

The Bilingual Family Newsletter



Editor:

George Saunders

DECEMBER 1984 VOLUME 1 No. 4

EDITORIAL

The Newsletter continues to grow in popularity. Letters from all over the world continue to arrive regularly, many simply telling us to keep up the good work, some to seek solutions to various types of problems in establishing and maintaining family bilingualism, some to offer suggestions. One suggestion we have received from a number of readers is that we widen our scope to include problems of biculturalism, not only bilingualism, in families where the parents come from quite different cultures, e.g. Japanese-American, German-Arab, etc. Nearly every cross-language marriage also involves two different cultures, although some cultures, e.g. Dutch-English, obviously have much more in common than others (such as the ones just mentioned above). We hope, in the near future, to include more aspects of biculturalism in the Newsletter, and invite readers who live or have lived in a two-culture household or environment to share some of their experiences with other readers.

My family's time in Germany is just about over, unfortunately. It has been a very interesting and enjoyable experience for all of us, and the children's German has benefited very much. We return to Australia with much material (books, comics, audio and video cassettes) to help us maintain the language gains which have been made - until we come again (our next five-year plan!)

Members of the Advisory Board, their families, my family and myself, would like to wish all readers a happy New Year and every success with their bilingual efforts.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The editor and publishers are very grateful to the Advisory Board and other individuals for all the help they have given in the production of the 1984 volume. The members of the Advisory Board are listed on page seven.

COMPETITION FOR READERS

We have decided to hold a competition for readers. There are even prizes to be won: one year's free subscription to the *Bilingual Family Newsletter* or any book from the publications of Multilingual Matters.

We are looking for short anecdotes about your most amusing or interesting bilingual experience. We are also looking for the best bilingual joke or cartoon. The editor's sense of humour will be final.

INTRODUCING MEMBERS OF OUR ADVISORY BOARD:

The Byram Family, England

In this issue we meet the Byrams, an English-French bilingual family. They have also written an article for us, which appears below, giving details of how they went about withdrawing their two children from their English school during normal school time so that they could receive part of their education in their other language, French. This may well be something worth considering by other parents in England and in countries with similar educational regulations. (In future issues we hope to look at the possibilities for this type of action in other countries.)



Ian, Alice and friend on one of their French afternoons

Marie Thérèse and Michael Byram both studied languages. Marie Thérèse studied German and Swedish at the Sorbonne, and Michael studied French, German and Danish at King's College, Cambridge. They met in 1968 when they were both language assistants at the same school in Flensburg in the far north of Germany. During that year Michael wrote a thesis on bilingualism in the Danish-German border region, his first interest in bilingualism. They married in 1970 and then spent one year in Cambridge, followed by two years in Copenhagen while Michael did his doctorate on a Danish author.

Continued on page seven

EDUCATING OUR BILINGUAL CHILDREN AT HOME

MICHAEL and MARIE THÉRÈSE BYRAM

We are probably a typical bilingual family – if such a thing exists! Marie Thérèse, who is French, and Michael, who is English, met when we were students spending a year teaching in a German school. At first we spoke German together but by the time we were married we had got into the habit of speaking French, which is still our common language. So when the first child, Alice, was born, she heard and spoke French, although she heard a lot of English from other people, since we were now living in England. At the age of three, she joined a playgroup and began to make rapid progress in English. By this time, Ian had been born and, some 18 months younger, was just beginning to speak. From parents he heard only French, from Alice French and, with the influence of playgroup, some English for play.

Although we have always consistently spoken French together and with the children, reinforced by a minimum of eight weeks' summer holiday with French grandparents, for both Alice and Ian English is dominant for most of the year. In France they speak French together, but in England they speak English. To us they always speak French – because we insist – but often with English interference. People often say, of course, how lucky they are to speak French and English, not something they would think of saying of the Chinese children who live just down the road. We decided, however, that we would like them to "speak French" in a much fuller sense than being able to talk fluently. "Speaking French" in the full sense involves an understanding of the French way of life as a French person experiences it. French children go through a process of socialisation, of being introduced to the way things are in French society, from birth. We could not hope to imitate this completely, although Marie Thérèse brings this into our home unconsciously and the annual visit to grandparents helps considerably. A major influence on French children is their school life. Here they learn about the world around them in a French way. Although we could not hope to reproduce this either, we nonetheless decided that they should experience something of French education if possible.

