

the bilingual family newsletter

news and views for intercultural people

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editorial

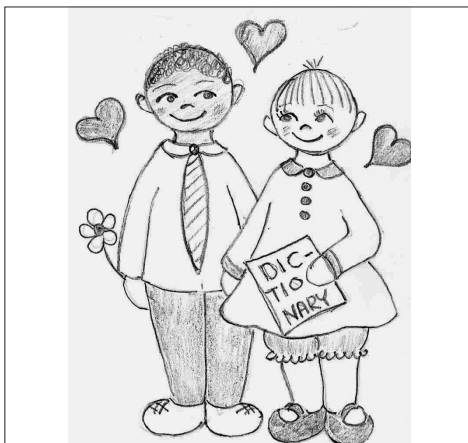
Iman Laversuch's assertion that expressing love across linguistic or cultural boundaries is often subject to miscommunication will come as no surprise to many readers. Of course, it may be this very challenge which makes inter-cultural relationships so appealing. The thrill of getting to know and understand someone else's 'inner world' may carry an extra excitement for some if it also allows a window on a different or 'exotic' culture and its take on life.

Of course the practicalities of everyday living in a multilingual context, whilst often exciting, also involve some fairly mundane questions. The decision of which language to use when, and how, whilst often guided by our emotions, is also influenced by our social context. As Joan Bursch explains, whilst many parents may instinctively wish to speak their 'mother tongue', the reality of their situation may force their hand and they end up having to wear many linguistic 'hats'.

Balancing the romantic and the pragmatic is, of course, not the exclusive challenge of intercultural families. All relationships are subject to such considerations. The point of the articles featured is not to suggest that this is more, or less, of an issue when multiple languages/cultures are involved, but to highlight how certain 'typical' aspects of multicultural living, such as language choice, may be affected by the ongoing struggle to balance the ordinary and the extraordinary in the process of living our lives together with those around us.

Sami Grover

The Language(s) of Love - Expression of Emotion in Intercultural Relationships Dr I.M. Laversuch



As so many in the *BFN* community have no doubt already discovered, one of the most common motivations for learning a second language is also one of the most beautiful: love. I first became aware of this in my own marriage. Several months after our wedding, my husband sat me down and said, 'Ich liebe dich'. I was a bit taken aback but flattered. Up until that point, we had spoken to each other almost exclusively in English. I remember flushing and then stuttering 'I love you too, Honey.' My husband frowned and then said 'No, I didn't say, *I love you* – I said *Ich liebe dich*.'

A long conversation followed. My husband told me that while he had said 'I love you' before, he had never said 'Ich liebe dich.' 'That's something you say only once. Americans say, *I love television*, *I love potato chips* etc. In Germany, you can't say, *Ich liebe Erdnussbutter* [I love peanutbutter]. It just sounds funny.' Being a wife, I was moved. Being a linguist, I was intrigued.

I took an informal poll among our international friends who were in relationships with American English-speakers. I was startled to find resounding agreement. Not only did the partners commonly feel that, to them, Americans say 'I love you' too soon, but too often!

To a certain extent, this is nothing new. Already in the 1930s, the two linguists Sapir and Whorf developed what is known as the *Theory of Linguistic Relativity* which postulates that different systems of linguistic articulation correspond to unique culturally mediated systems of perception. In recent years, some researchers have begun to extend this to include emotions. According to this revised theory, learning a new language involves acquiring not only a new system of grammar, but also a new set of perceptions and emotions.

Although this might sound complicated, it is very easy to demonstrate. Think of a vulgar word in your mother tongue. Now do the same in a foreign language you have learned. The foreign word simply does not have the same impact as in your native language. Even if you intellectually understand the meaning of the word, without feeling the emotions associated with the expression, it remains hollow. This gulf between speaking and feeling a language also helps to explain part of the difficulty in translating a text from one language to another. Ultimately, what makes translating such a challenge is trying to find the words or expressions which will have the same or equivalent

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emotional impact as those in the original language.

So what does all this mean for people who speak more than one language? Repeatedly it has been found that people who have two or more languages describe themselves as having two sets of emotions. As my husband explained, saying 'I love you' just doesn't feel the same as saying 'Ich liebe dich'. Does this really mean that bilinguals develop two different personalities? Two different selves? In a word, no.

