

the

# bilingual family

newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

## IN THIS ISSUE

- Teaching Your Child a Second Language
- Deaf Bilingualism
- OPOL Family and a Culture Gap
- Your Letters of Support

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## editorial

Isn't it always the way? No sooner do we announce that this will be the last volume of the *BFN*, due to a lack of submissions, and we are inundated by great articles and beautiful letters reiterating how much the *BFN* has meant to people over the years.

While we remain convinced that it's the right time for the *BFN* to move on, and for somebody else to take up the mantle online, we were all very touched by the genuine expression of support and gratitude shown by so many of our readers.

From Christine Jernigan's fabulous and revealing article on bringing up a child with a parent's second language, through Iman Laversuch's exploration of bilingualism and Deafness, to Suzanne Barron Hauwaert's latest dispatch from the OPOL family, we hope this issue will go some way to fulfilling our promise of making this last volume the best one yet.

We are still looking for submissions for the last two issues, so please keep your anecdotes, queries, articles and letters coming. The *BFN* would not have been what it is without you.

We continue to explore options for supporting an online community of bilingual/multilingual enthusiasts. Watch this space for more information.

In the meantime, thank you once again for your support. It means the world to us.

Sami Grover

## “Mommy - Talk to me in REAL!”

### Teaching your Child your Second Language

by Dr Christine Galbreath Jernigan

The impetus for this article: a short conversation with an acquaintance who just didn't *get* bilingualism and relationships. After explaining I speak to my children in Portuguese, a language I learned in my twenties, this interlocutor quipped accusingly, “*So you've NEVER said 'I love you' to them in English?!'*” My simple



Christine's family

retort, “*I say it in Portuguese*” was met with that look of parental disapproval and holier-than-thou disbelief.

How to explain the inexplicable nature of language and relationships. They intertwine, vine-like, and grow up together. However, as any parent-to-be will attest, the fear of “messaging up” is firmly rooted. I wondered, and sometimes even agonized over, whether my passion for foreign language would interfere with being a good, loving mother.

I fortunately had the benefit of a higher degree in Foreign Language Education that helped me understand linguistics, Portuguese language and culture, and foreign language teaching methodology. I had researched and written about language and motivation using human subjects, so I knew how to treat people I was studying, to see them as whole people and not just numbers to manipulate. I had worked in the field, teaching elementary school children and adults to speak a second language. After some years and in a very pregnant state, I left my then current teaching position to stay home with my babies, making them (in my mind) the most beloved guinea pigs alive today.

I fretted early on that I didn't know enough: though my Portuguese was pretty good, I had only lived in Brazil for a year and a half and that was ten years ago. During that time, and since, I had had no contact with babies, so I didn't know ‘baby talk’ vocabulary or children songs and such. I actually met once a week with a Brazilian woman who lived near our block, who tutored me in these areas. I wanted to be able to say, ‘pacifier’ and ‘stinky diaper’ and sing songs and nursery rhymes.

So while I was making a birth plan and nesting the apartment, I was also learning how to talk to my baby. We were both starting at the beginning to some extent, and I calmed myself with, “*Remember, it's like with classroom teaching, you only have*

*Continued on page two*

## Mommy - Talk to me...

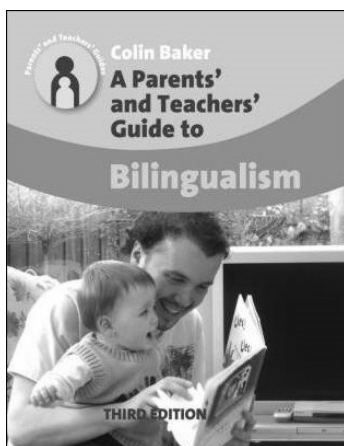
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to stay one step ahead of the students.” Mine was a baby step.

Veteran parents who heard about my plan were all too happy to write it off as a nice intention. “We’ll see how you feel once the baby comes”, they’d say with a knowing smile. I could detect a note of remorse in their tone, signaling that perhaps they hadn’t taught sign language or completed the Baby-Scientist program with their child as they’d eagerly planned.

Plus, I was a non-native speaker with no Brazilian familial ties. My brain worked in English. I spoke English to nearly everyone. I do math in English. What if I taught my kids some odd creole with my home town accent (Nashville, Tennessee!). What if I used crudely congealed Portuguese verbs and unwittingly vulgar vocabulary? I’ve spent less than a year and a half in Brazil and I am not Brazilian, no matter how many Brazilian friends I make or how much I speak Portuguese. How can I begin to teach the language, when it is so threaded with a culture that is not my own?

