

the
bilingual family
newsletter

MULTILINGUAL
MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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**2004
Volume 21
Number 2**

editorial

First of all, thank-you to all the readers who returned the questionnaire included in the last set of reminder notices. It is a big help to us to keep in touch with what you, the readers, feel are the major issues facing you. If have not received a copy of the questionnaire and would like to have your say, please get in touch. Please also see the article on page 8 for more information on the results of the survey.

Also featured in this issue is the life-story of Elisabeth Baumfree, better known as Sojourner Truth, a prominent bilingual ex-slave and anti-slavery campaigner. Her story is a moving reminder of the power of language, both as a tool of oppression, and as a force for change.

Our queries section focuses on some of your concerns regarding the *One Parent - One Language* method to coincide with the launch of our new title on this subject (please see page 4).

Jim Crawford's column looks at the role language is playing in the run up to the presidential elections. Whilst events surrounding the occupation of Iraq will, quite rightly, be the main issue of the election, it is nevertheless a telling sign of the power now held by America's minority communities, and in particular the Spanish-speaking population, that nearly all politicians are now paying lip-service at least (no pun intended) to the importance of linguistic diversity.

Sami Grover

Travelin' and Testifyin': A Bilingual Bonds-woman's Journey to Freedom

Dr. des. I.M. Laversuch



In 1787, in the tiny town of Hurley, about seven miles west of the Hudson River and ninety miles north of New York City, a slave by the name of Elisabeth Baumfree gave birth to her twelfth child born in bondage. Elisabeth named her daughter Isabella. Like most slaves in Hurley, Isabella grew up a monolingual speaker of Dutch. Those first years in that small Afro-Dutch community would remain cherished memories for Isabella throughout her life. Her father, James, was a somber but gentle man, respected by everyone in the river valley; and her mother, Elisabeth, was a warm and attentive woman who cherished Isabella all the more having had all but two of her children sold away from her. As for her owner, Colonel Johannis Hardenbergh, Isabella would later say that he was harder than some but better than most. He rarely abused his slaves, and even permitted some families, like Isabella's, to raise a little tobacco and corn which they could exchange for food and clothing. In comparison to many slaves of

the day, then, the Baumfrees lived a relatively peaceful existence. All that changed, however, when the Colonel died and his son, Charles, inherited the Baumfree family. From one day to the next, their situation went from uncertain to desperate.

They were forced to surrender their precious plot of land and were made to live in the dank earthen cellar of the lavish hotel Charles had had built for himself. Into her old age, Isabella would recall the penetrating damp which twisted her parents' arthritic limbs. It is a truly a testament to their faith and ingenuity that they did not freeze or starve to death or succumb to some dread disease. But their family sufferings were not at an end. When Charles died, the surviving members of the Hardenbergh family decided to put the Baumfree family up for sale. The family was to be torn apart like tens of millions of people before them. Finally the day came and the Baumfrees were set on the auction block along with the other Hardenbergh "livestock". The bidding was brisk that day. While slavers from around the region dickered over the price for her two elderly parents, the then nine-year-old Isabella was sold quickly for 100 dollars. As was the custom, the family was given no time to say goodbye to one another. In a flurry of action, Isabella was loaded into a cart with a flock of sheep also purchased on that day and transported to the home of her new owners, the Nelly family.

Unlike the Hardenburghs, the Nellys did not speak Dutch, but were monolingual

Continued on Page 2

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Travelin' and Testifyin'

Continued from page 1

speakers of English. The inevitable misunderstandings which resulted from this language barrier were invariably blamed on Isabella. When she failed to understand her new owners, she was accused of being willful and insolent. Mrs. Nelley was particularly impatient with her new Dutch-speaking slave girl. As Isabella would later recount in her personal memoirs: "If they sent me for a frying-pan, not knowing what they meant, perhaps I carried them the pot-hooks[...]Then, oh! How angry mistress would be with me!" More than once, Mrs. Nelley flew into a rage over Isabella's 'failure' to understand her directions and would not be satisfied until her husband John had soundly thrashed the child. On one occasion, Mr. Nelley whipped Isabella so severely that the little girl's back eventually split open and her blood flowed in rivulets. The emotional and physical scars from those first language lessons would mark Isabella for the rest of her life. In time, however, she did learn to speak English and became a Dutch-English bilingual. Indeed, it was Isabella's ability to master the languages of her tormentors which she would later use as an adult to undermine the very system of degradation engineered to silence her.

