# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

*Editor:*
George Saunders **DECEMBER 1988** **VOLUME 5** **No. 4**


## EDITORIAL

As this issue goes to press; my family and I will be leaving the German winter to return to the Australian summer, arriving just in time for Christmas. We have had a most enjoyable six months stay and have all benefited greatly from it, not only linguistically, but in many other ways as well. We leave Hamburg and our friends here with a certain amount of regret and reluctance, as we know it will be quite some time before we will be able to afford to make the 20,000 kilometre journey from Australia to Germany again as a family.


One aspect of my children's experiences in Germany may be of interest to readers, since the matter has been raised a number of times in recent issues, namely their impressions of doing English (their stronger language in which they are indistinguishable from monolingual Australian English speakers) as a subject in the German school system. Because of Thomas's experiences in Hamburg in 1984, when he was forced to do English in grade 5 with complete beginners, we were hoping that this time the subject would prove to be more stimulating and useful. This was in fact the case.

Frank's classmates in grade 7 had already been learning English for two years, and Thomas's fellow-pupils in grade 10 had done English for five years. (Katrina is in grade 2 and thus had no English instruction at all at school in Hamburg.) Both boys were put in the advanced English class in their particular grade. Frank found the work in English easy, but since English spelling is not exactly his strong point, the writing exercises were helpful for him. He resisted the temptation to correct the teacher, except on the few occasions when he thought the class were being given completely false information, e.g. when they were told that baby dogs were called 'puppets'! Thomas found his grade 10 English classes very interesting, as at this level authentic English short stories, complex newspaper articles, etc., were being read and discussed. He had to work hard to get a 1 (= an A) in class tests, as part of the tests required the translation of complex English passages into *German*. His teacher also took advantage of the fact that she had a native speaker in the class to acquaint her pupils with a national variety of English other than British or American English. His classmates appreciated his presence as a ready source of information when

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## INCREASING LANGUAGE ABILITY THROUGH READING ACTIVITIES

**Sarah Rilling**
***Hokkaido, Japan***

Reading has always been important to my life. It has been a way for me to gain knowledge as well as to relax and be entertained. Naturally when my son was born four years ago, I wanted to pass along to him this enjoyable and educational love of reading. As soon as his infant eyes were able to focus on the bright, simple objects in the hard-board books I found in the local bookstore, we have enjoyed "reading" together. A real advantage of hard-board books is that they can be stood up next to baby, so that baby can "read" to himself. The pages in this type of book also don't tear easily and they are highly resistant to baby's chewing.

For the last year and a half, my son, Andrew, and I have been living in a very rural area of Japan, where I have been teaching English at an isolated university. I am a single parent, and there is only one other native English speaker in our area, so Andrew's contact with English has been minimalised. Lenore Arnberg's *Raising Children Bilingually: The Pre-school Years* has highlighted in my mind that English, although Andrew's mother tongue, is now his minority language. Indeed he spends six to eight hours every day in a monolingual Japanese kindergarten. His playmates at home only speak Japanese, and the children's programs he watches on television are almost exclusively in Japanese. Even during his free-play at home, he is using more and more Japanese and less and less English. Although I am extremely pleased that he has successfully assimilated himself into the Japanese-speaking community, my desire to help him progress in English is real. My love of reading seems to have provided a solution to this problem.

The best way a parent can influence a child's interest in books is by demonstrating to the child how much the parent enjoys reading. Every evening in our house, there is at least one hour of "quiet time" when the television is turned off and I read. Andrew is encouraged to do any quiet activity he wants to: draw, work in an activity book, or play with blocks, but often he also chooses to "read" one of his picture books.

Every evening before bedtime, we snuggle up together with whatever book(s) he chooses, and I read aloud to him. Reading aloud is an extremely important way to broaden a

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child's vocabulary and syntax, as well as to expose the child to a number of expository styles of writing. Although our main reading materials have been picture books, in this last year we have also read together two short children's novels. Discussing the books before and after each reading helps Andrew understand more fully the story and the language used. It also builds skills in predicting what will come next. Reading aloud to a child is a close, sharing time, and it shows the child that reading is fun.