I was encouraged by Dr Greg Yelland, coauthor of *The Metalinguistic Benefits of Limited Contact with a Second Language: It is no odder for a parent to say ‘If I’m not fluent in a language, I should not teach it to my kids,’ than it is to say ‘I’m not a professional artist; therefore I shouldn’t spend time helping my kid do crafts.’ Parents worry their child will make grammatical mistakes in the language. Yet, even in our native languages we make mistakes. Does that mean we should not speak at all? God bless that man!*



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When my daughter was born, my husband and I resided in Australia but soon moved stateside. Since her birth, I had begun my research not only on my family, but also case studies of other families raising their children to speak a language they do not speak ‘natively’. I started keeping a blog of daily experiences with my children on my site ([www.bilingualwiki.com](http://www.bilingualwiki.com)). I wanted to show parents that real people could succeed, and I wanted to share our bumpy route in progress.

The theme I see reading any interview with parents is relationships. Some parents were afraid of how the second language might hinder their deeper level communication with their children. Some wondered how to teach a culture that is airline flights away. “Will I be real, would

*Some parents were afraid of how the second language might hinder their deeper level communication with their children. Some wondered how to teach a culture that is airline flights away.*

*I be myself, if I’m speaking my second language instead of my native tongue?”, “What if they don’t want to speak the second language, or stop speaking it when they get to high school?”, “How will others feel if we speak the language while they are around?”*

In searching for answers, I work to balance the answer of a researcher and teacher with the mother’s side of things. I just cannot tease apart the two, so leave caveats like, “Research shows X, and I believe that to be true in general, but in your case, and as a mother, I might suggest Y for the next few months.”

At the crux of this issue, I can’t find a reason for parents not to teach their child their second language. There are limits perhaps. Some parents are divorced and only spend half of their time with their children. Some have children with speech difficulties or learning challenges that need to be taken into account when making a language plan. There are signals parents need to pick up on when their child’s frustration level starts rising to a boil.

Another constant I can say is that speaking a second language with a loving attitude does not hurt your relationship with your child. Quite the opposite, it can be an extra string of the complex cord that binds you together as parent and child.

Since I am my children’s main source for Portuguese, I find there’s a direct correlation of how much time I spend engaged with the kids and their facility with Portuguese. When I notice my kids’ hesitance as they try to express themselves, I see that we haven’t spoken much lately. So, I talk more to them. I tell them something funny that happened to me that day - something that would interest them. I find it helps click their little minds over to the second language before they’re asked to produce the language themselves. I ask them what they’re up to, get them to tell me stories of their school day. That’s got to be good in general.

The time we spend speaking Portuguese is not “book learning” in any sense. My six-year-old James recently overheard me telling someone that I had been teaching his sister and him Portuguese since they were little. He corrected me later, saying, “But you’re not teaching me Portuguese!” His sister, Sydney, age 8, tried to explain what I meant. That it’s not teaching like with pencils in school, but just talking to us in Portuguese is the teaching. Again, his response, “But she’s not TEACHING us Portuguese!” No, not teaching in the book-at-a-desk sense, just living and experiencing time together that involves communication in another language.

I queried a Portuguese language and literature professor at the University of Texas at Austin to see if he spoke a second language with his son. He is American and speaks English as a first language, but is fluent in Spanish and Portuguese. His response surprised me: *I know some families who speak to their children in another language, but I’ve always felt that it was a little artificial. I’d rather go play ball, fish, fix cars, play with bunnies, catch snakes and lizards, hike, watch sports, and BBQ fatty meats.*

Yet both are possible. You may have to do some digging to find out expressions in certain fields of interest, but that’s do-able. Find someone who speaks the language natively. Go to a soccer game with native speakers of the language and learn from listening. Talk grill and fire and fatty meats, just do it in the second language.

This is not to say that it’s always easy. My kids are so excited to share their day when they get in from school, that Portuguese often gets left behind and sentences are a mix of languages, leaning heavily towards English. I work hard to not curb their enthusiasm. After all, my goal is to raise happy well-adjusted children. When they say, “e depois, um frog estava near o playground!”, I will repeat back all in Portuguese, using a questioning disbelief and enthusiasm to overshadow anything that might look like correction: “O QUE? Um sapo perto do parquinho?! Serio?!”

(“What? A frog near the playground, really?!”). From then they will use “sapo” for frog as they continue their story (if they don’t, then I sometimes do a little more overt correction), saying “*Diga ‘sapo’*” (“Say ‘frog’”).

