The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Editor:
George Saunders **JULY 1985 VOLUME 2 No. 2**

EDITORIAL

Our circulation continues to grow steadily, which is very pleasing and encourages us in our efforts. We are still receiving many letters from readers with questions, comments and suggestions, for which we are very grateful, as they assist us greatly in the planning and preparation of future issues.

In this issue we have at last managed to get a Bilingual Humour section started which, depending on response, we hope to make a regular feature of the Newsletter. We look forward to receiving *your* favourite anecdote or joke.

INTRODUCING MEMBERS OF OUR ADVISORY BOARD:

The Peirce Family, France

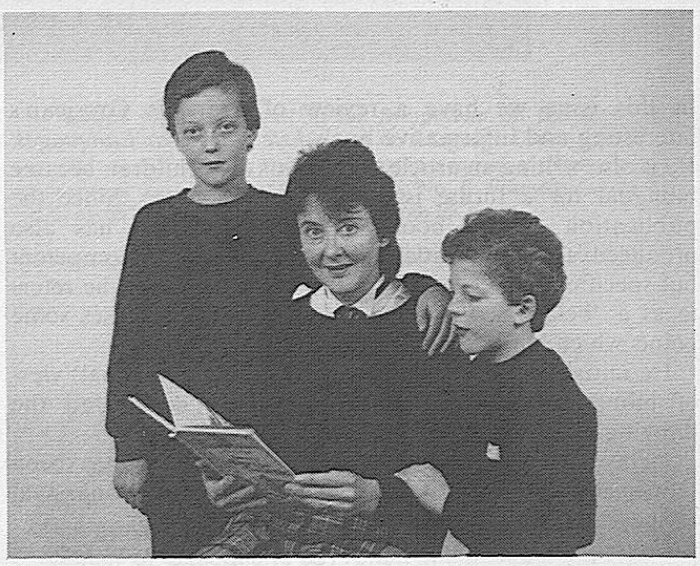
Veronica and Rob Peirce are English-speaking South Africans by birth, but have lived in France for twelve years and are now naturalised French citizens.

South Africa is a multilingual country, and has two official languages, English and Afrikaans. Like all South Africans, the Peirces learnt a second language at school – in their case Afrikaans – and grew up in an environment where it is the norm to hear not only English and Afrikaans spoken, but several African languages too.

Shortly after marrying, while working as a legal secretary in Johannesburg, Veronica decided to learn to speak French, and enrolled in evening classes at the Alliance Française, not dreaming for a moment of the consequences this 'coup de tête' would have on her life. Eighteen months later the Peirces left South Africa for France. Rob, a civil engineer, had seen at the Alliance Française and applied for, a three-month French Government sponsored study course in advanced engineering techniques, and had been accepted. Dissatisfaction with things in South Africa led the Peirces to decide to have a look at other parts of the World, and the course in France was to be the first leg on a journey to Canada, where they had been accepted as immigrants.

On arrival in France, Rob was sent on a six-week crash course in spoken French, and Veronica was allowed to join him at a preferential tariff. Thereafter he plunged into his study course in various French agencies and companies, and 'survived' in French as best he could. Veronica enrolled at the Alliance Française in Paris, and started trying out her French on local shopkeepers. Rob's course was prolonged to five months, at the end of which, and one week before they were due to fly to Canada, he was offered a job with an English consulting engineering firm working on the Centre Georges Pompidou. The decision to remain in France was quickly taken, at least for the five years the construction of the Centre was scheduled to take. In their five months in Paris, Rob and Veronica had become enthusiastic Francophiles, which is perhaps why they are still in France twelve years and two children later.

Rob now works for a large French construction company, on overseas projects. Veronica worked as a bilingual secretary for an International Weekly magazine until the birth of their first child in 1974. For the past five years she has been studying through the University of South Africa, by correspondence, for a Bachelor of Arts degree, majoring in French, English and International Politics. She has completed the French part of the course up to degree level and has enrolled this year (January, 1985) for the second of three years each in English and International Politics.