All this is similar, no doubt, to what people think who send their children to Saturday schools for ethnic minorities. There is not, however, a large enough French minority where we live to make such a school and anyway we do not think that our children should have to do more school simply because they are French. For one thing, it might turn them against their French inheritance if they have to do extra school in order to acquire it. For another thing, it would make them feel different in a negative way, which is a dangerous development for young children whatever the cause. Finally, we knew that parents have the legal right to educate their own children, provided they can satisfy the education authorities of their ability to do so. The fact that we are both teachers obviously makes this easier, but there are many parents who are not teachers and yet have decided to educate their children at home. We did not want to go the whole way, however. We wanted a compromise which allowed the children to spend some time at home for their French education and the majority of their time in their normal English primary school.

We first spoke to the Headteacher of their school. He was

very much in favour of our idea but explained that he could not take the decision. He nonetheless helped us by finding out to whom we should address ourselves in the local education authority. A letter to the authority eventually brought an interview with the Adviser responsible for the school. We explained our ideas and showed him some of the French school books we had bought with the advice of French primary school teachers. Some time later we received an official letter giving permission for the children to spend one afternoon at home, to be arranged in detail with the Headteacher. From that point onwards, there were no real problems. The fact that the Headteacher was supportive meant that the doubts that class teachers had about the children "missing" lessons were overruled and, in time, disappeared. The children themselves have generally liked the idea, although there have been moments when they have complained. Such complaints may be genuine, or may sometimes be motivated by other causes – missing the playtime with their friends. In general they now appreciate the value of their French afternoons, for example, Ian was visibly pleased when one of his French friends expressed admiration and surprise that he can read as well as speak French!

Once the decision had been made and accepted, the issue of how best to use the very limited time had to be decided. Obviously, the first thing was to teach them to read and write. French schoolbooks proved to be inadequate, the presentation is very formal, there is no "story", just phrases or made-up texts to make pupils learn some point, Alice and Ian who were used to the English method and were already keen readers would have been put off by such unattractive schoolbooks. We looked for children's books we could use as reading books. The task wasn't easy, as the language in most French children's books is very sophisticated and there would have been too many words they didn't understand, but we finally managed to find some suitable material, not too complex and attractive enough.

For the written work, we decided on workbooks which are used in France to reinforce school acquisition or to refresh the memory of French children during their long summer holidays (*les cahiers de vacances*). Here again we had to try several before we found the right ones. They also acquire their skills in French in different ways; for example they made soft toys from patterns with instructions in French, which involved reading and talking about the French shapes, texture of the material, measurements, numbers, etc. They make cakes with detailed recipes written in French. Now they feel more confident in French, they write willingly to their friends in France and ask us to check the spelling. Since they both can read French easily, we can now dedicate part of the afternoon to the study of topics. Ian is particularly keen on history and we often read and discuss books we brought back from France, notes are also written. We vary the topics as much as possible, nature, geography, songs, first aid and so on.

Clearly, everybody has a different situation, a different starting point, but the effort has been very worthwhile and we hope other families will find some help and inspiration in our case.

SCHOOL AND THE BILINGUAL CHILD

ANN MASON

The Redlands Primary School, London, England

The following article highlights some of the difficulties facing both bilingual children and their teachers in the normal school system and suggests how parents can take action to help teachers become aware of their children's particular linguistic situation and needs. The article is based on Ann Mason's experiences and observations as a teacher in England.

Having potentially bi-, tri- or even quadri-lingual children in one's class can be regarded very differently by different people. The responses can vary from absolute terror and fear – "Whatever can I do with them?", to a very real delight which sees the situation as a positive challenge out of which much that is good can come. This variation on the part of the teachers is, of course, partly due to personality differences as one would expect, but also, in large measure to differences in understanding and levels of professionalism.

