It's a little strange editing an article by my own mother – the temptation to revenge those long nights she spent correcting our Finnish homework may be a little too great. But I have to say that I found Marjukka's article as illuminating as it was moving.

I have always been profoundly grateful for the linguistic gifts my parents have given me, and for the service they have shown to others in starting Multilingual Matters and the BFN. Yet I still slip into the assumption occasionally that bilingualism is just the norm these days - or at least that it is not questioned in the way that it used to be.

Yet you only have to look at Cecilia Gomez's letter to realise that prejudice and mistrust still persists in many parts of the world, or read Iman Laversuch's article on homesickness to understand that intercultural living is far from pain free.

Now that I find myself living in the US, a country whose main language I speak (albeit somewhat differently!), I am beginning to understand the very subtle, yet challenging, cultural norms that the intercultural person is confronted with every day.

These challenges are both a curse and a blessing - and can bring joy and exhilaration or pain and alienation - depending on how they are approached. But I am certain, as with most things in life, they prove themselves so much more rewarding when faced together. With your support the BFN can continue to ensure that we are not alone.

Sami Grover

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As we come to the end of the BFN's 25th year of existence, I think it is time to tell the story of how it all began.

I suppose it started when I met Mike, my English husband, one beautiful Finnish midsummer night in 1971. We fell in love and embarked on the exciting journey of an intercultural marriage. To be able to keep in close contact with my family back in Finland, we needed longer holidays and more freedom to live our lives on a timetable decided by us. Publishing was Mike’s chosen career, and therefore to be our own “bosses” it was natural for us to start a publishing business - publishing research material for universities.

Back in the late 1970s, when our children were born, there was very little material available on bilingualism and multiculturalism, yet there was a large amount of immigration in many countries. Research had been published on bilingualism which indicated that it was not a good idea to speak two languages to children, as results apparently showed that they were not doing so well in school. Unsurprisingly to bilingualism advocates, that research has since been dismissed as not taking into account the children’s social and economic background.

It was against these unfounded prejudices towards bilingualism that we had to battle when we decided that our sons would become bilingual Finnish/English. My emotional language was Finnish, and I could not imagine speaking English to my beautiful boys. English even now, after 36 years in this country, is a foreign language to me – despite the fact that I love it and love England. The other very important reason for bilingualism was that my parents didn’t speak English. I couldn’t have denied them the pleasure of conversing with their grandchildren in Finnish on our twice yearly visits to Finland. Luckily my mother-in-law in

Continued on page two
The Story of the BFN...
Continued from page one

England gave us her full support as she knew only too well the challenges of bilingualism, coming from a Welsh-speaking family and speaking only a limited amount of Welsh herself.

To prove that we were not harming our children, and to calm any fears that some of our friends and relatives had, we were desperate to find research-based evidence on bilingual upbringing. Having established the publishing firm a few years earlier, we started deliberately looking for material on bilingualism and multiculturalism. To our surprise there was plenty available, but it was often published in research journals which did not specialise in the subject. As far as we knew there was no publishing house specialising in multilingualism and multiculturalism, yet immigration was common in most western countries and a large part of the world population spoke two or more languages daily. We had found a niche market, and the firm Multilingual Matters was born.

The material we published (and still do) was academic research, and therefore not so easy to read for a lay reader not familiar with the subject. In 1983 we published a book Bilingual Children: Guidance for the Family by Australian researcher George Saunders, who had studied his own children’s simultaneous acquisition of English and German. George was the German speaker in the family, although he is not a native German. His love for the German language made him study it at the highest level and teach it in a university. When the book was published it received a long and very positive review in The Guardian, one of the leading British newspapers. In the weeks after the review our post box was inundated with letters from parents wanting to know more about how to raise children bilingually. Some of the letters were “cries for help”, making us realise that we were not the only parents in need of correct information on bilingualism. The idea was born for a quarterly newsletter, which would cover the latest research on bilingualism written in a readable, non-academic style. The first issue of The Bilingual Family Newsletter was published in 1984, and was edited by George Saunders for the first ten years.