*Sarah and Andrew Rilling*

Since reading is to be a fun activity, it is important that the parent takes pains to choose materials which are appropriate for the linguistic and cognitive development of the child. I make it a practice to preview any book. I often change the text into simpler language forms. I avoid stories which I feel may frighten or disturb my child. Children seem to identify with characters who are in a similar situation as the child. Children look up to characters slightly older than themselves, but if the characters are too much older, the child may no longer be able to identify with the character. For books in English, Jim Trelease's *The Read Aloud Handbook* (available in U.S., British and Australian versions) offers a very useful list of books in different categories (wordless books, picture books, short novels, poetry, etc.) with a guide to age appropriateness of the books.

I feel very fortunate that I can afford to buy English language books for my son. The attitude of the Japanese society toward learning English is also very positive, so several bookstores in larger cities sell a good selection of children's books and workbooks in English. My family in the United States also sends me books which I request.

Not having access to minority language books should not hinder the determined parent, however. If the parent is able to read the local children's literature, these stories could be translated into any language by the parent. A weekly trip to the local library could soon result in a home library of desired language texts. I would advise writing the text down and reading it to the child as children benefit from repetition upon re-reading (and children always want to hear a favourite story over and over again). If the parent is unable to read the local language, a minority language story could be created simply by "reading" the pictures. I use this technique when I volunteer-teach the five-year-old class at Andrew's kindergarten once per week. The kindergarten has a nice collection of Japanese children's books, so once per week I choose one and "read" the pictures to the children in English. Hearing familiar stories in an unfamiliar language delights the children. Naturally I keep the stories very concrete and redundant.

One idea I have borrowed from Jacqui Clover and Sue Gilbert's "Parental Involvement in the Development of Language" is to create my own stories in English and let my child illustrate them. This is a combined effort, so we are both very pleased and proud of the results. Our family photo album has also been used to create our own English language stories.

One last idea for stimulating the desire to read that I'd like to share is the Language Experience Approach to Reading (L.E.A.). The idea behind L.E.A. is that the child can read most easily and enjoys the most the words and stories that he creates himself. L.E.A. involves the child dictating a story to a parent, older sibling, or to a teacher. The parent (or whoever) writes down the story verbatim. The child is then encouraged to read back his own story. This gives the child an immense sense of accomplishment and it helps the child to discover that writing originates from people. Andrew and I use L.E.A. in the following way: every couple of weeks, Andrew dictates a letter to his grandmother or favourite uncle. I then read the letter back to him while he listens. I then encourage him to read the letter. A few weeks later when we receive a response, he is always excited to hear the responses to his questions or comments.

For Andrew and me, reading has been a valuable sharing time as well as a time to expand Andrew's understanding of English. Before we read the most recent novel together, Andrew often spoke Japanese even to me. Since we have spent several quality hours reading this one extended story, Andrew has spoken almost exclusively English to me when we are alone. This is a trend that I'd like to continue.

***References***

Arnberg, Lenore *Raising Children Bilingually: The Pre-school Years.* Multilingual Matters Ltd, Clevedon, 1987.

Clover, Jacqui and Sue Gilbert "Parental Involvement in the Development of Language". In: *Every Child's Language.* Multilingual Matters Ltd, Clevedon, 1985.

Trelease, Jim *The Read-Aloud Handbook.* Penguin Books, New York, 1985. (British and Australian versions also available.)