Bilingualism is not a dysfunctional personality disorder. It neither restricts a person's daily routine nor limits his/her social interactions. In fact, just the opposite may be the case. Many studies have shown that bilinguals frequently display heightened sensitivity towards the differing cultural perspectives of others. This does not mean, however, that bilingualism automatically guarantees satisfying, emotionally fulfilling relationships.

Many of the bilinguals I interviewed reported that it can be extremely frustrating to be in a relationship with someone who does not speak their language(s). A vivid example was given by Sophie, a French/German bilingual; and Gerald, her monolingual English husband. As Sophie recalled:

'In the beginning, it was wonderful. But it was a status symbol to have a French girlfriend. All of his mates admired him for that. I told him, I am both French and German and he could take it or leave it!'

After a great deal of talking, Gerald came to see how hurtful his rejection of Sophie's

German side was. Further, Sophie was able to explain to him how important it was to her that he take time to learn at least one of her languages. Like many bicultural/bilinguals, Sophie felt strongly that by learning her language(s), her partner demonstrated his willingness to appreciate her different cultural frame of reference. Sadly, not all monolinguals are aware of the importance their partners attach to learning their language(s) and may see their decision not to try in purely practical terms e.g. not enough time, talent, money. Today, Gerald winces when he hears Sophie recount his earlier faux pas. But, as both he and Sophie proudly report, those days are long since past. Today he is learning both German and French. This interpersonal success is not to be taken for granted, though.

I knew that he was hurt because I didn't say anything in return. That's just something we don't do. Maybe if somebody is gonna die or something...

As many readers will no doubt agree, it is not always easy to maintain a relationship with a monolingual who does not speak either one of your languages. Maria, a Spanish/English-speaking exchange student from Ecuador, currently studying in Germany, whole-heartedly agreed. In a private interview, she explained:

'I have had relationships with two Germans before and they didn't work. I need to talk...a lot! Sometimes, they just didn't understand because they didn't know my culture. My new partner comes from Argentina, but his mother is German and his father is Irish. So, we speak the same languages and we love to switch back and forth. With my German boyfriends, I could only say 'me gustas' but with my boyfriend now, we have reached a much deeper level. I say 'te amo' to him. I could never have said that before. And if my boyfriend were to say 'Ich liebe dich' in German, I would tell him: 'Tell me in Spanish. I don't feel it in German.'

Importantly, when Maria states that she and her partner 'speak the same language', what is most important is not so much that the two use the same words but that they both appreciate the emotional meaning behind the words. After all, if language choice alone were all that were important for a successful relationship, monolinguals who spoke the same language would never have problems in communicating. For the same reason, bilinguals who speak the same set of languages do not automatically and immediately understand one another. This point was exemplified by the experiences of Ausa and David, another couple I interviewed.

Like many of her compatriots, Ausa speaks flawless English along with her native Icelandic. These language skills were key in her earning a position as a flight attendant for a major airline. One afternoon, on a routine stop-over, Ausa found herself in a New York bookstore with her i-pod. She looked up to see David,

New BFN Online Archive Launched - 22 years of articles, opinions ideas and research on bi/multilingualism

Multilingual Matters have launched a new website, exclusively for the *BFN*. The website, which can be found at www.bilingualfamilynewsletter.com features an online archive of all *BFNs* ever published. The issues appear as PDF files and will be accessible to existing subscribers. We hope that this will prove a useful research tool for parents, teachers and academics alike. We are currently working on compiling a detailed contents list to allow quick identification of which issues may be useful to you.

The list of articles that have been published over the years is way too extensive to list here, but edited highlights include *Street & School Language* in 1997 (14:2) and, in the same year, *Distinguishing Communicative Difference from Language Disorder in Bilingual Children*. (14:1). Other articles

include *Are Bilinguals Better Language Learners?* (20:1, 2003) and the provocatively titled *Insincere Americans, Silent Finns and Arrogant Germans: Cross-Cultural Miscommunication* in (13:1 1996). For those interested in the bilingual language situation in the US, Jim Crawford's columns which ran from issue 16:2 to 21:2 provide an on-going analysis.