It’s crucial that parents be aware of children’s anxiety levels. That doesn’t mean switching back to the first language at the first sign of difficulty. It means, instead, that you are taking their feelings seriously and doing something to help out. That might mean slowing down your speech or repeating something with easier vocabulary or using the expression in a context in which the child is more familiar/comfortable. Again, you know your child best and may need to ‘fudge’ in certain circumstances.

In my case, if I see they are about to give up on something I’m saying due to lack of understanding, I’ve sometimes just said the word quietly in English and then, right after, said it in Portuguese. Otherwise, you risk facing children like the one I’ve quoted below. I interviewed her mother about teaching her second language to her daughter and she expressed how upset her daughter could become. *Sometimes Elizabeth likes for me to speak it (Spanish as a second language) because it’s special and different but sometimes she hates it because if there are too many words in a sentence she doesn’t understand, she gets frustrated....so she says, ‘Talk to me in REAL. Talk to me in PLAIN!’.*

It doesn’t need to escalate to this point if you see your child is becoming frustrated. And if it does get to this point, honesty works well. The mom might try, in slow, empathic Spanish, “*I’m sorry I didn’t say it clearly. I am trying to say...*” or “*This is hard to understand...a funny way to say it is...*”. Speaking the second language shouldn’t become a battlefield. If it does, make a new plan - even a mini-adjustment for a specific situation. The priority is your child’s happiness, so that - tempered with the motivation to share the language - your time together will be more meaningful.

#### **Code and Commitment**

In speaking Portuguese in the States, I’ve found my children and I share a certain code and can easily communicate without others understanding. What might be embarrassing moments are smoothed over because we can discuss what others can’t hear. I might tell the kids to stop staring at a stranger in odd clothing or I can remind them to thank the cashier.

This code is a sort of relational bond and if it starts early, it’s a part of the parent/child’s communication, of how they

*Continued on page six*

## Notes from the OPOL Family



### MIND THE CULTURAL GAP Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

On a recent trip to England to visit my parents and sister I saw that being able to speak two languages perfectly and feel at home in two cultures can be a challenge. Like many OPOL families we live in my husband’s country (France) and spend less and less time in my country (England) these days. Full-time school has limited our travels and my family prefers to visit us in France. Usually I go back in the Easter holidays for a week. Although it sounds strange, I can sometimes feel like a tourist in my own country. I look British, speak with a British accent, but 51 weeks in France has an unconscious effect and without realizing it I am saying hello and goodbye to shop assistants, shrugging my shoulders and complaining about the quality of the bread. From a distance my kids look like typical Brits too, same clothes, same haircuts, but they have a certain attitude which makes them seem different.

Arriving by Eurostar from France we stepped out of the train onto St. Pancras station in London and were temporarily culture-lagged. I felt overwhelmed by English; people talking, shouting and singing. My language, which is limited in France to the home and British friends, was suddenly everywhere. The announcements and posters all screamed English. It was strangely tempting to speak French to my children because everyone understood what we said in private.

Using pounds and pence seemed very strange too, and I fumbled looking for my £2.25 in change for my café latte, while the barista girl assumed I was foreign and offered to look in my purse to help me sort out the coins. To get back into UK life I bought a newspaper. The newspapers were all headlined by politics. Marc and Nina are aware of world news, but it is filtered through the French news. They might know the names, but to be honest if David Cameron or Gordon Brown came up my kids and said ‘hello’ I don’t think they

would recognize them. It was the start of the UK elections campaign and Marc and Nina mixed up French and UK politics, and asked loudly, ‘So who will be the next President?’ People looked at them with a mixture of bemused amazement and shock that two British kids thought there was a President of Britain...

In London we spent a day in Madame Tussauds with my friend Sally and her two kids who are the same age as Marc and Nina. Apart from international celebrities, like Hannah Montana or Britney Spears, Marc and Nina behaved like kids on a school-exchange trip from France. Inside the exhibition, in front of Queen Elizabeth 1st, it was disconcerting to hear my kids ask ‘Who is that Queen?’ and not recognize any current British famous people, like Lewis Hamilton. In the famous World Leaders section they were suddenly patriotic for France. They bypassed Mandela, Obama, Blair and Bush and asked for me to take their photo next to ‘our’ Nicolas Sarkozy. On the way back on the Underground the kids insisted on calling it the Metro and kept asking me why the woman keeps saying ‘Mind the Gap!’ How can a parent, living away from the culture, fill in all these gaps?

