# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Editor:
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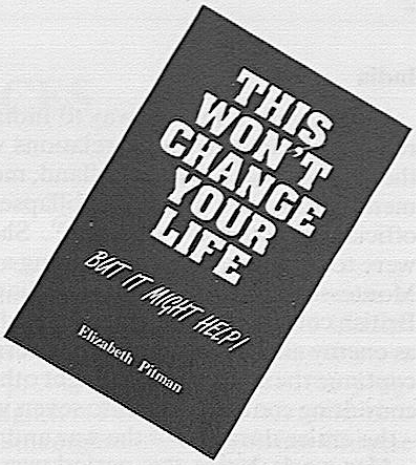


## MULTILINGUALISM AND MONTESSORI: WHAT CAN BE DONE?


**M. J. Rosanova**


Every year, InterCultura Montessori in Oak Park, Illinois, hosts the Families and Languages Conference. One of the speakers in 1990, Jan Swan, brought along some videos of the Spanish-language immersion elementary school, a non-Montessori magnet school which she co-ordinates for the Milwaukee Public Schools. Though most of the children come from non-Hispanic, non-Spanish-speaking homes, their total immersion in Spanish-speaking environments from junior or senior Kindergarten on (with no English-speaking adult staff until the end of second grade) produces confident native-level speakers. In one of Ms Swan's tapes, an Hispanic talk-show host interviewed some of Ms Swan's fifth graders – non-Hispanic, Northern European and Afro-American in background – with great wit and a genuine pleasure which the children shared, and somehow, quite admirably, took completely in their stride.

In just three to four years, Ms Swan explained, children in the Canadian-model Milwaukee immersion schools break into "communicative fluency", the ability to handle everyday life in the target language. The vast majority of students in traditional high school and college foreign language courses never reach communicative competence – not even after four and five years of instruction. So this result of the Milwaukee Public Schools' immersion programme is a wonderful, deeply impressive, and, for many of us, an emotionally moving datum which confirms over thirty years of research in the field of early childhood foreign language immersion (Genessee, 1987).

In the child-centred, whole language Montessori environments of InterCultura, though, similar children normally break into communicative fluency in the target language – the ability to speak effectively and without embarrasment with people who understand no English – in just eight to ten months.

### What's possible is what's normal

According to UN statistics, the number of people around the globe who are multilingual is greater than the number of those who are monolingual. This is sometimes difficult for Americans to understand. For the last three hundred years, speakers of languages other than English have usually entered US society on the bottom rung. Bilingualism has been widely viewed as a mark of backwardness and disadvantage (Hakuta, 1986). In most countries, though, there has always been a neighbour not too far away – a people to be feared or a people with whom to trade – a neighbour or neighbours a knowledge of whose language(s) has always been an advantage, a necessity, a mark of prestige. The United States has managed to construct a social and economic island where monolingualism has come to look "normal". In the age of the Global Village, however, this long standing illusion threatens to make Americans look sometimes like the village eccentric, sometimes like the town fool. Statistically speaking, monolingualism is *not* normal. Given the right environment, *multi*lingualism is a normal facet of human development.

Montessori was well aware of this. Her entire argument for pre-analytical learning in early childhood (the "absorbent mind") rests on her analogy of language learning: no one teaches formal language lessons to babies, no one drills infants or toddlers in language, but given the right environment at the critical "sensitive period", every healthy child acquires the necessary skills. In writing about global, wholistic learning before the age of seven, Montessori returns continuously to her analogy of language learning during this time of life in various cultures and in various combinations. Children below the age of seven do not "study a foreign language", instead, given the right environment, they acquire a second mother tongue.

> "Statistically speaking, monolingualism is *not* normal."

It was Montessori's work in India which most cogently affirmed her belief in multilingualism and multiculturalism as the natural state of man – a goal which a development-based environment would naturally facilitate.