Bent on securing her freedom, Isabella elicited the support of a kindly Dutch Reformist couple who lived nearby. The Van Wagenens were pious people and staunch abolitionists. With their help, Isabella was eventually able to escape with her infant daughter, Sophia, in her arms. This was not the last time that Isabella's language skills would be her salvation. In an unprecedented legal case, she hired two prominent Dutch lawyers, John H. Rutzer and A. Bruyn Hasbrouck, to sue for the immediate return of her son, Peter. At the age of five, Peter had been illegally sold down South to a sadistic Alabama slaver who would later be convicted of bludgeoning his own wife to death. Isabella persisted, won the court case, and Peter was returned to her.

It was Isabella's ability to master the languages of her tormentors which she would later use as an adult to undermine the very system of degradation engineered to silence her.

Shortly after winning her law case, Isabella had a vision in which a voice told her to travel the country and tell whomever would listen about the horrible truths of slavery. Isabella obeyed. And, in honor of this vision, she officially changed her name and became "Sojourner Truth".

True to her vision, for nearly half a century Sojourner Truth traversed the United States telling her story to packed audiences of people, rich and poor, who had come to hear the "Libyan Sibyl" speak.

Once punished and beaten for her English, she soon rose to become one of the leading orators of her time, lending her powerful voice to the ever-rising chorus of anti-slavery activists and women's rightists like Frederick Douglass, William Lloyd Garrison, Harriet Beecher Stowe, Harriet Tubman, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and President Abraham Lincoln. Indeed, her most famous speech, entitled, "Ain't I A Woman?" is still counted today as one of the landmarks of oratory history.

What makes the story of Sojourner Truth's life a particularly powerful symbol for the BFN community on this the 120th anniversary of her death is her uncompromising ability to repeatedly overcome the most incredible obstacles. The great grand daughter of a Mohawk Native American, the daughter of West Africans, a child raised in a Dutch American community of the United States, she is the very embodiment of multiculturalism. Further, her phenomenal dedication to using both of her languages to liberate not only herself but those around her can serve as a positive and powerful reminder for us to use our own special linguistic gifts to build constructive cross-cultural alliances, and lift our voices, as she did so tirelessly, to speak for those whose cries for justice have as yet gone unanswered.

If you want to find out more, read:

1. *Narrative of Sojourner Truth: A Bondswoman of Olden Time*. The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth Century Black Women Writers. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991.
2. Mabee, Carleton. *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend*. New York and London: New York University Press, 1993.
3. Painter, Nell Irvin. *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*. New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company, 1996.

letters



Bilingualism and Adoption

As a Speech and Language Therapist, I was interested to read the correspondence between Colin Baker and Roger Horney (*Queries, BFN 20:1*)

The main issue is, I believe, that Sasha's parents are concerned about what they perceive as a delay in her expressive language development. Any child whose communication development is causing concern should be referred for a speech and language therapy assessment. The therapist would take a case history and discuss with parents or carers such factors as the linguistic background of the child/ family, in addition to assessing the child. With this information the therapist would be able to offer the appropriate advice or

intervention. In some cases, information and advice about language development might be all that is needed; in others, further observation might be indicated.

Many speech and language therapists work with children who are expected to become bilingual. We would not discourage parents and carers from speaking languages other than English with their children. However, in this case it is clear that Sasha's parents do not wish to introduce Mandarin at this stage.

In the UK, referrals to speech and language therapy can be made through a G.P. or Health Visitor (in some areas parents can refer directly to the Service).

