repeat it, and only after the successful remediation would I continue with the original interaction.

Such strategies worked best when we played. I would hide the ball behind my back while taking Christopher through one of my insisting sequences. This was usually accompanied with much laughter, funny voices and pulling faces. He learned early in life to laugh about himself. At the height of his refusal to speak German between two years and two months and two years and three months, I would say to him things like “I accept that you don’t want to speak German now. Maybe you should go and play alone for a while and we’ll play together again later when you feel like speaking German.” That worked wonders for installing in him a need to speak German.

Whenever Christopher said something in German to me spontaneously I went out of my way to respond to him and comply with his wishes. I wanted him to experience “success” with his attempts to speak the clearly harder language.

At times I tried the “I don’t understand/what did you say?” strategy. Sadly, this did not work very well for Christopher. He would just repeat the English word or utterance. But I have heard and seen this strategy work for others.

In insisting that your child speaks the minority language I would advise you not to expect too much. This can easily be off-putting for the child and counter-productive to your
aims. When I asked Christopher to rephrase something in "Mummy words", I always accepted his first attempt. That means I praised him even if he only changed one word in a multi-word English utterance to German. But then I followed it up with a correct model and the encouragement to imitate my model. His faulty imitation usually proved my assumption right that he could not quite say it in German yet.

For example:

C: me carry that
M: oh oh was sagt Mami
what does Mummy say
C: me carry das
das = that
M: ja! du trägst das
yes! you carry that
kannst du sagen: ich trag das?
what can you say: I carry that?
C: me trag that
trag = carry

At this point, I would abandon the issue and try again next time.

I did not always jump at him when he said something in English to me. If the thought he expressed was cognitively difficult already, for example, or if one of us was in a bad mood, I would ignore his wrong language choice but repeat in German, sometimes with questioning intonation so that he had to verify my translation, before I continued with the main purpose of the interaction. I mostly insisted on him speaking German when we played, read books, when he wanted something from me, like a drink or when he used an expression or utterance with high frequency.

Helping with structural development
Christopher is now long past the stage of having difficulties with sounds and is laboriously acquiring a vocabulary. By now he can express everything he wants in both English and German, although English sounds much more target-like. Until about three-and-a-half years of age, his German sounded rather fragmented with a few morphological markings, often English word order, and a sizeable amount of English functors. All through his language development he had certain preferences which no amount of insisting could eradicate. He gave them up at his own pace, usually a whole bunch of them at once, but immediately replaced them with others. I was not really concerned about those. I had learned to live with them and to wait for the next development spurt at which they would be abandoned. What did concern me, however, was the lack of, for example, verb inflections. Consequently, one day I instigated a game in which we challenged each other’s ability to do crazy things.

C: Kann du springen?
M: Ja! Kannst du fliegen?
nein!

M: Kannst du bellen?
C: nein!

M: Kannst du auf der Nase laufen?
C: ((laughing)) nein!

Typically, monolingual children find verb agreements significant once their cognitive ability has matured enough to perceive morphological markings. Unfortunately, bilingual children's cognitive ability might be well past that of monolingual children at the time of acquiring verb inflections, but not lead to such markings. The reason for that could possibly be found in the very restricted set of people who speak the minority language with the child and thus a lack of naturally occurring grammatical sienacies. Games like the one described above may create sienacies for grammatical features which otherwise go unnoticed.

Coping with a developmental gap between the two languages
In some cases the child is quite competent in the majority language already, but hardly able to construct two-word utterances in the minority language. Parents often feel compelled to give up at this point, feeling sorry about the strain they believe they are causing their child. Ideally, it shouldn't come to such a developmental gap between the two languages, but if it does, I still don't think the situation is beyond remediation. I suggest that parents step back a stage and orient their input in the minority language to the child's linguistic level rather than his or her cognitive level - at least and especially when they are playing with the child. There is nothing wrong with talking in two-word utterances to our children. Short utterances which we accompany with appropriate actions, like feeding the teddy or moving the car over the bridge, give the child direct models of what can be said and provide accessible structure for the child's creative variations.

"There is nothing wrong with talking in two-word utterances to our children."

One aspect which adults easily target is that the roles of parents and children are complementary to some degree. As parents of bilingual children with no or little access to other children who speak the minority language we must take care to provide some models for the "child role" like requesting, rejecting, being silly, etc. That too is likely to be much more motivating for the child's use of the minority language than straightforward "adult talk". It gives children the feeling that the minority language is as useful for their needs as the majority language.