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a handsome American, who was also strapped to an i-pod. The two smiled and started chatting. AUSA was shocked to discover that the two not only shared the same taste in music, but also the same languages. David's mom, it turns out, was an Icelander who raised her son bilingually in Icelandic and American English. What began as a chance meeting and a cozy latte machiatto, quickly blossomed into a serious transatlantic relationship. AUSA remembers:

'In the beginning we thought we had met our perfect match. We could speak in Icelandic or English or both. It was fantastic! I think we both had the feeling, 'This is it!'. Then he called me and said, 'I love you' and I panicked. On the one hand, I knew what he was saying was not weird at all in the States. But we just don't say that here! It sounds weird in Icelandic. We feel it, but we would never say it. So, the fact that David had said it...sounded so... superficial. It was terrible. I knew that he was hurt because I didn't say anything in return. That's just something we don't do. Maybe if somebody is gonna die or something... but even then. I think we both realized then that although we speak the same languages, we use them differently.'

Since then AUSA and David have learned to express their feelings for one another in ways which they both understand. In the end, there are no short-cuts to good communication, no matter how many languages you speak. Moreover, as I have learned in more than ten years of marriage, the same differences which can make a cross-cultural relationship so exciting can also make it enormously challenging. But perhaps this is true of any relationship really. The secret is give-n-take.

Today, when I look at my relationship with my husband, I'm amazed at how much we have influenced each other over the years. I have to smile, for instance, every time I hear my British/German husband ask our American friends: 'What's up?' just as he has to suppress a laugh whenever I ask him, 'Have you hunger?'. At the same time, despite all of this cross-cultural learning and compromising, we will always have our differences. My husband will never exchange his beloved Nutella for my extra crunchy Skippy peanut butter. And I will continue to say 'Ich liebe dich' to our giant orange tabby cat, Tigger. Of course, considering the fact that he is half-American, I don't suppose he minds that much...oder?

All names have been changed to protect the privacy of the couples interviewed. Except for Tigger's that is...

Spotlight on the Editorial Board: Christine Hélot



Name: Christine Helot
Children: Ciara 28, Aoife 24, Fabrice 22
Country of residence: France
Country of origin: France
Family languages: French, English and some German. Ciara speaks Spanish fluently, Aoife speaks Spanish and Portuguese fluently and has good command of German and Fabrice also speaks some Spanish.

What first got you interested in learning other languages?

I started studying English at the age of 11. I got a penpal from California and we started exchanging letters in our basic English and French. 40 years later we are still writing and visiting. English was my favourite subject at school because it was a window to the world I dreamed of discovering. Some years later, in 1967, I was able to spend a year in California. That year changed my life. Not only did I learn English, but I looked after a handicapped baby who became like my own child. I returned to France to study English and linguistics and became an English lecturer in Paris, then Dublin.

What brought you to Ireland?

I met an Irish man who wanted to go back home. I adapted quickly to Irish life, the pace is slower than in Paris, the friendliness (the Irish are such francophiles!), the sense of fun and the incredible beauty of the West Coast. There were so many children in Ireland, so soon I wanted a family of my own and Ciara, Aoife and Fabrice were born. We decided to give the children two first names each: an Irish one and a French one.

Can you describe the language strategies used in your family?

Strategies were clear with our first child - French only at home - and English outside. With time it became more difficult to keep English out of the home with friends coming to play etc. Whilst we still tried to use as much French as possible, I was careful never to exclude their English speaking friends. Summer visits to France were great, but it was sometimes difficult for the children to figure out how to behave: hands under the table in Ireland, but hands on the table in France. French Granny's food was

declared the best and still is today. Watching cartoons on TV in France was also allowed for much longer than at home in Ireland, because it was good for their French.

Why did you move back to France, and how did this move effect the family's language balance?

Unfortunately, we had to go through the pain of separation and I moved with the children to Strasbourg in Alsace, another bilingual part of Europe. The first thing the children wanted to do was to cross the border and see Germany. Coming from an island, they loved the idea of living in one country so close to another. Learning German at school was easy and they could not understand the negative attitudes of their Alsatian friends. Adapting to French school discipline was not easy but the fact that the children spoke French fluently helped them to fit in. We switched our language policy to English as the home language, despite my son's teacher insisting it was bad for him. The fact that I had spent 7 years writing a PhD on bringing up children bilingually did not impress the teacher. Yet when two Chinese pupils came into his class, my son of 7 took on the role of translator and was the only child to talk to them. Finally the three children managed to get a place in the International school in Strasbourg where they made many friends who were, like them, multilingual and multicultural. They now feel at home equally in any European country, while their Irish identity is still very much part of them, indeed one lives in Bilbao, one in London and one in Dublin.

