

The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: Marjukka Grover

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EDITORIAL

Interest in bilingualism has grown enormously during the last twenty years. There are now many more books on how to raise bilingual children and I sometimes wonder if the Newsletter has served its purpose and is no longer needed. However, the subscriber figures don't show any sign of declining and comments like the one from Helga Rhein warm my heart. *'Your publication, including the various books recommended in BFN, have given me lots of inspiration and food for thought. Just like other readers have mentioned before, yours is one of the journals I get, which is immediately read from front to back the minute it arrives. Hope you keep going strong for long!'*

Another reader writes *'I enjoy reading the Newsletter, but it would be interesting if there could be some scientific input as well as the anecdotal articles, and particularly on the question of the acquisition of three languages.'*

That wish has been granted in this issue – although not on trilingualism. Ulf Schuetze's article on code switching needs concentration from those of us who are not linguists, but gives a good insight into a child's language acquisition and reassures parents that the mixing of languages is a normal phenomena – nothing to worry about. The reader will get more practical hints on multilingual upbringing from the interview of Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa, the author of a new book *Raising Multilingual Children*, (a review will appear in the December issue). And the question on language disorder published in Vol.18: 1 caused an interesting discussion among our readers.

So – please keep writing. The subject of multilingualism is never exhausted.

Marjukka Grover

CODE-SWITCHING IN BILINGUAL CHILDREN AT THE AGE OF THREE - Should It Be Corrected?

Ulf Schuetze

'Sonja a- je SCHENK ca'
Sonja has- I give this (as a present)
(French/German; Meisel 1994: 434)

This sentence was uttered by Annika. At the time, Annika was 3 years, 2 months and 24 days old. Her mother is French, her father is German. Her parents decided to raise her in both languages following the *one person, one language* principle. Her mother speaks French with Annika,

"Of what is known about the lexicon of children who speak two or more languages is that they can access words of all the languages they speak at the same time."

her father German. Annika is growing up in Hamburg. In this sentence, Annika inserted a German word into a French sentence. This kind of **Code-Switching** is called **intrasentential**. It refers to switching between two languages within the same phrase. In the example, Annika not only uses a German verb but also does not apply a correct ending (morphology). The first person singular of *'schenken'* corresponding to French *'je'* would be *'schenke'*. If Annika was my daughter, I would ask myself two questions. First, should I correct her? Second, if I decide to correct her, what do I correct: do I provide proper inflection in saying *'schenke'*, do I mention the infinitive *'schenken'* to indicate the base form of the verb, do I give the French phrase *'je donne'*?

Language development at the age of three

Around the age of two, children start building **semantic** (meaning of language) fields: they often invent words to give them meaning or they over- or underextend the meaning of a word. For example, they refer to everything that flies as a bird. It is around this time that the first signs of **syntax** (sentence structure) and **morphology** (the internal structure of words) become apparent. They are restricted to two-word utterances at this point and it is not before the age of three that children start forming more complex sentences. A bit later, around the age of three, children start to develop metalinguistic awareness.

Metalinguistic awareness refers to the ability to reflect upon language. This includes opinions or attitudes about content or style of utterances, perception of segmentation of words into sounds, categorial and abstract knowledge about the structure of language and its uses. In other words, they are able to analyse structure separately from meaning.

Adult speech to children at the age of three

As noted, around the age of two, the first semantic networks have been established. At the same time, children begin to apply rules of syntax and morphology to their speech which is a process that becomes more and more important in the third year.

However, while parents provide feedback when talking to children, research has shown that parent's speech mainly shows

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CODE-SWITCHING *from page one*

children how words are used and categorized. The rules of syntax or morphology are rarely taught. Nevertheless, over time children seem to master these rules just fine. In fact, research has demonstrated that children cannot and do not learn the morphology of a language by repeating specific examples they have heard from others (Tager-Flusberg in Gleason 1997, Chapter 5).

Children are quite creative in applying a morphological rule when it should not be applied. For example they add the regular past tense '-ed' on to irregular verbs such as 'falled'. This is a form they have not

"I don't see that any form of correction regarding Code-Switching at this point will foster Annika's language development in either of the two languages."

heard from their parents. It seems that children simply know the rules that govern morphology. However, applying these rules correctly takes some time and at the age of three children are at the beginning of this process.

Bilingualism

A central question in studies on bilingualism is in what way learning two languages at the same time affects a child's personal and academic development. Among others, Cummins pursued this question and came up with the idea of 'The linguistic interdependence model' (Cummins 1983, 1989). He argues that although the surface features of languages are different, there is an underlying cognitive and academic proficiency which is common across languages. It makes it possible to transfer skills from one language to another.

