EDITORIAL

I wonder if the politicians will ever learn what an asset bilingual/multilingual citizens are for their country. It seems to me that it is the small, well-off countries – like my beloved Finland and other Scandinavian countries – whose school language programmes are producing highly language-skilled populations. The reasons for this are obvious: parents want their children to learn other languages, the governments are willing to put money into language-learning programmes, and a person’s language skills are regarded as a mark of a good education and future prosperity – not only on the individual level but also for benefit of the whole nation.

Why then don’t countries who have a significant minority-language-speaking population always use their natural assets? The ‘English only’ movement is winning large scale support in the USA although dual language programmes are becoming popular in some areas, as described by our USA correspondent, James Crawford, on page three. But will Spanish-speaking children in most states in the USA soon be in the same situation as Welsh-speaking children were in Wales 30-40 years ago? Those children were reprimanded – often punished – for speaking Welsh in school. Yet now the Welsh speaking schools are gaining popularity even among English-speaking parents who realise that knowing another language will enrich the child’s life. In this issue’s leading article Gwennan Llwyd Evans describes the Welsh Language Board’s decision to get an early start on promoting bilingualism by educating parents and professionals, like midwives and health visitors, on the advantages of bilingualism. Other countries should follow their example.

Gwenan Llwyd Evans

Minority languages need support, institutional and financial, in order to survive in these days of increasing globalisation and domination of international communications media by majority languages. Here in Wales, the Welsh Language Act 1993 established the requirement for the Welsh and English languages to be treated on a basis of equality in public life. The Act also established the Welsh Language Board as a government-funded body to promote and facilitate the use of the Welsh language, currently spoken by just under 20% of the population, about 500,000 people. The Board has developed a language planning strategy which has identified a number of priorities. Increasing the overall number of Welsh speakers is obviously a crucial one, and this means working at the family level.

In essence, there are two ways of doing this, one of which is producing new speakers through the education system. In fact, through a combination of parental demand and enlightened education authority policies, we are

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already reasonably successful at this in Wales – by now, almost one third of children are receiving their primary education through the medium of Welsh. These developments are having a demonstrable effect, as shown by official census figures. Between 1981 and 1991, the percentage of children aged 5-9 who spoke Welsh increased from 17.8% to 24.7%, and the percentage of young people aged 10-14 from 18.5% to 26.9%.

The other way of increasing numbers of speakers of any language is to ensure that the language is passed naturally from generation to generation in the family and the community. This is possibly the most vital element in language acquisition, as it can be argued that a language which is acquired only as a second language through the education system isn’t really a living language. One of the Board’s major priorities therefore is to encourage parent-child transmission of the Welsh language, especially in homes where only one parent speaks it.

According to our research, if both parents speak Welsh, there is a 92% chance that their child will be Welsh-speaking. However, if only one parent speaks the minority language, this percentage drops dramatically – to 54% if the mother speaks Welsh and 49% if the father speaks Welsh. Our first priority therefore, is to increase these percentages, in the first place to maintain the status quo in terms of numbers of first language speakers, but hopefully then in a couple of generations to increase natural transmission.

So that’s the why. But how can we do this? Since we obviously can’t enforce language policies in the home, we have to try to make the bilingual family option an attractive one. Parents and prospective parents need to be aware of the advantages to children of being bilingual from an early age. They also specifically need to be aware of the potential benefits to their children’s of being able to speak Welsh in Wales (employment prospects and taking a full part in Welsh life and culture). Our aim in this marketing campaign, therefore, is to try to make sure that parents have the relevant information available before they make a decision about choice of language in the family. The Board has produced a number of leaflets and booklets offering advice and information appropriate to different stages, which are being distributed in different ways. The first thing we tried was including information leaflets in the new mother Bounty pack, a pack of promotional goodies (nappies, ointments and so on) which is distributed through maternity hospitals.

This is a perfect example of targeted marketing, because the information only goes to those people whom you want to receive it – that is, new parents. Recall of the leaflets among parents who said they had received the packs was good, and we have just embarked on the third consecutive year of this exercise. Every mother who gives birth in participating hospitals in Wales (around 31,000 a year) receives a leaflet about the advantages of bilingualism in young children, details of how to get advice on achieving this and a booklet of useful phrases to use if you want to speak Welsh with your baby.