And how did the move work out for you personally?

Getting a job at a French university was not easy. I had a hard time accepting that academic rules were different, but I've been fortunate to work in a teacher education institute where my research is most needed and I'm glad to see that attitudes of teachers towards home languages are changing. Having lived in Ireland for 17 years has left its mark too: I don't like planning things in advance, I miss reading the Sunday papers and, most of all, I miss the sea. I love reading an Irish novel and now I even welcome a rainy day! Whenever I go back to Ireland, what I like most is to stay in Connemara and Mayo - I still think it is the most beautiful place on earth. I always return with a suitcase packed with the latest novels and stones from my best friend's beach. I follow closely any research dealing with the Irish language and one of my main interests is the study of family transmission of minority languages. I think it is no surprise my eldest daughter is in love with a Basque speaking man. My linguistic plan for the future is to learn Spanish properly to be able to communicate with my future grandchildren.

The Things They Say...

Over the years, we have probably published hundreds of anecdotes of the humorous situations that arise from bilingual children's language use. However, it is not just the 'little ones' in a family that give rise to the occasional intercultural slip-up.

Marjukka Grover, the esteemed co-editor of this newsletter, is well known amongst her colleagues here as an occasional source of multilingual mirth, aided and abetted by the mixed blessing of the spell check facility on the word processor. Whether she's telling an author about her unusual family heritage ('Most of my family were poor Finnish pheasants'), or complaining about her workload ('I have way too much staff on my desk!'), she can usually be relied on to bring a sense of humour to the proceedings.

Given Marjukka's inability to distinguish between the letters 'b' and 'p', any readers with a reasonable knowledge of English colloquialisms will understand the concern when she contacted the local council to ask them to remove a load of bricks from the front garden'. Needless to say, all male members of the household were elsewhere when the rubbish truck arrived!

In The News

The British *Independent* newspaper reported this month on attempts by the government of Trinidad to change its national language from English to Spanish:

'English is the language of almost all of its inhabitants. Football and cricket are its national sports. [...] But, eyeing the markets of Latin America seven miles off its shores, the former British colony [...] is rejecting its Anglo-Saxon past and aiming to be Spanish speaking by 2020.'

According to the newspaper, the move has been met with little resistance, despite the fact that currently only about 1500 of Trinidad's 1.3 million citizens is Spanish speaking. Apparently many inhabitants have responded willingly and enrollment in the new language classes has been high. The newspaper points out that much of this success stems from Trinidad's already mixed and cosmopolitan heritage:

'...with 40% of its population Hindi-speaking East Indians and a good smattering of other ethnic groups with their own languages, [Trinidad] has never been a monolingual society.'

Source: www.independent.co.uk

Returning Home - The Future of an EFL Bilingual Mikako Yamamoto



A picture drawn by Hitomi based on one of the books she was reading in England.

Living in England was an excellent experience for my daughter. It is often said that children absorb new things like a sponge. My daughter, Hitomi was exactly like that.

Hitomi was born and grew up in Japan. She was surrounded by Japanese speakers as her outside environment was the largely monolingual Japanese society. However, I tried to create an English language environment for her at home so she could get familiar with the language. I spent lots of time with Hitomi playing games in English, singing English songs together and reading a lot of English picture books. As a result, listening to English was as natural to her as listening to Japanese until she turned two-and-a-half. However, as she grew up, she began to show reluctance to be spoken to in English. Nevertheless, she still preferred to listen to English songs and stories. Her attitude towards the language continued like this until, in the middle of June 2002, my daughter and I left for England because of my MA degree course. We lived there for about 14 months till the end of August 2003.

When we arrived, Hitomi was only 5-years old and couldn't speak English at all. However, attending a local primary school totally changed her attitude towards the language. She became eager to learn. Fortunately, she could listen to and understand much of what teachers and friends said if they spoke to her slowly and clearly. In addition, she could read and write 'hiragana' by then. Hiragana is one of the systems of Japanese letters. Actually, Japanese is written in the three main orthographies: hiragana, katakana and kanji. Japanese children usually acquire hiragana first before entering primary schools because the alphabet of hiragana is simple.