If there is a **common underlying proficiency**, the next question is if bilingual children develop two systems, one for each language, or one. Of what is known about the lexicon of children who speak two or more languages is that they can access words of all the languages they speak at the same time. Consequently, regardless if there are two systems or one, the languages are interconnected with each other.

Intrasentential Code-Switching

Children use Code-Switching for different purposes. Saunders (1988) reports that they want to get the parent's attention or

CONFERENCE REPORT

The Third International Symposium on Bilingualism UWE 18-20 April 2001

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

The Third International Symposium on Bilingualism was held in Bristol, at the University of the West of England last April. The organisers brought together a wide range of international participants with speakers on subjects as diverse as

- Bilingual Identity
- Bilingual Education
- Language Minorities
- Acquisition of Languages
- Code-Switching

The five main plenary speakers all gave thought-provoking lectures. Professor Jurgen Miesel, from the University of Hamburg, started the conference with a talk on bilingual language acquisition and how language features such as grammar can change over time. Professor Thomas Roper (University of Massachusetts) continued with a discussion on the role of Universal grammar. This is a theory that all languages have similarities or universal systems. Young children could possibly speak several languages as they are much more open to any language. Dr. Tom Dijkstra (Nijmegen Institute) reviewed bilingual word recognition. Words in a multilingual are automatically activated in the brain and Tom explained how similar cognate, or root words could overlap in languages. Professor Nancy Hornberger of the University of Pennsylvania discussed language policies and enlightened us to the human right to be multilingual. She told of how the one-nation-one-language policies which were held rigidly in many countries such as South Africa are relaxing now and native

they appeal for linguistic assistance. Köppe and Meisel (1995) found that children also comment on their language and ask for translations. These are signs of metalinguistic awareness. Starting around three and a half years of age they ask a question such as 'how does one say again for?' Quite often when children realize that they used a word from another language they correct themselves.

Discussion

With regards to the example given at the beginning of this short article, Meisel points out that 'donner' does not unambiguously convey the German meaning of 'to give a present'. An explanation for 'schenk' is that Annika was trying to say 'Sonja schenk ich das'. In fact, when her mother asked Annika what she was trying to say, Annika rephrased her sentence to 'Schenk ich das' (Give I give that). This is a correct sentence in German. Annika left out the referent, 'Sonja', because she said it

languages are coming back into everyday use. The last speaker, Suzanne Romaine, of Merton College, Oxford University, described the unusual linguistic situation in Hawaii. Local language activists have started a campaign to change all written signs back into authentic Hawaiian spellings, which were originally recorded by English missionaries. For example, Hawaii should read hawai'i. As locals come to terms with forgotten spellings there is also a push to pronounce words correctly and to return place names to their original names.

I participated in a seminar group discussing trilingualism, chaired by Charlotte Hoffmann and Jasone Cenoz. We discussed childhood trilingualism and the importance peer group friends and school had on the language, and how parents could balance language input. Another theme was how to order languages and work out which one is first, second or third.

Finally, I joined in a seminar on bilingual identity which covered many interesting papers, such as how to educate bilingual Japanese-American children. Mari Allik talked about three generations of Estonians living in Sweden and their thoughts on bilingualism. Linda Thompson also gave a fascinating account of a study made in Singapore on young children's language patterns. The children were hearing two or more languages daily from family and school. Their ability to switch, adapt and live with multilingualism was refreshing to hear!

The conference was jointly sponsored by The Linguistic Association of Great Britain, The British Academy and Multilingual Matters. It was a very sociable conference, with a drinks party sponsored by Multilingual Matters. We look forward to the next International Symposium in two years, to be held at Arizona State University, USA.

before. With the pronoun following the verb, 'schenken' is then correctly inflected to 'schenk'.

At least three processes took place in Annika at this point. First, she was aware of the different meaning between 'donner' and 'schenken'. Her French and German language system are interconnected. She compared the two meanings (in their syntactic and semantic context) and chose 'schenken'. Second, integrating 'schenken' in the French sentence caused morphological problems. At that age mistakes in applying morphological rules are very common when just speaking one language. Moreover, the interconnection of the two systems allows her to apply a French ending to the German verb. Third, she corrected herself in rephrasing the sentence. Self-correction is a sign of metalinguistic awareness and an integral part of language development. Despite the

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INTERVIEW

Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa: Multilingualism in Action.

By Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa, 37, is an American with Japanese roots and is married to Christian, an Ecuadorian diplomat. They are currently posted in Geneva, in the French speaking part of Switzerland. The family languages are English, Spanish, French and German. Their three multilingual children, aged eight, five and three, attend the German School in Geneva. Tracey has just published her first book, *Raising Multilingual Children**, which was inspired by her children and meeting other families in similar situations. I talked to Tracey about life with her polyglot family....