We are also aware that there’s a need to give people the opportunity to discuss the issues before the family language pattern gets too established. We have therefore started a pilot project in West Wales, in co-operation with the County’s midwives and health visitors, (obvious candidates to offer counselling in this area) in which the choice of language in the family is discussed with the mother during pregnancy and after the child’s birth.

The intention is to develop and extend the project over the next couple of years on a national level. The information pack needs to be adapted to make it suitable for different areas of the country, since the levels of support available for parents vary according to how much Welsh is used in various communities.

The proof of whether all this activity actually works will have to wait at least until the 2011 census publishes the numbers of Welsh speakers in the relevant age groups. But the early indications are good, and the information material has certainly been welcomed – both by parents and professionals – and interest has been expressed in the project by minority language communities in several other countries, including Finland and the Spanish Basque country.

Further information and sample packs available from the Welsh Language Board
Tel: +44 (0)29 2087 8000
e-mail: ymholisau@bwrdd-yr-iaith.org.uk.

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**Bilingual upbringing easy!**

I appreciate the articles in your Newsletter, but it is only natural I suppose that people write about problems they encounter rather than how easy it is to bring children up bilingually. I am American, my husband is German, and we have two sons, Nicky, age 8, and Jonathan, age 5. We have lived in Germany since Nicky was 5 weeks old.

We never considered any alternative to bringing our children up bilingually, and it has really been almost effortless. Papa has always spoken only German to them, and Mama only English. In school and kindergarten of course they speak German. Since my husband and I met in English, we have usually spoken English at home, though now that my German has improved he sometimes just stays in German. It is very convenient at the dinner table, since when a child wants to get Mama’s attention, he simply speaks English, and when he wants to talk to Papa, he speaks German. Together, Nicky and Jonathan speak either language, sometimes in the same conversation! They often make puns and word games between German and English.

I have always spoken English with the children, except sometimes in social situations. The boys are so used to it that I often have to remind them to speak German to me in front of their friends.

Of course I realize that we have a number of advantages. First, and most importantly, we have spent every summer with my family in the US, and often a few weeks in the winter. This keeps us in touch with English language and American culture. We read English language books and talk on the telephone with American relatives.

As important though is the fact that English is the dominant world language now, and American culture (well, mainly rock music!) and language are very much admired in Germany. It is considered here as a great advantage for a child to speak English. My children are admired and envied by parents and children, all of whom would love to speak English fluently, Nicky and Jonathan are very proud of speaking both English and German, and feel that this makes them
'special' in their classes. We have never heard this kind of admiration for bilingualism directed at the Serbian, Italian, Turkish, Russian or African children who we know here.

Another advantage we have had is that the 'minority' language of English is the 'mother' tongue rather than the father's. I do probably spend more time with the boys and I am also more verbal than he is. Mothers also tend to be the transmitters of culture, nursery rhymes, songs, etc.

I think an awareness that bilingualism and speaking other languages in general is normal and interesting also helps – my sister is marrying a Mexican, we have travelled with the children in various European countries, and have friends with children who speak other languages. So my boys realize that people speak many different languages and find this quite wonderful.

We are in the Waldorf education system, which introduces two foreign languages already in Grade 1. Nicky is in his second year of English and Russian in his school. He helps his teacher in the English class, so far this seems to work, and gives him a special standing in the class. Much of the language teaching involves games and play, anyway at this age. He has also picked up Russian very quickly, I think as a result of his bilingualism.

Of course we have had a few challenges. Around age 2-3, I found that the boys would very quickly lose the minority language – after a few weeks in the US, Papa would call and they could not find their German; and by the time Christmas rolled around in Germany, even with me there, it seemed like half their words in English sentences were German! A few weeks in the other language always cured this however. And it has smoothed out as they have got older, now they can easily switch from one language to another in both countries.

Nicky starting talking a bit late, and still makes a few grammatical errors in both languages at 8 years old. He is more mathematically oriented, while his brother is more verbal. I think these are just differences in temperament though, not related to bilingualism.

A disadvantage is, I am sure, that my German would have improved more quickly had I been speaking German rather than English with the children! Though I know we have had several advantages, I hope our experience is encouraging for others. The most important advice for raising children bilingually is: just relax!

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NEWS FROM THE USA
Is Dual Language a Dual-Edged Sword?

James Crawford

While bilingual education contends with a climate of intolerance in many parts of the United States, one variety is blossoming in a glow of popularity. Two-way bilingual education – increasingly known as 'dual language' or 'dual immersion' – seems to be shielded from the harshest political winds.