Sheila Anderson, Keighley, UK

NEWS FROM THE USA



Plus ça change Jim Crawford

American tolerance of linguistic diversity seems to have come a long way in a short time – at least, judging by the behavior of American politicians. As recently as 1996, the Republican Party platform included an English-only plank. Its presidential nominee, Bob Dole, cited bilingualism as one of “the divisive forces tearing at our country”, arguing that “we need the glue of language to help hold us together. ... English should be acknowledged once and for all as the official language of the US”.

This year, by contrast, virtually all presidential contenders have made efforts to speak Spanish on the campaign trail. Virtually nobody has complained – except for those who have been subjected to their solecisms.

The Democrats’ early front-runner, Howard Dean, drew laughter from a Latino audience when denouncing what President Bush had done to “*nosotros ingresos*” (us incomes). Another also-ran, Joe Lieberman, caused merriment by mixing Spanish with Yiddish: “*Viva chutzpah!*” Fortunately, neither followed the example of a congressman on a visit to Mexico, who announced: “*Estoy embarazada*” (I’m pregnant). Meanwhile, George W. Bush has continued to butcher the Spanish language and the English language with equal aplomb.

Whether they applaud this trend or not, Anglo-Americans are beginning to recognize that the Hispanic population has come of age politically. The latter grew by nearly 60 percent during the 1990s, overtaking black Americans as the nation’s largest minority group. While Mexican Americans and Puerto Ricans tend to lean Democratic, Cuban Americans are overwhelmingly Republican, and the party loyalties of other Latinos remain in flux. Thus these groups represent sizable blocs of “swing voters”, not only in California, Texas, and New York but, more importantly, in closely contested states such as Florida, Arizona, and New Mexico.

In 2004, with Americans divided by issues like the Iraq war and a slumping economy,

most voters care a great deal more about their party’s fortunes in the November election than about the symbolic politics of language. For Latinos, on the other hand, the symbolism is significant. Even though many of them speak limited Spanish themselves, they appreciate the respect for their ancestral tongue, however token, and politicians increasingly feel pressure to provide it. Now, it seems, candidates can usually do so without risking Anglo support.

Yet tolerance has its limits. The Democratic standard-bearer John Kerry is quite willing to show off his halting Spanish, while being very careful to conceal his fluent French. Despite bantering off-the-record with French journalists, he reportedly refuses to be recorded speaking their vernacular. The political peril is obvious. One Bush cabinet member has already leveled the charge that Kerry “looks French”, seeking to capitalize on some Americans’ loathing for “Old Europe” following the split over Iraq. Sounding French as well could be the *coup de grâce*.

President Bush has openly criticized the English-only movement – a calculated move – but does he reject the xenophobia behind it? In a spontaneous moment, his personal feelings seemed to come through. The occasion was a joint press briefing in Paris with Jacques Chirac, the President of France, in May 2002. An American reporter asked Bush a question, then turned to Chirac and asked him, respectfully, in French – Chirac is fluent in English – to comment as well (“*Monsieur le Président, pouvez-vous ajouter votre sentiments?*”). Caught off guard by the journalist’s bilingual ability, Bush responded with ridicule: “Very good. The guy memorizes four words, and he plays like he’s intercontinental. ... I’m impressed. Que bueno! Now I’m literate in two languages.”

Did Bush mean to suggest that proficient bilingualism is inappropriate for a “real American”? Did he intend to insult the French, implying that they should get used to the hegemony of English? Whatever the case, it is hard to imagine such a statement from any other leader representing his nation abroad – if nothing else, because of the embarrassment it would cause at home. But Bush’s gaffe received little attention in the US, even though the White House posted the comments on its Web site. Perhaps it believed the incident would boost the President’s popularity.

Apparently it’s still true that – to paraphrase H. L. Mencken – an American politician can never go too far wrong by overestimating the parochialism of his constituents.

James Crawford’s latest book is *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom, 5th ed.* (Los Angeles: Bilingual Educational Services, 2004).

CORRECTION

I love my Bilingual Family Newsletter and have passed it on to many! I just wanted to mention that I’ve noticed the advert for the *Two Languages or More* materials on the last page has been printed now in a couple of issues with errors. One is that “kronor” (already plural) can be written Swedish crowns in English, and you might put the equivalency in sterling (about £1 I think!).