Jason, Veronica and Dylan Peirce

The Peirces have two children, Jason 10 ½ and Dylan, 7 ½. The home language is English. Both children attended the local 'maternelle' or nursery school, from about the age of three. Prior to this they had heard a certain amount of French from neighbours and friends, and spent occasional periods in the 'halte-garderie' (Municipal child-minding centre which frees child-bound mothers of under-threes for a morning or afternoon, to enable them to go to the hairdresser, dentist or shopping in peace).

Continued on page two

At the age of six, when children in France enter primary school, both Jason and Dylan were bilingual and were able to pass into the French primary system with their classmates.

To maintain their English, Veronica and Rob are firm about English being spoken at home, except of course, when French-speaking friends are present. In fact, the children do not always respect this rule, and sometimes communicate with each other, and with their parents, in French, though this tendency diminishes during school holidays, and when English-speaking visitors are present in the home.

Both children had lessons in English reading and writing in a small, private Saturday class, Jason during his first year in primary school, and Dylan in his last pre-school year. This enabled them to gain admission as 'externé' pupils to the International School of St. Germain-en-Laye, which, with its nine national sections, offers the possibililty of six hours per week of national language tuition to bilingual children. 'Externé' pupils are those who, for numerical reasons, cannot be given full-time places in the Lycée. Children are enrolled in their particular national section, and spend one morning and one afternoon per week at the Lycée, in normal school hours, studying their national language and history. For the rest of the week, they attend their local primary school. Eighty-six schools in the vicinity of St. Germain-en-Laye now have pupils enrolled as 'externés' at the Lycée, with the blessing of the French School Authorities. Though the system imposes an increased load on children and parents, notably double homework, and transportation, it seems, after several years of operation, to be proving a success, and is even preferred by a number of parents to full-time enrolment in the Lycée.

Jason and Dylan can both read and write in French and English, and are judged to be at the level of any average monolingual child in each of their languages. Jason is regularly placed in the top five at his French school, and around the middle of his English class at the Lycée. Dylan is in the middle of his class, in both languages. He has some pronunciation problems in English, and stuttered for a period, between the ages of three and four. Recent speech therapy has resulted in a marked and rapid improvement.

Veronica and Rob Peirce are convinced of the value of bringing up their children as bilinguals, They know, however, that it is a challenge and requires considerable determination and perseverance, even in a very favourable educational and social environment, where the concept seems to be accepted and is even officially encouraged.

THE MONOLINGUAL VERSUS THE BILINGUAL VIEW OF BILINGUALISM

As seen by François Grosjean

A summary and commentary by George Saunders

In this issue we have a review of François Grosjean's interesting and informative book *Life with Two Languages.* He is also writing an article on how his own children became bilingual for a future issue of the Newsletter. Since the publication of his book, François Grosjean has also produced a paper entitled "The bilingual as a competent but specific speaker-hearer".* In the paper, which he refers to as a "belated epilogue" to his book, he discusses some points which are of interest to bilingual families.

He initially criticises the monolingual (or fractional) view of bilingualism which has for so long dominated the thinking of researchers, educators and laypeople:

> "The yardstick against which any bilingual has been measured has inevitably been the ideal monolingual speaker-hearer."

Consequently, "the 'real' bilingual has long been seen as the one who is equally and fully fluent in two languages. He or she is the 'ideal', the 'true', the 'balanced', the 'perfect' bilingual. All others (in fact, the vast majority of people who use two languages in their everyday life) are 'not really' bilingual or are 'special types' of bilinguals."

Another consequence of this attitude has been that tests used to evaluate the language skills of bilinguals have usually simply been the same tests used with monolingual speakers of either language. Doing this, however, completely ignores the different social functions each language has for a bilingual, i.e. for what purpose, to whom and where each language is used. This very important point is often overlooked by educators. Rarely are bilinguals' *two* languages taken into account when assessing their overall linguistic ability.

An example of this would be if a bilingual were tested for verbal intelligence only in English. My own research reveals the unfairness of such a procedure. I have tested the vocabulary development of my children in both English and German at various ages using the Peabody Picture Vocabulary Test as a basis. Similar findings were made for all three children. At age 7 years 9 months, for instance, Frank knew 161 out of 200 vocabulary items (the first 100 items of both Form A and Form B of the test) in English and 158/161 in the German version. For some items he did not know either the English or the German word (e.g. furrow/*Furche*), for some he knew only the English (e.g. soldering), and for some he knew only the German (e.g. *Wache* [= sentry]). Consequently, if we were to count a correct response in *either* English *or* German, his score of *known concepts* would rise to 173/200, which is significantly higher than his score in either language considered separately.