#### **Help!**

There may be a day when you realize that your child is simply so proficient in your second language that you can actually trust them talk for you. I do try to speak as much French as I can, but garages, doctors and plumbers tend to use so much jargon my basic knowledge of the language will never be enough. As generations of expats and immigrants have discovered, bilingual children often know more vocabulary than their parents, and more importantly they can remember it and say it correctly. I wouldn’t recommend this, but there are times when it’s essential.

When our car broke down while Jacques was away on business I had to order a spare part at the garage, and I needed the right word. It sounded something like Doritos, the Mexican spicy triangular crisps that you dip in your guacamole. I knew the mechanic would not appreciate my weird language logic (‘it sounds like a Mexican crisp...’) or mispronunciation. Luckily, 13-year-old Marc has the perfect memory of a teenager, and an interest in mechanical things. At the garage Marc became my official translator and discussed the problem in detail with the mechanic while I stood by feeling rather helpless, but grateful.

**You can read more about Suzanne’s OPOL family in her blog:**  
<http://opol-family.blogspot.com/>

**Are you part of an OPOL Family? Want to chat about life with two languages and cultures? Join other OPOL Families to chat via Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert’s new Facebook group: Notes from the OPOL Family**

# Deaf Bilingualism: Crossing Languages and Bridging Cultures

By Dr. I. M. Laversuch  
Photographs by G. Nick

According to recent estimates of the World Health Association, there are approximately 278 million people around the world who have some form of moderate to profound hearing impairment or deafness. The major causes of deafness in children are extremely varied. From infectious diseases such as measles, mumps, and meningitis to depletion of oxygen to the brain due to complications during birth, there are any number of factors which can result in significant hearing loss in children. In most cases, deaf children are born into hearing families. In the past, there was tremendous pressure placed upon these families to raise their children monolingually in either

*In the past, there was tremendous pressure placed upon these families to raise their children monolingually in either exclusively oral or manual environments.*

exclusively oral or manual environments. In other words, with either a spoken language or sign language as the sole medium of communication. Over time, however, the debate between oralism or manualism has given way to more holistic communicative intermodal approaches which advocate exposure to both sign and spoken languages.

Although more research is needed, to date, it would seem that the benefits which may result from a so-called “total communication” approach are many. To a certain extent, this outcome should come as no surprise. For many decades now contemporary investigations have firmly established the many social, psychological, cognitive, and linguistic advantages which are associated with multilingualism. In this article, the very personal stories of three young people and their experiences with sign and spoken languages are described. First, there is Tristan’s story.

Tristan lost his hearing in an accident during his birth: unnoticed by his doctors, his umbilical cord became entangled around his neck, strangling him as he

passed through the birth canal and cutting off his brain’s flow of oxygen. The result was that Tristan became one of millions of children who are pre-lingually deaf; that is having lost their ability to hear before acquiring a language. As such, Tristan faced a particularly difficult challenge when trying to learn spoken German, as the only deaf member of a hearing, non-signing family. Having been advised against signing by conservative East German doctors who staunchly advocated a strictly oralist approach, neither of Tristan’s parents introduced him to a sign language. To help members of the BFN community understand the enormity of the challenge before him, imagine trying to learn a foreign language from native speakers without being able to hear them — a daunting task to say the least.

However, thanks most especially to his mother’s love and perseverance, Tristan eventually learnt to write and read the German language successfully, although speaking German is still sometimes extremely difficult given the weakness of his vocal chords.

By comparison, Tristan had little or no difficulty acquiring his second native language, German Sign Language (GSL). Although the grammatical system was completely different, GSL finally presented Tristan with a linguistic mode of communication which allowed him the freedom to completely express the full range of his considerable intelligence and wonderfully warm and witty personality. Moreover, it was his fluency in GSL which later served as the key to opening the door to discovering other cultures and languages.

During a year long study abroad in Canada, Tristan had the opportunity to learn not only American Sign Language (ASL), but also spoken English. *“During my time in Canada, I felt accepted by the deaf people there.”* In the beginning, it was not always easy for Tristan because the grammatical systems of ASL and GSL are different. But after a period of adjustment, he found that ASL had opened up a whole new world for him. As Tristan explained: *“My time in Canada was very important to my individual development because the Deaf community was so much more progressive. (...) I became more self-confident and developed a clearer self-identity as a Deaf person. The only*

*negative was leaving.”* Today, Tristan is just a few steps away from achieving one of his life’s goals: becoming a teacher of Deaf and hearing impaired children.