That's because it benefits not only minority students learning English, but also majority students learning Spanish, Chinese, Korean, Arabic, and various other languages. English-speaking parents are beginning to recognize the advantages of bilingualism and to seek it for their children. As a result of this demand, the number of dual language experiments nationwide has grown from a mere handful ten years ago to more than 266 in 1999, according to a survey by the Center for Applied Linguistics.

Politicians are taking notice. In a recent speech, US Secretary of Education Richard Riley endorsed bilingual education for all American students. 'I think that it is high time we began to treat language skills as the asset they are, particularly in this global economy.' Riley said. 'Proficiency in English and one other language is something that we need to encourage among all young people.' He announced that the Clinton administration would seek additional funds in Congress to promote dual language programs.

Pedagogically speaking, dual language makes good sense. Besides offering a natural environment for acquiring a second language, it offers something that traditional immersion programs lack – 'peer tutors' who are native speakers of the target language. Research so far remains limited. But the available evidence suggests that students in these programs, regardless of their language background, are prospering academically and usually achieving fluent bilingualism.

As a policy matter, however, dual language poses some difficult issues. Advocates for language-minority students have long pinned their hopes on this approach as a way to gain popular acceptance for bilingual education. They predicted that including English speakers would create a new constituency – middle-class 'Anglo' parents with political clout – thus raising the social status of bilingualism. It would also send the message that language skills are valuable, helping Americans to recognize that English proficiency alone is not enough in today's world.

So far, however, the 'English Plus' strategy has failed to pay off. To their credit, a number of English-speaking parents have become vocal advocates for bilingual education. Yet at the same time, English-only activism has, if anything, intensified. In 1998, Californians voted to ban most native-language instruction for English learners, eliminating bilingual programs for hundreds of thousands of minority children. Exceptions were made, however, for all of the state's dual language programs.

While this was fortunate for a few children, the overall trend is troubling. There is a danger that bilingual education – once designed to offer equal opportunities for minority students – could be transformed into an elite program primarily benefiting English-speaking students who desire to learn another language. Funding that once flowed to aid the disadvantaged would be rechanneled to the advantaged.

Of course, Secretary Riley is correct. All students should become bilingual. In an ideal world, dual language programs would be accessible to everyone. The reality, however, is that only a minority of English-speaking Americans recognize the value of bilingualism or the opportunities that a bilingual education can provide. Too few are currently willing to enroll their children in dual language to make these programs widely available.

Over time, one hopes such attitudes will change. But until they do, placing too much emphasis on this approach could harm the students whose life chances most depend on high-quality bilingual education.

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Campaign for Promoting Bilingual Education in USA

The Arizona Language Education Council (ALEC), formed by parents, teachers, business people, tribal leaders, community volunteers and researchers, is a non-profit association which seeks:
1. to increase public awareness about language education issues;
2. to dispel myths and misconceptions about bilingual education;
3. to provide a clearinghouse of information for Arizonans, policy-makers, and news media.

For more information contact ALEC, P.O. Box 68185, Oro Valley, AZ 85737-0005, USA
Tel: (520) 721-2677 e-mail: comments@alec2000.org
http://www.alec2000.org
THREE YEARS OLD AND THREE FIRST LANGUAGES

Jean-Marc DeWaele

After obtaining my doctorate in Romance Applied Linguistics at the Free University of Brussels in 1993, under the supervision of Professor Hugo Baetens Beardsmore, I was offered a job in the Birkbeck College and my wife and I settled in London. Having been raised bilingually, the issue of bilingualism has always fascinated me. The subject of my doctoral dissertation was synchronic variation in the French interlanguage of Flemish students. The birth of my daughter Livia at the end of 1996 stimulated my interest in early multilingualism.

Livia with her parents

A number of studies have been carried out on Bilingual First Language Acquisition but very few deal with Trilingual First Language Acquisition. I realised that Livia’s linguistic development would be an obvious research project and I have been video recording her at regular intervals. A linguistic diary allows me to write down interesting utterances she invariably produces once the camera has been turned off.

My wife’s native tongue is Dutch, mine is French and we live in an English environment. We follow the rule of one person - one language. I only address her in French, my wife in Dutch and her friends and neighbours speak English with her. My wife and I usually communicate in Dutch which makes it the dominant language within the family.