How do you explain your success with the four languages?

In my book I write about the ten key factors influencing successful bilingualism or multilingualism. In my own family's case, I think our success with the four languages has come primarily from our consistent strategy, the opportunities the children have had to use their languages in meaningful situations on a daily basis, and having been exposed to languages at critical periods in their upbringing. This means the factors of Strategy, Consistency, Opportunity and Timing have all been key to our own family mix.

What languages do you and your husband speak?

I am half-Japanese and studied Japanese at high-school and as a college student. Christian was sent on a year-long course for diplomats in Tokyo, so he learned basic Japanese too. We were then posted in Tokyo for three years right after we were married. Christian attended the German school in Quito, Ecuador and so is fluent in German. Right now I have 'second-grade' German – my goal is to learn along with the kids! Christian also studied French at the Sorbonne in Paris for a summer, and I have been learning French since arriving in Switzerland three years ago, so we are both fairly capable in French.

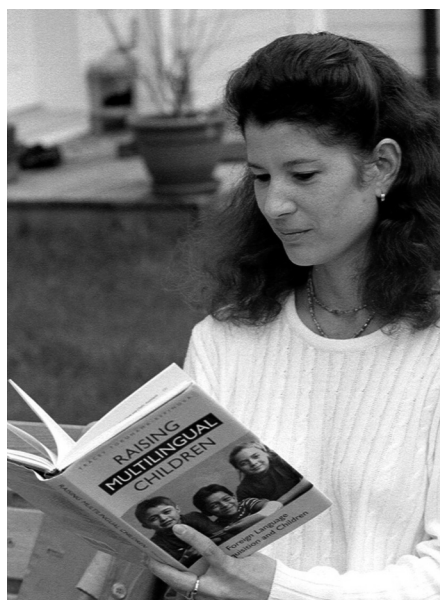
Why did you choose a German language school?

When my oldest child, Natalie, was three and a half we had to make a decision about which school she would attend. We were in Boston (USA) at the time and had very little choice about where to apply. We had to choose between the German School or the American School. We realised that coming from the German system Natalie would always have the option to return to the American school, but if she started with the American system she would not be able to change to a German school due to the language barrier.

In Geneva we had the option of the local French speaking schools, but chose to stick with the German system as we realised the children would learn French from the environment, and the German school had a better reputation than the local French-speaking school in our village.

Do you plan for your children to continue in the German school until leaving, or would you choose another school language?

We have been extremely happy with the German school – the quality of education is excellent and I feel the children have benefitted greatly from this experience. The German school in Quito (Ecuador) was remodelled three years ago. It is one of the best campuses, academically and architecturally, in South America, so I presume we will continue in the system. However, my children now have options to go to other German, English or even



Tracey reading her new book

French schools in Ecuador, or anywhere else in the world we may be sent. I think this will also serve them later in life, when they think about university study as well. They will have options many other students would not be able to entertain, given their language background.

How do you pass on your parental cultural heritages of Japanese-American and Ecuadorian to the children?

All of my father's side of the family lives in Hawaii and we try to visit frequently. Last summer we celebrated my grandmother's eightieth birthday with family, and it was wonderful to see how the warmth of family doesn't cool because of our distant address. We traced back our family trees two years ago – the children loved helping with the old photos and discovering their roots. Natalie,

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Autistic Spectrum Disorder can go undetected

I meant to write back to you after my letter about the delay in my son's language development was published in Vol.11. No.2, 1994. At the time I had too many worries about my son that I couldn't get my thoughts together.

The query by Ann Giles about her daughter's possible language disorder in BFN 2001, Vol.18 No.1. reminded me very much about the problems I had with my son who was finally diagnosed with Aspergers Syndrome (AS) two years ago (at the age of eight). Dr Carolyn Letts' reply that 'any hint of Autistic Spectrum Disorder (of which Aspergers Syndrome is one) would probably have been detected by now' is quite different from the reality.

No-one who came into contact with my son mentioned the possibility that he might have AS. None of the professionals – his teachers, his GP, the child psychologist we went to see about his toileting problems – mentioned it. It was by pure chance that I heard of it from a person I came to know on the Internet. Yet when he was diagnosed we were told it was a 'typical case' of AS. Many people have had a similar experience, and many cases just go undetected until they are adults.