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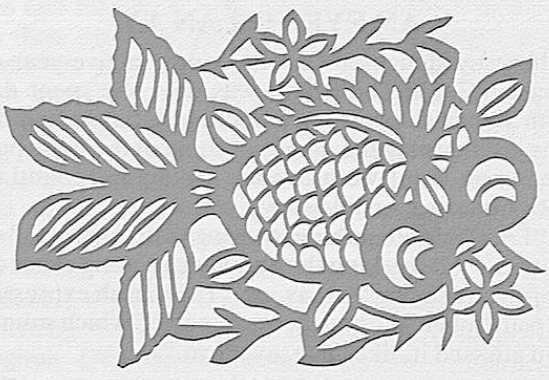

*Chinese paper-cutting sent by Gail Schaefer Fu*

**India**

Montessori found her way to India in 1939 for a variety of reasons – partly her poor relations with the Fascists, partly the frailty of her home in Holland, most obviously her assessment of Europe's shattering collapse into World War II. The official pretext was "business". She and her son, Mario, were to be involved in a consulting and training project. The Montessoris, of course, were Italian citizens. In India, the British colonial authorities classified Montessori and her son as enemy aliens. The two were interned but then released to continue their work. What might otherwise have been a brief consulting contract grew into seven years of Montessori's life – the entire duration of the war and then some.

Her work during this period was to construct a series of "English medium" Montessori schools for speakers of Hindi, Urdu, and the other native languages of India – an inextricably multicultural and multilingual country where English is one of 15 official national languages. In other words, in the last major period of her life, in the years just before her last major work, *The Absorbent Mind,* Montessori focused on the creation of culturally appropriate early childhood immersion environments – environments fit to deal with the daily realities of multiculturalism and multilingualism (Trudeau, 1985).

> "Montessori focused on the creation of culturally appropriate early childhood immersion environments."

This was the necessary premise to Montessori's completion of her own developmentally appropriate life-task at that point – aiming her work toward a sense of "logical extension" and "summing up" which would lead to "serenity and satisfaction" (in Erik Erikson's terms). When Montessori came to India, she was already in her late sixties; these were seven of the last 11 years of Montessori's life. This process of unfolding and completion – this process of integrating individual development and social dynamic, from embryonic physiology to multicultural reality – was perfectly consistent with the work of Montessori as a young MD struggling over the problems of developmentally disabled children, copying over the works of Itard and Seguin by hand in French, annotating her own insights in Italian along the way, experiment after experiment. This was the same young woman who taught anthropology at the University of Rome, holding forth on Weber's notions of unbiased observation of non-Western cultures, speaking out in favour of cultural pluralism, despite the rise of the Fascists. This was the same young woman who could hold her own in four different languages at meetings of suffragettes; and who perceived very early the broader implications of her work, the power of her insights into human development and group process, their power to enable, to liberate, and to transform.

## AN EYE FOR AN AY

When my daughter Carolina (now a five-year-old Spanish/English bilingual) was tiny, she spent days with a Spanish-speaking monolingual babysitter. She was just learning the names of some of the body parts when one day I went to pick her up and found the babysitter in a terrible stew.

"I'm afraid something is wrong with Carolina," she fretted. "All day long she has been pointing at her eye ('ojo') and saying 'Ay, ay, ay'" (a Spanish expression of pain, much like "ouch, ouch, ouch," which sounds, you guessed it, like "eye, eye, eye.")

**Elizabeth Lewis, San José, Costa Rica**

Several English-language immersion Montessori schools continue to exist in India and Pakistan. Independently formed Montessori immersion schools exist in Dar-es-Salaam, Tanzania, in Buenos Aires, Argentina, in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and elsewhere. As far as we have been able to ascertain, InterCultura is the only such school in the United States. Founded in 1985, InterCultura is something of a grandfather in the field.

**InterCultura**

InterCultura currently offers immersion programmes in Spanish, in French, and in Japanese, for children aged two years nine months through six years of age. InterCultura would like to develop arrangements with public schools to request federal funds and to implement continuing elementary school level immersion and bilingual immersion programmes, whether in the Chicago area or elsewhere.