Working in an Evening College allows me to spend my mornings with Livia. From the age of 5 months to 2½ years, she went every afternoon to a Pakistani child-minder who spoke English and Urdu with the children. We were a bit concerned that the introduction of a fourth language might be too much for Livia but this fear turned out to be unfounded. At 2½ she started at a local English nursery school which provides an extra stimulation for her development. She learns to draw, sing, dance, and she even gets two hours a week of formal instruction in French.

She speaks English with her dolls and repeats the rhymes, songs and phrases heard at the nursery. Parents are justly amazed when they observe their children’s acquisition of their mother tongue. When the child acquires three to four languages simultaneously, and with such apparent ease, it is even more impressive. Livia started producing her first words at the age of 1 year 2 months. She had a good passive knowledge of about 150 French, Dutch, Urdu and English words by then (i.e. she reacted appropriately when asked to fetch or do something). Her first words in English (1:2) were, not surprisingly, produced at the child-minder’s house. She pointed to a banana and said ‘bana’, followed by ‘give!’ She also produced Urdu words like ‘billi’ (cat), ‘bareesh’ (rain). She never got past the one-word-utterance stage in Urdu but has a good passive knowledge. Her first French words were (1:3) ‘poupou’ (target: bonbon, ‘sweet’), ‘froid’ (cold), ‘chaud’ (hot), ‘pabi’ (target: poubelle, ‘bin’). She produced only the first syllable of Dutch words in that period: ‘scho’ (target: short, apron), ‘wa’ (target: water, water), ‘mo’ (target: mond, mouth).

The first multi-word utterances in French and Dutch appeared at 2:2, for example, in French: ‘Four machine est finie’ (oven machine is finished), ‘Papa, pa ratij!’ (Daddy is gone). The utterances became gradually complex like: ‘Je m’appelle Livia avec une barbe et dans mon jardin j’ai des petits abricots et haricots’ (my name is Livia with a beard and in my garden I have small apricots and beans) (2:11) and in Dutch: ‘pil(e)isters van la, voor mij av av’ (plaster from Livia, for me ouch) ‘Nu heb ik een groot bed en ik kan goed slapen en mama en papa kunnen nu rustig slapen’ (now I have a big bed and I can sleep well and mommy and daddy can sleep in peace). English, as I said, was and still is the language used with the dolls and with friends:

‘Paddington sleep’ (2:4), ‘We’re gonna

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MY GOD-DAUGHTER – KATERINA

Marjukka Grover

Katerina, my 10 year old God-daughter, was adopted by my brother’s family 3½ years ago from Russia. She lived her early years in a children’s home in Ivangorod, on the Russian/Estonian border, and had no word of Finnish when she arrived at Seinäjoki where my brother’s family live. A big change for a seven year old girl: a new mother, father and big brother, Hari, a new language and a new culture.

When I first met Katerina, she had been in Finland for four months and was already able to make herself understood in simple Finnish. I will never forget the beautiful little girl, in a red winter coat, waiting at the station for the arrival of her new auntie from England. I had heard that she was a very lively child but a sudden shyness took over, she buried her head behind her father’s back and whispered ‘isi - Marjukka silmat pois’ (= daddy, Marjukka eyes off). My brother explained that Katerina had seen photos of me only without glasses. I took my glasses off and that did the trick. Katerina and I have been great friends ever since.

Katerina is very bright, lively and sunny girl who makes friends easily. My brother and sister-in-law hoped that she would become – and remain – bilingual despite the fact that neither of them speak Russian more than at a very elementary level. By the time Katerina started school at the age of eight (the school-starting age in Finland is seven) her Finnish was pretty fluent due to her mother staying home from her teaching job for the first three months, and after that Katerina attending a Finnish-speaking Day Care Centre. But how to keep her Russian developing? My brother and sister-in-law are very positive about the Russian language and culture and are conveying that message to their daughter. They found a Russian piano teacher for Katerina and kept contact with her best friend, Alina, who was adopted in Finland at the same time. Luckily Seinäjoki has enough Russian-speaking children for the school to organise two hours of Russian per week.

This February, during my visit to Finland, I was talking with Katerina about her languages and life in Finland. The following is our conversation – in Finnish of course!

Marjukka: Was it exciting to move from Russia to Finland even though you didn’t speak any Finnish?