Autism is a 'Spectrum Disorder' which means there is an extremely wide range in severity from the classic Autism (the person doesn't have any interest in communicating with the outside world), to near 'normal' (the person may be very intelligent and is willing to communicate, but does so in an odd manner). The symptoms vary greatly too and no one Autistic child is exactly like the other. AS is at the 'normal' end of the spectrum and that makes it very difficult to detect. My son had problems at school listening to teachers, concentrating, finishing tasks, making friends, etc., and was on the Special Needs Register for over two years, but because he always scored above average in tests, (to his teacher's amazement) the school wasn't prepared to do anything about his difficulties.

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CAN AUTISTIC... *from page three*

We are an English/ Japanese family. When I wrote to you about my son's language problems, he was three and had only just started talking. Once he started talking in sentences, (at the age of four) he talked in English and Japanese at about the same level and never mixed the two languages. When he started school at five he learned to read very quickly and at times he seemed to learn to speak by reading books! Even now, his reading ability in both Japanese and English, is far ahead of his peers, and far more advanced than his speaking ability (which is 6-9 months behind, according to his speech therapist). Someone suggested that it's probably because reading is a one-way process which is easier for him to handle than talking.

"But there are many things we can do to help him cope with his problems now that we know exactly what they are."

He's ten now and is a more balanced bilingual than his sister, who is two years older than him. Two years ago, just before his diagnosis, we moved him from the local state primary school to a very small Steiner/Waldorf school, (only 9 children in a class) where the class teacher stays with the same class throughout the lower school programme (age 6-14). Although he still has his problems, he is much happier at school and made friends with all the children in his class in the first term. He takes it in his stride learning French and German, and loves knitting (part of Handcraft curriculum) and circus skills (equivalent of PE in other schools).

The 'social skills' workshop last summer, run by the speech therapy unit specializing in Autism, made him (and us) aware of which area in communication he found difficult. Autism is not curable. My son will always have AS. But there are many things we can do to help him cope with his problems now that we know exactly what they are. We have become more tolerant of his quirky behaviour and know what to do in advance to alleviate some of the more difficult problems.

Sorry it's gone on so long – I can't stop when I start talking about AS. I went through hell for years feeling as though I had failed as a mother, I'd like to help anyone who may be going through the same thing. Thank you for reading.

Kazumi Honda, Reading, England.
email: kazumi@edobarn.demon.co.uk

NEWS FROM THE USA:

Bilingualism - At What Cost?

James Crawford

Are American schools spending too much on children whose English is limited? That has long been the contention of those seeking to outlaw bilingual education. Their argument seems to resonate with voters in states like California and Arizona, where English-only school initiatives have recently passed. It taps resentments about what some consider to be excessive public expenditures on 'special' programs for immigrants.

The irony is that reliable data are almost entirely lacking on the costs of bilingual education. State and federal governments have rarely tried to study this issue in a serious way. So it is difficult to justify claims that programs for English learners are 'too expensive' – or conversely, that schools should be spending more.

Of course, lack of evidence has never been an obstacle for English-only proponents. In the early 1990s, the US English organization simply concocted its own estimate. The financial burden of bilingual schooling on federal, state, and local governments, they claimed, was a shocking \$8 to \$12 billion each year.

In point of fact, actual expenditures at the time – under the federal Bilingual Education Act – totalled approximately 2% of the US English estimate (State and local spending was mostly impossible to quantify). Pressed on how it had arrived at the \$8 to \$12 billion figure, the group explained that it had taken the average per-pupil expenditure for all 50 states and multiplied that amount by the estimated range of limited-English-proficient (LEP) students nationwide.

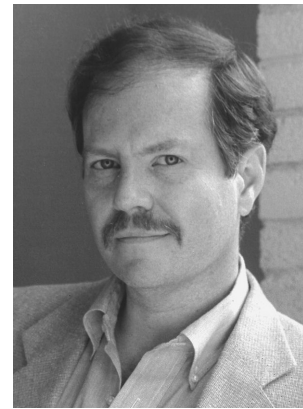
This crude procedure involved two erroneous assumptions:

First, that all LEP children are in bilingual programs – which is far from the case. Studies have consistently shown that a majority of these students are enrolled in various forms of all-English instruction.

Second, that the cost of educating LEP students is identical to the cost of educating non-LEP students. That would be welcome news, if true. It would also vindicate the cost-effectiveness of current programs for English learners. Unfortunately, it is not true. As any educator can attest, special populations cost more to teach because of extra demands for training, materials, assessment and administration.

So the relevant question becomes: what is the marginal expense of these programs? In other words, how much more does bilingual education – or its English-only alternatives – cost than mainstream schooling? This is what policymakers need to know (but usually do not) in order to budget reasonable subsidies to help school districts serve the needs of LEP children.

States and localities rarely collect reliable data in this area. The problem is that such costs are extremely difficult to disaggregate



from overall school expenditures. Few outside researchers have managed to quantify them either.