A similarly inspiring story came from my second interviewee. If the doctors’ worst fears had come true, Helene Braunstedt would simply have become one of the several thousands of children in Germany who die each year before celebrating their first birthday. *“When I was eight months old my middle ear became inflamed.”* In no time, what had first seemed to be a minor infection developed into a life-threatening brain fever (meningitis) and Helene’s parents were faced with a heart-breaking dilemma: the very medications which could save their infant daughter’s life, could also leave her with profound cognitive and/or physical impairments. Without a moment’s hesitation, her parents gave their permission for the medical intervention. The medicine successfully cured Helene’s infection but ultimately left her with permanent hearing loss.

Luckily, Helene’s parents did not waste any time in seeking professional help for their daughter, which is sadly still too often



the exception rather than the rule. For Helene, help first came in the form of double hearing aids. By the time Helene reached the age of nine, however, her hearing had deteriorated to such a point that even the most powerful hearing aids were no longer sufficient. Once again, the physicians were consulted and the decision was made to try a Cochlear Implant (CI).

A relatively new technological advance at the time, the implantation procedure involves the surgical placement of an electrical device into a subsection of the human skull which allows sound to be

transmitted to the acoustic nerve of the brain.

Laughing lightly with a toss of her rich auburn hair, Helene reassures that the procedure sounds far more invasive than it actually is. *"It sounds absolutely horrible but don't worry, you're given anesthesia!"*

Once again, the surgery was a resounding success. Today, Helene is one of nearly 130,000 people worldwide who have been fitted with a CI. *"From an audiological point of view, I am still deaf. My implant decreased my hearing loss from more than 90 to 30dB."*

That may not sound like a lot to someone with normal hearing. However, as the ca. 15 million deaf and hearing impaired Germans can attest, every dB makes a difference. *"Before the operation, I wasn't even able to use the phone because I was too dependent on lip-reading, even if I tried to call friends or relatives. After my rehabilitation, I learned to hear in a completely new way!"*

Despite her personal success with the CI, Helene acknowledges that the technology remains rather controversial in some circles of the Deaf. *"Some see the implant as a threat to the community. I somehow understand the point, but it's everyone's*

*...sign language makes you and your whole body become more sensitive in a way. GSL is a bridge to another world.*

*right to decide how his/her life should be."* For Helene, the CI not only made it possible to hear, but also helped her to pursue her goal of studying spoken German and English at university. She reports having a special fondness for spoken English. *"I always wanted to study English! I loved it at school! (...) when I had my first lesson, I was like 'WOW! A new language!' I remember standing in the school yard, hopping up and down, saying 'Hello! Good Morning! My name is Helene.'" Generally, learning to speak English as a foreign language is not of course without its challenges. However, for a hearing impaired person, Helene faced some additional difficulties as well. Learning how to pronounce her new English vocabulary was especially difficult. It was also a challenge learning how to give sentences and phrases the*

proper stress and rhythm. Over time, however, with much practice and perseverance, Helene overcame these obstacles and has become an eloquent speaker of both her native language spoken German as well as spoken English as a second language.

Not stopping there, Helene went on to expand her linguistic repertoire to include German Sign Language (GSL). *"I had known some signs and knew how to finger spell the alphabet in GSL, but I was not able to sign a complete sentence before I started university."*

Today, Helene hopes to extend her multimodal multilingualism even more to include the French and British Sign Languages. When asked what she likes about signing, she answers: *"It is so powerful (...) sign language makes you and your whole body become more sensitive in a way. (...)GSL is a bridge to another world."*

Minna is one of Helene's hearing friends who grew up with spoken German and Russian in her home and later learned to speak Spanish and English fluently. Like Helene, Minna has also begun to study GSL at the university. And like Helene, Minna has also found that sign language has opened up a whole new world to her. *"What I found fascinating about GSL is its vitality. For me personally it was so logical to connect pictures in my head with signs."*

As Minna was careful to explain, this was not the only difference she discovered when learning GSL. *"Well, a sign language offers some very practical advantages. For example, if you are in a crowded room and not near the person you would like to talk with, you can sign over a large distance. Sometimes I also find the language is more concise and compact. There is a sign to express exactly what I want. The disadvantages? Obviously, if you are carrying something in your hands, it is hard to sign at the same time. But I actually like being forced to put down what I am holding in order to make my point."*

Another positive point which Minna mentioned was the intensity of the connection which she establishes when conversing with someone. *"I have noticed that every time I have a conversation in GSL, I look people straight in the eyes and that's beautiful."*

Unlike Tristan and Helene, Minna is not hearing impaired. For that reason, her interest in sign language was initially met with a certain degree of surprise and skepticism from the surrounding Deaf community. According to Minna, this reticence was probably due to the lack of tolerance and understanding which many