I have put the strategy of "child talk" in the section of what to do when the minority language is lagging behind, because children might figure out these ways of using the minority language for themselves. However, you don’t need to wait for developmental problems before you employ this strategy.

A further strategy which can be employed in any case, but should be employed if the child fails to develop active skills in the minority language is the construction of conversational routines. In such a routine, the parent originally provides both the questions and the answers:

M: Mummy is going to work now. where is Mummy going? to work?

Eventually the child will fill in the answers:

M: Mummy is going to work now. where is Mummy going? to work?
C: work!
M: yeah!

M: Mummy is going to work. and where is Daddy going? to Grandma!
C: work!
M: yeah!

M: and you are going to Grandma. where are you going? to Grandma!

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DARING TO BE DIFFERENT


Reviewed by Marjukka Grover

Intercultural couples have chosen a complicated route in life, one which takes more work, more empathy – more everything!

Did I realise this 18 years ago when I entered into an intercultural marriage? Yes – and no. Yes – that both of us were serious about our marriage and wanted it to last despite cultural and language difficulties. No – that it would take years before I would feel really at home in England and that our different, yet on the surface quite similar, cultures would cause many conflicts.

For those who have just fallen in love but have their feet still firmly on the ground this book is ideal reading. It is also interesting reading for those of us who have survived in an intercultural marriage so far since it gives a good insight into our problems – and rewards.

The book starts with a chapter categorising the different types of people who might enter into intercultural marriages and for what reasons. The author describes the types with the help of case studies which she then uses throughout the book to illustrate different situations. I personally found this part of the book less interesting and a bit artificial. Is there a similar categorisation of people entering into monocultural marriages and if there is would it differ greatly from this list?

The author then describes three stages of marriage: honeymoon, settling in and resolution. In the honeymoon period everything is new and exciting and the differences are seen as romantic and attractive. The settling in period is difficult as the excitement of the romantic love is beginning to wear off, the new country does not feel home and yet the everyday contact with the old country is lost. A friend of mine described this period well when she said: “I feel happiest in the plane between Finland and England.” The feeling of not belonging anywhere is very disturbing and many start wondering if the price of love was too high.

Contact with the old country is lost. A friend of mine described this period well when she said: “I feel happiest in the plane between Finland and England.” The feeling of not belonging anywhere is very disturbing and many start wondering if the price of love was too high. It is the period in which both spouses begin defending their own ways against foreign assimilation and their different ideas about marriage and life in general culture. However, it is important to remember that, for most, that feeling does not last for ever. The couples will find some kind of resolution to their problems. They may be carrying on fighting for the rest of their married life or suppress their feelings and pretend there are no problems. The author suggests the third and best alternative is for each partner to allow the other to be different without giving up his or her own identity.

In the second part of the book the author describes in detail where potential pitfalls lie for intercultural couples. Differences in cross-cultural marriages are often extreme as they involve cultural identity and are therefore harder to resolve. By describing possible troubleshoots from food and drink to in-laws and sex, the readers will be able to identify the forthcoming problems facing them in the new culture and therefore be better prepared. Although all people have the same fundamental needs there are many different ways of perceiving them, and this in an intercultural marriage does cause conflicts since we are all the result of our own society.

I found the third part of the book the most interesting as it offers advice on how to manage the differences and how to get them to work for, not against, the marriage. In this section the author also gives a long listing of practical advice on how to prepare for an intercultural marriage.

“Although all people have the same fundamental needs there are many different ways of perceiving them.”

The author first describes four types of marriage: submission, compromise, obliteration and consensus.

Submission is the most common marital model where the one partner submits totally to the other partner’s culture. This model has definite disadvantages and very rarely works in the long run as the person is never totally successful at denying or losing his or her ethnic identity.

Compromise in theory is a good solution as it indicates equality in the relationship but this model has disadvantages too as adjustments are made for the sake of co-existence and may not satisfy either partner.

Obliteration refers to a marital model in which the couple try to manage their differences by denying their individual cultures altogether. While this may be the only solution for some couples it is not ideal since both partners have to sacrifice their ethnic heritage, which is a part of human psychological well being.