The rigour with which InterCultura has pursued Montessori's own commitment to natural multilingualism of course, is rare. American education is driven by market forces. (Elkins, 1990). In the 1950s, Nancy McCormick Rambusch revived Montessori education in North America by cutting Montessori's original daycare-length format down to three-hour segments that resembled American Kindergarten schedules, i.e. units which resembled the prevailing standard of the market. American Montessori schools have not offered foreign language immersion programmes because American ethnocentrism – a regrettable economic and social arrogance, really – have made such a concept virtually unmarketable.

The very existence of InterCultura, however, shows that that need not be the case.

**Appropriate goals**

Of course, not every Montessori school needs to share the priorities of InterCultura in order to share InterCultura's ideals. Montessori schools nurture wonderful creativity; and one sees that in language and culture, as well as in other areas.

In many Montessori environments, it's possible to find a part-time teacher offering French or Spanish lessons 15 to 20 minutes once or twice a week. Occasionally, one finds a native speaker of Spanish who attempts to serve as a foreign language reference person. There may even be a head teacher who dons a colourful shoulder scarf to effect the role of foreign language reference person. After two to three years of such programmes, the average child may be able to recognise 20 to 30 words and phrases; and may develop a curiosity about foreign languages which increases the likelihood of enrolment in a foreign language course in junior or senior high. Any school which has accomplished this much has made an important contribution in twentieth century America – even though the statistics tell us that the average student of a foreign language in an American secondary school will either change to a new introductory language course or drop the study of a foreign language altogether within one or two years.

> "If you "follow the child", you might be surprised."

After three years in a total immersion environment in a Montessori setting, however, the average child is both functionally bilingual and functionally biliterate – in other words, truly multicultural before the end of early childhood, during that transitional period when basic life-long values have begun to form.

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# DECISIONS AND CONSEQUENCES

**Gail Schaefer Fu**

Long before our first daughter was born, my husband and I had made a decision: we wanted our children to be bilingual. The fact that they were both born in Hong Kong certainly assisted us in realising our aim, but this was by no means the only factor.

Living in Hong Kong made things easier because both Chinese and English are official languages and many if not most government documents, signs, menus and billboards appear in both languages. There are newspapers, radio and TV stations in both languages so parents who decide to help their children be bilingual do have resources and support systems in both languages.

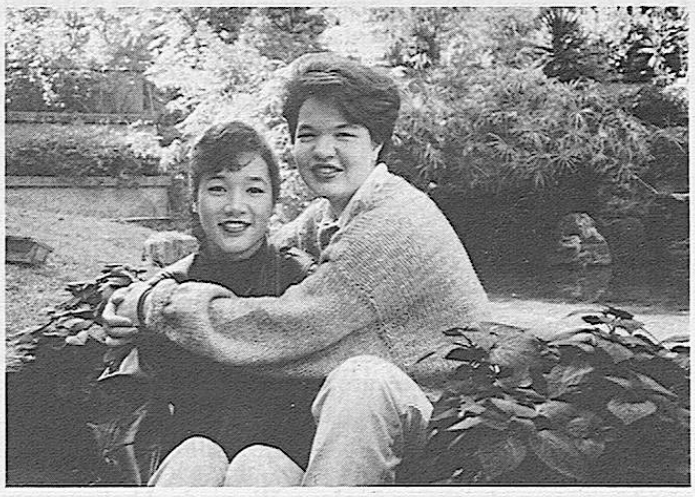
> "To be honest, we didn't want our children blaming us later for teaching them only one of the languages!"

In addition to the environment, another important factor for us was the fact that my husband is Chinese and I am Caucasian American. It seemed especially important in our particular family for our children to feel part of both of their cultures: language, we felt, was an essential part of experiencing the two cultures. (Also, to be honest, we didn't want our children blaming us later for teaching them only one of the languages!)