François Grosjean says that the effects of bilingualism have been so closely scrutinised because the monolingual viewpoint regards bilingualism as the exception, whereas, as he rightly points out, half of the world's population is bilingual. He then makes an obviously heart-felt comment with which many bilinguals will sympathise:

> "As a bilingual myself, I have often wondered whey the cognitive consequences of MONOLINGUALISM have not been investigated with the same care!"

This reminds me of an incident related by Traute Taeschner in her book *The Sun is Feminine* (Berlin: Springer-Verlag, 1983, p.22) in which a pediatrician advised the German-speaking mother in a bilingual German-Italian marriage in Italy to give up speaking to her daughter in

German because the child had not begun to speak by the age of 18 months and the use of two languages was obviously the cause of this delayed linguistic development. The mother followed the advice and "two months after the 'treatment' had begun, the 'miracle' occurred, and the child began to speak." Traute Taeschner then makes the caustic, but so true, remark:

> "Many monolingual parents whose children have not begun speaking until shortly before their second birthday have also been perplexed, worried, and somewhat disappointed. But they were luckier, because no pediatrician told them to keep quiet in order to resolve the problem".

François Grosjean says that the negative and destructive monolingual view of bilingualism may also influence some bilinguals, causing them to downgrade their own language competence if they are not just about perfect in each language or, if they have managed to reach this sort of standard, to be critical of those who have not. Although he does not mention it specifically, a consequence of this for bilingual families could of course be that parents have unduly high expectations of the level of bilingualism their children should attain. In the Newsletter we have often warned against unrealistic perfectionism on the part of parents as representing a danger to the survival of bilingualism in a family: parents' desire to perfection in both languages can cause them to abandon the attempt to raise their children bilingually when they realise that such perfection is an almost unattainable goal. This does not, however, mean that parents should not do their best to help their children reach a high standard of bilingualism. But at the same time they should not forget that most bilingual children simply do not have equal exposure to both their languages, so that usually one language will be "weaker" in some way (perhaps not being as grammatically accurate, not having as extensive a vocabulary, needing to borrow some words and expressions from the other language, etc.). However, just because it is "weaker" does not mean that it cannot be an effective and natural means of communication between children and parents. This is surely a commendable achievement in itself and something worthy of being fostered.

In the second part of his paper François Grosjean discusses the bilingual (or wholistic) view of bilingualism. This view proposes that

> "the bilingual is NOT the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. The coexistence and constant interaction of the two languages in the bilingual has produced a different but complete language system. An analogy comes from the domain of athletics. The high hurdler blends two types of competencies: that of high jumping and that of sprinting. When compared individually with the sprinter or the high jumper, the hurdler meets neither level of competence, and yet when taken as a whole, the hurdler is an athlete in his or her own right. No expert in track and field would ever compare a high hurdler to a sprinter or to a high jumper, even though the former blends certain characteristics of the latter two. A high hurdler is an integrated whole, a unique and specific athlete, who can attain the highest level of world competition in the same way that the sprinter and the high jumper can. In many ways the bilingual is like the high hurdler: an integrated whole, a unique and specific speaker-hearer, and not the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals."

Looking at it this way,

> "The bilingual is a fully competent speaker-hearer; he or she has developed competencies (in the two languages and possibly in a third system that is a combination of the first two) to the extent required by his or her needs and those of the environment. The bilingual uses the two languages – SEPARATELY OR TOGETHER – for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Because the needs and uses of the two languages are usually quite different, the bilingual is rarely equally or completely fluent in the two languages. Levels of fluency in a language will depend on the need for that language and will be extremely domain specific."

François Grosjean thus makes a strong plea for a much wider acceptance of the bilingual (wholistic) view of bilingualism by all people who compare bilinguals and monolinguals in terms of language competence, language performance, langauge learning, etc. Let us hope that this plea will be heard loudly and clearly.

*An invited paper presented at the Symposium on Bilingualism, 9th Annual Boston University Conference on Language Development, October 1984; it will also be published in the *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* (1985), Vol. 6, No. 6. François Grosjean has kindly agreed to our quoting extensively from his paper.