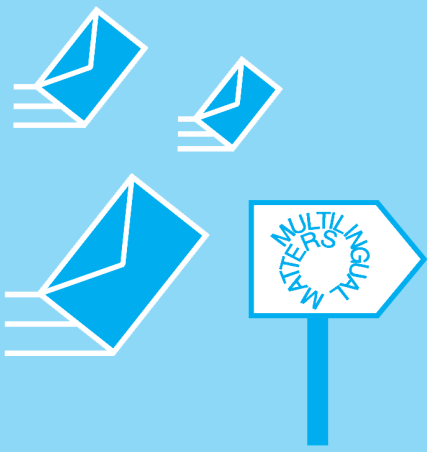
deaf people have experienced from the Hearing world. However, as soon as it became clear that her interest was sincere, she began to make deaf signing friends easily. This invitation has allowed Minna the chance to see the hearing world from a completely new and often frustrating perspective: *"It's outrageous how many barriers deaf people still face nowadays. (...) I try to involve my surroundings into my interest in sign language as much as I can. For example, I have taught my hearing friends the finger alphabet and I often invite my deaf and hearing friends to do things together. I want to try to tear down some of the borders that exist between these 'two worlds'."*

When asked what advice they would give BFN members who are interested in expanding their cross-linguistic communities to include a sign language, the three had the following tips for communicating with the Deaf and Hearing Impaired:

- Always look in the person's eyes. This facilitates communication by making a connection and it also helps to ensure that your lips are facing the deaf/hearing impaired person so that they can read your lips more easily.
- Speak slowly but without exaggeration as that will make your mouth form unnatural shapes and that in turn will make it that much harder for the deaf/hearing impaired person to lip-read.
- Try to use your hands when you're speaking to augment what you are saying.
- Remember that deafness is not a cognitive disorder. The fact that someone can't hear what you are saying does not mean that he or she can't understand what you are saying.
- If you see people signing, don't stare at them. It is considered to be extremely rude.
- If you see people signing, don't walk in between them and interrupt their conversation. Be considerate and walk around them.
- Make sure that if you are communicating with a deaf or hearing impaired person to be in a well lit environment so that the person can see you and your face clearly.
- Deaf and hearing impaired children should have the opportunity to regularly meet and communicate with other deaf and hearing impaired people.

*Continued on page eight*

# Letters



We are among the “small but loyal following” of the Bilingual Family Newsletter, and are sorry that it is to cease publication. I think we have been subscribers for around 25 years. We brought up our two daughters bilingually (Norwegian and English) and found the newsletter inspirational (they are now aged 29 and 30, and the older one has had good use of her English working in India). We recommended the newsletter to other families who wondered about the advantages or disadvantages of bringing up children bilingually. Our original strong belief in the benefits of bilingualism goes back even further to our time studying in Finland in the late 1960s and early 1970s, where we were impressed by the examples of children in mixed Finnish-Swedish marriages growing up bilingually. My wife is from North Norway, and has family links to the still partly bilingual North Norwegian Finnish community. I am from England, where some people still in the 1970s feared that bilingualism would impede children’s language development - although I can remember my grandfather saying how greatly he admired a friend of his whose English-German family had been brought up bilingually. In Norway, one of our daughters had as a child a minor speech impediment, as it turned out temporary. The young school speech therapist diagnosed initially a mismatch between a rapidly growing tongue and less rapidly growing set of teeth, but when she discovered that our daughter was bilingual she started on about ‘half-lingualism’. When we challenged her for scientific evidence, she could only refer to a half-remembered lecture from her student days. Fortunately we were familiar with research from Finland giving a different account. We will miss the newsletter.

**Venke Aasheim Olsen and myself**  
**Michael Jones Saupstad, Norway**

I was really sad to learn that Volume 27 will be the last. We have been reading the BFN for the last 15 years, and I was always really excited to find it in the mailbox and to read it. It has been a wonderful support for us and I want to thank you for this. Besides, with all these nice articles by your mother and yourself about your bilingual family it is as if we have known you for years!

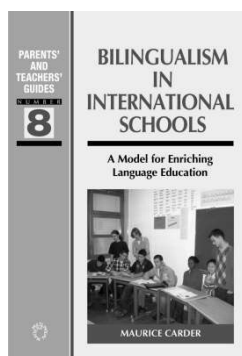
We are a Greek-German family living in Athens (father Greek, mother German), and we have been raising our two children bilingually with the valuable support of the BFN. Our elder son is 16 now, the younger 14; both of them are bilingual now, the OPOL approach worked fine!, and almost trilingual if you count also their very good knowledge of English. And they do not attend a German or International School but just a “normal” public school. Every time I had doubts or got tired in my every day efforts, the newsletter with articles from experts as well as from families dealing with similar difficulties gave me courage. This confidence also helped me to encourage many other non-Greek mothers living here not to give up and to believe that eventually it will all have been worth it.