The correct contact details for obtaining these materials are:
tel: +46 8 690 95 76
fax: +46 8 690 95 76
e-mail: skolverket.lidi@liber.se

The materials are really good and worth publicising, so it’s great that you’re doing so!

Carol Benson, Sweden

the bfn needs you...

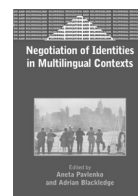
Can you help publicise the *BFN*? Do you have ideas for articles, anecdotes, book reviews, short articles/fillers or other materials? Please contact us on:

info@multilingual-matters.com

The *BFN* is for you, but above all, by you.

NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

Edited by
Aneta Pavlenko (Temple University)
and Adrian Blackledge
(University of Birmingham)



The volume highlights the role of language ideologies in the process of negotiation of identities and shows that in different historical and social contexts different identities may be negotiable or non-negotiable. The chapters address various ways in which individuals may be positioned or position themselves in a variety of contexts. In asking questions about social justice, about who has access to symbolic and material resources, about who is ‘in’ and who is ‘out’, the authors take account not only of localised linguistic behaviours, attitudes and beliefs; they also locate them in wider social contexts which include class, race, ethnicity, generation, gender and sexuality.

Pbk ISBN 1-85359-646-9
£27.95/ US\$44.95/ CAN\$64.95

Queries



Q: One Parent - Which Language?

I am Norwegian, my husband is English, and we have three children, aged 7, 4 and 1. We live in the UK and have stuck to the One-Parent-One-Language (OPOL) rule. My husband does not speak Norwegian, but respects my view on this. It has been challenging at times, but worth the effort as my 7-year-old now has no problem communicating with relatives when we go to Norway. My 4-year-old still mixes English and Norwegian, but his sentence structure is Norwegian.

To my delight, both always address me in Norwegian, so the OPOL approach is definitely working. When I am alone with the children, communication flows freely in Norwegian. When my husband is alone with them they all speak English. All very natural and uncomplicated. What I find more difficult is the times when the whole family is together, for example meal times. Because the children

A: Your family is not the only one with the tricky conundrum of how to keep the OPOL approach going while accommodating a monolingual partner. Typically it is the father who remains monolingual, and it can be frustrating to be always switching languages or isolating one family member.

However, as time goes on things do change and the work you have done establishing Norwegian will bring benefits. The eldest child seems to have a good solid foundation, while the second one is trying very hard. As for number three he will naturally follow the elder ones. Your time together in the afternoons seems productive.

automatically address me in Norwegian, my husband easily gets left out. This is, of course, not pleasant for him. I have recently tried to make meal times English only. The problem is that the children are so used to addressing me in Norwegian that the change is not happening easily.

My 4-year-old still has a long way to go with his Norwegian, but it has been developing well lately. I am concerned that if he gets used to speaking English to me he will discover how easy this is, and stop speaking Norwegian altogether. At the moment he consistently addresses me in Norwegian and it seems heartbreaking to say 'No, speak English please' when all he is doing is what I have been encouraging all along. Is he too young to be able to know when to switch between Norwegian and English?

My 1-year-old is obviously too young to speak, but he will observe me speak English as well as Norwegian to the other children. Will this jeopardize his chances of learning Norwegian? I am aware that 2nd and 3rd children are often less successful at learning the 'minority' language, so I am conscious that I need to give him as much Norwegian input as possible to help him along.

I work part-time, which means every day there is 'room' for Norwegian to be used before my husband comes home. During weekends and holidays, should I reduce the use of Norwegian to a minimum, out of concern for my husband? This would make his life easier, and relieve my guilt, but in my heart of hearts I feel it's unnatural for me to speak English to my children so much of the time.

