

the bilingual family newsletter

MULTILINGUAL
MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

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2005
Volume 22
Number 1

editorial

Welcome to the first *BFN* of 2005! It often seems that the most successful stories we hear are from those families or individuals that take a genuine pride in their cultural heritage(s). However, whilst we may celebrate our 'otherness' as a benefit, it can sometimes be seen by those around us as a barrier. As we seek to have the 'best of both worlds', we will inevitably run into times when this can lead us to being partially (or fully) excluded from one or other of our cultural, familial or social spheres.

In the lead article in this issue, Alec McAulay explores how both the Scottish and Japanese sides of his family initially perceived his daughter, Elena, as being distinctly foreign. Thanks partially to a sensitive (and strategic) approach from the parents, and partially to the family inevitably getting to know her as an individual rather than as a 'type', Elena is now fully integrated into both sides of the family. There are lessons to be learned for us all.

Whilst it is fine to be proud of our diverse heritage, we may all do well to consider how we communicate this pride. In some cases it may be necessary to confront prejudice, ignorance or discrimination head on, but there may be other times when we may need to take a more diplomatic approach. What we may see as a simple celebration of our heritage, for example, may be seen by others as boasting or 'one-up-manship'. The multicultural life is rarely simple, but then what is?

Sami Grover

Critical Incidents in Bilingual Child-raising: 'Othering' of the Child by Extended Family

Alec McAulay



Alec McAulay, from Scotland, has lived in Japan for 15 years. He and his Japanese wife Naomi live in Yokohama, where Alec teaches in the Faculty of Education at Yokohama National University. They have a daughter Elena, three, and a son Joseph, 10 months. They are raising their children bilingually using the One-Parent-One-Language strategy.

Long before my daughter was born, I expected my father-in-law to say something derogatory about her mixed background. He is an old school Japanese patriarch, a medical man, whose aura conveys that he is the head of his household, and expects to be treated as such. I like him. He doesn't really talk to me, but he doesn't really talk to anyone. In fact, because we share an interest in shooting and editing video, he probably talks to me more than most. His line of approach is invariably intergroup rather than interpersonal, stressing the esoteric Japaneseness of his endeavours, but I appreciate that he makes an effort with me. It is more than he does with his youngest daughter, my wife Naomi, with whom he has not seen eye-to-eye for years. Many years ago, when I went to his home

and knelt before him to ask, as tradition demanded, for his daughter's hand in marriage, his reply amounted to, "Well, she's not up to much, but if you are willing to have her..."

And so it came as no surprise when one day, as my wife was considering what Chinese characters to bestow upon our daughter's name, (i.e. how we should 'spell' it in Japanese), my father-in-law interjected that it didn't really matter what characters you gave to a 'gaijin.' Whether or not 'gaijin' is an ethnopaulism (a negative or derogatory term or stereotype - Ed.) is an ongoing debate. I might legitimately be called 'gaijin', or 'foreigner', (literally 'outsider'), but there is something fundamentally wrong about referring to your own granddaughter in this way. While I expected this kind of remark from him, there were two things I did not anticipate. Firstly, that it would happen so soon; five days after Elena was born. Secondly, I did not anticipate how pleased I would be. My pleasure came from seeing the reaction on my wife's face, a look of

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'Othering' of the Child... Continued from page 1

visceral disgust. We had been together for 10 years in Japan, and although she had been sympathetic to any discrimination I had suffered, there had always been a cool, detached element to her comforting. Now that it was happening to her own flesh-and-blood, I could see she was feeling it as I had felt it – in her gut. To my great shame, the thought that ran through my head was, "At last!"

My shame at this thought only came with hindsight, brought on after Elena's first visit to my family in Scotland. For although I had easily foreseen that Elena would at times be regarded as a foreigner by my Japanese in-laws, I completely failed to anticipate that my own family would do the same.

Looking at four-month-old Elena's abundance of hair, my sister remarked that she was lucky to have such hair, "unlike little white girls." I couldn't believe my ears.

"Are you saying Elena isn't white?"

"Well, she isn't!"

"Then what is she?"

"..."