Because we had, as parents, both languages between us, we decided that we would follow the "one language, one person" principle: one person would speak only the one language to the child and the other person would speak the other. This principle would help the child at a young age keep the two languages separate even before they were aware that one language was called "English" and the other was called "Chinese". As a matter of fact, when our children were quite young they sometimes said things like "Daddy says it this way" or "Mommy's talk".

Having made those basic decisions of "policy", we next thought about the kind of child-care we wanted for our baby daughter. Because both my husband and I have full-time jobs, it was necessary for us to find a person who could help us care for our daughter during the day. We considered the idea of a full-time helper or amah in our own home but decided that it would not be very lively or very much fun for the baby to be living with three adults. Instead we chose to take our daughter every day to the home of a friend who had agreed to take care of our child and who herself had three children. This meant that even before our own daughter began to talk she was surrounded by other children and by their chatter. The fact that she now speaks perfectly accented Cantonese should be attributed, I feel, to her childhood playmates and not to her father who, having been born in north China, speaks only excellent but not perfect Cantonese, the dialect of the south.

The next major decision had to be made when our daughter reached school age. We wanted her to be able to read and write Chinese as well as to speak Cantonese and we recognised that the complexities of Chinese characters made it almost imperative that we place her in a Chinese kindergarten. We chose to ignore the advice of some of our Chinese friends – advice which probably stemmed from the pragmatic value placed on English in Hong Kong – who told us to put her into an English kindergarten and teach her Chinese on Saturday mornings. We did not believe that this would be a realistic plan for our family. So from a Chinese kindergarten she moved to a Chinese primary school (at which time her younger sister was born) and from there to an Anglo-Chinese secondary school which means that in theory, at least, some subjects may be taught in English though in practice this varies widely from school to school in Hong Kong. (There are now very few schools which actually label themselves as Chinese-medium as these do not have strong attraction for either parents or pupils.)



*"Oh I'm so glad I'm Eurasian!"*

As for my daughter's English, she studied it formally along with her classmates and followed the syllabus provided in the Chinese school system. At home, of course, I continued to talk with her only in English and to encourage the reading which we had started as bedtime stories when she was a little girl. Her pronunciation of English was very clear and accurate when speaking with me though I sometimes overheard her discussing English homework with her friends. At those times, she would adopt a more stilted "school pronunciation" and would thereby sound more like a second language speaker of English.

Her little sister followed an almost identical path except for the fact that there were then two children in our home rather than only one. Now the younger daughter is a teenager and the older daughter is a young adult. Both speak English and Cantonese with ease and without inhibition. When speaking with each other they may now use either one or the other of their languages though when they were younger they tended to speak only Cantonese. They have tended also to keep their languages quite separate and rather carefully avoid sprinkling their Cantonese with English words or their English with Cantonese ones.

To date, I would say, both of our daughters are easily and comfortably bilingual. The older one has begun to add Putonghua (Mandarin Chinese) to her repertoire and

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recently, when I asked her to name one thing she really liked about herself (I think she was feeling discouraged about something that day and I was trying to boost her ego), declared emphatically that she liked the fact that she is bilingual.

On a separate occasion, we had been out shopping for T-shirts and jeans for her third year at university. While returning home in the car, she spontaneously and for no apparent reason burst out with "Oh I'm so glad I'm Eurasian!" Surprised not by the sentiment but by the sudden emotion of her statement, I asked her in what way she was glad: "Well, for one thing, I don't have to look like everybody else – and for another, I'm just different." Being taller than most Chinese girls and being more Asian in appearance than most Caucasian American girls, she seemed to be glorying in that difference, confident rather than confused by the dualities within her. Six years her junior, her younger sister seems to be developing in the same vein. Writing recently to a new pen-friend, my younger daughter described herself in these words: "Well, I'm 14 years old, and I like swimming a lot. I'm on my school team. I like watching Michael Chang play tennis very much (especially his funny little acts on the tennis court). The most special thing about me is I'm a mix (China, USA, Germany)." (The German coming from her maternal grandfather).