I intend to base most of what I say on children who are fluent in one language and have English as a second language. I do, however, realise that there are many and varied forms of bilingualism. Some of the children in my school come using three languages, Hindi, Bengali and Arabic, and then have to learn English, so I am not unaware.

Let me put before you three different class situations which will illustrate why some teachers find such difficulty when facing the bilingual child.

School A is in a mainly white indigenous area. Teachers there have never had any children arrive with no English. They have not, it goes without saying, received any training in teaching English as a second language (ESL), much less bilingualism, and all that that means. Nor have they, to any great depth, any real understanding of how language, any language that is, is acquired. Thus the teacher in this school will adopt an "immersion" ideal; forbidding bilingual children to use any language other than English, whether in class or in the playground. There will be no use here for other cultures or other concepts already acquired in the other language. If the children are lucky, the teacher will, being professional, try to set aside time each day to "teach" them English. If they are unlucky, the belief will be that they will "pick it up" from the others – and if the child is bright, has supportive parents, and hears good linguistic patterns around him, that will happen. On the other hand, it may not.

In school B the staff consider themselves very "advanced" having had several children over the years from non-English families. They have probably got as far as acknowledging the need of the child for specific ESL teaching. With luck, this could be done within the class, but more often it is not, and the children who are thus "withdrawn" for positive reasons feel negatively "different". They usually work only with children with a first language which is not English and thus receive no good patterns in those specific periods. As for the children's first language and culture – no use is found for that at all except maybe at Christmas, when it is given token recognition with such questions as "What do they sing in your country, dear?", or "Can you sing us something in your language?" The child in this situation often feels "odd" and rather like a specimen at the zoo, to be looked at and prodded. Quite frequently this causes the child to close up completely or even to deny the part of him which is not English. The damage this can do psychologically and emotionally may be hard for some people to imagine, but the evidence is that it is very definitely there.

To digress a moment – I know a young Indian, an Anglican priest, who was brought up as an Anglo-Indian in India until he was eight, then came to England where he remembers consciously being "English". He remembers the first lorry-driver who swore at him and called him "brown monkey" and how his soul revolted at being linked with "them". He was English, he knew he was. The next ten years, until he was 18, he consciously refused to acknowledge his Indian-ness in any way. Then, one day, he saw through the door of the supermarket, a young smiling Indian coming towards him, hand outstretched, as if to talk to him. His soul recoiled, he averted his gaze and hurried through the doors intending to ignore the stranger. As he passed through the door he realised, with a profound sense of shock, that it was himself, his own reflection, he had recoiled from! He was denying his very self.

In school C (and schools like this are still very few) the teachers have remained open-minded, have continued to read and attend courses and have heard about how essential it is for bilingual children to use their inherited languages, both or all of them, in the school situation. These teachers will welcome the children who speak languages other than their own. They will see it as a positive situation within which to work, whether the children are fluent bi- or tri-linguals or whether they are still in the early stages. At all levels of work, in all curriculum areas, these teachers will positively encourage the use, verbal and written, of the dominant language as well as the second or third. Such teachers, such a school, will try to support bilingual children by getting adults into the school who speak the mother tongues of the children. Letters, notices, labels, will be written in any script that is the first language of any child. Games that are nation or race-specific will be taught to all; music which is not English will be shared and "made". Assemblies will be multi-faith sometimes, one faith at others – but there will be occasions where all children can join in and share what they know and love with their friends.

How can parents assist? If the school we are talking about is of type C then there will be no problem! Such a school will be constantly asking parents in to be there and work with children in another language, to translate letters and books, to share artefacts with them. Such parents will be easily able to be full and equal partners with the school in their children's learning.