MULTICULTURAL TOYS

We have recently been sent the catalogue of a new organisation called *Play for Life* whose principle aim is to promote co-operation between parents, teachers and the toy trade and industry to create life affirming playthings for children.

The catalogue lists a very wide range of toys, games, puzzles, etc. Of particular interest to our own readers will be their list of Multi-cultural dolls. The catalogue lists the manufacturers and suppliers and also offers the opportunity of ordering by post. This mail-order opportunity is only available at the moment to addresses in the British Isles (and to BFPO addresses) but the organisers of Play for Life indicated to us that they will reconsider that policy.

Why not send for further details to:

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and also say if an overseas order service would be of interest to you.

EVALUATING BILINGUAL EDUCATION: A CANADIAN CASE STUDY

127 pages. 1982. **MERRILL SWAIN and SHARON LAPKIN**

Paperback ISBN 0-905028-09-0 £4.50 (US$7.50)

This book was written as a synthesis and overview of a number of evaluations of French immersion programs in Canada. It is a non-technical yet thorough description of Canadian research intended not only for research workers but also for parents, educators and policy makers.

"A book which should be studied by all those concerned with the problems of multilingual communities and which should help to dispel fears and misconceptions."

Times Educational Supplement

Contents: 1. Introduction; 2. Bilingual Education Programs in Ontario; 3. Major Issues in Research and Evaluation; 4. Linguistic Effects; 5. Academic Outcomes of Immersion Education; 6. Social and Psychological Aspects of Immersion Education; 7. Summary; Conclusion and Implications; Bibliography.

BILINGUAL HUMOUR

We are happy to publish the first three entries in our competition for jokes etc. based on bilingualism. Some readers have pointed out that the humour is often not translatable into English, but please do not let this deter you from sending in your anecdotes etc. We will print them in the original language and provide an English translation and/or explanation and hope that this will help readers who do not know the particular language to appreciate the humour as well.

From Alvino Fantini, Vermont, USA.

A neighborhood dog was looking for a job. He passed an office with a sign saying they wanted an experienced worker who was an excellent typist, who knew how to operate a computer, and was bilingual.

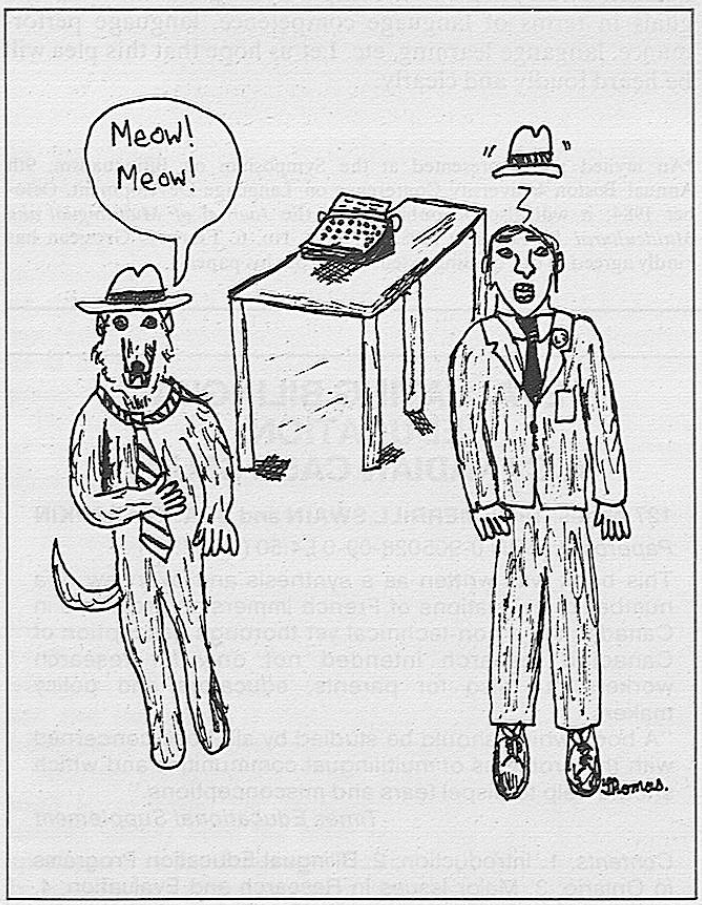
"Ah, that's for me," thought the dog. He picked up the sign and walked into the office.