Katerina: It was very exciting to come to Finland. I remember everybody speaking SO quickly and I felt I will never understand what they are saying. I thought ‘What did they say?’ and I studied peoples eyes and how they opened their mouth. If somebody was shouting I guessed that the person is angry but if they spoke gently they liked me and meant good.
Marjukka: Do you remember what the first words you learned were?

Katerina: I learned first to say 'thank you' (kiitos) and 'please' (ole hyvä) and names of food like 'butter' (voi), 'bread' (tigoo) and 'juice' (mehu). I didn’t like juice very much because I have always drunk either tea or water. Also 'mummy' (äiti), 'daddy' (istu), 'brother' (veli) and the word 'adoption' (adoptive). That is a very difficult word to pronounce. I always want to know what a word means. I also learned to read some words before I went to school.

Ten-year-old Katerina

Marjukka: And now you have been in Finnish school for almost three years. Do you like it?

Katerina: Yes I do, but the first year I had to concentrate hard to understand what the teacher said.

Marjukka: Isn’t it really nice that you are now bilingual and you can carry on learning Russian in school?

Katerina: For the first year in school it was easy to speak Russian. In the second year I started to forget because I spoke Finnish at home all the time. When the Russian lessons started I said ‘why do I need to speak Russian in Finland?’. It was boring and I was fed up but I hadn’t realised that it could be useful. When I went to Bulgaria with my mother, and Alina and her mother, I noticed that I can use Russian. Mum told me before the holiday that in Bulgaria I can use Russian and I got interested. When I was there I noticed some children were speaking Russian and I went to talk to them. They were really surprised that a Finnish girl can speak Russian. I explained to them that I was adopted in Finland. They were so happy that I can speak Russian that they started to play with me. My mum was surprised too and so were the waiters and people in the shops. I was very glad that I could speak Russian. They had Russian sausages in Bulgaria – I liked them better than Finnish sausage.

THREE YEARS ... from page four

sleep now? (2,7), ‘I prepared the lunch and now you don’t want to eat it?’ (3,0)

Mixed utterances usually involve two languages, sometimes French and Dutch: 'Papa, papa, la bijna tombé' (Daddy, daddy, Livia almost fallen) (2,2), sometimes English-Dutch ‘Ik jump eruit!’ (I jump out of it) (2,5), and sometimes English-French-Dutch: ‘Mimi, what do you préféres, een boterham?’ (Mimi, what do you prefer, a slice of bread?) (2,10).

She realised soon that objects and body parts are referred to with different words in different languages. We had the following conversation about my feet when she was 2;5 and she uses the English word first, then the French, and finally the Dutch:

Livia: Grands pieds papa! (Big feet daddy)
Daddy: Grands pieds ? (Big feet ?)
Livia: Oui grands pieds. (Yes big feet)
Livia: Voetje, non grands feet (Small foot, not big feet) (*she points to her feet).

At one point, she used homonym to translate expressions, with hilarious results: ‘thank you very much’ became in Dutch ‘dank u voor de match’ (thank you for the match).

Metalinguistic awareness came very early. The language of a person or a doll is as important to her as the colour of the hair. Sitting in her bath with her mother duck she said (1;9): ‘Maman petit canard spréken Néerlandés’ (Mother duck speak Dutch).

After being corrected by my wife because she used a French word adapted morpho-phonologically to Dutch: she realised her mistake and said:

Livia: En de douteausen op tafel doen (and put the knives on the table).
Mommy: De messen! (the knives).
Livia: Ahja, douteaus is in het Frans (oh yeah, ‘knife’ is in French) (2,10).

It can be a shock when a toddler starts correcting her parents’ English. When my wife asked how her friend Caterine was, Livia answered: ‘non maman, Catherine’ (no mommy, Catherine - with English ‘th’) (2,4).

Her utterances in the three languages are generally well formed, with relatively few grammatical errors. Transfer errors are relatively rare and the errors she makes are generally comparable to those made by monolingual children at the same age, like the omission of the personal pronoun in subject position. We correct her errors and she spontaneously repeats the correction.

This anecdotal evidence shows that a very young trilingual child can grasp concepts like language and use it appropriately according to the situation. Having been in contact with different languages since her birth, multilingualism is seen by Livia as the norm rather than the exception. She understood very soon that most of her friends, our neighbours and her child-minder did not understand Dutch and French but spoke English and other languages. English has become the default language when meeting an unknown child in London. The situation at home is different because of our ability to speak and understand the three languages. She now addresses us mostly in ‘our’ language and she is very surprised when we occasionally violate this rule. Sometimes however, she extends her English dialogues with her dolls to us and expects us to ‘play act’ in English. We try to resist this in order to preserve French and Dutch as the languages of home.