In the other schools parents will not find it easy. It may be that here the parent must take the offensive; they must get themselves armed with research evidence, facts, etc. and go into the schools and education offices and say "This is what we now know about bilingualism and the use of mother-tongue. I want my child to have access to this in school – How can I help?" It may well be a long, hard battle, but more and more people are on your side – contact them, visit them. Get in touch with schools and education authorities which are positive, get their statements and show them to

Continued on page seven

SOME ANSWERS TO YOUR QUERIES

My husband and I are both bilingual - English and Welsh. We have a son who is only three weeks old at the moment, and we would like him to be bilingual too.

The trouble is that neither one of us identifies more closely with one language rather than the other. Every day we constantly change from one to the other, even when we are alone. As a result, neither of us feels that we want to be restricted to one language only, giving our son a mother and a father tongue.

If we both continued to use both languages, do you foresee many problems for our son in terms of confusion and possible retardation in picking up either language? We would be very grateful for your advice.

Alison Jones, Clwyd, Wales

Most successful accounts of children being raised bilingually highlight either "one person, one language" (i.e. the mother speaks one language, the father another language to the child[ren]), or functional specialisation according to domains (i.e. each language is used in a particular "domain", e.g. Welsh in the home, English outside the home). If you followed this system, this would mean that *either* (a) both of you would use Welsh only to your son (in the certain knowledge that he will acquire English outside the home), *or* one of you would speak to him consistently in Welsh, the other in English. This would guarantee that your son had a consistent and regular input of Welsh, which, as the minority language, will most likely need the most support and encouragement. And with only about 20% of the population of Wales speaking Welsh, Welsh needs all the speakers it can get! Also, if you did do this, you could continue speaking to *each other* as you do now in both languages, a situation which your son will most likely accept as quite normal.

Whilst we think the procedures suggested above offer a very good chance of success, we do know of some families where one or both parents use both languages to the children, depending on various circumstances, and the children are good bilinguals. However, this works only if the parents ensure that their children hear and speak enough of the minority language.

To conclude, some comments from the Welsh members of our Advisory Board, Dai and Siân Hawkins: *All things being equal*, using two languages with one's children doesn't, in our experience, create problems; if your son attends Welsh language playgroups and schools, then whichever language is used at home is not so important. It is your *attitude*, as parents, towards Welsh which will be the most important factor here. (English will be thoroughly learnt whatever happens!) If, on the other hand, your son's education is to be largely English only, then we would recommend Welsh as the first language *with him* if you want him to become fully bilingual. We know a number of couples who communicate bilingually together, but communicate with their children largely or wholly in Welsh. This is likely to be accepted as natural by the child, provided the parents don't become uptight about it. We know of a couple of cases where the parents have made only a half-hearted attempt to speak Welsh to the children and this has led to very negative attitudes in the children towards Welsh and to a low level of competence.

Our son Tibor is 15 months. His father speaks English to him, I speak my mother tongue, Hungarian, to him, but English to my husband (we live in Kent in England). At this age he seems to understand quite a lot in both languages and also uses about 7-8 words taken from both languages plus his own inventions. But I am getting uncertain about what language to use to him when we are in the company of other small children and their relatives, especially outside the family. I know that I should stick to Hungarian, but it feels silly and awkward, and I am afraid that the children may think that I am a freak (or worse - that we are an odd family), and that the parents/grandparents may regard my constant switching back to Hungarian as impoliteness. I think this dilemma stems from the fact that a mother's role is not merely to teach her children to talk, but also to teach them the social norms of the community and how to establish social contact with others. I would be grateful for any tips and advice.

Kati Beffles, Rochester, England

One of the liabilities that bilinguals face is having to share the world with monolinguals who think that bilingualism is abnormal. There is no need to apologise for bilingualism. You ought to explain how you are bringing up your child and why. Part of your explanation could be that you are Tibor's main contact with Hungarian and that this contact would be reduced considerably if you had to speak English to him whenever English speakers were present. Your friends and relatives will soon get used to the idea, and your sense of awkwardness will disappear. Other children will, on the whole, be quite happy to accept that your son is being addressed in Hungarian. Later on, he will be able to translate to his friends what you have said and what he says to you. In the meantime, you could briefly summarise in English what you have just said to Tibor. This will prevent Tibor's and your friends and relatives from feeling that they are missing something.