Back in the 1980s we had no emails, no mobile phones or Skype, all of which help today’s parents, children, grandparents and grandchildren keep in touch with each other and maintain a minority language, however far apart they live. Phone calls to different countries were expensive, satellite TV was not yet common and flights home meant saving for the rest of the year. Despite the expense of it all, we had it easy compared to people who emigrated to far-flung countries in the nineteenth and early twentieth century, and who often had to settle without ever seeing their family back home again. But to compare it with now, 20 years later, our experience was still quite a struggle and it’s not surprising that many parents gave up on bilingualism. The BFN gave parents hope. It reassured them that they were doing the right thing when they were worrying about what harm they may be doing in bringing children up bilingually. It gave support when they were on the brink of giving up. It answered their questions. It was the “website” for parents to find much needed research to calm their concerns. It was - and still is - the link between academics and parents. Many academics read the BFN to gain knowledge as to what is worrying parents, and to learn how they are coping with two or more languages and cultures. It has always been a two-way flow of information.

The questions we received at first for the BFN were very basic: How do you bring up children bilingually? What happens if...
children mix languages? Do bilingual children learn to speak later than monolingual children? How and when should one teach reading and writing in the second language? Later the questions have become more specific, also covering cultural, non-linguistic aspects of bilingual life. Questions on trilingualism and multilingualism are now more common, reflecting our globalised world. Parents may be in a mixed language marriage, yet moving abroad to where the language of the country is neither parent’s language – and a few years later they may move again to yet another country. Many of today’s intercultural children have to adapt and be ready to learn several languages in their childhood – and the BFN reflects that phenomenon. My own cousin, who is married to a Frenchman, has two children who speak Finnish and French, as well as German and Dutch as they have moved from Germany to Holland. I never stop marvelling that such small boys can speak French (a language I have never had much luck with)!

I have just seen a booklet which is given to every new mother in Finland on how to raise children bilingually (Finland is officially a bilingual country). Mothers in Wales have been getting a similar booklet for several years now. The booklet is full of simple clear advice on how to raise children bilingually and why it is worth the effort. How I wish we had had advice like that available 30 years ago.

But the BFN is still needed, despite worldwide communication being so much easier than 20 years ago. Today’s parents’ worries still seem to be similar to the ones we had. Maybe being a parent means that you worry about your children, no matter how much knowledge you may have on how to bring them up. And even now some professionals, with no knowledge of bilingualism, advise parents to speak only one language to their children so as not to confuse them. We still have a long way to go!

My own two beautiful boys are now in their early 30s and I am very proud to tell you that both of them speak, read and write Continued on page seven
There is away. intelligence, and fortitude may wither uncommon strength, resilience, animals which are revered for their possible. Without these supports, even the wild is as gentle and as gradual as new environment (be it in captivity or in the wild) is as gentle and as gradual as possible. Without these supports, even animals which are revered for their uncommon strength, resilience, intelligence, and fortitude may wither away.

This point leads to yet another common misconception: contrary to popular belief, homesickness is not at all limited to the psychologically weak or socially maladjusted. It is an equal opportunity illness which can strike anyone at any time. Sadly, far too many people remain unaware of this fact and insist upon offering useless, belittling, dismissive platitudes when confronting a person suffering from homesickness. Instead, sufferers should be told that there are some concrete steps which they can take to break out of their cycle of cognitive, psychological, and behavioral inertia.

HOMESICKNESS: Strategies for Coping

Readers who find themselves confronted with homesickness are advised to follow a strategy in which they “R.E.O.P.E.N.” themselves.

RESISTANCE: Fight against the urge, no matter how tempting, to fall into long tirades of bitterness or periods of regret.


OPTIMISM: Instead of focusing on all that you have lost, try to shift your thoughts to all that you have gained. Furthermore, take heart in the fact that you are not alone.

PROACTIVENESS: Do not wait passively for your situation to improve. Take concrete steps to bring joy into your life; everyday. There is much to be said for the old adage “laughter is the best medicine”(1).

ENERGY: Take care of yourself physically, psychologically, and spiritually, however you may define that to be. Just as importantly, become aware of those people and places which rob you of your energy; and react accordingly.

NETWORKING: At least initially, try not to center your Self around the friends and family you left behind. Instead, explore your new social environment and seek out new connections (2).