# LETTERS FROM READERS

## GROWING UP WITH ENGLISH IN FRANCE

Regarding the question raised by the family in Germany about taking English as a foreign language in school when the child already speaks the language, I encountered the same problem in France. I came to France when my son was 11 years old. My son "repeated" fifth grade so as not to get too far behind while learning French the first year, and the next year began his first year in a college ("sixième"). It was necessary to choose a foreign language, and I hoped that he could be put in an advanced English class so as to continue perfecting his reading and writing skills (his spelling was horrendous). However, the school said that this wouldn't work because of the class scheduling. So I then proposed that he remain in the beginners' class, but do work on his own: read books and write book reports, to keep up with his English. This suggestion was rejected also. The solution finally adopted was that he would take German as a first language, and in two years, when it was time to choose a second language, he would take English – but be put in with the group of students in his class who had opted for English as a first language. By then, they'd be in their third year, which would be a more suitable level for my son. So, in his third year at the CES, he would be taking third-year German *and* third-year English. Actually, the third-year English should give him a good background in English grammar, and the English/French translations should solidify his French. In the meantime, I would help him keep up with his English at home through reading books, writing letters, and of course speaking English at home.

Do any of your readers have reflections to make on the problems associated with a child who goes back and forth between two countries? My children go back and forth quite a bit between the U.S. and France. I am divorced and live in France, whereas their father lives in the U.S. My family is quite worried that my children will get behind in their schoolwork and not do well. (The visits cause the children to miss a couple of weeks of school once or twice per year.) I say, what they gain in travelling, language acquisition, and cross-cultural experience, will more than make up for missing a few weeks of school. Any comments?

*I would agree with your assessment of the situation. What do readers think?* – **Editor.**

I also have a problem: My children are sometimes tormented by other children who are jealous of the fact that mine speak English. For example, recently at a competitive sports event, the other little girls were very mean to my daughter (aged seven), going to great lengths to prove they were better athletes, make her feel inferior, and not include her in their activities. When I spoke to them about their behaviour, they admitted that they were jealous that she spoke English. Do you have an advice for dealing with this type of situation?

**Nancy Lynn Mahannah, France**

*Perhaps you could try to combat the other girls' jealousy of your daughter's ability to speak English by offering to teach them some English. Even if they only learn to exchange a few basic greetings and phrases with you and your daughter in English, it could remove a lot of the mystery and give them the feeling that they too can speak (some) English. If this doesn't work and your daughter continues to be tormented because of her English, it might be worthwhile seeking the assistance of the other children's teacher and/or parents. Have any readers had similar experiences, and if so, how did you solve the problem? Please write and tell us.* – **Editor.**

## ONLY ON SUNDAY

Thank you for a delightful and interesting Newsletter which is always fun to read. You and your readers may be interested in our system of teaching our children English. Actually, I've really only taken the easy way out. I am English and living in Norway with my Norwegian husband and three children. I have lived here for 14 years, and had work outside the home the whole time. When I get home from work, and the children are home from school/childminding, none of us has the energy to start speaking another language. So, we have reached a compromise – on Sunday I do not speak Norwegian. The family then uses its English the whole day. Well, that's how it works in theory – in practice the children are out with their friends and speaking Norwegian most of the time, and only get caught at meal times! If I feel we are really not getting anywhere, and have been slacking too much, I do have English-speaking friends who can help us back on the straight and narrow. Heidi (seven years old) can now understand nearly everthing that is said to her, and can hold a conversation going with an English speaking person – using her own grammatical rules! Synnøve (one year old) says beautifully "Hello", "No" and "Thank you" – which is about all you'll get from her in either language – and Christie (five years old) spends the whole day grumbling in Norwegian "I can't understand what you are saying". It is helping though, despite what Christie thinks.

I do not claim to have invented this "foreign-Sunday" idea. My mother's cousin married a Scot and moved with him to Scotland. She spoke only Norwegian on Sundays – and all her children – now grown up – are biingual. So there's hope for us yet.

Our attempts to bring the children up bilingually feel very like banging our heads against a wall most of the time, but then again, when we are on holiday in England they seem to understand and converse astonishingly well, so our efforts obviously pay off.