Although my sister didn't reply, it was obvious that the word running through her head was 'yellow.'

Elena is three now, and having talked to many parents of children with mixed backgrounds over the years, I realise that 'othering' of the children by the extended family is commonplace. As a newborn, it is physicality – a lighter hair colour, a darker

skin tone, rounder eyes, longer legs – that is highlighted, dissected and labelled (often, perversely, with pride) the salient identifying characteristic of the child. When they start to exhibit bilingualism, it is the use of the 'other' language that marks the child out as being of a different category from her cousins.

Before Elena was born, my wife and I talked at length about our plans to raise her bilingually. We discussed how we would deal with 'othering' on a social level, but did not consider our strategies for coping when it occurred within the family. The strategy we have developed is simple

As a newborn, it is physicality – a lighter hair colour, a darker skin tone, rounder eyes, longer legs – that is highlighted, dissected and labelled the salient identifying characteristic of the child.

– I deal with it. My family are used to taking each other to task on social issues. My father was a union activist and my sister is a straight-talker, so there are very few taboos. We fight, but we make up, too. If they are doing Elena a disservice I tell them. Hopefully, Elena will one day be big enough and smart enough to tell them herself.

As for my Japanese in-laws, at first I thought Naomi should be the one to confront them on these matters. However,

her family do not communicate like my family. If Naomi and her father have something to say to each other, it is said through the mother. Emotionally, Naomi is unable to challenge her father in a rational manner; inevitably the blood boils, on both sides. What we have realised is that I have an advantage here. My in-laws accept me as part of the family, but in terms of Japanese culture I am still somewhat of an outsider. I can challenge my in-laws when they 'other' Elena and it is not as volatile a situation as it would be were Naomi to do so. Any 'rough edges' to what I have to say are put down to my less-than-perfect Japanese language skills, rather than disrespect. When Elena was two, and my father-in-law again referred to her as 'gaijin', I simply told him, "Don't call her that. She isn't a foreigner. She is Japanese, and your grandchild." I then left the room with Elena, and Naomi came in to 'explain' what I had meant. We work as a tag-team. It gets results.

The incidents of othering have lessened now that Elena is three and able to speak for herself. She has a personality, with all the quirks, delights and demons that accompany that. She is accepted much more as an individual rather than a type. Naomi and I are glad that we have dealt with this while Elena was very young. It is better that these debates, arguments and rows took place when Elena was too young to remember something hurtful that may have been said in the heat of the moment. There have been tough moments in the first few years, but setting everyone right in the initial stages should, we hope, make things easier in the long-term for the whole family, and for Elena in particular.

New Resources: Bilingual Dolls for Young Children

We are often asked for information on new resources available to prospective parents that might support a bilingual upbringing. It is usually a fairly simple matter to get hold of books and videos in most languages, even if these have to be sent by relatives from abroad, but these still tend to be aimed at a monolingual audience - albeit in the minority language. What about resources that are specifically for bi- or multilingual children? Are there books, videos and toys that not only use another language, but actively support, encourage and celebrate language diversity? We have recently come across a number of materials that would appear to do just that.

These items are presented here as a guide only to what is available - we have not had the opportunity to review any of these materials first

hand, so would also love to hear from families that are actively using these, or any other, resources.

Dora the Explorer

A popular tv cartoon on Nickelodeon about a young Latina girl who is proudly bilingual. In addition to the TV show, videos, books and dolls are available. According to the network's website:

"Dora is bilingual, and she demonstrates that speaking Spanish is not only a valuable tool, but also a source of pride. Together you and your child can learn some basic Spanish!"

That certainly sounds good to us.

www.nickjr.co.uk

Alexa - Greek-English Bilingual Doll

Alexa speaks Greek and English. She says over 25 words and phrases. Alexa also has a booklet so children can read and learn along with her as she speaks. The doll is available from an online store that also sells a number of other bilingual and Greek language resources including books, DVDs and picture dictionaries.

www.store.greekbaby.com

Language Littles

These dolls come with their own translation booklets and are linked to a wider language learning programme. They are available in Spanish, French, German, Italian, Japanese, Chinese and Hebrew

www.early-advantage.com

Notes From the OPOL Family



Table Etiquette

We are eating dinner and Papa passes the salad across to Marc.