In short, she had mastered basic Japanese and had familiarised herself with English. This knowledge may well have been a help

to her in acquiring a second language. Even if this is the case, she must have felt lonely entering into this totally strange world all by herself. Fortunately she was blessed with three girlfriends right from the first day of school. These girls helped Hitomi whenever she couldn't understand what a teacher said. I heard later that Hitomi was crying at the beginning of her school day but she was smiling by the time I picked her up. Now I know how she coped with these new circumstances, but I didn't notice at the time.

She did go through a 'silent period' for a couple of months when she first entered the school, but she picked up many phrases from her friends and teachers. She gradually started speaking English around the end of August in 2002, only two months after we had arrived.

Hitomi told me that, if she could start all over again, she wishes she could speak English from the beginning. It looks like her level of English will be maintained as far as her motivation will take her.

I have been able to identify a number of reasons why Hitomi developed her level of English in such a short period. One was that her primary school introduced a new reading system, based on research into psychology, called 'Early Reading Research' which is still being developed at the University of Warwick. Hitomi's home teacher gave each child a notebook with a glued down piece of paper. On each piece of paper were written five or six words that children should read without relying on phonics skill. Children receive another piece of paper for their notebook when they could read all of the words given to them fluently. The children also brought books home with them to practice reading and are asked to read to teachers at school sometimes. The teachers check how a child's reading has improved before deciding whether they should progress to the next level of books or not.

Another major factor that motivated Hitomi was the local library. Luckily, we lived close to it so we could take her to a room full of books and spend lots of time there. Indeed, the library ran a programme to encourage children to read more books. After you read a book and tell a librarian about the story that you have read you

would receive a sheet of stickers each time. That event gave Hitomi opportunities to participate in a good way to improve her English.

As I mentioned above, these excellent resources and the educational environment around Hitomi attracted her and motivated her to learn English. At the end of her first year she took a literacy exam. The result showed that her literacy ability was actually one year ahead.

Certainly, her time in England produced an impressive result. However, we are now facing another challenge. Namely, how do we preserve her ability in English now that we have returned to Japan.

Soon after we got back to Japan, Hitomi enrolled in an English class that is opened for returnees. She attends lessons every Saturday. She also keeps reading English books everyday so her reading level is still high. When she left England in summer 2003, she was reading books from stage 9 of the Oxford Reading Tree. Now, in autumn 2004, she is proceeding to stage 12. According to the Oxford web site, the approximate reading age of stage 12 is 9 years – 9 years 6 months. From this point of view, it could be said that she is actually improving her English skill in reading rather than merely holding it. Furthermore she takes English proficiency exams regularly and achieved a wonderful result so far. For instance, she passed an exam that shows a level of English ability equivalent to junior high school students in domestic base.

On the other hand, it seems that she is losing her oral skill gradually because opportunities to communicate in English are limited. She will become 8-years old this winter in 2004. At the moment, since she still keeps in touch with her friends in England through the internet and over the phone, and has a dream to go abroad to take ballet lessons there, she is keen to learn English spontaneously. Hitomi told me that, if she could start all over again, she wishes she could speak English from the beginning. It looks like her level of English will be maintained as far as her motivation will take her. I only hope that she won't lose her drive, and that she will keep her dream and be proud of herself as a bilingual in the future.

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Notes From the OPOL Family



Some Mothers...

Suzanne and Jacques are an English/French couple with three more-or-less bilingual children (Marc, 8, Nina, 6 and Gabriel, 2 years old). They now live in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Marc and Nina attend the French Lycee there. They try to stick to the One-Parent, One-Language (OPOL) approach.

Mama? Mummy? Maman?

Gabriel is talking more and more each day and refers to me as *Mama*. I wonder why he doesn't use the English word *Mummy* so I listen to see what the others say. Interestingly they change my name often. With English-speaking friends I hear 'Mummy said...' and with the French friends 'Maman dit...' But between themselves they seem to have picked *Mama* as their chosen name.