You will probably find that once Tibor starts talking in earnest, English speakers will admire his ability to speak the two languages and will listen with interest to exchanges between you and him. Of course, it may be difficult at first to overcome the feeling that everyone is staring at you when you speak Hungarian together. But the fact that people look at you will usually simply be a sign of curiosity about something unfamiliar. It is easy to mistake curiosity for disapproval or hostility if one is a little uncertain. So please persist.

The only awkward situations will occur when you have to address Tibor and English speakers *at the same time*. On these occasions you could use English, although even here you could still tell Tibor first in Hungarian, then the rest in English. The important thing is not to show any uneasiness when you are speaking Hungarian to Tibor, otherwise he will sense your embarrassment and this will shape his own view about the status of Hungarian.

If you do all this with good humour and try to overcome your present feeling of awkwardness, most other people will readily accept the situation and, once they start seeing Tibor's developing proficiency in his two languages, may even encourage you in your endeavours.

Until recently I have prided myself on achieving a nearly perfect two language balance in my nearly three-year-old son.

I am Polish, my husband is English and Voytek can speak both languages equally well, with only occasional transferring of syntax and/or literal translating from either one or the other language.

Voytek knows I can speak both Polish and English and Daddy only English, but he dislikes me using English to him, not even when I read, or rather, translate books he knows to be written in "Daddy's language". He will convey the same message in the two languages when we are both present in the same room, as if to show and stress that he wants to stick to our respective languages. He plays with English children in English, with Polish children in Polish and even pronounces their names differently depending on the language he is actually using. I help out in the playgroup he goes to and whenever I speak to other children in English, he'll never say anything to me in English, even if it refers to what I'd just said in English.

It would have been a perfect arrangement, if it hadn't been for reading! Voytek adores books and I read to him for at least half an hour a day, frequently longer. I always read in Polish, and as most of his books, though not all, are in English, I translate. He has now started asking about letters and wants to learn to read for himself. I started teaching him letters (phonics) in English as I have decided it would be more beneficial to him than to learn reading in Polish. I want him to read and write in Polish, but not until he's mastered reading in English.

The Glenn Doman method didn't seem to work, so he's learning his letters from an alphabet frieze. There's one condition though - he insists that I read the "stories" (every letter is illustrated by a scene rather than one object) in Polish - then letters follow in English e.g. *w* for *winter*, *c* for *cat*, etc.

My problem and question to you is whether through this practice I am not defeating what I have set out to do, i.e. bring my son up bilingually. It is the only situation when I use English to him, and only when I refer to the letters themselves - because even the commands like "show me", "where is", etc. are in Polish.

I am not quite sure that I am doing the right thing teaching him to read in English.

Please advise - maybe it's not too late to switch to Polish if that's what I should have been doing all along.

Marie Stanley, London, England

As your son already discriminates effectively in the use of each language by speaking the "appropriate" language to either mother or father, he should not find it difficult to learn how to read in both languages at the same time. Don't forget, he learnt how to speak in English and Polish at the same time. Also please remember that "words" as a combination of letters are more important than merely recognising the sounds of individual letters. By teaching him only the English sounds of the letters he sees, you might well make it more difficult for him later on to associate the correct Polish sounds with the same letters. It would help if for each picture you made available a bilingual text. Why not write the Polish beside the English, perhaps using a different coloured pen for each language. Then you could read to him both the Polish and the English, or perhaps Voytek's father could help him to learn how to read in English, whilst you could concentrate on his reading in Polish.

According to Theodor Andersson, a well-known American researcher in the field of bilingualism, pre-school

biliteracy is an excellent aid to maintaining the "weaker" language of bilingual children. He is the author of a helpful little book titled *A Guide to Family Reading in Two Languages: The Preschool Years* (published by and available, for US\$1.25, from the National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, 1555 Wilson Boulevard, Suite 605, Rosslyn, VA 22209, USA).