> "I am pleased by the tapestries that have emerged and are still being woven."

So far so good, as the saying goes. I am gratified and feel validated by the consequences which have emerged over the years from the decisions that we took earlier regarding our children's upbringing. They are certainly fluent and apparently comfortable bilinguals in Cantonese and English and they seem to be comfortable in their biculturalism as well. I do not believe they are a "mix" of two different colours of paint, as on an artist's palette, which results in a quite separate and third colour: rather I think of it as a tapestry made up of many different threads, each independent and vivid in its own identity and colour. We made, I believe now with even stronger conviction than ever, the right decision when our first daughter was born twenty-one years ago: I am pleased by the tapestries that have emerged and are still being woven.

*(Traditional Chinese paper-cuttings pictured in this issue were done by hand by a friend of the Fu family.)*



# LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT OF A GERMAN/ENGLISH BILINGUAL CHILD

## (Part 3)

**Reinhold Trott**

**My wife Maureen is English, and I am German. We both have a good command of each other's language, but converse exclusively in English with each other. We work as freelance translators and hold part-time jobs which are also language-related (teaching German to adults in my case, and my wife has an administrative job involving regular foreign-language correspondence). Richard, our only child, has been brought up bilingually right from the beginning (which was the subject of two previous reports published in the *Bilingual Family Newsletter* 1988 Vol. 5:2 and 3). We live near Hamburg in Germany.**

The following report (Part 3 in this issue, Part 4 to be published in 8:2) covers Richard's language development from the age of 3½ to about 7½ years, i.e. the late preschool years until the beginning of his second year at school.

### English as a family language

At the beginning of this period we both talked English to Richard, while I talked German to him when I was on my own with him. When Richard started going to kindergarten at the age of about 4½, I gradually "phased out" German altogether as he was getting enough intake of this language due to greatly increased social contacts. This led to English becoming the usual and almost exclusive means of communication within the family. Although Richard can be quite stubborn and insist on his own way of doing things, he has never questioned the role of English as a family language or refused to speak it at all. He does not mind us talking to him in English in the presence of German children and easily switches between the two languages when acting as a mediator between his playmates and us. He has been quite unimpressed by occasional silly remarks of children on our English conversation. Recently, however, he has occasionally refused to speak English to me in the presence of other children. This, however, was just to tease me and he reverted to English quickly afterwards.

> "The fact that he uses English even in a highly charged emotional atmosphere shows how deeply ingrained this language is."

He even seems to be a little proud of his bilingual ability. Although there are a few other bilingual children of various ethnic backgrounds in his class, he was the only one on the first day at school to tell his teacher that he can speak another language. Even helping Richard with his homework, which is a must in the German school system, has not re-introduced the German language in our home on a large scale. Of course, we cannot help reading the texts with him in German, but the conversation going along with it and our discussion of the texts with Richard are invariably in English. Quite recently (at the start of his second year at school), for example, I helped him with this maths homework, introducing some technical terms in English such as "tens" and "units". When he carried on his own, I overheard him counting in English (although he usually counts in German, when on his own). This shows that English is indeed very much on equal terms with German, and he has achieved almost the

same degree of numeracy in English as in German, being able to carry out the same mathematical operations in both languages.

There are, however, some needs which cannot be fulfilled by the English language. Obviously, the kind of English he hears from us is very much an adult middle-class language. We have deliberately withheld bad language from him and Maureen has frustrated the few half-hearted attempts on my part to break this rule. Richard can meet his need for bad language only by resorting to German. Kindergarten and school seem to have provided him with an inexhaustible supply of these words, which he also likes to use at home to provoke us. When it comes to real verbal conflicts (and there have been quite a few!), however, Richard's medium of communication is invariably English. The fact that he uses English even in a highly charged emotional atmosphere shows how deeply ingrained this language is.