Astrid Griffiths, UK

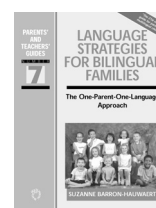
Studies show that over time the emphasis changes from having direct one-to-one contact with the eldest child to using mixed language use as the family grows. This seems inevitable in a bilingual family and, even though the last child may not get such a 'pure' example of Norwegian, at least he has his siblings as a strong role model of 'how' to be bilingual. Around age six or seven your children will switch and mix languages appropriately to suit the conversation subject or company, and if they feel that their father is left out then English will be used more.

Your idea of English-only at mealtimes is kind to your husband, but may hamper your children from speaking to you

naturally. The most important thing is to foster fluent Norwegian, and I am sure your husband would understand this. I would wait until Norwegian is well established in all the children before reducing it in the home.

If you do decide to reduce Norwegian at home then you may want to think about having *language immersion* time in Norway to compensate. Ask your family and friends to help out with language and culture, through reading, songs, films or cooking together. The older ones could even go alone for holidays. As a parent you are a positive role model and they will soon be bilingual with all the efforts you are making.

Suzanne Barron-Hauwert, Malaysia



Language Strategies For Bilingual Families: The One-Parent - One-Language Approach

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

Suzanne has written a superbly clear and accessible account of the daily challenges of family life with several languages. I would warmly recommend this book as the 21st Century guide to parents of multilingual children.
Helen Le Merle

- Provides an inspiring approach to passing on two or more languages
- Family case studies give a fascinating insight into being a multilingual family

This book looks at how families can support and increase bilingualism through planned strategies. One such strategy is the one person-one language approach, where each parent speaks his or her language. Over a hundred families from around the world were questioned and thirty interviewed in-depth about how they pass on their language in bilingual or trilingual families.

June 2004
Pbk ISBN 1-85359-714-7
£14.95/ US\$27.95/ CAN\$39.95



Q: Starting Late - Too Late?

We are a Dutch-English family living in Cornwall. Until recently I haven't spoken Dutch to my children and never thought I really would. What has changed is that we have bought a flat in Holland and that we will be spending a significant amount of time in Holland and that our links with Holland and my family will be much stronger. My husband John already speaks a fair amount of Dutch and is trying to learn more but finding it hard and discouraging work. We have got 3 children, Oliver, Zoe and Lewis.

Oliver is five and just started junior school. He feels antagonistic towards speaking Dutch which is mainly due to my own ambiguous relationship with the language. He has, however, picked up a fair amount of Dutch and will hopefully get used to it.

Zoe is two. I have recently started speaking Dutch to her and she seems fine with that. She doesn't speak any Dutch herself though. Baby Lewis is 11 months now.

We would be very grateful for advice on how to proceed from here! Even though the one parent – one language approach seems very fruitful. I don't want to do it that way. Obviously, I am most grateful to hear of all possible ways to teach our children to speak Dutch properly. Particularly, methods involving the whole family.

We are quite worried and uncertain about the way forward and would therefore be very grateful for your help and advice in our wish to become a bilingual family.

Rita & John Stephen, UK

A: Rita's situation is quite common with fluent speakers of a second language, living away from their home country. They are so comfortable using the language of their partner and the community where they live that they use it

[My eldest son] feels antagonistic towards speaking Dutch which is mainly due to my own ambiguous relationship with the language.

for the majority of the time. Only when children come along do they begin to reassess the situation.

I agree that the *One-Parent-One-Language* approach is not for your family since you don't feel comfortable speaking only Dutch. One strategy which would be suitable is called *one-location-one-language*, where the language is linked to a *place* not a person. You have created an excellent environment for Dutch to thrive in your family by buying a property in Holland. This will give your children a real purpose for learning and speaking Dutch. The fact that you plan to spend lots of time there is

positive too, as you and the children will soon find local friends and have a reason for using Dutch. John's enthusiasm to learn Dutch is great, and he should find lots of relaxed social opportunities with family and friends to pick-up and practise Dutch. Try to speak as much Dutch together as possible in Holland.