One exception, a California study conducted in the late 1980s, reported some fascinating results. It found that – with an adequate supply of qualified teachers – schools spent about the same (an extra \$200 per child each year) to provide quick-exit bilingual education, late-exit bilingual education, or all-English immersion. What cost substantially more (\$876) was dual immersion and ESL 'pullout' (\$1,198) because of the additional administrative and teaching staff required, respectively.

More than a decade later, a federal court found that the state of Arizona had set an arbitrary \$150 ceiling on per capita subsidies for LEP students. That amount was obviously too little, the judge said, because it forced poor districts to terminate language assistance programs for many students who still needed them. But exactly how much spending was appropriate remains to be determined. Pending a final decision in the case, *Flores v. Arizona*, the state legislature has declined to increase the expenditures.

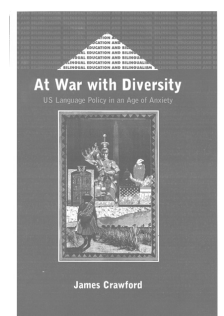
Sadly, there is one consideration that gets little notice in this debate: the economic benefits that accrue from second-language skills, both for individuals and for a society that faces a shortage of functional bilinguals and biliterates. Rather than gripe about the financial burden of English learners, Americans should consider the opposite side of the coin. A nation that fails to cultivate its linguistic resources will ultimately pay what Kenji Hakuta and Catherine Snow have called 'the costs of monolingualism'.

For further information visit his web site at: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford/>

James Crawford's latest book is

At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety
Published by Multilingual Matters, 2000, 143p.

ISBN 1-85359-505-5
Price £9.95/ \$15.95



TV-THEORY

I am German and have lived in Edinburgh for over 20 years together with my Scottish partner who does not speak German. We have always stuck to the *one parent, one language* approach. Our son Robbie is now six and half and speaks German and English equally fluently, but of course they are differently strong in different circumstances. At times his German (the minority language) has been possibly even stronger than English.

I think there is one distinguishing feature which played a major role in his good accent-free acquisition of German. When I would permit some TV watching, (he was around two years) we decided to make it German videos only. Then it was the taped regular weekly children's program *'Die Sendung mit der Maus'*, which a friend offered to tape for us. This gave Robbie an excellent varied and ongoing children's program which was up to date with the latest children's characters in Germany and which used a

"This gave Robbie an excellent varied and ongoing children's program which was up to date with the latest children's characters in Germany..."

variety of accents from different German regions. It has now become a very popular event when this friend arrives (about every three months) with another full four hours of a *'Maus'* tape. We treat and pamper him appropriately – so long may it last!

However, I am always mean with the time Robbie is allowed in front of the box: a maximum of half an hour twice a day. Also, initially, (not now) I was very keen for him not to watch any TV or videos in English, which he did anyway in childminder's houses or at friends, so he wasn't deprived of the knowledge of *'Tele-Tubbies'* or *'Tom and Jerry'*.

To have this kind of program on tape (as opposed to children's feature films or comics) makes the program presenters or the figures in it more of an ongoing reality, since they continue from month to month to produce different stories. These characters have become his friends. Also other children in Germany know them and we can recognize pictures and figures when visiting bookshops or other stores in Germany. He now mostly chooses to watch *'Maus'* but occasionally he decides to watch an English video. Another advantage of ongoing new programs is

that they don't become so boring for the adults; I often get drawn in by an interesting report on for instance *'how do the holes get into Swiss cheese'* or *'how are wellies made'* with the result that we talk about it. Even John, my partner, likes them and has picked up an enormous amount of German by watching the tapes. Other than these video tapes we generally don't watch much TV with Robbie, only once or twice a week selected programs.



Robbie

My main point is: the powerful medium of TV can be used constructively to boost the minority language. I think the child can be helped to develop an enthusiasm in the minority language by the provision of a good recorded regular children's program, which must be ongoing and contemporary. It should not be too difficult to obtain, either by recording these programs yourself or asking a grandparent or a friend to do it for you.

And just to finish our story – although this has nothing to do with my point of making use of TV power. Since Robbie was on the road to grasping both languages well, I agreed for him to go to a Gaelic medium nursery at three and half and school at five. My partner was very keen on Gaelic, his forefathers spoke it and he had learned it as an adult. There is also a revival of Scottish Gaelic – a Gaelic-medium primary school opened in Edinburgh about 12 years ago. That means that he speaks English to his father and most friends outside the house and German to his mother and some friends (aided by German TV) and Gaelic to everyone at school. I imagine that he will probably never be as fluent in Gaelic than in the

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More comments on Semantic-Pragmatic Disorder

I was very interested in the letter from Ann Giles (Vol. 18 No.1). My daughter, Ruth, now 13, was diagnosed when quite young as having semantic-pragmatic language disorder and autistic tendencies. I made sure she received appropriate help and her difficulties have now been substantially overcome. I now spend quite a lot of my time supporting other parents of children with similar difficulties.