I know that I feel awfully small and ineffective whilst reading about all the wonderful people who manage to bring their children up totally bilingually. But I'm sure there are plenty of "Sunday-people" around, and maybe this idea will help them.

**Ingrid Smith, Åmot, Norway**

## TEACHING CHILDREN TO READ EARLY – A GOOD IDEA?

I am writing in response to several articles in *BFN* Vol. 4: 3 & 4, 1987, but first of all to thank you for the great help you've been. We have two bilingual daughters, more than that, bi-cultural. We consider it a great opportunity to grow up in two cultures, to have direct access to all their riches. Living in France, French culture comes naturally, but an important aspect of their education has been bringing out their American side. And it has worked. When asked what they are, they say both French and American, not half and half, but 100% both. Their father is only French, I am only American. Our identities are very clear, and the girls have the best of both.

With regard to Anna Brennon's article "Teaching a Bilingual Child to Read" (*BFN* Vol. 4, No. 3, 1987), my first reaction was "What a production! It's so much easier to just enjoy reading to them for five years, then get a good [see below] reading book and six months later they'll know how to read." This has been my experience with Abigail, now eight years old. I am opposed to early formal learning, in particular reading. I cannot see the point in teaching a child to read words he or she cannot even say yet. To anyone interested in early reading, I would recommend reading several books on child development. The first years are a time of physical and spoken language development, and they need to be left alone to get on with it. Talk to them, read to them and let them climb trees. If you are reading to them a lot, they will show and tell you when they are ready to begin learning to read by saying, pointing to a sign, "What does this word mean?", or "Teach me how to write my name", or "But I can't read the words!" when I say, "That's all the stories for tonight, you can look at books by yourself until lights out". This happened somewhere between five and six with Abigail. So shortly before her sixth birthday, when I was in New York City, I went to Barnes and Noble, a large general and university bookstore, remembered from my college days, looking for a book to teach her to read English. I knew nothing about teaching reading. I knew a simple reading book, like we all had in school, was not what I needed. I needed a method that would tell me what to do and I found it, and have been very happy with it. It's called *Teach Your Child to Read in 100 Easy Lessons* by S. Englemann, P. Haddox and E. Brunen, published by Cornerstone Library, Simon & Schuster, New York, 1983. ISBN 0-346-12557-X. $14.95.

And it works! In fact, we only did *half* the book over *three* months and she could read! When she met an unfamiliar word, she could sound it out and often recognise it with no help from me. I highly recommend this book for children who will not be learning English at school. Seven months after we started reading in English, Abigail started first grade at a French public school. We found she was able to apply the principle of sounding out words in French. The code is different (the letters and groups of letters are not pronounced the same way) but the principle is the same. By Christmas, she was reading as well in French as in English. Since then she is improving in both, of course, faster in French than in English because she spends more time at it. And she's now reading real books for pleasure – the original Paddington books, which are quite wordy, Hitchcock mysteries for young people in French, the Narnia books by C. S. Lewis, an extensive collection of English books on dinosaurs, etc.

On another tack, in answer to Clare Granger ("Changing Language" *BFN* Vol. 4: 3, 1987), I agree that a change in languages was the only way to keep up their French. We all speak English together when we are at home, and French when there are non-English speaking people present. At one time when we considered moving to the USA, we planned to simply change over to French. Both of my daughters were also late talking compared to their single-language friends and relations in both the USA and France. It seemed logical to me that it took them a few extra months to sort things out. There was a lot going on in those little heads! After all, it took me *years* to learn French in school and over here.

Finally, I was most interested in Constanze Taylor's article "One parent–one language – is it always the best approach?" (*BFN* Vol. 4: 4, 1987). I have never been convinced by the "One parent–one language" approach because it fails to address the questions of which language the parents use with each other, as well as which language the whole family speaks together. It also may severely limit use of the second language. My husband and I spoke French together for five years before our first child was born, at which time we decided to switch to English and make that our family language. It was a bit of an effort at first, but it has been a success and we are very happy with our decision. An extra benefit has been that his English has improved dramatically, from passable to really fluent. Abigail corrects both of us. It's a family joke that her English is better than her father's and her French better than her mother's.