‘Merci’, says Marc.

‘De rien’, says Papa. Marc asks me for more water. I pour it and he says ‘Thank you, Mummy.’

‘You’re welcome’, I say, thinking how polite he is today.

‘Why is it nothing for Papa and why are you saying welcome, Mummy? Isn’t that what you say when you come in?’, asks Marc brightly.

‘Well, that’s just what you say’, I waffle, looking at Jacques for guidance, and wondering myself why the French say ‘nothing’ too? Is it their way of saying ‘nothing is too much trouble for me’ or is it ‘nothing’ to help another? What are the English ‘welcoming’ anyway? Welcome to what? The Land of Politeness?

Learning the right social etiquette is even more challenging in another language. All those bizarre illogical statements and replies. I say ‘How do you do?’ and you say ‘How do you do too?’. Or the French ‘Enchante’ followed by a kiss on the hand which I always find rather smarmy and flirty. There are kisses in ones, twos, threes or even fours, or a hug. One must get the numbers right or God help you. Get the timing wrong and you will bump noses.

When eating together there is the mealtime greeting too. Do we say ‘Bon Appetit!’, which is rather pretentious if you are not French, or the English ‘Enjoy your meal!’ which sounds too hopeful?

I remember eating with German friends and they would say ‘Danke’ or thank you and the response would be ‘Bitte’ which means please. That always really threw me because it sounded like the conversation was going backwards in time. For me Please comes *before* Thank you!

Second language learners need intensive classes in how to eat, greet and say goodbye. Then we have more chance of fitting in and sounding ‘right’.

Minding your P’s and Q’s is hard work though. I had a bad attitude towards table manners as a child. I always cheekily asked why it was Q instead of T for ‘Thank you’. I had two strict parents to pick up on my appalling slurping of soup, elbows on the table and talking while eating. Now, in our OPOL family, if we don’t have the same rules then the kids will openly flout them! If only Mummy cares then they can do in front of Papa, or vice versa. Licking the plate clean is one thing that drives me mad, yet Jacques accepts!

Marc and Nina are still puzzling over the huge disparities of table behaviour between Mummy and Papa the next day when we sit down to eat Japanese food.

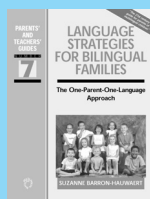
‘Itadakimas!’, I say cheerily (the Japanese equivalent of Bon Appetit!)

The children ask what it means. ‘I say Itadakimas and you say Itadakimas back’, I reply. ‘Pick up your chopsticks and eat. Don’t stick them upright in the bowl. It looks like incense for a funeral! You can slurp your soup by the way.’

They tuck into the food, pondering the new etiquette and wondering whether they can really slurp their soup... something usually not allowed in either Mummy or Papa’s rulebook!

Suzanne and Jacques are an English/French couple with three more-or-less bilingual children (Marc, 7; Nina, 5; and Gabriel, 18 months). They have lived as a family in Budapest, Cairo, Zurich, France and England and now live in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Marc and Nina attend the Lycee Francais there. They try to stick to the OPOL approach.

Suzanne is the author of *Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-Parent-One-Language Approach*, available from Multilingual Matters.



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MM Launch Open-Access Archive

Multilingual Matters are to allow open access to a large proportion of its backlog of academic journals. This move applies to all of our academic titles and will create a searchable archive of all issues up to and including 2003 volumes that are available online. The *Bilingual Family Newsletter* is not yet available online so will not be affected by this offer. Early volumes of some of our academic journals are also not currently available in a digital format. This new resource will help researchers access vital information about bilingualism, multilingualism and sociolinguistics.

Already the creation of the back issue archive has been greeted with much interest from academics. Aneta Pavlenko, leading researcher, regular user of, and contributor to, Multilingual Matters’ journals has welcomed the move, both in terms of the increased exposure that it will mean for her own work, and as a resource for keeping up-to-date with other research in the field:

“This stunningly generous decision by Multilingual Matters to offer open access to all of their journals up to and including the year 2003, will be welcomed by scholars around the world and will contribute greatly to the cohesiveness of our field.”