Is that because *Mama* can be said in both English and French? Is it linked to hearing the baby say *Mama*, or is *Mama* simply easier to say? For me the word conjures up images of the American mother from *Little House on the Prairie*. I would not have chosen it but I am out-voted three to one!

When I go to pick up Nina from school she runs out to me shouting 'Maman, Maman!' I ask her about her day and she replies in French. This is quite annoying, but usual behaviour for a bilingual child. I say 'Hey, I speak French to the teachers, but not to you!' 'Non' says mademoiselle 'Tu parle Français avec moi' Is she embarrassed to have her mother speaking English or just testing me out? We say nothing until we get in the car. I refuse to speak French, she English. But once safely belted in she cannot resist giving me the gossip of the day and talks in English all the way home!

Mother's Day

Every year around springtime we have our annual dilemma regarding Mother's Day. As a child I celebrated Mothering Sunday in England, which usually falls around mid-March. Gifts were made in school or I would make

my mum a cake or bring her tea in bed. I still ring my mum on that day and send a gift. The American Mother's Day is celebrated internationally. This year Mother's Day was the 6th of March in the UK, then the 8th May over here in Malaysia (the same as America, Canada, Australia and New Zealand). Finally, the French celebrated their *Fete des Mères* on the last Sunday of May which was the 29th of May.

The children don't know what to do. In March they see me calling my mum and worry that they missed the special day. Then they see the local Mother's Day advertised all over in Malaysia in with special cakes and flowers on sale and they again worry. What will Mama say? Luckily the French school finally saves the day by making a card or gift in class at the end of May.

I have to say I would rather do the UK one (like my mum so we can feel special together!) but the children seem to need the school art projects and teacher's guidance to chivy them along. Since they don't really get pocket money and Jacques is the last person to remember a date they can't do it themselves yet. But why not all three... English tea at the Ritz in March, followed by a bouquet of orchids at the beginning of May and a sweet little handmade card from school at the end of May. Dream on!

On the paternal side all is steady. Jacques has been 'Papa' in all languages ever since they could babble. He also knows exactly when to look forward to his day of indulgence – Fathers Day is the same date everywhere, in England, France and Malaysia!

My Beautiful Mother

My mother-in-law just came to visit us. It's 10 years since we first met. One of my first mistakes was literally translating 'mother-in-law' into 'mère-dans-loi' which means nothing and is quite strange. So Jacques took me aside and enlightened me: 'You must call her belle-mère or 'beautiful mother', even if she is not so beautiful. Also remember that belle-mère means 'stepmother' too. And sisters-in-law are belle-sœurs too!'

But I do find it odd to call her my 'Beautiful Mother', it sort of seems insulting to my own mother, who by rights should be the beautiful one. I wonder what my future daughters-in-law will call me and whether I will enjoy this complimentary title one day. Anyway, my Beautiful Mother and I do get on pretty well, and she is extremely complimentary about my English cooking and always requests apple crumble and custard!

One-Parent-Many-Strategies - The Limitations of OPOL in a Trilingual Context

Joan Bursch



One of the best ways to acquire and maintain two or more languages, many would argue, is the *one-parent-one-language* method, or *OPOL* (e.g. Tokuhama-Espinosa, 2001). The idea seems simple enough, but how well does it work in practice?

I am Jamaican-British, my husband is German and we live in North East France; in Alsace, a region with a long history of bilingualism (French-German/Alsatian). In our family, we try to practice *OPOL* as far as possible. I speak English to our children, Whitney (aged 10) and Pia (aged 8 ½). My husband speaks German. Our children are trilingual from birth, since they have lived in France all their lives. My children have attended a bilingual French-German nursery/primary school since the age of three. School-time is equally divided between the two languages; a whole day of French, followed by a whole day in German. Certain subjects are taught in French. Others in German. Others still, for example grammar, are taught in both languages. The children regularly receive homework and occasionally require our assistance. Helping my children with their homework first made the limitations of *OPOL* clear to me.

Most people would agree that helping with homework works best in the language of instruction. The problem is that the school

language may not correspond with the parent's language. I would like to know if other parents translate instructions from the school language into their own when helping their children. I suspect not.