I have to admit that I never contributed actively to your newsletter, although many times I thought about writing about our personal experiences. But somehow I never found enough time (you know, being a full-time working mum as well as a mum being in charge of the bilingual education of her children is quite a challenge and keeps you busy...). I did, however, always read the BFN from the first to the last page!

I truly hope that you manage to continue being present somewhere on the internet (where???) because I think it would really be a pity if this forum of exchange and support just disappeared.

All the best to you and many thanks again.

**Dagmar Schaeffer, Athens, Greece**



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## Mommy - Talk to me...

*Continued from page three*

express how they feel and who they are. I interviewed a German man living in the US with his American wife and daughter. He spoke German to his five year old daughter whenever they were alone together or at home. Just after he got his citizenship in the US, he came home from the ceremony and joked, “*Okay, no more speaking German with Daddy. I’m American now!*”

Most unexpectedly, she burst into tears. Her father had to console her for some time, assuring her again and again that he was making a joke and that of course they would keep speaking German together.

I volunteer weekly in Sydney’s second grade classroom and have noticed how interested her classmates are in our speaking Portuguese. Sydney’s best friend, Hadley told her mother matter-of-factly, “*Okay mom, we need to speak another language.*” I notice Hadley will pick up on certain words Sydney uses talking to me, like, “*Look at this!*” and she’ll repeat them until she has the accent down perfectly. She even calls me, “*Mamãe.*” Hadley admires this quirky relationship - she wants in on what we have.

Of course, not everyone will consider your code enviable. Carly, a woman I’d interviewed years ago about her raising her children to French (her second language) while living in England, wrote me a recent email about how sick she was of people’s surprise at her speaking exclusively French to the kids. She wrote me about one incident in particular: *I was explaining to a mom I’d met about why I spoke French to my children. She furrowed her brow and said, ‘Well, I lived in Germany for 5 years and am totally fluent in German but would never dream of talking to my children in German. That would be really weird and we’d never have a proper relationship.’*

Carly wrote on to explain to me how she had even cried over this encounter and how she wanted to avoid such negativity in the future. I love her dramatic tenor: *So, the next time I got the ‘So are you French?’ question, I lied. Like an Oscar-worthy actress, I smiled and said ‘No, I’m English but they have an aunt who was French and I want my kids to speak French too.’ The lady smiled back and said ‘I think that’s wonderful!’.* It was such a RELIEF not to have to launch into an epic defence of my linguistic and parenting views, so LOVELY to have a simple, positive acceptance.

So often being different, when it comes to our kids, makes others feel awkward. Family members and friends who don’t speak the second language are challenged to step out of their comfort zone. An open

discussion can allow you to acknowledge that what you are doing is not the norm, but that it is another way to communicate and deserves respect. My own parents have demonstrated frustration at not understanding what Sydney says to me in their presence. Around age four, she was really starting to say cute things that made me laugh, and I'd try to translate, but it just didn't come across as funny. My father said, "It's like we're missing part of her personality."

Since then, my parents have let me know they are on board. They realize that this requires flexibility on all our parts and their acceptance has enriched my relationship with them as well.

### Culture and Resources

We have for years listened to Portuguese music in the car. The other day I put on a Gilberto Gil CD and was surprised to hear Sydney sing along with the first few songs. She told me that the CD was one she used to listen to as she went to sleep. I later attended a concert of Gilberto Gil and became emotional to the point of tears when he sang "Copo d'Aqua" ("A Cup of Water"). It's a song Sydney sings when she's acting silly and wants me to get her a drink. It was our song. The culture was ours in that bit of music.

I've been reading Portuguese to the children since they were little. The resources are not easy to find, but friends in Brazil bring back materials like books and DVDs. However, sometimes English speaking videos and books that have been translated into Portuguese are much easier for the children and me to relate to. Of course, part of the cultural learning is lost, but the familiarity increases kids' comfort level. With their contextual and cultural content, these translations are easier to understand, decreasing frustration, increasing motivation. We especially love getting dual language books through [Language Lizards.com](http://LanguageLizards.com), because the content of the books is about children's behavior in different countries - what other cultures do when a child loses a tooth or can't get rid of the hiccups, for example. Now that my kids are older, we are reading English chapter books translated into Portuguese. For books I find challenging, I read the chapters in English first, then in Portuguese aloud for them. It helps grow my knowledge of the language in a way that's interesting and that feels purposeful.