*Maureen, Richard and Reinhold Trott*

The other exception to the rule of "English only" within the family are funny events or jokes Richard experiences and hears outside and wants to tell us about as well as games he has learnt at school and wants to play with us. We usually manage to "anglicise" these, however, which Richard accepts (I sometimes find it difficult not to have too purist an attitude in this respect, which of course is not at all helpful).

Sometimes Richard uses a German word in an otherwise English context if he cannot think of or has not come across the English equivalent. Referring to something he did at school he said e.g. "I have [sic] once done a Rolle vorwärts [= a forward roll]." In that case we usually respond by deliberately using and emphasising the English word in our response. An answer could be, for example, "Where did you do a *forward roll*?" We have observed that some adult speakers of English who have lived in Germany for a while are quite sloppy in their speech habits in that they allow all sorts of Germanisms to creep into their conversation. There is absolutely no need, for example, to constantly use the word "Tagesmutter" instead of childminder, which is a perfectly normal English word. Finding the right equivalent can be difficult, but we think it is better to use an English word which does not cover the sense of the German word a hundred per cent (e.g. "commuter train" for "S-Bahn") than producing hybrid sentences which would never be used or understood by English speakers in a monolingual setting. We have even taken to translating some local names (where possible) into English. Thus we refer to a little lake as "Mill Pond", which is a translation from the German name "Mühlenteich". This may sound queer, but Richard does not seem to think so and has accepted it. On the other hand, keeping the German name would require a rather unnatural change of articulation in mid-sentence and might have an adverse affect on the intonation and pronunciation of the rest of the sentence (the option of a monolingual who would simply adjust the foreign name to the sounds of his own language and pronounce the name like "Moonlentike" is not open to the bilingual who has an excellent knowledge of the majority language.)

**English outside the family**

Whilst we have succeeded in establishing English as a family language, we have largely failed to extend it beyond this sphere. For several years now, Richard went to an English playgroup which Maureen started with other English-speaking mothers. The children, however, could not really be induced to speak English to each other. They were so used to speaking German to other children that it did not occur to them to change their habit in the English playgroup. For them it was just a silly adult idea as most of them can converse much better in German anyway. They spoke English only when an adult organised some activity for them which involved saying or explaining something. But this could take up only part of the time, whereas they wanted to be left on their own for the rest of the time. A sense of frustration took hold of all the other members of the playgroup. An attempt to revive it last year proved to be a flash in the pan, and we first reduced our meetings to once a month from meeting once a week and then discontinued them altogether. The children did derive some benefit by hearing other native speakers of English and realising that there were peers in a similar situation. Last but not least, it was interesting and important for the parents to exchange experiences and views, and these contacts are being kept up.

Even less satisfactory was our experience at the English church in Hamburg where Maureen and I both acted as Sunday School teachers for several years. Over the years more and more children turned up who did not know enough English to understand instruction in this language, let alone make active contributions in it of their own. In the end we decided it was not worth trouble spending nearly two hours on the train to take Richard to an "English" Sunday School, which was becoming less and less English. Apparently many parents of bilingual children lack the energy, consistency or sometimes even the will to give sufficient support to the minority language.

"Many parents of bilingual children lack the energy, consistency or sometimes even the will to give sufficient support to the minority language."

Our visits to England are too short and far between to have any lasting effect on Richard's command of the language. The benefits are more emotional. Up till fairly recently he only had contact with adult speakers of English during our visits. Last year, at the age of about 6½, he played with English children on a playground for the first time. He even told some of them proudly that he was from Germany and could speak that language, too. Richard associates England so strongly with the English language that it does not occur to him to say anything in German when we are over there. My attempt at switching to German while having an argument with him in order to avoid having unwelcome listeners have always failed (although of course it does work the other way round in Germany, which I find quite convenient, and Richard, too, I suppose).