Don't worry too much about your children's lack of Dutch, they are still young and have plenty of time to catch up. For Oliver, I would try to find some Dutch books, cartoons or videos to prepare him for trips there, and make your time there fun and exciting so he wants to be there. Dutch should clearly be linked to the flat and family in Holland. Zoe and Lewis are just beginning to be aware of who speaks which language and may benefit from you speaking Dutch to them directly (i.e. reading a story or singing songs) on a one-to-one basis for half-an-hour a day. In a Dutch environment they will soon work out who speaks what and adapt accordingly. As parents you are creating the right conditions for your bilingual and bicultural children to benefit.

Suzanne Barron-Hauwert, Malaysia

Suzanne is the author of "Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One Parent One Language Approach", published by Multilingual Matters (see advert on opposite page). Married to a Frenchman with three young children she has direct experience of bringing up children with two or three languages.

Research Opportunity: Help Needed

Calling all Dutch/French Families

I'm looking for French/Dutch families in the South of France with young children for a research project about bilingual children. The research is about upbringing and linguistic aspects of bilingualism.

I'm a 22 year old Dutch developmental psychology student and I'm studying in France (Montpellier) for 1 semester. If you are interested or want more information you can reach me at: heskevleming@hotmail.com.

Next schoolyear I'm also doing the same study in the Netherlands, If you are interested for this research you can also email me.

Heske Vleming, France

Important Second Language Aquisition Conference - San Sebastian - Basque Country

EuroSLA is a society for people with a research interest in Second Language Acquisition. The next Eurosla conference (Eurosla 14) will take place in Donostia-San Sebastian from September 8 to September 11, 2004. We can confirm the four plenary speakers: Ellen Bialystok, Zoltan Dornyei, Batia Laufer and Carmen Muñoz. We received over 250 proposals, most of them for oral presentations and we have only been able to accommodate 25% of them due to space and time limitations.

The conference also has an exciting social program. The Eurosla 14 welcoming reception will take place on Wednesday evening (September 8) at the Miramar Palace and will be sponsored by Multilingual Matters to launch their new *International Journal of Multilingualism*. On Friday we will have the conference dinner at a typical Basque Cider House.

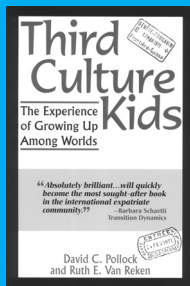
The venue, the Miramar Palace, has beautiful views of San Sebastian bay and is very close to two of San Sebastian's famous beaches so you will be able to enjoy the beach at lunch time or even in the evening.

September is still in the high season and our conference is right before the International Film Festival, so make sure that you book your accommodation as soon as possible. Please visit our web page for updated information about the conference!

<http://www.vc.ehw.es/eurosla2004>

Book Review:

Third Culture Kids: The Experience of Growing Up among Worlds



**David C. Pollock and
Ruth E. Van Reken**

**Reviewed by
Anne-Marie de Mejía**

The title of this book is very revealing. It focuses on experiences that are well recognised by families who move from one country to another, and specifically on how children and young people come to grips with 'growing up among worlds'. These experiences have an unmistakable influence on the development of these so-called 'third culture kids', defined by the authors as, people who have spent 'a significant part of (their) developmental years outside the parents' culture' (page 19).

Third culture kids, or TCK, are accustomed to moving in and out of different cultures, but this does not mean that they do not find it difficult to leave friends and established patterns of

behaving to become 'foreigners, hidden immigrants, adopted, or mirrors' (page 53) in their new country. However, their degree of cultural adaptability or their ability to function as 'cultural chameleons' (page 92) can not only help them survive and enjoy the experience, but also enable them to later provide a bridge between different cultural groups.

This book is written for 'global nomads' and their parents who want to understand their individual cross-cultural experiences in relation to those of other highly-mobile individuals. It contains a wealth of information about the benefits and challenges of a life-style which is becoming increasingly common. The

...the voices of those who have both enjoyed and suffered a cross-cultural childhood share their perceptions of the differing facets of being a global nomad...

authors are well-placed to discuss these matters, as both have had long experience advising parents and their children on how to come to terms with their multicultural experiences.