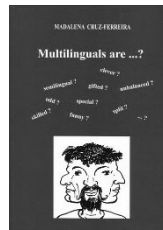
We spend so much more time together with this resource being one we enjoy and often it doesn't mean we're doing something "different" in the negative sense. Sydney and I have been reading translations of the Harry Potter series. She

## NEW BOOK

### MULTILINGUALS ARE...?

By Madalena Cruz-Ferreira

Publication date 2010



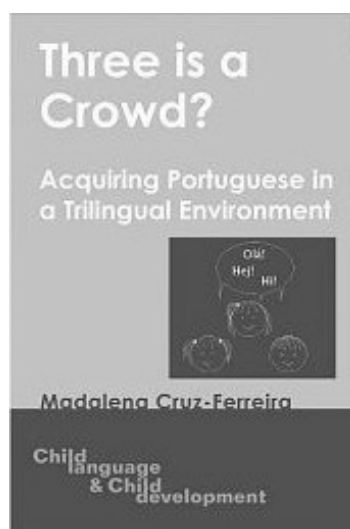
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Multilinguals are people who use several languages in their everyday life. Attitudes towards them are very diverse: some consider them gifted or unusually intelligent, while others fear that they are not fully competent in any one language. This can lead to conflicting advice about multilingualism at home, in school, and elsewhere, particularly nowadays when awareness about multilinguals is growing wherever several languages are used.

This is the first book which discusses, in lay terms, the reasons behind the beliefs and myths traditionally associated with multilinguals. It is written for the general public and is relevant for families, teachers, and everyone else who ever wondered about multilingualism.

### Table of Contents:

- 1. It's a multilingual world, but multilinguals are the odd ones out
- 2. Multilinguals must have balanced languages, but one of them must be dominant
- 3. Multilinguals must develop one main language, but that won't let them develop other languages
- 4. Multilinguals have no mother tongue, because they are not native speakers of any language
- 5. Multilinguals can learn new languages easily, but only in childhood
- 6. Multilingual competence means erasing signs of multilingualism from the speech of multilinguals
- 7. Multilinguals don't have many languages, they have many half-languages
- 8. Becoming multilingual is both a drain and a strain on your brain
- 9. Growing up multilingual is no problem, provided you seek clinical assistance
- 10. In order to raise multilingual children, you must speak to them in only one language
- 11. Multilingualism should be encouraged, but only in languages that matter
- 12. Multilinguals are multilinguals because they are gifted for languages
- 13. Multilingualism is a boon, but also a bane, or vice versa? What are we talking about, really?? Introducing Yuti Illustration Credits



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Written by a multilingual parent, educator and linguist, this book is for parents, educators and linguists in our predominantly, increasingly multilingual world.

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Continued on page eight

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 Channel View Publications Ltd  
 St Nicholas House  
 31-34 High Street,  
 Bristol BS1 2AW,  
 England

Tel: + 44-(0)117-3158562  
 Fax:+44-(0)117-3158563  
 E-mail: [sami@multilingual-matters.com](mailto:sami@multilingual-matters.com)  
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**Deaf Bilingualism**  
*Continued from page five*

- Give children exposure to all kinds of languages, be they spoken or signed. Multilingualism and multiculturalism are gifts to all children, be they hearing or not.
- Have patience and always show respect.



According to many health care officials, despite important technological advances, the rate of hearing impairments may be on the rise due to the increase in new environmental dangers (e.g. walkmans played at injuriously loud volumes for prolonged periods of time). In addition, the increasing lifetime expectancies in many countries around the world have also been accompanied by rising rates of hearing impairment among the aging populations. For this reason, the chances that you or someone you know in the BFN community may develop a hearing disorder are much higher than you might think. However, as the stories of Tristan, Helene, and Minna remind, the real barrier to meaningful communication is not deafness but the ignorance which often accompanies it.

**Mommy - Talk to me...**  
*Continued from page seven*

mentioned at dinner that the kids at school were all talking about Harry Potter and that, at recess, some were playing “quadribol” (the Portuguese translation for the outdoor wizards’ game “Quidditch”). My husband gently told her, “In English, it’s ‘Quidditch’”, for her to understand and use the term correctly with her classmates. We try to normalize our communication as much as possible for the children. To be quite frank, they didn’t sign on for this.

You did, however. It’s a fulltime job - sometimes a stressful one, definitely over 40 hours per week. Kudos for the work you’re doing. Your children will reap the benefits and so will you, as you strengthen your ties with them, while giving them the gift of another language. Proceed with confidence!

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