Well, that's it. Are you still with me? And again, thanks for being there!

**Margaret Crick, Mirande, France**

P.S. There is an English bookstore in Toulouse, South Western France called

Contact details removed

### *You might be interested to know that . . .*

**Centre for Language in Primary Education**
recommends two booklets published by Thimble Press, Lockwood, Station Rd, South Woodchester, Stroud, Glos., England, GL5 5EQ:

*Learning to Read with Picture Books* by Jill Bennett, contains a list of books arranged to reflect three stages in children's learning to read: the beginning stage (First Step), the early reading stage (Gaining Confidence) and the developmental stage (Taking Off). Also contains an excellent list of books for parents or schools.

*Read With Me* by Liz Waterland, tells how the author put into practice Jill Bennett's ideas of enabling children to learn to read real books instead of reading schemes.

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***The Good Book Guide*** and
***The Good Book Guide to Children***
91 Great Russell St, London, England, WC1B 3PS. All the books listed in them can be obtained anywhere in the world.

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If you are planning to start a minority language playgroup in England you might like to get in touch with

**Pre-school Playgroup Association**
61–63 Kings Cross Rd, London, England, WC1X 9LL. PPA aims to promote community situations in which parents can make the best use of their own knowledge and resources in the development of their children and themselves.

## CHANGING FAMILY LANGUAGE PATTERNS

I was very interested to read the comments on the one parent–one language approach in recent issues of *BFN*.

My husband Celal is Turkish and I am British. After spending five years in Turkey we have been living for the past eight years in Strasbourg, France. We have two daughters, Elvan (three and a half) and Selvi (nine months). We decided at the outset that Celal would speak only Turkish to them and that I would speak French to avoid family communication problems, since he does not understand or speak much English. I should mention that I was brought up as a bilingual French/English speaker and speak fluent Turkish. For the moment the children get their English input from nursery rhymes (which they love) and stories, as well as occasional visits to the UK. Later we hope they will be admitted to the International School in Strasbourg, where they would receive more and better English tuition than in an ordinary French school. Celal and I speak Turkish together in front of the children and mostly French when alone.

French has been Elvan's dominant language since she started speaking at 18 months; she hears it from me, her childminder and most other people, as well as at nursery school. She has always understood Turkish perfectly, but has spoken only a few words at a time, usually in response to a question from her father. We can visit Turkey only once every two years and do not have many Turkish friends in Strasbourg, so we eventually felt that something would have to be done if Elvan and Selvi were to have an active command of Turkish. We were also anxious to counter the low prestige of Turkish in France (as the language of despised immigrant workers), a problem the children will not come up against with English.

Then we read Constanze Taylor's article "One parent–one language . . .?" In the December 1987 issue of *BFN* and decided to try out her family's rather unorthodox approach. For the past two months we have been speaking Turkish as the family language at weekends and on holiday, and the usual father/Turkish, mother/French combination during the working week. For three weeks nothing special happened, then suddenly one weekend Elvan began to speak Turkish to us both. Shortly afterwards we went on a three-week trip to Turkey, where we all spoke Turkish. After refusing to speak it for the first week, Elvan returned with Turkish her dominant language and ten days later is very gradually beginning to revert to French when addressing French-speakers, while continuing to speak Turkish to her father.

We are very pleased indeed that the strategy is working so well. Clearly, though Elvan will probably soon revert to a pattern in which French is more or less dominant, her Turkish has "taken off"; she enjoys it, is proud of it and should be able to develop it further (Celal also intends to teach her to read and write Turkish later). I shall certainly continue to speak Turkish to both children at weekends and on holiday. English continues to be marginal, but Elvan enjoys producing her few words and singing the many nursery rhymes she knows by heart, and in my view should have no difficulty in learning English later. It remains to be seen how Selvi (nine months) will react to our language-switching approach, which she has experienced from a very early age.