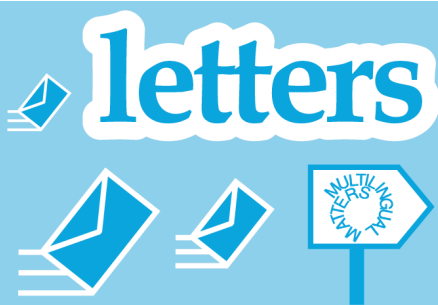
The book is divided into two sections. In the first, the authors highlight key notions, such as 'home', 'cross-culture' and 'high mobility'. They cite at length extracts from the personal testimonies of Erika,

Rob, Heather and Joe, among others, who have all experienced at one time the feeling of 'not belonging anywhere in the world' (page 5). The reader is then provided with the TCK profile, where the authors analyse how this type of lifestyle affects interpersonal relationships and developmental patterns in situations where value systems often come into conflict. The second section is concerned with advising parents on how to maximise the benefits of these experiences by building a strong foundation in family life. The writers also give practical suggestions to both parents and sponsoring organisations on how to minimise the stress associated with coming home, or 'reentry' to the home culture. The book concludes with a plea for understanding of the traumas of 'Adult Third Culture Kids' who have grown up with unresolved conflicts deriving from past TCK experiences.

All in all, this wide-ranging, richly exemplified text constitutes a very valuable and highly readable book, where the voices of those who have both enjoyed and suffered a cross-cultural childhood share their perceptions of the differing facets of being a global nomad and thereby help others to understand similar experiences.

US\$19.95

**Available from Nicholas
Brealey/Intercultural Press
ISBN pbk 1-85788-295-4 2001,
www.interculturalpress.com**



How much do they actually understand?

We live in Germany. I speak French to the children, my husband speaks German to them, and when we are together we speak English. If the children do not watch French TV, play with French friends etc. their vocabulary is limited to what we teach them. I make an effort to increase their vocabulary but with 3 languages, the French vocabulary I use every day can only be limited!

My children sometimes use words that may be unusual in French but are common in English. In both languages the words sound the same. At times people are surprised by our children's imaginative choices of words, but they must not be lured into believing that these children have a wide vocabulary. In fact, their vocabulary is often limited. To make matters worse, when our children speak French, they have no accent and most people assume they understand the language as well as any other child!

Problems start when the children go to school and face a teacher who has little experience of multi-lingual children. As parents we often hear: "Your child doesn't listen. I asked her to do something and she just looks at me blankly!" I realised there was "a problem" with our children when they started to invite French friends over. French mothers would ask our children something and I saw the "blank look" described by the teacher: I knew my

children could not possibly understand the words used because I never used them myself.

For these children the first one to two years at any school can be difficult. Our children often get frustrated. We pick them up exhausted from school. If the child does not understand much, he gets bored. If he has been trying hard to understand, he gets tired. In both cases he eventually, and naturally, "switches off". Quiet children will keep in one corner, active children may be disruptive.

To someone who does not understand what is happening, it can appear as if these children don't pay attention or are not interested and their behaviour can be frustrating to a teacher. So if you have a multilingual child entering school, the chances are that he/she could be misunderstood. Raise awareness: these children work really hard!!

Danielle Huber, Germany

21 Years of the BFN - The Readers Speak

Sami Grover



After 21 years, we thought it time to assess our progress and ask our readers if there is anything we should be doing better. A questionnaire was sent out in our last round of renewal notices. If the survey is to be believed, it would appear we are certainly doing something right. When asked whether the content of the BFN was too specialist/academic, about right, or not specialist/academic enough, out of 44 respondents to this question, 36 felt that we have got it about right. We were, of course, delighted with this response.

Surprisingly, perhaps, one of the most encouraging points came from the few who were choosing not to renew. When asked why they were choosing not to renew, a number answered that they were confident enough to handle it on their own, a wonderful indication of how far awareness of bi/multilingualism has come. Others had subscribed for a number of years and felt that the BFN had helped whilst they were finding their feet, but that they no longer needed it now the kids had grown up. Having said that, other readers whose children have grown up still choose to retain their subscription, but for different reasons: "...we are less dependent on the newsletter but we still read it and enjoy it."