Incidentally, can't you get some reading material from a Polish bookshop in England - or from Poland? Posters (of parts of the body, etc.) with multilingual inscriptions are available from the Free Kindergarten Union of Victoria, 383 Church Street, Richmond, Victoria, Australia.

I am an English girl (an ex-primary school teacher) living in Spain with a Spaniard. We have twins of 12 months, and I would very much like them to grow up speaking both English and Spanish. I have several English friends here, so at the moment the babies probably hear more English than Spanish spoken.

My big concern is that when the boys start playgroup or school they will then have to learn Catalan, the local language, which is all that is used in schools. I would very much like your advice on bringing up children to be trilingual (neither their father or I speak Catalan).

Veronica Lambert, Gerona, Spain

There is no problem bringing up children trilingually as long as each language has a function in their lives, e.g. Spanish for communication with father, English with mother, Catalan with other people. So just carry on speaking English and Spanish; the twins will learn Catalan quickly when they start Kindergarten or school.

However, it seems to us that if you intend to continue living in a Catalan speaking area, it would be rather strange if you, the parents, did not also learn the language. Why not start to learn the language now, or at least try and learn the language with the boys when they start playgroup or school. If your twins are better and faster language-learners than you are, ask them to help you. It is important that your twins learn Catalan properly, as it is the medium of instruction in schools, but this does not mean that they should begin to forget their English and Spanish through lack of use. Becoming a trilingual speaker is not all that different from becoming a bilingual speaker. There are millions of them in the world.

Continued on page six

POLES APART

192 pages. 1984. GLORIA FRYDMAN.

Paperback ISBN 0-909367-13-2. £8.90 (US\$16.00).

Published by River Seine Publications, available from Multilingual Matters Ltd.

How does Poland appear to an ordinary family of Australian visitors?

To Karol who had migrated at age fifteen and was longing to revisit the scenes of his youth; to Gloria who is Australian-born; to their sons aged ten and eight?

Gloria Frydman provides first-hand impressions of the many people she met, including journalists, farmers, doctors, miners, Party members and Solidarity supporters; exploring their views and reflecting on the many contradictions that make present-day Poland a nation of people who are "Poles Apart".

Some answers to your queries *Continued from page five*

My husband is English and I am German. We both speak each other's language well.

We have two children, a son of nearly four, and a daughter of one year. As we live in Germany we decided that both of us should speak English to the children in order to at least slightly compensate for the dominant influence of German. We also intended to speak English to each other, but have not really succeeded as we were used to speaking German all the time before the children were born.

The situation now is that my husband and I speak German and English alternately to each other and use only English when talking to the children. Our son has an almost equally good command of both languages, although he now speaks German much more often than English, mainly when he is talking to himself or playing, but often when he talks to us.

I have three questions:

1) Is our daughter likely to get very confused by our son using both languages indiscriminately?

2) Should we go on reminding our son to speak English in our presence or should we leave it up to him which language to use?

3) Since he started speaking our son has stuttered slightly from time to time. It is not that he has difficulty in uttering a word but rather that he starts saying something and then stops. He then starts again, and this can occur several times. We have the feeling that often he cannot find the right word or expression in the language he is trying to speak. This can be problematic when other people are talking to him as they sometimes do not have the patience to wait to see what he has to say. Should we do anything about this, or do you think it will sort itself out?

Ulrike Finn, Lauf, Germany

1) No, your daughter will not become confused. Your whole family uses two languages in the home anyway. Moreover, if you analyse your son's speech carefully, you will probably find that he does not use languages indiscriminately. He probably uses one language more often than the other in different situations.

2) If your son is talking to himself, you should not try to dictate which language he uses. This is an individual freedom.

If he addresses you in German, just talk to him all the time in English, even if he answers in German. You could also occasionally pretend not to understand when he says something to you in German, although it's not wise to overdo this. And don't forget to show that you are pleased when he uses English and to tell him occasionally how clever he is to be able to speak English as well as German. A little praise can work wonders.