At my children's school, maths is taught in German. Following the practice of *OPOL*, my husband helped with maths homework. Who should help with French, as neither of us are native speakers? I am the only parent who speaks French well enough, so the decision was taken out of our hands. However, this puts me in the position of abandoning my native language when interacting with my daughters. It is hardly fair to speak of a 'choice' I am making.

My husband now works in Stuttgart and only returns home on weekends. Consequently I am now responsible for helping with German too. Whilst I occasionally do speak about the exercises in

... the dynamics of the employment market have restricted contact to the other language. I can no longer 'choose' to speak one language but must, and luckily can, speak three.

English, the instructions from the workbooks are always read as written, i.e. in German. We see here how employment changes result in modifications to my family's linguistic practices. Not only have the children been less exposed to English since they started school, naturally affecting their fluency, but the dynamics of the employment market have also restricted contact to the other parent and his language. I can no longer 'choose' to speak one language but must, and luckily can, speak three. My children may well spend more time with the English speaking parent, but circumstances hinder me from speaking one language only. What is more, the gap

created by the absence of German at home has not been filled with English, since my daughters 'choose' to fill it with the dominant community language; French.

Multilingual practice interests me not only as a mother, but also as a researcher. I am researching the trilingual writing practice of one of my daughters, Pia. This research involves me taking a closer look at the general multilingual behaviour of her family unit and her wider environment. Bronfenbrenner's ecological model (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) has provided one useful way of classifying the different social contexts. He speaks of 'ecosystems': the micro (e.g. family or school), the meso (the interaction of two microsystems), the exo (e.g. parental employment factors) and the macro (e.g. government/national policies).

A look at the literature reveals that there are many definitions of multilingualism. Baker and Jones (1998), for example, identify six different types of multilingual family context. I find their classifications interesting in that they explore the relationship of the parents' home language(s) in the context of the wider community which speaks the 'dominant' language. Their definitions also accommodate the fact that parents do not always speak only their native language. Already, the picture is becoming more subtle than *OPOL* allows. Above all, we see the interplay between multilinguality as a personal characteristic and multilingualism as a community practice, whatever the degree of proficiency (Aronin & O'Laoire, 2004). Nevertheless, Baker and Jones' categories of multilingualism still fail to capture the language practices of my particular household:

- neither of us speak the dominant community language (French) as a native language to our child (Baker & Jones category 1). I speak English, my husband speaks German. It was the nanny who spoke French from birth;
- neither of us have the dominant language as a native language yet choose to speak the non-dominant language at home so that the child first learns the dominant language at school (cat. 2);
- we do not share one non-dominant language without community support (cat. 3). My husband and I do not have a common non-dominant native language, and there is community support for German e.g. at school;
- we do not share the same native language, which is also the dominant language, yet choose to speak to the child in a different language (cat. 5).

Table 1

	Listener			
	Father	Mother	Pia	Whitney
Speaker				
Father	G, E	G, E, F	G, E, F	G, E, F
Mother	G, E	E, G, F	E, (F, G)	E, (F, G)
Pia	G, F, E	F, G, E	F, G, E	F, G, E
Whitney	G, F, E	F, G, E	F, G, E	F

Intrafamilial Language Distribution, Bursch (2005)

G = German, E = English, F = French

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My family's language patterns are much more a mixture of two further categories identified by Baker and Jones:

- double-dominant home language without community support: parents have different native languages, which results in trilingualism (cat. 4, yet there is community support for German);
- mixed language: parents and family are bilingual in a (partly) bilingual community. Parents speak both languages to the child and codeswitch.

Baker and Jones describe which languages parents speak to their children. But what about the languages spoken between the children, or between parents? Harding and Riley (1996) have addressed this issue, and come up with a diagram visualising the language flow from one speaker to the next. The idea is extremely attractive and it can be used to show what is going on for a particular sequence of dialogue or, as I do, to present a more holistic picture of who speaks what to whom. The limitation of this procedure is that it assumes that speakers only use a single language in any given stretch of dialogue. When I observe my own household, a somewhat different picture emerges:

- multilinguals rarely speak a single language consistently. They have many and use them all, depending on the situation;
- code-switching takes place between speakers, even mid-sentence. This is not always due to a lack of vocabulary. It may also happen because certain words are preferred in a particular language;
- preference for a particular language leads to a linguistic hierarchy or 'language order';
- multilinguals use the range of their linguistic repertoire for self-dialogue;
- the introduction of formal schooling impinges upon the consistent practice of *OPOL*.