The list of topics that readers would like to see addressed indicates the huge variety of interests within the BFN community. More advice on older children and adults, as opposed to infants and toddlers, was a common theme. We have carried numerous articles featuring teenagers and young adults in the past, but it is probably true to say that the majority of the material we receive is from young families. This is certainly something that we will actively be seeking to address in the future. Another issue which readers mentioned was bi/multiliteracy, as there can be a tendency for literacy to be sidelined by issues surrounding oral proficiency. More information on specific websites, parent groups and other resources was also a common request. Some also suggested that there should be more attention paid to potential problems, with one reader

commenting that "people tend to say very little about problems. Most are so happily multilingual it can verge on the depressing." As always, the best way to ensure that a topic gets the attention it deserves is to write us an article on it! If there is anything you might like to write, then please do get in touch.

A few readers felt that the BFN was too focussed on "middle class, expat families" suggesting that this "gives a distorted view of actual multilingual families worldwide". It would certainly be fair to say that most

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contributors come from well-educated, high status social groups, so-called "elite bilinguals". Over the years we have tried to address issues faced by other immigrant communities but with limited success. This may partly reflect the differing needs and interests of various social groups, but this is not to say that various bi/multilingual communities or groups can't learn from each other. We will certainly continue to encourage contributions from a wider variety of communities around the world.

We have also been assessing how we might further utilise computer technology. Back-issues being made available online, electronic versions of the current issue and renewal reminders by email are all avenues that we are actively investigating. Unsurprisingly, respondents were of mixed opinions, from those who were very keen, to those who were totally uninterested. Whether any are implemented or not will depend, obviously, on the cost and practicality of setting them up but we would like to reassure readers that they will still be able to receive the newsletter and reminders by post.

The most common criticism was that, given its relatively slim nature, the subscription cost was high. This is something we are aware of, but that we can unfortunately do little about given the BFN's small circulation. The newsletter does not make a profit so, without a significant rise in subscriber numbers, any reduction in price would quite simply not

be commercially viable. We will, of course, keep readers comments in mind when making future pricing decisions. Other criticisms included the idea that articles were too long, or that the lay-out is uninviting (something we have tried to address with our recent re-design).

Despite the few criticisms, the overall response was overwhelmingly positive and encouraging. Accolades ranged from "excellent – my favourite read" to "amazing and reassuring". One reader in particular commented that "it helps me to feel normal to be bilingual – thank you!" Others took the opportunity to praise the queries section and our past coverage of bi/multilingual children with learning difficulties.

We would like to thank all those who have responded to the questionnaire so far. Respondents' subscriptions have been credited with two extra issues. Thank you also to those who have offered to distribute promotional leaflets and/or sample copies – we are in the process of having some more printed. In the meantime we will endeavour to learn from your feedback and will continue to develop the coverage and appeal of the BFN. Please keep your comments, articles and subscriptions coming in. It is you, the readers and contributors, who make the BFN what it is – it would certainly be a very different publication without you!

humour



A Narrow Country

When Robbie (now 9 years old) was about 3 or 4 we travelled from our home in Scotland to Germany.

When I accompanied him to the toilet in Heathrow and we closed the door of the cubicle (obviously a bit squashy because it wasn't meant for 2 people) he said:

- "Heisst das hier England, weil's hier so eng ist?"

- Is this called England because it is so 'eng' here? ('eng' means 'narrow' in German).

Helga Rhein, Scotland

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.

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If you do not already subscribe, use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues. If you know of any other families who may be interested in BFN, enter their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

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contacts

If you wish your name and address to be included in the contact section, please send us the following information: Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specifications of the types of families with whom you wish to get in touch.

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Glossary

Enrichment Bilingual Education

A form of bilingual education that seeks to develop additive bilingualism, thus enriching a persons cultural, social and personal education. Two languages and cultures are developed through education.

Equilingual

Someone who is approximately equally competent in two languages.