I quite agree with Dr. Carolyn Letts, who answered the query, that any Autistic Spectrum Disorder should have been picked up by now but, sadly, I know from experience how often it fails to be identified. Parents who are having difficulty obtaining a satisfactory diagnosis should be aware that there are a number of specialist assessment centres that can help. Most of them unfortunately have very long waiting lists, but at least you will eventually get satisfactory answers to your questions.

At one stage, our daughter's language was so poor, we were happy to accept anything from her, in whatever language it came. She received intensive language therapy in a language unit, and her English really took off then. We were so delighted to be able to converse with her at all that we did not push the German and that has lagged behind, though she is now learning it at secondary school. We do feel that it is better to master one language, and get by in another, than to be struggling in two or more languages.

Parents in the UK who are concerned about their children's language development can get information and advice from the charity Afasic. The helpline number is 08453 55 55 77.

Alison Hüneke, Wallington, England.

Problems on diagnosing Autistic Spectrum Disorder

While the characteristics of 'classic' Autistic Spectrum Disorder should be apparent by at least school-entry age, I recognise that professionals may be reluctant to use the diagnosis until absolutely certain. With milder instances (as found with Asperger's Syndrome) there may be uncertainty (and sometimes disagreement between professionals) about whether a child falls into this category or not. This may explain some of the difficulties experienced by your readers in getting a firm diagnosis. Autism is identified on the basis of difficulties in three areas of functioning (sometimes referred to as the 'autistic

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PROBLEMS...from page five

triad'), but in some cases the impairment in one or more of these areas may be comparatively mild. These areas are, first, a **social impairment**: the individual does not interact socially with others in the normal way and may not seek social contact in the same way that others do. This may be manifest mainly in verbal communication with the milder forms, but there will usually be problems with non-verbal social interaction (e.g. use of gesture, facial expression, 'behaviour' in social situations) as well.

Second, a **communication impairment**: again although poor language may be a feature, the autistic individual will find other forms of communication difficult as well. Alternatively, they may have comparatively well developed language, but use it in socially inappropriate ways (often the case with Asperger's Syndrome).

Third, **impairment of imaginative behaviour**, with repetitive, meaningless activities (e.g. lining up toy cars as opposed to creating imaginative scenarios with them) often predominating. This means that even though language *per se* may be very limited (or hard to assess because it is not the native language of the professional assessing), if the child is able to engage in some symbolic or imaginative play then s/he is unlikely to be autistic.

There should be no way in which 'being bilingual' can mask these characteristics. Where a child does not interact socially with others in the expected way, has poor general communication (linguistic and non-linguistic) and displays repetitive or obsessive behaviour to the detriment of creativity, (with some this may mean obsessive talking about favourite topics) then autism may be a possibility. This is independent of cultural or linguistic background.

The issue of whether to 'drop' one or more of the child's languages should s/he be diagnosed with a communication impairment is one which understandably causes a lot of concern. As a speech and language therapist (SALT), I feel this is a decision that must be driven by the needs of the family, wider cultural group and the child. It should not be dictated by language of teachers and therapists (and indeed this is expressly indicated in professional guidelines for SALTs); I recognise, though, that lack of appropriate resources (to employ bilingual co-workers for example) may cause difficulties in some areas.

Dr Carolyn Letts

Department of Speech, University of Newcastle, Newcastle upon Tyne NE1 7RU, England.



Adoption and Trilingualism

Two months ago we adopted a girl aged three years and a boy who has just turned two. The children are English. The boy has just started to speak (he has around 20 words) and the girl started nursery in January. I would really appreciate input on raising my two adopted children trilingually.

I am an EAL teacher and bilingual Italian/English. I was myself a trilingual child with Italian, English and Swedish. My husband is English and he has some Italian. In the near future we are going to move to Holland for some time.

I would like my children to learn Italian, but with issues such as settling in and bonding I have opted not to speak to them in Italian yet. My parents have been here recently for four weeks so they have picked up a few words.

Yasmin Ferrari Beveridge, England.

You obviously have had experience yourself of being trilingual in your childhood, which is a big advantage. You know that it is possible to keep three languages in play and not turn out mixed up or confused, as many people believe. The fact that you actively plan to raise your children trilingually also indicates that you have a positive attitude to them developing proficiency in three languages. You will therefore have the patience to encourage them to communicate in Italian, English and Dutch, without them becoming too frustrated or unwilling to continue with the process. It is important that your husband is in agreement with the idea of the children being brought up trilingually and with the family language policy to be adopted.