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**The preferred or dominant language**

Whatever has been said so far about Richard's proficiency in English and his readiness to use it when talking to us, there is no denying the fact that his dominant as well as his preferred language is German. This can best be illustrated by the fact that the proportion of English used while Richard is playing on his own has nearly shrunk to zero over the years (while I was talking to him about this report, however, he made a point of saying that he does sometimes speak English on these occasions). Furthermore, it is obvious that his English is much more strongly influenced by his German than the other way round. Whilst his German is practically free from Anglicisms, he still uses quite a few Germanisms, one of the most notorious ones being the use of "still" in the sense of "else" ("what still" instead of "what else").

In order to get a rough picture of the relative strength of the two languages at the time just before Richard started school (at the age of about 6½) I carried out the following experiment: I gave Richard two sequences of pictures in the form of comic strips (the kind of which he had never seen before; so he was unfamiliar with the characters and the plot). Then I asked him to tell the stories in English and in German. As having told the story in one language before would certainly have an effect on the way it was told a second time in the other language, I asked him to start with English while telling the first story and with German while telling the second story. Between the first and the second telling of each story, a day or two elapsed. In spite of the obvious shortcomings of the method, I think the test has given us a more accurate picture than we could have gained just from our "impression".

> "There is no denying the fact that his dominant as well as his preferred language is German."

As it turned out, the method seemed to favour the language in which the story was first told, as least as far as the length was concerned. I have therefore considered only those results which show a similar tendency in both stories.

The test seems to suggest that Richard's German vocabulary slightly exceeds his English one. In the first story it comprised 67 different words in each language, in the second 108 English and 115 German.

The length and the structure of the sentences is the area where there is most agreement in the results of both stories. The average length of English sentences exceeds that of German ones by over 50%. Similarly, the structure of the English sentences is more complex. In the case of English the proportion of co-ordinate clauses is, on the whole, slightly higher than in the case of German, the proportion of subordinate clauses is considerably higher whilst that of simple clauses is much lower.

The proportion of mistakes is almost identical in the second story (with English having a minutely higher percentage), it is almost three times higher in the case of German in the first story. In spite of this discrepancy, it can be concluded that Richard's English is more correct than his German.

An analysis of the mistakes reveals that in the first story none of the English mistakes is due to Germanisms and only one of the German mistakes (5.6%) is due to an Anglicism. In the second story, about a quarter (25.9%) of the English mistakes can be attributed to Germanisms, but only 3.3% of the German ones to Anglicisms. The Germanisms are literal translations from German, e.g. "driver" instead of "motorcyclist" or "he swum further" instead of "he went on swim-

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## WHAT DOES THE FUTURE HOLD?

**My wife is Japanese and we have not yet produced any offspring but plan to do so in due course. We would like to be quite well prepared for raising a bilingual child so we're looking at all sorts of ideas now rather than waiting and being caught unawares.**

**The principal reason for wanting to be prepared in advance in that a friend of mine is in precisely the same position and is having all sorts of troubled getting his son to attend classes in his wife's native language, Japanese. The problem as I see it is that Japanese is not spoken at all in the home and the little boy is probably feeling justified in his attitude, i.e. it isn't important for you (Dad) so why do I have to give up my time to learn it?**

**My feeling is that if my wife and I speak two languages at home quite naturally and switch from one to the other at will, then a child in that environment could very well assume that this is a very normal part of life and it will not be an issue. My fervent desire is to produce a child who can be at home in two languages, that is, not to see one as the native language and the other as a second language but that they coexist and are both as useful as each other. With regular trips to Japan to see in-laws and so on I hope that this will be the case.**

**Of course the best laid plans . . ., so we would appreciate any ideas that you may have, and of course if we can help in any way to further your efforts we shall. I know of two other families here who are in the same position and the topic of bilingualism regularly surfaces at the dinner table and of course, all parents are a bit myopic when it comes to looking at their own children! But we discuss it avidly and I can assure you your newsletter is awaited with real interest here!**

**Andrew Blair Miller, Mitcham, Australia**

You make some good points in your letter. If you proceed as planned you will obviously have a much better chance of successfully raising your child bilingually than your friend in whose home no Japanese is spoken. For that particular child Japanese is not a language acquired naturally and used as a natural means of communication in the home, but rather a foreign language which he has to learn through formal instruction.