But what can you do if you have tried all of these strategies and you still feel homesick? According to Professor Ad Vingerhoets, from the Department of Clinical and Developmental Psychology at the Tilburg University in the Netherlands, in severe cases involving prolonged homesickness (longer than 12 months), the cure may be very simple, albeit not necessarily easy. As Professor Vingerhoets states: “It seems that homesickness is not very easy to treat. In mild forms, people may learn to live with it, but in serious cases, there is just one remedy - go back to the roots.”

A few years ago, a good friend of mine showed me just how simple it can be to take this final step. Susan was a Chinese Canadian who was married to a Frenchman in the Alsace. One afternoon, I received a surprise telephone call with an elated Susan on the other end of the line: “Guess where I am??!” she asked hurriedly. “I’m standing at Charles de Gaulle Airport and I’m flying HOME!!!” After having survived six years in a dying marriage and suffering every psychosomatic disease known to man, one morning Susan woke, got out of bed, and took the first train to the airport. “I wasn’t planning on leaving.” She reported breathlessly: “Actually, I was on my way to work...But, for some reason, I just didn’t get off the train at my stop...I just kept riding...until suddenly I found myself standing in front of the ticket agents...I just bought myself a one-way ticket back home, to Canada!”

That was the last time that I ever heard from Susan. I like to imagine her someplace very happy and very...well...at home. But, before you find yourself standing at the nearest international airport buying the first one-way ticket back you can find, there is one thing to bear in mind. The decision to move back may present many new, unforeseen challenges. Heeding this warning may be particularly important for expats who have been living abroad for a prolonged time. As Dr. Van Tilburg cautions: Even when someone returns home things may have changed, especially if one has been away for a long time. One often cannot return to the same house; and friends and family may have moved on. Furthermore, the move and new surroundings/cultures may...
Promoted by the excellent article in your Newsletter by Alex Poole and also the letter from Monika Jonasova about prejudice (BFN 25:2), I have finally put pen to paper (so to speak) to recount our experience with Sarah.

Our daughter is now almost 20-years-old and speaks six languages. I am English and studied and taught languages and linguistics in Australia. She is Flemish-speaking. We decided to bring Sarah up and her father is a Flemish-speaking Belgian. We decided to bring Sarah up with the OPOL (one parent one language) system - English and Flemish. I frantically looked for reference material beyond my own French-based research when Sarah was born and was very happy to discover the BFN which became my reference and support for many years. I was also lucky to have a British baby group in Leuven to reinforce her baby language and vocabulary in English before she started the local Flemish school. Both Sarah and I are eternally grateful to the BBC for their excellent children’s programmes and serials – ‘Playdays’ remains one of her very best memories of baby days!

My husband’s family was not always sure of the two language approach. My own father, living nearby, was disappointed when Sarah didn’t manage to say ‘Daddy Jim’ until several weeks after the Flemish ‘Bompa’. However, our perseverance in the beginning has paid off and was compensated by such moments when, at 18-months-old, getting no reply from me to her request for toothpaste she turned to her father and asked for ‘tandpasta’; when in frustration with some handicraft project, she cried out ‘this is all in a button’ (knot = knop = button in Flemish); when after several days with English friends in London she insisted on translating everything for her father on his arrival from Belgium.

Sarah participated in the decision to move and was happy to exchange the Belgian weather for the sun and surf and winter skiing of the Basque country.

We developed a system from the very beginning where I corrected any grammatical or vocabulary mistakes and Sarah would happily repeat and auto-correct. This I feel was an important step in avoiding the dangers of cross language interference.

At school at 2½ years, Sarah fitted into the Flemish system, and indeed took advantage of the local way of life and traditions just as wholeheartedly as the English festivities I strove to maintain: – Christmas began on 6th December with Zwarte Piet (Black Peter) and ended on New Year’s day with Viennese walzes, family lunch and the traditional Nieuwjaars brief for the grandparents.

When she was 12-years-old we decided to move to Southern France. Sarah participated in the decision to move and was happy to exchange the Belgian weather for the sun and surf and winter skiing of the Basque country. I was confident she would cope with the change of language at school but nevertheless had a big lump in my throat when I left her for the first day at her new French college. Six years later she completed her Bac (Economy) with brio and has just spent a gap year in Taiwan where she has learned Mandarin. This September she went to Nottingham to start a business and languages degree.