Bearing all of this in mind, I have tried to show what my family's everyday linguistic practice looks like in a table showing the various interactions between family members (Table 1.). This is clearly quite a different picture to *OPOL*, and my depiction also differs from that of Harding

and Riley on a number of accounts. Firstly, I sequence the languages in the order of use, based on my knowledge of my family's language practice. Hence, whilst Pia's father speaks to the whole family predominantly in German, I speak predominantly in German to Pia's father but in English to Pia and her sister. I speak equal amounts of French and German to both children, based upon my involvement with homework etc. I have further added a category for self-dialogue. It might seem surprising that people should speak to themselves in anything but their native language, but I assure you, we do! Certain terms or expressions creep their way into your normal vocabulary to the extent that, sooner or later, you find yourself using the 'foreign' term exclusively. At 10am and 4pm our children, as is typical in France, get their *gôûter*, or tea, so that I'll say: 'what d'you want for your *gôûter*?' My husband will say, when it is time to lay the table: 'Tisch decken! Hol die tablemats!' When either parent says goodbye, the girls' standard reply is: bye, 'tschüß, cheerio-toodle-doo!' And if I swear, then it is in German: 'verdammst noch mal!'

Languages are not spoken in a vacuum. The circumstances shaping language use need to be considered in any discussion of language choice...

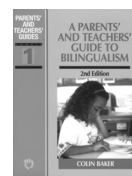
The usual question that arises from monolinguals is: how do they manage? The answer? Fairly well. Whitney and Pia speak French and German like native speakers. Once upon a time they spoke English like native speakers too but, for now, it has been sidelined. Still, it is not forgotten, and I content myself with the fact that I consistently, maybe even persistently, speak to them in English as opposed to switching completely to French or German. There was a time when I used to harrass my children for not speaking English or for replying in French. Nowadays, however, I tend to let them be. I don't want English to bring up associations of a ranting mother who is never satisfied (don't forget, you learn languages emotionally as much as cognitively). I permit myself the occasional 'what did you say?', a raised eyebrow and a smile on my lips meaning: English, please! Mostly I simply repeat what they said in English and leave it at that. One parent, many strategies.

The table I have proposed aims to give an overall impression only. As it stands, it

demonstrates my family's language hierarchy, as it illustrates which language(s) are generally spoken more of and to whom. What it does not do is to show the quantity of a language in relation to the person spoken to: Pia speaks mostly French to me and her sister, but does she speak *more* to me than to her sister?

OPOL, as a guideline, is a commendable strategy which many multilinguals, including myself, attempt to follow. *OPOL* can help to maintain contact with a language to which a child has less exposure beyond the family unit. *OPOL* is extremely helpful, particularly if there are no community schools to keep this language alive, or if such schools are fee-paying and therefore not accessible to everyone. Once one moves beyond bilingualism to trilingualism, however, and from the 'microsystem' of the home to the additional 'microsystem' of the school, *OPOL* becomes problematic. Languages are not spoken in a vacuum. The socio-political circumstances shaping language use need to be considered in any discussion of language choice so that the true extent of such 'choice' can be evaluated. Moreover, one should not forget that the linguistic context for any family is not static. The demands placed on family members by their environment may change over time. Thus, our linguistic behaviour is influenced by a number of sociopolitical factors over which we have minimal control, and which combine with emotional considerations to shape the language(s) we may 'choose' in order to express ourselves. With these considerations in mind we may, as parents, teachers, researchers, policymakers and 'linguaphiles', further our appreciation of the intricacies of multilingualism – and multilinguality – in a socio-cultural context.

List of further reading on page 8



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Reception Classes/Centers: For newly arrived students in a country, to teach the new language of the country, and often culture.

Receptive Bilingualism: Understanding and reading in a second language without speaking or writing in that language.

Receptive Language: Listening/ understanding and reading.

Register: (1) A variety of a language closely associated with different contexts in which the language is used (e.g. courtroom, classroom, church) and hence with different people (e.g. police, professor, priest). (2) A variety of a language used by an individual in a specific context.

One-Parent-Many-Strategies... continued from page 7

Further reading

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