Probably the most well-known strategy for bilingual family language development is the *one parent, one language* approach, where each parent speaks a different language to the children. In your situation, the third language will probably be Dutch, which your children will most likely pick up

easily after the move, as it will be the language of the country where they are living and where they go to school.

If you decide to adopt the *one parent, one language* policy you will also have to decide which language(s) to use when speaking to your husband. Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert, writing in the BFN Vol. 17, No.1, 2000, says that in reality it is often very difficult for parents just to keep speaking one language and that very often '*trilingualism is much more of a fluid and changeable phenomenon than bilingualism*'. She also says that it is important that trilingual children are reassured that parents understand and also speak all three languages, to a certain degree, so that they will be a position to understand when their children go through the stage of mixing their languages in their efforts to communicate. Also, in this way, parents can act as appropriate role models for their children, who can see how they switch language to suit the particular situation.

I would recommend that you start using Italian with your children as soon as possible, especially since they have had some contact with this language, due to your parents' recent visit. The importance of establishing effective relationships in one particular language and helping children to identify a particular language with a particular speaker has been emphasised by many researchers, and would seem to be of special importance in your situation where the children involved are adopted. If they feel comfortable relating to you in Italian they will cease wondering why you have decided to change from using English in your dealings with them.

Anne-Marie de Mejía

Dr Anne-Marie de Mejía is a member of the BFN advisory board and works at the Universidad del Valle, Cali, Colombia.

HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Max Knight (7 years), bilingual (German-English), from New York City was looking at a photo of a boy in a yellow shirt

Max: *Hier ist der Junge, der keine Mutter und keinen Vater mehr hat.* (Here's the boy who doesn't have a mom and a dad anymore.)

Mother: *Ach, er war ein Waisenkind.* (Oh, he was an orphan.)

Max: *Nein, ein gelbes Kind.* (No, a yellow kid.)

Weiss or *waise* is a homophone.

Waisenkind means 'orphan' (child) *weisses Kind* means 'white child', or here child dressed in white.

Gabriele Dehn-Knight, New York.

INTERVIEW ... from page three

Gabriel and Mateo realised their names came from relatives several generations back.

Being with the Ecuadorian embassy here in Switzerland we have a lot of contact with other Ecuadorian families and share national holidays with them. We also visit Ecuador yearly, and are lucky to have relatives from both sides of the family visit us here in Switzerland.

How do you celebrate special days such as Christmas, Thanksgiving or Carnival in your multicultural household?

At Christmas we have a tree with decorations from all around the world, and three Nativity scenes – from Ecuador, America and Japan, which friends have given to us. I am particularly partial to Thanksgiving, however, because it's the one holiday that all Americans celebrate, despite their religious views. I think the simple value of being thankful for all is a cross-cultural one that should be cultivated

Carnival was not celebrated in my upbringing, but here in Switzerland and in Ecuador there is a great deal of festivity and dressing-up. We explain to the kids where and how the holiday originates and let them point out the differences to us, so they acknowledge the similarities themselves.

Which languages do you use when you all sit down together as a family at the dinner table?

At dinner I always speak in English and my husband in Spanish. Together we speak English, probably because we started using English while at university together. The children only address their father in Spanish and me in English. That's part of the consistency I mentioned earlier which is so important for children, especially when they are young.

What languages do you read and sing to your children?

I read to my children primarily in English, but that is because the kids and I are used to that. If they ask for a book in French, Spanish or German I'll read that as well, but they usually ask for English books. My husband reads mainly in Spanish and when going through non-Spanish books likes to point out the Spanish equivalent for the children.

I love learning songs with my children, who are all very musical, but I have a terrible voice! I enjoy much more hearing them than singing myself! I ask them to teach me the German and French songs they hear from school.

What are the advantages of being an expatriate multilingual family?

Being an expatriate has a wealth of advantages that lend themselves to multilingualism. The key factor for my children has been opportunities – using their languages in a meaningful context means they have many chances to practice, experiment and develop their language skills.

A child who is in a monolingual environment faces a much greater challenge to cultivate foreign language skills, because the opportunities for meaningful use are far less. Motivation is diminished, because the foreign

language is not needed for survival, such as getting through school and playing with local children.

And the disadvantages?

Being an expatriate can have disadvantages if one is not prepared for the challenges or begins without a strategy for success. As a counsellor in international schools in Tokyo and Ecuador I realised that many problems were linked to transition. The children were either just arriving, just getting ready to leave (or their best friend was just arriving or getting ready to leave) and so they spent much of their time in transition, and unable to focus on settling in and enjoying their situation. Luckily we came with a plan to get the most out of our situation and to take advantage of the opportunities available, including the exposure to languages.