I hope this testimony can be a reassurance for those who might harbour fears about the ‘dangers’ of early multilingualism. Livia’s grammar and mental lexicon are not in disarray. Her cognitive development appears to be perfectly normal and she expresses herself with ease. If she doesn’t get the cookie she ordered in one language, she code-switches to the other, just to make sure we understand her request. Her idiosyncratic utterances are generally comparable to those of monolingual children.

As a father I feel moved by my daughter, and as a linguist I am constantly fascinated, sometimes to her annoyance, when I scribble another of her utterances on a scrap of paper, like this last one, when she (2;10) sang to her doll: ‘I’m happy because it’s my birthday. I receive a doll and you go in the sky and you find and you go. Een mooi chansontje! ’ (... a nice little song)

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HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Stina (6 years old)
suffered from a nasty vomiting bug. Finally she vomited green goo and returned the bucket to me with the comment ‘Hier Mam, nur noch Guelle (mum, all I bring up is manure).’ She got mixed up with the words Guelle and Galle similar sounding, yes but two different things indeed.

Monika Vest, Edinburgh, Scotland.
A helpful approach to stammering?

I am German, my husband is English. Our daughter Charlotte (three years old) started speaking very early; first in German then added English through her father, friends and now nursery. For a time, German seemed to be losing out, but I persisted in speaking it to her. I’ve bought German videos, books and having German local friends has helped a lot. She can now speak German quite well and English is no problem.

However, I have noticed recently that when she’s trying to say something quick or if she starts saying something in one language and then gets confused because she can’t think of the appropriate word, she starts stammering.

Is this to do with the bilingualism or is this just due to the fact that her brain is faster then her mouth at the moment and she can’t get the words out quickly enough? At the moment I just make sure she knows she has my full attention when she’s trying to say something and then I tell her to speak slowly, that there’s no hurry and I’m listening. Is that a helpful approach?

Second query: I grew up in a bilingual situation myself, but one where both my parents are German-speaking, but the environment was Italian. Due to Italian children in the house, I learnt Italian first and my mother tells me there came a point when she had to insist that I reply to her in German, rather than Italian, though she can’t remember what age I was then. What age can I insist on Charlotte answering me in German? Now seems a bit early as she has some vocabulary she only knows in English and some only in German. The question has only started bothering me now as her sister will be starting to speak soon and I’m worried that the two of them will speak English to each other and to me and I’ll be the lonely German voice droning away….Please advise!!

Barbara, Eifler, London, England

Despite over 60 years of research, mostly in America, we know very little about the cause of stammering. As for pre-school children are concerned, it is generally believed that stammering is not caused by the child him or herself, but by the behaviour of the people around the child. Stammering increases and continues while pressures are put on the child’s speech. Some educational psychologists and speech therapists in the early days of scientific research on bilingualism sought to find links between bilingualism and stammering and suggested that bilingualism could cause stammering in some children. This is completely wrong! There is no evidence to prove that bilingual children are more at risk to develop stammering than monolingual children. Moreover, there is no reason to think that children born and brought up in natural and supportive bilingual environment should be under more pressure than monolingual children. In fact, to force a bilingual child to speak one language only (which unfortunately is often the advice given by monolingual speech therapists) will put unnecessary pressure on an otherwise normally developing child. Bilingual speakers, children and adults alike, sometimes have temporary word finding difficulties in one of their languages. Competent adult bilinguals would probably code-switch, i.e. change to a different language, and ask their conversational partners to help. When young bilingual children have such difficulties, we adults should try not to draw any attention to them. The approach you are using is very helpful indeed. The key here is to remove any pressure the child may feel to have. Ann Irwin, a speech therapist in Newcastle, has written a practical self-help guide for parents, entitled Stammering in Young Children, (ISBN 0-7225-1640-1 published by Thorsons in 1988).