Consensus (i.e. agreement) is the best model for the intercultural couple. In this model neither partner sacrifices things which are essential to him or her. Both partners are strong and secure enough in themselves to allow their partners to be different without considering it a betrayal or a threat.

Although the author states that the success or failure of the marriage in the end is a personal matter there are certain characteristics which, to a greater or lesser degree, are found in common among couples whose marriages work. The author lists Factors for success as follows:

1. Good motivation for the marriage
2. Common goals
3. Sensitivity to each other’s needs
4. A liking for the other’s culture
5. Flexibility
6. A solid, positive self-image
7. A spirit of adventure
8. Ability to communicate
9. Commitment to the relationship
10. A sense of humour

Successful couples don’t necessarily need to fulfil all ten categories – but the more factors you can claim, the better
prospects your marriage will have. I would organise the list in a different order placing commitment to the relationship, good communication and a sense of humour at the beginning of the list. (The author explains the complexity of good communication with a Chinese word Ting [listen] which is a composite of four vital parts: ear, mind, eye and heart, all four so important in cross-cultural communication where language alone could cause lots of problems.) The list of factors for success is useful since it is easy to pinpoint the areas which are working well and those where more work is needed to make the relationship better. If one were to list factors for the success of monogamous marriages I don’t think it would differ very much, but perhaps couples in an intercultural marriage need a bigger sense of humour to survive.

The last chapter “Before taking that big step” gives detailed advice on what a person contemplating an intercultural marriage should do before the final commitment. Although finding out as much as possible about each other’s country, culture, language and family is a very sensible thing to do, I suspect many young people “madly in love” will see everything through rose-coloured glasses and refuse to accept the negative sides to which the author frequently draws the reader’s attention. I would certainly recommend to my sons that they read this chapter if they ever follow their parents’ footsteps into intercultural marriage. The author also states the vital importance of finding out your own cultural make-up before the wedding. Being positive and proud of your own culture will help you to adopt the same attitude towards that of your partner.

I read the book with great interest and despite its “warning” tone, found it positive and eye-opening overall even after 18 years of marriage. One thing the author forgets to point out is that being the “foreign” partner can be an advantage as well as a disadvantage. There have been times when I have been glad to be a “foreigner” and have got away with mistakes for which an English person would have been criticised. The case studies were interesting but a glossary giving background details of each case study would have helped the reader to understand better the couple’s difficulties. I found it hard to remember the details mentioned in earlier chapters when the same couple was used in a different example later.

My father’s advice to me, when I announced my intention to marry was “remember – a marriage is not living in a rose-garden – it is a lifetime of hard work but well worth the effort”. The author finishes the book with a similar statement about the worth of hard work and commitment, which I hope will be of encouragement to all of us, since an intercultural marriage can open new horizons and enrich life enormously:

Intercultural couples must be ready to give whatever it takes, never losing track of the fact that in the end, if all goes well, they also have the possibility of getting MORE than couples who didn’t dare to be different.

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You can see the opportunity for introducing vocabulary in a meaningful way as well as the positive reinforcement for yourself once the child starts contributing bits and pieces in your language. The routinised character of these interactions does not only help the children in their orientation in the world (that is what I originally used them for with Christopher), but make the verbal interaction very predictable as well. Thus you reduce the strain in a linguistically stressful situation.

Should parents “teach” language to young children?

I think that we should not shy away from purposely teaching our children linguistic skills as long as the teaching techniques we choose are fun and address the child’s level of understanding. Parents of monolingual children, too, use a wide range of teaching techniques more or less consciously when interacting with their young children. It is often the faster developing monolingual children whose parents are more skillful transmitters of the language.

As minority language speaking parents who want to make a conscious effort to teach our children our own language, our challenge is to detect our children’s linguistic needs and to package the teaching in a way that the children enjoy our little schemes. As with other aspects of parenting, exchanging ideas with other parents might give us the ultimately successful trick to make our child comply with our rules of language choice or help him or her to acquire a yet lacking grammatical form.

Good luck, and let me hear about your successful strategies. My address is:
Dr Susanne Döpke, Department of Linguistics, University of Melbourne, Victoria 3052, Australia.
Please send your queries, answers and/or contributions to George Saunders at either of the two addresses below:

Contact details removed

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☐ Please send a sample copy of BFN to:
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COUNTRY

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