"Don't tell me you're applying for the job?," said the astonished manager.

"Woof," said the dog, and he walked over to the typewriter and typed 75 words a minute without an error. Then he went to the computer and produced a perfect readout on the history of dog breeding.

"Well, that's great," said the manager, "But are you bilingual?"

"Meow, meow," said the dog.



From Pascale Travis, Maidenhead, England.

My (French/English) daughter, Isabelle, aged 3;9, told me this on the way back from her English nursery school:

Isabelle: Maman, la maîtresse a raconté l'histoire de bébé fromage.
(Mum, the teacher told the story of bébé fromage*.)*

Moi: Bébé fromage? Tu en es sûre?
(Bébé fromage? *Are you sure?)*

Isabelle: Oui, bébé fromage.
(Yes, bébé fromage.)

Moi: Comment il s'appelle en anglais?
(What's he called in English?)

Isabelle: 'Baby Cheeses.'

Moi: Ah! Tu veux dire 'baby Jesus'. En français on dit 'bébé Jésus'.
(Oh! You mean 'Baby Jesus'. In French you say 'bébé Jésus'.)

Isabelle (smiling): Ouaih! 'Baby Jesus'.
(Yeah!)

**fromage* = cheese; *bébé* = baby.

From Nancy and Norbert Pierro, Ettlingen, Germany.

Torsten's maternal language is English. When at the age of three he went to a German kindergarten, he understood German, but it took some time until he could speak like the other children. One day the nursery teacher was doing a small repair job on the water pipes. Having asked one of the older children to bring her the tool she required, she was rather surprised when he reappeared with Torsten in tow. She had said, "Bring mir mal den Engländer." *(Bring me the Engländer.) (Engländer* has two meanings: a. English person; b. monkey wrench).

HELLO MERHABA

A new bilingual video in Turkish and English has been made by the Turkish Education Group and Islington Libraries, London.

The video is for Turkish-speaking children aged between five and seven years. The first of its kind, it offers them an entertaining and educational programme and a chance to use their language skills.

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BOOK REVIEW

François Grosjean, *Life wtih Two Languages. An Introduction to Bilingualism,* Cambridge, Ma. and London, U.K.: Harvard University Press, 1982. ix+370pp. Price US$9.95 (paperback).

Reviewed by Wendy Saunders, Sydney, Australia.

Many of the letters I have read in the BFN are from people who are firmly committed to bringing their children up bilingually but who write in for reassurance that they are doing the right thing. We as parents all desire the best for our children and this book by François Grosjean reinforces ideas which we instinctively believe to be right, that is, that bilingualism is no great load to carry and that it can be a natural thing in the family. In families where there are two home cultures, bilingualism is the necessary bridge between one culture and the other, and a working knowledge of the two languages goes a long way towards helping the child successfully function in both cultures.

The book is clearly set out in six chapters, each well sub-headed, and covers all aspects of life with two languages. The chapters could be read in any order, as each is an individual unit. In fact, I raced through the three chapters headed "The Bilingual Child", "Bilingualism in Society" and the "Bilingual Person", finding them really fascinating, as I related them directly to our family. Then, at a more leisurely pace, I started at the beginning and read the no less fascinating first two chapters, "Bilingualism in the World" and "Bilingualism in the U.S.A.". These are a very comprehensive general picture of the use of various languages throughout the world. The final chapter is called "Bilingual Speech and Language", and concludes the book with a discussion of the influence one language has on the other, and mixing and borrowing between the languages. Of particular interest and help are the direct quotes from bilingual speakers which appear in the form of 'boxes', headed 'Bilinguals Speak', every few pages, and which reinforce the ideas presented in the book. They are short, direct quotes from bilingual speakers from many countries, covering a wide range of backgrounds, cultures, educational abilities, and status of languages in host communities. They make really interesting reading, as they give the reader a chance to hear first hand what people think of their own bilingualism and bilingual upbringing. These 'boxes', together with the excellent discussion of up-to-date research, all point towards the fact that children who speak the home language as well as the community language emerge well-equipped to cope with any conflicts which may arise from their belonging to two language groups.