Access to the online back issue archive will be via Multilingual Matters’/ Channel View Publications’ new online platform:

www.multilingual-matters.net

This is also the address for online access to current volumes, which will be restricted to subscribers only. Multilingual Matters hope that this resource will prove a valuable research tool for academics and practitioners alike.

the BFN needs you...

Would you like to write for the *Bilingual Family Newsletter*? Do you have ideas for articles, queries, humorous anecdotes or features that may be of interest to other readers? Are there issues which you feel need to be addressed by the newsletter? If so, please get in touch.

We welcome contributions from parents, teachers, researchers and bilingual children themselves on all aspects of bilingual/ bicultural life. The newsletter does not make a profit so we are unable to pay contributors, however, you will receive a few free sample copies, and, of course, our eternal gratitude! Remember, the BFN is for you, but above all it is by you.

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Queries



In this issue we feature two very similar queries regarding acquisition of literacy skills for bilingual children. Below, Professor Viv Edwards of the University of Reading responds to both queries, giving us some up-to-date information on the latest research into the most effective strategies for teaching children literacy skills in any language.

Reading has come under the microscope in recent years and we now know a great deal more about learning to read in one – and more – languages. In the same way that it is not necessary to learn to speak different languages sequentially, there is no problem with learning to read two languages at the same time.

Learning to read involves, for instance, understanding that print carries meaning; that speech is broken up into words; that there are certain conventions, such as the direction of the print (though this may change between languages); that you can guess unknown words from context; and that you can read ahead when you don't know a word. Knowledge of this kind is easily transferred between languages.

There are, however, wider questions, irrespective of the number of languages used. One of the big debates concerns the most appropriate approach. Traditionally, learning to read was seen as the acquisition of a set of *skills* which would allow you to *decode* text. Phonics and 'Look and say' are examples of the skills approach. Many educators, however, have identified shortcomings with these approaches. Children with poor visual memory, for instance, find themselves at a disadvantage.

More recently the consensus has been that, although both are important, more emphasis needs to be put on teaching *strategies* rather than *skills*. Fluent readers don't decode; rather they make meaning of the text. The teacher's job is therefore to

Alphabetical Similarities

I am French and my husband is Sri Lankan Tamil. We live in London and have 2 children: Kalyani (3yrs) and Sayan (17 months). My husband and I mostly speak English together. I speak French to the children and my husband speaks Tamil, with some English. Kalyani is starting to speak French now and has a good understanding of Tamil. She can also have a basic conversation in Tamil. She understands English quite well but doesn't speak much yet. She will be starting Nursery in September where she will have to speak English all the time.

My question is that I want to start teaching the French alphabet to Kalyani, then slowly words and finally how to read. She has shown a keen interest in books from an early age but, given the similarities of the French and English alphabets (particularly the differing vowel sounds), will it create too much confusion? Given that she will not learn how to read in English for another 2 years, should this not give me enough time to teach her how to read in French?

Heloise Ganesharuban, London

give children strategies to make meaning of what they read. With very young children, this could take the form of asking them to predict what is coming next, by looking at the cover of the book and guessing what the story will be about. More experienced readers can be encouraged to pick up cues from illustrations when they don't know a word,

Children learn to read not by decoding every letter but by using a wide range of clues... some educationalists refer to reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'.

or reading to the end of the sentence and then coming back to the unknown word. Pamphlets for parents wanting to support their children's reading are available from the *National Centre for Language and Literacy*.

It is fine to start straightaway with words, for example, rather than teaching the alphabet. It is best to teach words in context. Use simple books with minimal text on the page and a lot of repetition. There should be a good relationship between the picture and the text.

Curious to Read French

My daughter Fleur is now 4 and bilingual in French and English. Her language skills have developed excellently and she is considered as a monolingual by both sides of the family, which I take as a compliment.