Bringing up our daughter bilingually has helped her become multilingual: French, which she had experienced only passively until she started school here, she reproduced seemingly without effort and learned to read and write correctly in her first school year; Spanish (with Spain just over the border) she adopted with great enthusiasm; German came as the next language – obviously helped by the germanic Flemish and especially by an active school exchange. We still maintain the bilingual balance at home despite the fact we are now in a third-language environment often with visitors from many different nationalities.

We would like to think our daughter has become part of a new generation of world citizens.

NEW PUBLICATION

This book is for parents who live in a foreign country and intend to raise their children in their own heritage language(s). It offers helpful suggestions for this challenging situation and provides useful strategies in the daily interactions between parents and children.

This book is hugely enjoyable! It is written in a highly accessible style, and yet it is academically rigorous. The author has a profound understanding of the linguistic, social, cultural and psychological aspects of trilingualism ... She draws excellent conclusions for prospective parents of multilingual children and has a clear message to those who doubt that multilingualism can work.

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Parents' and Teachers' Guides, 2008

200pp Pbk ISBN-13 9781847691064
Price £18.95 / US$36.95 / CAN$36.95

www.multilingual-matters.com
There are many families around the world who communicate using a third language which they both speak fluently. It's very positive that you are thinking ahead about bilingualism and that you are both bilingual too. This is a great model for your child. It's clear that English has an important role in your family, because that is the language of communication for you and your husband. When your baby arrives you have a few options.

Firstly, you could each speak your own language (you speak in Korean and your husband in Chinese) to your child from birth. This is the basis of the One-parent-One language (OPOL) approach that you read about, and allows each parent to establish their own language when the child is young. This would be good for helping your child learn Korean, because you can sing or tell stories in your maternal language, which really helps language skills. You can still speak English together as a couple.

In my research on trilingual families I found that the children quickly pick up the third language too, from hearing their parents use it all the time, and they often become trilingual. Later on, when your child is comfortable speaking the two parental languages you can always introduce English as a language you use when you are all together, or though books, music or films. You could perhaps find a tutor or organize extra classes in English to build up vocabulary and grammar. Children in trilingual families usually learn to “switch” language very quickly and use the right one for the right person.

Secondly, one or both of you could speak to your child in English, because you both speak it well and feel confident using English together. This is often referred to as a Non-Native strategy. Your child would still pick up Chinese, from your husband’s family, school and local friends, as long as you continue to live in China. However, this option would limit Korean use, and perhaps make it difficult for the child to communicate with your family when you visit.

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert
Author of Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-parent-One Language Approach and the OPOL Family Blog. See advertisement on the right for more details about Suzanne’s book, or check out her website at: www.opol4us.com

Marc discusses each language seriously and meticulously, questioning us on which one we think is the easiest, which one is useful, and which one will help him in the future. He picks German in the end. Jacques is happy since he speaks excellent German. In fact, his mother fought to get a German class established twenty years ago in the same school, rallying round parents to give the children more choice.

The German class is small and is run via webcam so the teacher can cover four schools at the same time. I am a bit sceptical about this futuristic set-up, but the kids accept it as normal. Talking to the microphone or the camera has become second nature. It is a delight to see Marc saying ‘Ich bin Marc!’ and chanting ‘ein, zwei, drei...’ He is fascinated by the differences and the similarities between English, French and this new language. He is amazed that German has an extra letter (the ‘ss’ sound or β) and that they use capital letters for so many nouns and enjoys the lack of pressure to become fluent and the slow pace of learning that beginners can indulge in. Watching him enthusiastically tackle his German homework I am glad that finally language learning is fun...

Post a comment on Suzanne’s blog: http://opol-family.blogspot.com/

More Information

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 families were interviewed in-depth about how they pass on their language in bilingual or trilingual families.

The realization that the home you once left behind is gone can be a devastating one, leaving the person feeling devastated, cheated, and alone. For that reason, long-term sufferers of homesickness who have finally made the often excruciatingly difficult decision to “go back” are warned to prepare themselves for the fact that the home they left behind may only exist in their memory, not in reality. This point is not made to discourage but to protect the weary.