It is in the fourth chapter, headed "The Bilingual Child", where readers of the BFN will find answers to most of the commonly-asked questions. It describes the four most widely used strategies for creating bilingualism in the family and the success rate and difficulties of each method. Readers will find their own family situations described here and will be reassured and encouraged by the knowledge that children are capable of acquiring two (or more) languages and successfully separating them. However, to maintain the use of the two languages, it is important that the children feel they need the languages in everyday life. Many parents write in to say how hesitant they are to use such ploys as 'pretending' not to understand the small child when s/he uses the 'wrong' language to the 'wrong' person, or gently and tactfully refusing to comply with a child's request until it is uttered in the 'correct' language. (Incidently, this tactic is used by parents all over the world to teach the use of 'please' and 'thank you'.) After reading what Grosjean has to say, parents will realise that they no longer need to feel they are acting harshly or unnaturally – unless, of course, this method is too strictly enforced as often it is inappropriate if the child is tired or distressed. In fact, if the child is acquiring his or her second language input from only one person it could well be an absolutely crucial tactic, otherwise the child will become what is known as a receiving bilingual – that is, s/he will be able to understand his or her second language without being able to converse in it.

In the first chapter, "Bilingualism in the World", Grosjean gives a clear picture of the world-wide language situation. It will probably surprise other readers, too, to find how few nations are truly monolingual; in fact, 'a large proportion of the world's population is bilingual'. Grosjean shows what a natural thing bilingualism is in the lives of many people. It is such an integral part of their daily lives that it hardly rates thinking of as something particularly odd or unique. He describes many countries and their linguistic policies (which amount to either support and promotion or neglect and repression of the languages of linguistic minorities).

While topics discussed in the second chapter, "Bilingualism in the U.S.A.", deal specifically with the minority groups of that country, they can have a wider application to many other countries with language minorities. Grosjean discusses why certain minorities have become practically monolingual (in American English), while others have maintained their original language, in spite of having to compete with a world language, English. Majority-community attitudes, discrimination and education policies are extensively covered.

The third chapter, "Bilingualism in Society", discusses the attitudes in many countries towards bilingualism and why a language in one country may enjoy high prestige, yet in another country be regarded very negatively, and how these positive or negative attitudes influence language maintenance and use. This, of course, influences parents considerably if they are making a conscious decision to bring their children up speaking the community language and/or the mother tongue of one or both of the parents.

He then talks about personal language choice – which language the bilingual uses to a particular person or in a particular situation. He says that "rarely does a single factor account for a bilingual's choice of one language or another" and qualifies this by showing that the particular subject may influence the choice; for example, whether the person is talking about work, school or home related topics, as often vocabulary or jargon is used in one context only and so is learned in only one language. As to which language bilinguals speak to whom, participants, situation, function of the conversation, as well as context, play a part in the choice, and when speaking to total strangers bilinguals may be guided by factors such as facial characteristics and appearance.

Closely linked to choice of language is the common phenomenon of code switching, which is the term used to describe beginning a sentence or conversation in one language and changing mid-sentence or mid-conversation to the other and back again. The reasons for it, and attitudes and tolerance towards it, are discussed both here and in the final chapter of the book. This chapter concludes with a detailed discusson of biculturalism and why children, in particular, are often in conflict because the peer group exerts pressure to conform to the host-land culture which is still alien for many of their migrant parents. It is interesting to read that probably the best way to cushion children against this culture clash which may arise is by passing on to them a workable knowledge of both the mother tongue and the community language. This way they are better able to function in each society with far fewer anxieties and feelings of alienation.

"The Bilingual Person" is the title of the fifth chapter which describes just how complex a person's bilingualism can be. The degree of competence a person has in both languages is not a static thing, but is influenced by the time of life when the languages were acquired, and changing circumstances which can cause a shift in dominance in either language; for example, improvement in fluency and expansion of vocabulary when the second-language community is visited. Grosjean also explores the complex issue of where in the brain each language is stored and briefly discusses the effect of emotion and stress on language use, and the effect of bilingualism on the personality – whether the use of either language changes the speaker's personality or just the behavioural norms expected by the listener's language community. Grosjean says that "the bilingual rarely questions his or her bilingualism, and that it rarely interferes with everyday activities". He concludes this chapter with brief descriptions of well known bilinguals both of the past and present.