She will be starting reception in the English school system in September. Even though she is and will be the youngest in her year, she is, according to her teachers, very bright. She will be learning more seriously to read. She has already done most simple phonemes in the English language, with the Jolly Phonics method at school. She can already recognise words and accurately read simple words like 'cat', 'dog' or 'fox' or in French 'lavabo', 'vite', 'barre'.

She is very curious about French reading and I am wondering if I should avoid the issue until she can read in English, as I read in some publications, or can I move at her own pace simultaneously in French?

Carole Paquis, Walsall

Children learn to read not by decoding every letter but by using a wide range of clues, including the visual support of the illustration, their knowledge of the language (e.g. If you read 'le' in French, you know that the next word will be a noun), and their experience of what is likely to happen next in a given situation. Some educationalists refer to reading as a 'psycholinguistic guessing game'.

It's OK to teach children letters and the sounds they make as well, but the best way to help children make use of this knowledge is in drawing their attention to the first letter of an unfamiliar word, rather than building words up letter by letter. This is particularly true in a language like English where the sound-letter correspondences aren't good.

Another fundamental principle is to make sure that reading is fun. Sharing a book should be a relaxing, quality time for parent and child. Ultimately, this is far more important than the language of the books you are reading.

Help Your Children with Reading (30p), Help Your Children with Writing (40p), and Help Your Children with Spelling (40p), are available from:

The National Centre for Language and Literacy, The University of Reading, Bulmershe Court, Reading RG6 1HY.

Cheques with orders should be made payable to 'The University of Reading'.

Retaining a Minority Language in a Majority Language Environment

Nadejda and Georges Duquette



Like most parents, we decided that it was important for our child to communicate with us in our mother tongues. Nadejda immigrated to Canada some seven years ago. We wanted our daughter to communicate with Mom in Russian and to share her heritage so Nadejda interacted with her in that language on a daily basis. The fact that Nadejda was able to stay at home certainly had a positive advantage on our daughter's Russian language skills. Georges, a French-speaking Canadian, would communicate with our child exclusively in French whenever he could. However, the real challenge for us lies ahead. We live in an essentially English-speaking environment and we have so far sheltered our child from that world, but she will soon be immersed in English. Whilst she should easily acquire the majority language, we would like to ensure that she retains and safeguards her mother tongue (Russian) and her country's second language (French). Experts estimate that between 33% and 70% of the world's children live in a country where bilingualism and multilingualism are the norm,¹ but how do we go about ensuring that our child finds her first two languages sufficiently relevant so as not to assimilate and limit herself to English in the future?

The Motherese Period

The period of bonding between the child and the mother, or the person who otherwise assumes that role, is critical in providing the building blocks upon which the first language will develop. If this first language receives enough support, other languages should also develop well. This is known as additive bilingualism. However, there is more to language development during this period, otherwise known as the Motherese Period, than the development of speech skills. Since language is two-thirds non-verbal,² communication takes place around early affective and cognitive cues³ that enable a mother tongue to be understood. These cues are more easily understood if the messages are clear and the communication process is routinely applied in and around specific contexts.⁴

Encouraging reading is one of the best ways to preserve the mother tongue, or any

parental language. We were fortunate that our daughter was able to benefit from Nadejda's daily presence. She was exposed to picture books even before she began to walk. Although not every child reacts positively to such an early start, we felt that further exposure, if done in a relaxed environment, would be beneficial. At eight months, a ritual was already established that she would sit on her potty and go through her book. Mom would also read to her after breakfast and before bedtime. She always asked for Mom to read to her in Russian and for Dad to read in French. Research has shown that reading from books with pictures will augment meaning recognition and stimulate interest⁵ and we know that reading increases knowledge and vocabulary and should have positive effects on academic results.⁶

At one point or another a child may question the relevance of the minority language and culture and even deny the existence or hide its presence. This is especially true during adolescence ...

A Different Alphabet

Since Russian is based on a Cyrillic alphabet, we had the added problem of deciding which language our child should start to read in. On the one hand, Russian was her mother tongue, but on the other hand she would be attending a French language school. We certainly didn't want to introduce both at the same time since some letters have one sound in Russian and a very different one in French. Initially, we started with the French but, to our surprise, she expressed a stronger desire to read in Russian. We backtracked quickly and spent a few years reinforcing the Russian. We made sure that the letters' features and the sounds associated were clear. Now she is almost ready to learn the French alphabet.