3) It should be stated from the outset that your son might have developed a stutter if he were being brought up monolingually. If a professional speech therapist, *specialising in bilingualism*, considers that his stutter is being caused by the fact that he is a developing bilingual, it is possible that he has not learnt properly how to keep his languages apart in certain circumstances. This may cause him linguistic insecurity and make him hesitate when making an utterance. You can help him to find the right word or expression and by locating those things he finds hard to say in either of his two languages and practising them with him (see Carl Dodson's remarks on bilingual language play at the end of the letters section).

From what you say, a lot of the trouble is caused by other people's impatience. Perhaps you can mention this to people who do not let your son finish what he has to say. Wendell Johnson¹, an American professor of speech pathology and psychology, makes a number of recommendations as to how parents can help to overcome their children's stuttering, among them:

- (i) "Make talking enjoyable. See to it that the child has as much a feeling of success as possible in speaking. (One) should do all (one) can to make the child's speaking enjoyable and rewarding. Certainly (one should) not make a point of criticising him for mistakes in grammar and pronunciation ... or for other things about his speech that are not important in relation to the fun and satisfaction he gets from speaking as well as he can.
- (ii) "Try to be the kind of listener (the) child likes to talk to ... when he is "talking over his head" be patient, and now and then supply him with a new word which he has not yet learned but which he needs at the moment. To a reasonable extent and in meaningful ways help him to add to his vocabulary - preferably at those times when he needs words he hasn't learned in order to tell you things he has never tried to say before."
- (ii) "Read to (the child) whenever you can. In reading or speaking to him, enunciate clearly, be interested in what you are reading and avoid a tense, impatient, or loud voice. Enjoy this reading and make it fun and companionable. Do some of it every day, (if a parent) preferably just before bedtime, if possible."

As can be seen, this advice, if followed, reduces the child's anxiety about speaking and makes it an enjoyable experience for him or her. Whilst Johnson mentions these steps specifically as effective means of building confidence in the disfluent speaker, they would seem to be a sound procedure for assisting also any bilingual child who is having difficulty in expressing him- or herself.

1. Wendell Johnson *et al.*, *Speech Handicapped School Children* (New York, Evanston and London: Harper & Row, 1967).

I have two children, Jaan (4½) and Simon (nearly 3). I am Estonian and have always spoken Estonian with Simon. However, I only spoke English with Jaan until fairly recently. So, in effect, I have two children to whom I speak two different languages. I have tried to bridge the gap and Jaan can understand simple sentences (commands and praise and similar), but I can see no way of introducing any abstract thinking in Estonian. Our selection of books in Estonian is very limited, I have no Estonian friends in this country, and Jaan is starting school soon. His English is well established and he does have an interest in Estonian, but I feel I am not prepared enough to channel his interest constructively. I would like to speak gradually less and less English to the boys (when I address them both, I first speak Estonian, then translate it), but I can see how I could easily be trapped into speaking even less Estonian.

I do realize it is too late to give Jaan an excellent command of Estonian. It will always be his second language. But I would like him to speak and understand. What would be your suggestions? At the moment, Simon prefers speaking English. Obviously, this is the language of his big brother and also television and most of our books.

My husband, by the way, is English and does not know any other languages.

Tina Tamman, Essex, England

Changing from one language to another between people who are close to each other and are used to communicating in one language only, is extremely difficult and not always successful. This is especially true when the new language is not the dominant language of the community in which one lives. Nevertheless, it is not impossible – but it will require a great deal of understanding, patience and perseverance on your part. The process might well be successful in your case as Jaan is showing an interest in Estonian. Saying specific things in both English and Estonian is a good initial procedure. Once you have done this several times for a particular sentence in the same or different situations, say it in Estonian only. Also encourage him to say some things in Estonian. When he does, give him the maximum amount of praise possible. Perhaps then Simon will also enjoy speaking Estonian once more.

Above all, don't worry too much. Easier said than done, we know, but strain easily communicates itself to young children and can set up feelings of inadequacy.