The concluding chapter discusses the influence one language has on another in the bilingual's speech. The amount of interference is largely related to whether the speaker is speaking to a person who understands only one or both of the speaker's two (or more) languages. Although this chapter deals with the speech of bilingual adults, one can easily see the implications for small children who are exposed to two languages – the degree of fluency and mixing of the two languages by children once they are able to separate their two languages is largely controlled by the conversation partners (usually a parent) according to how much mixing they tolerate and how much they show the child they understand from a mixed sentence. The chapter, and the book, concludes with a discussion on language borrowing, its impact, and acceptance of and resistance to it, at a personal, community and national level.

I enjoyed reading this book very much. For me, a non-technical reader, its interesting and readable style made it a very good 'Introduction to Bilingualism', and it certainly explains many points raised by parents about bilingualism and its effect on their children. It will help readers to clarify their own attitudes on the subject and decide what type of bilingualism they will aim to achieve in their family.

LETTERS FROM READERS

I was not very impressed with your first Newsletter. Firstly, I found it a little too glib and optimistic about bilingualism. I agree with your view that bilingualism is desirable wherever possible, but I believe you dismiss the problems involved too readily. We know from our three children that some have far greater problems acquiring two languages correctly than others. It could be very disheartening for some readers to hear how easily the linguistically gifted children of your linguistically trained editor acquired German so perfectly!

Secondly, I found the letters in your first edition very false. I presume this was because you then had too small a readership to find "real" letters.

I found the third issue better than the first and therefore wish to subscribe for a year.

Mrs G., Germany

I'm sorry you were disappointed with the first issue. It is certainly not the aim of the Newsletter to be glib. It is true that, where possible, we try to be optimistic. Not to do so would rather defeat the purpose of the Newsletter. However, we do not ignore the fact that various problems can arise when bringing up children bilingually – or trying to! Our suggested solutions to these problems are based on a combination of personal experience, discussions with bilingual families and the literature on bilingualism. We realise that our suggestions may work very well in some families, not so well in others, and that even within the one family what works with one child may not work with another. In some cases, when our Advisory Panel could not agree, we have published two distinct replies to the one problem (and received some criticism for our "confusion"!)

As for the bilingualism of my own children, it has always been my intention by writing about them to encourage, not discourage, other parents. Even for a "linguistically trained editor" it's not all plain sailing! And not everyone would agree with your comment that they acquired German 'so perfectly". Their German, although fluent, is grammatically not as correct as their English and would not satisfy a perfectionist. They also sometimes have to seek my assistance with German words and expressions, so that they do have to put some effort into communicating in German. I am convinced that some sort of bilingualism is better than no bilingualism at all and thus try to encourage parents to do the best they can in their particular circumstances.

Incidentally, as we have seen in previous issues and will see again in future issues, being linguistically trained does not make someone immune from the problems facing "normal" parents, just as being a marriage counsellor is no guarantee that someone is going to be more happily married than someone who isn't.

With regard to the letters in our first issue, please be assured that they were all genuine. They were letters received either in response to my book Bilingual Children *or to the first announcement of the proposed publication of the Newsletter. We receive so many letters from readers that we have no need to prime the pump by writing our own letters. We try to answer all personally and select for publication those which we feel will be of interest to other readers.*

My wife and I are trying to bring up our three children (aged two, four and six) bilingually (I am a native speaker of English, my wife of German). At the moment, they seem to be predominantly receiving bilinguals, in that however much we speak to them in English (this being the language used at home), they always answer in German. This, of course, is not really surprising, since on a day-to-day basis (including school and kindergarten), they come into contact with far more native speakers of German than of English. The important thing, as your book *Bilingual Children* makes clear, is to keep persevering in the hope that their proficiency in English will become a little more active. Certainly, on a holiday visit to England this summer, I was pleasantly surprised at how well they were doing in actually producing English themselves within a few days. I subscribe to the Newsletter and find it, like your book, a marvellous source of information – and comfort! I wish you all the success you deserve.