Different Media and Contexts

We realise that comprehensible input is important and so, in addition to a variety of library books, we now expose our child to selected videos and television programs (not more than 30 minutes per day). We also use colouring and problem solving activity books. It is important to select age-appropriate materials. A parent should not assume that what is written on the product is always true, but should make a

personal decision regarding any material. The closer the experiences depicted are to the personal experiences of the child, the better the results. We have also learned that a child will model the behaviour and incorporate the values presented just as she or he will reproduce the behaviour and value systems of a parent or sibling. The social learning skills acquired during this period, determine, to some extent, how the child solves problems later on.

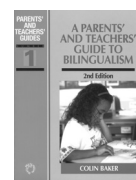
Nurturing Conceptual Understanding and Cultural Behaviours

Cultural heritage is especially important in retaining a language when it is also a foreign language in the host country. We know nine families who have tried to preserve a minority language. After some study of their varying circumstances, it became clear to us that the preservation of cultural heritage, whether transmitted through oral tradition, through reading, through direct contact with people who share that heritage or a combination of these factors, will help safeguard and protect a minority language.

It would appear that the presence of a minority language speaking grandparent is a particular advantage. Interestingly enough, the first child seems to benefit the most from this. This is partially because of the one-on-one bond between the grandparent and the child, and also because the parents' communication with the grandparent mean that the language is integrated as a necessity into everyday life.

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A Parents' & Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism



A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism - Colin Baker

"Professor Colin Baker writes as a concerned parent as well as an academic and educationalist ... The book is accessible to general readers and avoids academic jargon"
J. Gundara, *Times Educational Supplement*.

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The child is also shielded to some extent from the outside world and is in contact with a loved one deeply rooted in the minority language culture. Even when the minority language is not a foreign language, a distinctly different cultural identity may be preserved. For instance, the Canadian National Anthem may have the same music, but the words and culture are very different if it is sung in French rather than English⁷.

A Survey

We conducted an informal survey amongst the nine families mentioned above. Things often changed when other children came along. Yes, parents benefited from their experiences with the first child and learning routines were better planned, but the grandparent was either no longer there or not there for long. That meant not only a loss of meaningful contact with a dear loved one, but also a loss of contact with the culture, language, roots, history, values, and traditions. The older siblings also began to bring in friends who would use the majority language in the home. That doesn't mean that it has to remain that way. Under the right conditions, a minority language can be preserved, but more work may be required on the part of the parents.

We observed that, in at least half of the families we followed, the retention and safeguarding of a minority language spanned at least four generations in about one third of the children. Some children were more adept and these offered continuity from one generation to another while most were more likely to assimilate and use the majority language.

Conclusion

Is it possible to retain and safeguard one or more minority languages? Yes, if sufficient effort is invested in the process and if this investment continues from generation to generation. At one point or another a child may question the relevance of the minority language or even hide its presence, especially true during adolescence when peer acceptance requires them to "fit in". However, one day, they will be happy and proud to be bilingual. Natasha, a 17-year-old who immigrated to Canada with her family 12 years ago, explained to us that she felt uneasy about her Russian heritage during her school years but is now very proud of being able to speak two languages. Such stories surely make bilingual upbringing worth the investment.

References on page 8

Diverse Forms of Diversity: Deaf Bilingualism

Dr. Des I.M. Laversuch

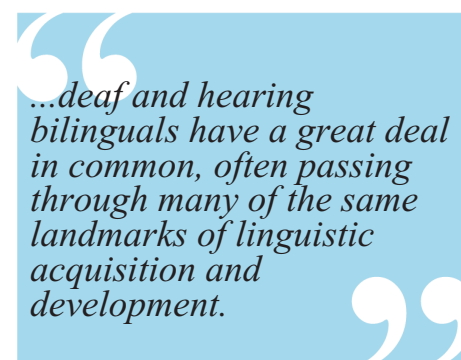
When most people think of a bilingual, they picture someone who speaks the two native languages of his/her mother and father. However, we now know that this picture is rather simplistic. Just as there are multitudinous methods for measuring degrees of language competence, there are also an infinite number of ways to learn or acquire a language. Even the line we use to differentiate between two or more languages is not as clear as some might imagine. There are as many forms of bilingualism as there are bilinguals.