With regard to books: how about getting in touch with Estonian emigré groups and finding out about possible sources of books.

Please send your queries and/or answers to George Saunders at either of the two addresses below:

Contact details removed

SOME FURTHER POINTS OF INTEREST RAISED BY ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS IN CONSIDERING THE ABOVE QUESTIONS AND OTHER LETTERS RECEIVED

1. Bilingual language play

Carl Dodson mentions the importance of bilingual language play by young children as a means of practising and separating their two languages. His comments are relevant to a number of the situations mentioned above:

Parents will notice that even at a very young age children realise that things can have two names or that things can be said in two ways. Parents will find that when their children begin talking they will often play with language by saying to themselves a word, phrase or sentence in one language, followed immediately by an equivalent utterance in the other language. Parents should not stop this bilingual language play. In fact, they should encourage this private speech activity by playing this bilingual game with the children at other times. This activity can be an important mechanism which helps developing bilinguals to separate their languages, reduce or eliminate cross-language interference and to switch easily and effectively from one language to the other whenever required.

2. Knowledge of the language of one's spouse

Siân and Dai Hawkins offer this food for thought:

It's rather sad that so many parents seem to make no attempt to achieve even a reasonable *passive* grasp of their partner's native language. Learning the language would surely give an insight which would be an invaluable means of increasing mutual understanding and respect, and, of course, of aiding one's children's progress towards bilingualism.

Introducing the Advisory Board *Continued from page one*

Since then they have lived in England where both their children were born, Alice in 1974 and Ian in 1975. Michael worked first in a school and since 1980 he has been in the School of Education at the University of Durham. Marie Thérèse worked in Cambridge in a school and then in Copenhagen in a language school. Since returning to England she has always done part-time teaching of French and German to adults.

Details of their family bilingualism are given in the article on page two.

MEMBERS OF THE EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD:

Bruno and Bronwen Di Biase
Mike and Marie Thérèse Byram
Michael and Irene Clyne
Carl Dodson
Michael and Leena Fahmy
Alvino and Beatriz Fantini
Kevin and Mirja Haskins
Dai and Siân Hawkins
Veronica Peirce
Jim Swift

Manfred Pienemann and Helena Virtanen-Pienemann

Schools and the bilingual child *Continued from page three*

your own education authority. Your child's conceptual future is at stake. Don't give in without a fight. If all else fails make a positive first step by offering your child's teacher:

- Books in your child's language to keep in class.
- Pictures, posters of your child's home, country, culture.
- Your own presence to sit in class and translate so that bilingual learning can go on before English is established (if that is the case!)
- Your services to make labels in the classroom, etc, etc.

Most teachers really *want* to have parents as partners but they are not trained to it! Once you have been accepted, they will never let you go!

Claudine Brohy is engaged in a Research Project on **The Language Behaviour of Bilingual Couples** and would like to receive the following information from couples who are both bilingual in the same languages:

- Language choice in various situations (according to topic, place, feelings involved, the presence of other people, etc.)
- On language switching and mixing
- On the language strategies for their children

Contact details removed

CONTACTS

If you wish your name and address to be included in the Contact section, please send us the following information:

Name, address, languages spoken in the family, Children's birth dates and specification of the type of families with whom you would like to get in touch.

Contact details removed

If you do not already subscribe to the Bilingual Family Newsletter use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues. The same form should be used to buy any of the books advertised in this issue.

If you know of any other bilingual families please help to secure the future of this publication by entering their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

To: Multilingual Matters Ltd,
Bank House, 8a Hill Rd,
Clevedon, Avon,
England, BS21 7HH

From: NAME

ADDRESS

TOWN

COUNTRY POST CODE

☐ Please enter a subscription to BFN.
£3.00 (US\$5.00)

☐ Please send a copy of Poles Apart.
£8.90 (US\$16.00)

☐ Please send a sample copy of BFN to:

NAME

ADDRESS

TOWN

COUNTRY POST CODE

Contact details removed