Dr Geoffrey Perrin, Bonn, Germany

Continued on page seven

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Thank you very much for your kind comments. Your letter raises an important point: even if children say *very little in their weaker language, they can acquire a very good understanding of the language if parents continue to speak it to them. Such a passive knowledge represents an excellent foundation on which to build an* active *use of the langauge. Please do continue to speak to the children in English and encourage them to reply in English. We wish you every success.*

SOME ANSWERS TO YOUR QUERIES

(We have received a number of questions from Pam Koga, an American who lives in Japan with her Japanese husband and three sons – one aged 3;6 and twins aged one. She speaks English to the boys. One of her questions is answered here – we will come back to her other queries in a future issue.)

I have a question about developing language skills in two languages. I heard from a linguist that one should not try to develop two languages to the same level. One language should be the main, stronger one, while the other should be the "second" language. He said that if you try to develop them both the same the person often can not express him/herself fully or even think deeply in either language. I am not a linguist, but I think the problem lies with the individual and that language is not the problem. What do you feel about this? Have any studies been done?

As far as we are aware, no contemporary studies of bilingualism provide any evidence that one should not try to develop two languages to the same level for fear of not being able to express oneself fully or think deeply in either language. Of course, most bilinguals do not manage to achieve the same level in both their languages: one language is usually stronger, either in general or in specific situations. The bilingual who is *equilingual,* that is, equally proficient in two languages, is a very rare species. The advice you were given would, therefore, be better rephrased as: by all means try to develop your children's Japanese and English to the same level, but be realistic about it. In your own case, if you remain living in Japan, it is most likely that your children's Japanese will be better than their English. However, this does not mean they should not be able also to acquire from you a useable knowledge of English.

I am expecting a baby and would like to hear your advice on teaching a child two languages from the earliest days. My husband is Greek and I am British, and it seems logical to me to bring the child up speaking both languages from the beginning, and if any emphasis is to be made that it be in Greek, as the child is bound to pick up all necessary English from playmates and school. I was surprised to read in *Parents* magazine of March 1985 that a reader who had written in to ask advice was told to get the child fluent in one language first.

A friend of mine in Greece, in the same position as me, has a two year old and is speaking both Greek and English to him. She is a little worried as he is slow in speaking, although he seems to understand both languages, and her doctors have told her not to worry, he may be later in speaking but will not suffer.

So, I'd be interested to learn your advice.

Dorothy Stefanidis, Pudsey, England

My wife and I are expecting our first child in June, and as she is Dutch and I am English we are both keen that our child should learn both languages. We are, however, uncertain as to the best way to impart our mother tongues to the baby – whether I should always speak English and my wife Dutch, or whether we should speak English always for its first few years and then introduce Dutch at home.

Mr R. Trott, London, England

The questions asked here are very common. (A related question was answered, for example, in Vol. 1, No. 3 of our Newsletter.) Mrs Stefanidis has answered much of Mr Trott's question. In families in which the parents each have a different native language, the "one person, one langauge" method, now quite extensively documented in the literature on bilingualism, has a very good chance of success. There is a much greater chance of this method succeeding if *right from the child's birth* it is spoken to by its mother in one language, by its father in another. This establishes a pattern of language use in the family right from the start. Evidence shows that it is very difficult for parents to introduce a "minority" language at a later stage (as suggested in *Parents* magazine). In the above two cases, as Mrs Stefanidis points out, it will be the minority languages (Dutch and Greek) which will need all the encouragement and fostering they can get if they are in any way to hold their own against English which the children will hear everywhere. Therefore, unless an extended stay in the Netherlands or Flanders or Greece is planned, it would not be wise to introduce English first and then try to change over to the other language later on. A particular advantage of each parent using a different language to the child is, of course, that whichever country the family is in the child is still receiving input in *both* languages.

Mrs Stefanidis's friend in Greece is experiencing something which happens not only to bilingual but also to monolingual parents and their children. Studies have shown that bilingual children do not begin to speak later than monolingual children, but there can be great individual differences between children, be they bi- or mono-lingual. In this case, we feel that Mrs Stefanidis's friend has received good advice from her doctors. We think it is important for parents of bilingual children who are worried about their children's speech development to consult only doctors *who have knowledge of and experience with bilingualism.* Far too often it seems that bilingualism is blamed for speech problems which also occur in *monolingual* children.

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

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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.

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