Even among those well-versed in the diverse forms of bilingualism, there is a tendency to overlook one of the most fascinating forms, deaf bilingualism. In the scientific literature, this term commonly refers to people who grow up completely conversant in two different languages: a spoken language and a signed one. As before, this simple definition tends to obscure the richness and diversity of reality. There are multiple pathways to deaf bilingualism. Some hearing people learn a signed language after years of formal study. Other adult deaf bilinguals learn a sign language as a second language after having lost their hearing due to a physical trauma or illness. Such is the case with Dr. I. K. Jordan, the first deaf president of Gallaudet University. At the age of 21, Jordan became profoundly deaf after surviving a car accident. This did not stop him, however, from becoming a fluent bilingual in American Sign Language (ASL) and US American English, then earning a Ph.D. in Psychology along with 11 other prestigious degrees.

In addition to these adult pathways, there are many other routes which start during childhood. There are hearing children born to families where one or both of the parents is deaf. In such cases, it is not unusual for the child to have a sign language as a first language and acquire a spoken language later on entering school. There are also many who grow up in the reverse situation; in fact, well more than 80 percent of deaf children are born to hearing parents. Such children may not only develop native fluency in a sign language but also learn to read, write, and even speak their parents' spoken language. To facilitate this process, it is not unusual for modern parents and other family members to learn a sign language as a second language. This was not always the case. Just a few decades ago, parents were routinely advised to use a spoken language and to avoid sign language for fear that it would hamper the children's development. Today, however, as research continues to demonstrate, we know that the benefits of

bilingualism are not limited to users of spoken languages. Many studies have found that deaf and hearing bilinguals have a great deal in common, often passing through many of the same landmarks of linguistic acquisition and development.

Having said this, there are features which typically distinguish deaf bilinguals. Whilst it is common for both deaf and hearing bilinguals to switch between their languages, in hearing bilinguals, this switching takes place in a serial pattern, as the speaker shifts from one language to another. Among deaf bilinguals, in



...deaf and hearing bilinguals have a great deal in common, often passing through many of the same landmarks of linguistic acquisition and development.

addition to this serial pattern, patterns are also possible in which both the signed and spoken languages are produced concurrently. Analysis has revealed that in some instances one language augments and supports the information provided in the other. Sometimes, however, the visual and verbal information communicated in the two languages is inconsistent or completely contradictory. Just how respondents interpret such mixed messages is one of the many questions researchers of deaf bilingualism hope to answer. One of the major obstacles to finding answers to such questions has been the tendency to overlook deaf bilingualism as unimportant. This dismissal is endemic of a basic negative attitude towards the Deaf community. The very real and frightening consequences of such prejudice are illustrated in the following true story of a bilingual family living in a small town in Germany.

The parents in this story decided to raise their daughter, Marie, bilingually in German and US American English. Almost immediately the parents' enthusiasm was dampened by the sharp resistance they received from extended family members and even complete strangers. Particularly biting criticism was saved for the American mother. Despite this resistance, the mother continued to speak to her daughter in her native language which initially seemed to pay off.

Marie developed into a communicative little girl who could express herself equally well in German and English. By the time Marie hit four, however, all this seemed to change. Suddenly, Marie was having difficulty understanding and responding to people around her. The village pre-school teacher, who had never been supportive of the parents' decision, insisted that Marie's difficulties could only be a result of English interference with German. Increased pressure was placed on the mother to stop speaking English with her daughter. At one point the parents were even forced to see a social worker to certify that they were not abusing their daughter by attempting to raise her bilingually!