A minor point I should be interested to hear other readers' comments on: Elvan has always spoken Turkish (and to a lesser extent English) with a French accent, although she has never heard anyone speak like this. Our recent trip to Turkey made virtually no difference to her pronunciation, though her vocabulary, grammar and general fluency improved enormously. Why is this, I wonder?

**Clarissa Barton-Sayarer, France**

## BILINGUAL HUMOUR

**Ingrid Smith, Åmot, Norway**

We are trying to bring up our three girls bilingually. Synnøve, at one year old, is as yet unaffected. On Sundays I do not understand Norwegian, and our family language becomes entirely English.

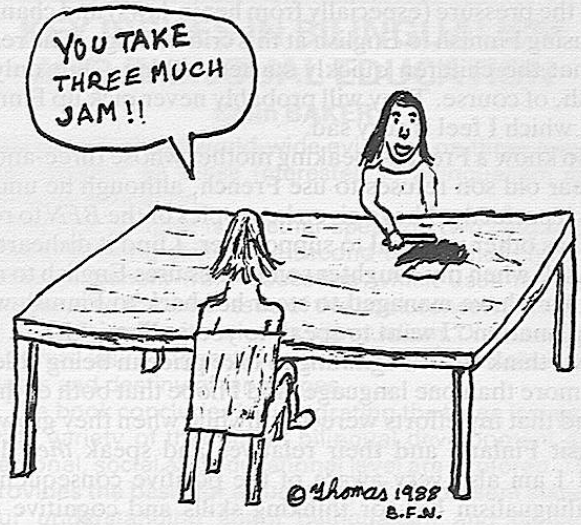
One Sunday morning at the breakfast table Heidi (aged seven) was criticising Christie (aged five):

"You take three much jam."

I tried to explain that that was not the way one said it, which she accepted, but then turned to her sister again and said:

"You take four much jam."

Christie had obviously taken, in Heidi's eyes, such a vast amount that the expression 'too much' (to her – *two* much) just failed to cover it!




## GOOD START IN FINNISH

I have found the *BFN* very encouraging and interesting reading, as I am bringing up two children (aged two and four) in my own mother tongue, Finnish. My children have hardly any contact with any other Finns and yet they are both able to express themselves in Finnish, and easily learn Finnish songs, stories, etc. Thanks to your encouragement – and ideas picked up from a few books dealing with bilingualism – I have been able to establish a mini-culture in my own home by way of books, magazines, cartoons, tapes, etc., generously sent by my family and friends. A real test of bilingualism will come soon when my mother is coming for a visit and will meet my children for the first time (the older one was only a baby when my mother last saw her), and I am looking forward to seing them talking in Finnish together.

My eldest child is also attending an all-Irish playschool and finds no problem at all in learning yet another language. It seems that she is so used to the idea that things have more than one name that another way of talking is just like a funny game. She absorbs new words and sounds and is able to reproduce them herself without any hesitation. (In comparison, I know there are young people in Ireland who even after nine years of formal Irish language teaching at school are unable to speak any Irish!) My daughter is supported in her Irish by her father and her grandmother, as I have no Irish myself.

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## CONTRIBUTIONS

Please continue to send us your 'stories', anecdotes, jokes, useful hints or any other contributions you think might interest our readers.

Remember, this Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you.

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Both of my children were quite slow in starting their speech. They were about two years of age before they really started talking, and I did feel a lot of pressure when I compared them to their monolingual peers who were chatting away. I know at least one Finnish mother who "broke" under the pressure (especially from her in-laws) and changed from using Finnish to English at this critical stage. The result was that the children quickly started talking – but only in English, of course. They will probably never pick up Finnish again, which I feel is very sad.

I also know a French-speaking mother whose three-and-a-half year old son refuses to use French, although he understands it perfectly. I have given her copies of the *BFN* to read as well as other material to support her. I find it disheartening myself when my daughter sometimes uses English to me, but so far I have managed to steer her back to Finnish with the explanation "I want to speak to you in Finnish!"