What are your future plans now?

I am currently compiling a collection of essays for a second book, *Issues in Multilingualism*, based on the fascinating questions that come up in the workshops I give for parents and teachers on raising multilingual children. These include questions such as 'Is there a link between musical ability and foreign language ability?', 'What language do multilinguals do math in (and does it matter?)', 'Is there a difference between trilingualism and bilingualism?', and on issues such as 'Adoption and bilingualism' and 'Bilingualism from the womb'. I continue to give several workshops a month in Switzerland and France and love this contact. I get a real rush of energy by sharing my research and helping other families on the road to successful multilingualism.

** Raising Multilingual Children - Foreign Language Acquisition and Children.*
By T. Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001)
Bergin & Garvey. ISBN 0-89789-750.

Please send us any material which you think might be of interest to our readers. Remember the Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you!

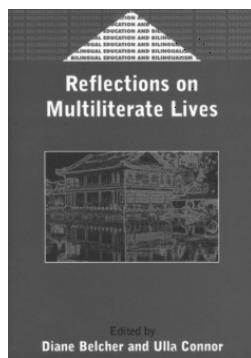
TV-THEORY...from page five

other two. But – who knows! In any case, that is not the point. He is now obtaining a valuable insight into one part of Scottish culture which has suffered a lot of oppression over the few centuries. I have also started to learn Gaelic and I am fascinated by so many aspects of my host country (music and songs, place names, community spirit and cultural events, etc.) which I was not aware of before. So, I have now Robbie helping me with my homework and I help him with his! It works and it's great! I am told by other native Gaelic speakers that Robbie is very good with his Gaelic and that he has excellent pronunciation. I have the impression (and I think others have mentioned this) that it has something to do with him being already primed to understand the concept of different languages and that his tongue was already used to acrobatics!

P.S.

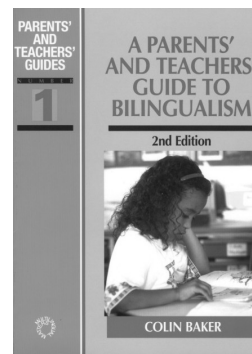
Other points to mention are that there should be a lack of embarrassment when talking in a minority language to the child in public because embarrassment transmits from the adult to the child. And songs and jokes – how important are they? Robbies latest joke is that he imitates my accent in English (which I will probably never lose), or he says 'go and say this or that again (in English)' and then he laughs his head off when I say it. Also how do you handle bilingual domestic arguments? Having to translate in these circumstances drives me mad!

Helga Rhein, Edinburgh, Scotland.



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Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the types of families with whom you would like to get in touch.

Great Britain

Carl & Miki Ames
 Tel: 01746 761389 e-mail: miki@mames.freemove.co.uk
English, German and Japanese speaking family living in Shropshire. Kai (son) born 17.02.00. Looking to meet other German and Japanese speaking families in the Midlands area.

Janice Weiss e-mail: weissfamily@netway.at
Janice with her bilingual German/English family will re-locate to Berlin in the summer of 2002 and would be most grateful if anyone could give her any useful information and tips about bilingual education in that area.

Carole Paquis e-mail: cpaquis@care4free.net
Carole plans to start a French school for bilingual children in Walsall / North Birmingham area. She would like to get in touch with anyone who has experience of starting a minority language school. Any advice would be gratefully received.

GLOSSARY

Incipient Bilingualism = The early stages of bilingualism where one language is not strongly developed. Beginning to acquire a second language.

CODE-SWITCHING *continued from page two*

mistakes children make when applying morphological rules where they shouldn't, eventually they use those rules correctly. As has been shown, the speech of adults has little to do with that. All in all, these three processes show that Annika is on her way to developing both of her languages in a sophisticated manner.

So if I was Annika's parent, I wouldn't see that any form of correction regarding Code-Switching at this point would help Annika's development in either of the two languages. She is already handling three processes at the same time; to try to correct her code-switching would only confuse her. However, apart from these linguistic arguments, I have to look at Annika's needs. If she asks for a correct translation, that cannot be ignored. It is an appeal for linguistic assistance and part of her metalinguistic development. That development cannot be taught but Annika needs feedback. A significant factor in language development is social interaction. My interaction with Annika could look like this. I ask her if she knows a similar word or if she can describe it. If that is not successful, I say the complete sentence in French and ask her to say the sentence in German. However, this violates the *one person, one language* principle which is why asking for a similar word or description should be tried first. An alternative strategy is to simply wait a moment and see if Annika corrects herself.

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