In the meantime, Marie became even more withdrawn. She refused to attend any social event without her mother, prompting the teacher to accuse the mother of being overprotective. Rather than cave in, the mother wisely took her daughter to a specialist who immediately diagnosed that Marie was nearly completely deaf! Due to a build up of fluid in her ear canal, Marie had lost almost all of her hearing. Thanks to the courage of a mother, and an early diagnosis by a competent doctor, Marie's true problem was identified and corrected with a combination of surgery and therapy. In addition, the mother made sure that her daughter's old instructor was replaced by a new teacher who was sensitive to Marie's special needs, seating her, for example, in the front of the class room where she could easily hear and see the teacher during lessons. Today, Marie is once again happy and articulate and the envy of everyone for her sunny personality and her ability to speak in both German and English!

This story illustrates the potentially devastating effects of continuing ignorance about, and intolerance of, bilingualism and biculturalism. In addition to the general prejudices against bilingualism, deaf bilinguals also routinely face the unique brand of intolerance which comes with being a member of a minority community often defined in terms of its perceived deficits and deviance rather than its assets. To correct this perception, deaf advocates have made increasing public awareness of Deaf culture a priority. Importantly this consciousness raising has focused on publicizing not only the needs of the community, but also its many gifts.

A major step in this direction occurred in 1986 when Marlee Matlin won the Academy Award for Best Actress for her work in *Children of a Lesser God*. Since that landmark victory, Matlin has also founded her own production company. Matlin's bilingual proficiency in ASL and English have been key in her success. While Matlin's achievements are

well-known in both the deaf and non-deaf community, there are many other deaf bilinguals whose contributions are far less well known but equally significant. An excellent example is Dr. Andrew J. Foster.

At the age of 11, Foster contracted spinal meningitis. He survived but was left deaf. Undaunted, he became a fluent ASL:English bilingual and in 1954 he applied for and was admitted as the first African-American to enter Gallaudet. Two years later he graduated with his M.A. and flew to Africa, where he opened numerous schools across the continent for the Deaf. Before his tragic death in 1987, Foster was responsible for opening the door to education for countless deaf Africans.

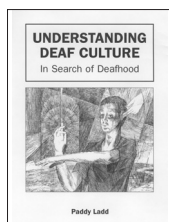
Despite such phenomenal contributions, there is still so much more to do. Deaf bilinguals can play a critical role in this process, by helping to bridge the cultural historical gulf which sometimes exists between the world of the Deaf and the Non-deaf. There is after all far more that connects deaf and hearing bilinguals than their use of multiple languages. Tying

both together is also the fundamental recognition of the fact that freedom of expression in the language(s) of one's choice is not a privilege reserved for a select few. It is a universal right which must not only be respected but vigorously protected.

Recommended Reading

1. Lane, Harlan. **The Mask of Benevolence: Disabling the Deaf Community.** New York: Random House, 1992.
2. Preston, Paul Michael. **Mother Father Deaf: Living Between Sound and Silence.** Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1994.
3. Sachs, Oliver. **Seeing Voices: A Journey Into the World of The Deaf.** New York: Vintage Books, 2000.
4. Walker, Lou Ann. **A Loss for Words: The Story of Deafness in a Family.** New York: Harper & Row, 1986.
5. <http://www.deafinx.com/read.html>

Books on Deaf Issues and Deaf Culture

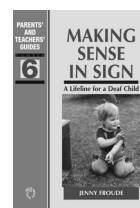


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Retaining a Minority Language... References

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2. Bryen, D. *Inquiries into Child Language*, Boston (1982).
3. Genesee, F. keynote address at the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism in Tempe, Arizona, April 2003.
4. Duquette, G. Cultural processing and minority language needs and special needs. In L. Malavé and G. Duquette (eds.) *Language, Culture, and Cognition*, Clevedon, (1991).
5. See any of Stephen Krashen's publications on “Free Voluntary Reading”.
6. MacGeorge, N. *The Effects of Word Imagery on the Retention of Sight Vocabulary: An Investigation in Grade One*. ERIC Document: ED 258133. (1984).
7. Duquette, G.. Do cultural perceptions facilitate language acquisition? in *The Canadian Modern Language Review/La Revue canadienne des langues vivantes*, 41(2), 524533 (1985).