Now I think she is beginning to take pride in being able to speak more than one language, and I hope that both of them will find that my efforts were worthwhile when they grow up and visit Finland and their relatives and speak *their* language! I am also very aware of the positive consequences that bilingualism has for thinking skills and cognitive development. Even besides all that, I find immense pleasure in being able to express myself to my children in the very words that my parents used to me – and that goes through the whole scale of emotions from frustrations to love!

Thank you once again for the encouragement and support and useful information in your Newsletter. The most important thing in dealing with something that is difficult is to be *aware* of the pitfalls and problems, for only then can you proceed to finding solutions. Carry on with the good work!

**Kirsi Slattery, Kilcoole, Ireland**

## JEALOUS CAT

Ozan, age five, was given a cat. When the cat arrived Ozan asked his parents "Will the cat understand Turkish or only Norwegian?" "Both" answered his father. "Good." said Ozan, "She is bilingual too."

The cat and Ozan were the best of friends for one and a half years, but suddenly the cat started to scratch Ozan and he didn't like that at all. Father and Ozan talked about it to try to understand what was causing the cat's behaviour. "Of course," said Ozan, "the cat is jealous of me." "Why?" asked the father. "Well – the poor thing is still only bilingual but I have become TRILINGUAL!"

(Ozan's family had had visitors from Denmark for six days, and Ozan had realised that he understood Danish as well as Turkish and Norwegian.)

## MOUNTAINS OUT OF MOLEHILLS?

*In the July issue of* BFN, *Linda Lynch, whose family is all-British and lives in Germany, wrote that they seldom had to make any effort regarding bilingualism, and that she felt that the articles in* BFN *made mountains out of molehills.*

Unlike Linda Lynch, I find the *BFN* very useful! Even if my problems are particular to my own child, me and my husband, I think that there is a lot to learn from other families' experiences in the field of bilingualism. The *BFN* helps me to persevere in my task at times when my enthusiasm seems to be lacking and makes me feel less isolated, as I realise that all over the world many other couples are also trying to ensure that their children become bilingual. However, I would like to read more about how children/teenagers who are being raised bilingually feel, or how adults felt when they were being brought up to be bilingual.

**Patricia Simpson, England**

*With regard to this last point, we would welcome contributions from teenagers and adults on how it felt to grow up bilingually. So please write us a few lines (or more) about your own or your family's experiences and feelings as bilinguals beyond the early years* – **Editor.**

## CULTURAL DIFFERENCES

I would like to comment on Linda Lynch's remarks on making mountains out of molehills. In my experience, it is due to cultural differences and aspirations in different countries. In countries such as Germany, people aspire to speak one or two other languages, and English is the favourite foreign language. Consequently, a three-year-old child speaking fluent English as well as fluent German would be admired as much as a three year old playing a musical instrument confidently would be admired by English people.

A lot of English people feel excluded when a foreign language is spoken in front of them to a child or by a child, to the extent that they think it is impolite. English relatives, health visitors, teachers, etc., are very quick to point out that a child gets "confused", "frustrated", etc., when having to cope with two languages, and therefore, in their opinion, the child should be brought up speaking only English.

**Christine Reeves, England**

## CASUAL APPROACH THE SECRET?

I was most interested in the remarks made by Linda Lynch. In many ways she expressed my own opinion on the subject, as I find it difficult to imagine that so many families run into so many problems raising their children bilingually. We have been raising our daughter Donna, now six, trilingually since birth, mainly because we have no choice. My mother tongue is English, my husband's is Arabic, and between the two of us we converse in French. We live in Tunisia where Arabic is the native language, although French is also used extensively. I speak to Donna only in English, my husband Arabic, and although her language development to begin with was slow, she is now completely fluent in all three languages, having picked up French from listening to our conversations and after spending two summers in France.