So, how do you know when it is time to leave? Lynda, another US American who was once married to a Catalan-Spanish speaker from Barcelona describes how she decided to draw the line: *Because my husband was unwilling to accept my feelings about my home country, and even on occasion refused to allow me to come back, even when family was very ill, I left him. By that I mean I divorced him and I came back to my home country. Some people are able to embrace the new and different and forever leave behind the past and the things attached to their home. [...] Others, are not able to do so for extended periods, even when fully integrated into the new culture. [...] If the feelings are that intense, face up to them, be brave and make a decision.*

Unfortunately, there is no one hard and fast rule for figuring out what is the best decision. Each family is a unique, complex socio-psychological system with its own set of norms, traditions, principles, and expectations. Consequently, there is no sure-fire way for determining when “enough has truly been enough”. However, there is one general principle which can be of great use here: namely, “honesty is always the best policy”. Try, no matter how difficult it may be at first, to be honest about both your strengths and your weaknesses, your borders and your limits.

Talk with the people you love and solicit their understanding and support. Moreover, don’t forget that one of the most important people in that circle of love should be yourself. And therein lies one of the most important lessons to be learnt if you are going to truly climb your way out of the maddening spiral of depression and despair known as loneliness. Before you can get the help you need, you must first be willing to demand the joy you deserve.

References

Footnotes
(1) Severe homesickness does not remit spontaneously but does get better with positive coping efforts.” (Thurber, 2007: 6).
(2) As Van Tilburg goes on to explain: “I’d be wary of a heavy reliance on social support from home rather than people in the new environment as it will hinder adjustment [...]. The people in your new environment can help you with the daily hassles of finding stores, schools, restaurants, doctors, etc., helping with the new language, norms, values, culture, and laws [...]”.

The Story of the BFN ... Continued from page three

Finnish fluently. They are also very grateful that we brought them up bilingually as it has given them strong roots in both of their cultures and that “second window” on the world, which has helped them to develop open curiosity towards different languages and cultures. It has taken Sami, now the editor of the BFN, across the Atlantic to marry a lovely American girl, Jenni, and although they have a common language, they too have embarked on the interesting and exciting journey of a bicultural marriage.

Bilingualism/biculturalism is a life-long journey with its ups and downs like any other. The BFN has helped many on that journey and I hope it will continue to help future parents too. Thank you to all the readers and contributors, especially the academics, who have freely given their advice and shared their knowledge with readers.

Since I was brought up monolingually and have never found language learning easy, I feel strongly that we have given our children a great gift by giving them multiple languages from early childhood. For me, the slogan “Blessed with bilingual brains” says it all!

New Publication

This book addresses issues that educators, policy makers and parents of linguistically diverse children must face when teaching in, administrating or choosing an International School. The author draws on teaching theory to propose guidelines, best practice and checklists for ensuring that all children in a school’s multicultural society benefit from a truly inclusive curriculum, regardless of their linguistic and cultural origins.

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Russian speaking families in the West Midlands, UK

A Russian/English family with a little boy (2.5 years old) would like to meet other Russian speaking families with young children that live in the West Midlands, preferably in the Birmingham/Worcester area. We live in Bromsgrove and speak mainly Russian at home. We would be happy to organise a Russian playgroup if there were other families that would be interested in joining.

REAL BOOK NEWS

For adults helping children learn English as a foreign language or additional language. Each issue introduces suitable real picture books for beginners in English and also includes a Feature Article of interest to parents helping their children learn English.

“Two Language or More”

The National Education Agency and the Rinkeby Institute of Multilingual Research (Sweden) have published a very informative 28 page booklet “Two Language or More” in Swedish, Albanian, Arabic, Bosnian, English, Finnish, Somali, Spanish and Turkish. Price 10 Swedish Kronor (Swedish Crowns/approx. £1.00 sterling equivalent).

Available from
Liber Distribution Publikationstjänst, 162 89 Stockholm.

GLOSSARY

Native Language: The language which a person acquires first in life, or identifies with as a member of an ethnic group.

Negotiation: Negotiation occurs in a conversation so that successful and smooth communication occurs. The use of feedback, corrections, exemplification, repetition, elaboration and simplification may aid negotiation.

Non-Native Variety: A language variety not indigenous to a region, but imported by in-migrants.

Non-Verbal Communication: Communication without words; for example, via gestures, eye contact, position and posture when talking, body movements and contact, tone of voice.