To answer to your second question I am afraid there may never be a good time to insist on a bilingual child responding to a bilingual adult in one language only. Bilingual children are acutely aware who are bilingual and who are not. Once they know the parents can understand both languages, the children will insist on using whichever language they feel like speaking at the time. If the parents insist on changing the children’s language choice and preference, the children will gradually develop a resistance. It may eventually lead to a language generation gap. The most important issue in bringing up bilingual children is to maintain their bilinguality. Often bilingual children prefer one language to another because they know they are better at one language than the other. If they feel confident that they can function in both languages freely, they will choose to use the language most appropriate for the context. One can then explain to a child that Mummy likes to hear you speak German. ‘Would you speak to German to mummy?’ Don’t make them feel that they have to speak a particular language only.

Li Wei
Professor and Director at the Centre for Research in Linguistics, Department of Speech, University of Newcastle upon Tyne, UK.

Should I speak my husband’s language to our daughter?

I am an English woman married to a German and we live in England. We have a baby, Rebekah, four months old, and both feel strongly that she should be brought up bilingual. We want her to be as strong as possible in speaking both languages, rather than her being brought up a ‘passive bilingual’. My husband always speaks German to Rebekah and we speak (mainly) German with each other.

I know that the ‘one person-one language’ approach works well when the speaker of the minority language is the mother who speaks most often with the child. I am not sure, however, whether we should take this approach as my husband only sees Rebekah for an hour or two in the evenings and at weekends. I go out with Rebekah most days when she only hears English being spoken (apart from a German ‘Krabelgruppe’ one afternoon a week). I am going back to work three days a week when Rebekah is a year old. She will then attend an English-speaking nursery. I am currently speaking German to Rebekah (although it is not my mother tongue) and wonder whether I should continue this or only speak English to her. Please could you advise!

Stella Krain, England
As you are determined that Rebekah should have a good command of both her languages, you need to ensure that she has frequent opportunities to hear and use both of them. Since you live in England, providing the necessary input in English will seldom be a problem as she will be surrounded by English-users outside the home and also, presumably, inside through TV and radio. Her exposure to German, however, is a different matter and both you and your husband will have to work hard to provide this, as it does not occur naturally in her surroundings.

The more German you can get into her environment the better. You will need to provide her with books, videos and tapes in German, but these alone will not be enough. Your husband’s speaking German with her is helpful but, as you note, his time with her is limited. It is also good that she will frequently hear you and your husband converse in German: this not only provides a further source of input, it also gives her an interactive model. If you also spoke to her in German all or most of the time, this would give a further boost to her input in the language and also help by associating German with all the positive emotions involved in the mother-child bond. I say ‘if’, as I know that many parents are unwilling to speak a second language with their children. I certainly would not have relished the idea of interacting with my daughter through the medium of my less-than-fluent Japanese. If this does not bother you, though, it seems clear to me that you should speak to Rebekah in German as often as possible.

The issue of what language to use when speaking to a four-month old baby may seem laughable to some people, but my experience is that once a relationship is established in a certain language (whatever the age of the person) it becomes very difficult to imagine using another language with that person. ‘Minority Language at Home’, rather than ‘One Parent One Language’ would seem to be the answer to your question.

Stephen Ryan, Osaka, Japan

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**MY GOD-DAUGHTER... from page five**

**Marjukka**: You went with your mum, dad and Ilari and also Alina and her family to visit the children’s home in Russia two years after you came to live in Finland. Was there anything special you missed when leaving Russia?

**Katerina**: First I missed my friends but Alina was my best friend in the children’s home and she was adopted in Finland at the same time. When we came to Finland and Alina left with her mother to go to their home I cried because I thought she had gone to a different country. It was so nice when I realised that she lived quite near. First we phoned each other a lot and spoke in Russian but after a year we started to speak Finnish to each other. I have known Alina since she was one year old.

**Marjukka**: You are a clever girl Katerina. By the time you are an adult you will be speaking several languages; Finnish, Russian, English, Swedish and perhaps French and German as well. Isn’t it fantastic?

**Katerina**: Yes. Finnish is now easy. I am also learning English in school and I can pronounce it well. I like English – I see it as orange in colour.

**Marjukka**: Really? Do you see languages in different colours?

**Katerina**: Yes I do. And also people’s names. Finnish is dark blue, Russian is white, my name is purple, mummy’s is dark pink, daddy and Ilari are both yellow. French is violet. In fifth grade I can learn...
The editor, with the help of the International Editorial Board, is happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism/biculturalism. We reserve the right to edit any letters published. All contributions to the BFN should be sent to:

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GLOSSARY: Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills.

Everyday, straightforward communication skills that are helped by contextual supports such as gestures.

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