Perhaps, in many cases problems arise because parents worry too much about whether or not they're doing the right thing by raising their children bilingually rather than letting it happen naturally.

Afer all, in monolingual families parents don't give their children's language development a second thought, unless of course their child has a specific language problem, as it is just one of many aspects of their child's total development. Maybe if bilingual parents approached the question of lan-

guage development with the same casualness as in monolingual families, fewer problems would arise. As so often happens, if one is unsure and apprehensive about a situation, spontaneity is lost, creating difficulties which otherwise would not occur.

I would like to add, however, that even though we have encountered no problems with bilingualism in our family, and it has worked out naturally without any particular effort on our part, I do enjoy the *BFN* very much, and I find many of the articles to be very interesting.

**Susan M'Rad, Tunisia**

## READERS' QUERIES

**I'm German and my husband is British. I speak *only* German with our son Daniel (1½) and my husband *only* English. As far as we know from the books, we're not doing anything wrong there.**

**Our problem is when to start and "train" our boy to use the two languages with two different persons. So far he mixes both languages up and isn't at all able to distinguish between the two languages. How should we react if he uses the "wrong" word with the "wrong" person? Especially for me as the mother, who is with Daniel most of the day, it gets quite difficult now to try and ignore him when he comes to me with a beaming face and says, "Car, Mummy!" He know and says the German word "Auto" to me as well, but not all the time.**

**Please give me some advice on this problem as soon as possible.**

**Susanne Owen-Hughes, Dorset, England**

Firstly, there is nothing wrong with the method you are using to bring up your son bilingually. The "one person–one language" method is quite common and has good chances of success.

Secondly, your son is only aged one and a half, and it is not unusual for children of that age to be still sorting out which words belong to which language. Generally, by about the age of two years children will more or less have managed to separate the two languages and use the "right" language to the "right" person. However, even then your son may still, for a number of reasons, occasionally use words from English when speaking German and vice versa. You could help (or, to use your term, "train") Daniel to become aware of exactly what belongs to which language by playing language games with him, e.g. "Daddy says 'car', 'horse', 'good night', etc. – what does Mummy say?" But don't make it a chore, it should be fun, and give him plenty of praise for being so clever. You could also have one toy which speaks only German, and one which speaks only English, and get Daniel, who is superior because he knows *both* languages, to help each toy communicate with the other.

If Daniel addresses you in English, you could experiment with the following:

(i) Jokingly say you thought he was talking to his father because he spoke English.

(ii) Suggest how he could have said it in German: "Ja, Papi sagt 'tree', aber ich sage 'Baum'."

(iii) Pretend that you do not understand ("Wie bitte?"), but as a game. If you don't overdo this and don't expect him to produce things beyond his present capability in German, he will quickly accept it as a kind of game (since he is no doubt well aware that you do in fact understand English. You will quickly sense from his reactions whether he is too tired, or whether he really does know something only in English or has momentarily forgotten the German expression (in which case, see (ii)).

It will at times be difficult and discouraging when your child attempts to speak to you in the "wrong" language, but if you are consistent and speak to him only in your language and encourage him as much as possible to use German to you, your efforts will pay off. Remember, though, that because you live in England, Daniel will have much less contact with German than English. You should not be disappointed, therefore, if his German is not at the same level as that of a monolingual child in Germany or at the same level as his English. English will most probably be Daniel's dominant language, but his German should nevertheless develop into an efficient means of communication which is perfectly adequate for communicating with you and in a German-speaking environment.

*Continued from page one*

they were struggling with class and homework exercises. In short, they both enjoyed the experience of studying their dominant language as if it were a foreign language.

On behalf of my family, the publishers, and the *BFN* Advisory Board, I would like to thank you, the readers and contributors, very much for your support during the year, and to wish you all a happy Christmas and/or New Year and every success with your bilingual endeavours in 1989.

**George Saunders**

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

Contact details removed

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**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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