If you and your wife do switch naturally between Japanese and English, your child will most likely regard this as a normal state of affairs. However, since you live in Australia, in an English-speaking environment, it will be important that your child hears and has to use as much Japanese as possible at home. The problem with a situation where either language can be used at any time is that children tend to opt for the language of the environment, which in this case would be English. This is particularly so as contacts with the outside environment increase. This is why many families prefer a more systematic arrangement, at least with regard to child–parents communication, e.g. the mother speaks Japanese to the child, the father speaks English to the child (the one person, one language method), or both parents speak Japanese

to the child, the child acquires English from friends, relatives, kindergarten, school, the neighbourhood. Available research on bilingual children indicates that a consistent approach is more likely to be successful. This is particularly important in the early stages of speech.

We often point out in the *BFN* that the bilingual who has equal proficiency in all aspects of two languages is quite rare; normally one language is dominant. This does not mean, however, that the two languages cannot coexist and be equally useful.

## ARE GRANDPARENTS ENOUGH?

**Our bilingual daughter is married to a unilingual English-speaker. Our two grandchildren are 27 months and 15 months old. We see them every week for a few hours. My wife (French) and I (French-Canadian) speak only French to our children and grandchildren. The little ones understand and react appropriately to our questions and comments.**

**I believe in the 'one person–one language' approach. Although our son-in-law encourages this approach and even uses the few words he has learned overhearing us speak to the children, our bilingual daughter has a much more relaxed attitude.**

**Given this background, is it reasonable to think that children can learn to speak the minority language with only a few hours a week of exposure?**

**This is a new experience for us grandparents. While our children were growing up, we lived in the USA, France and Italy. They were exposed to these three languages. Only French was allowed in the home, and the other languages at school and in the street. It was easy for us and very little prodding was needed for them to use all three languages.**

**Continue your newsletter. We need the support.**

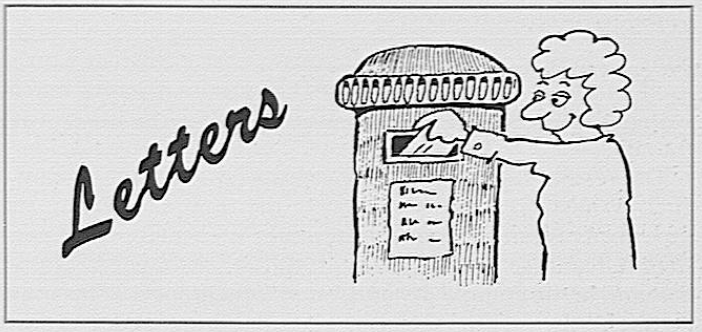
**Roland Thibault, Morrisonville NY, USA**

The degree of proficiency children acquire in their weaker language depends on the amount of exposure they have to the language as well as on the extent to which they are required to use the language. The contact your wife and you have with your grandchildren amounts to a few hours a week and gives them very valuable exposure to French. However, it is doubtful whether this amount of French alone will be enough to ensure that the children attain a good level of proficiency in the language.

Your son-in-law is obviously in favour of his children speaking French, but it seems from your mention of your daughter's "more relaxed attitude" that perhaps she does not speak much French to them. Could her enthusiastic parents and husband persuade/encourage her to use more French with the children? If she has got into the habit of using mainly English to them, she may find it difficult at first to change an established communication routine and will need support and encouragement from the family. If she is willing to speak mainly French with the children and you, as grandparents continue using only French to them, the chances that they will become proficient bilinguals will be very good.

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

Contact details removed




## THE STRUGGLE FOR BILINGUALISM IN SWEDEN

It is high time to tell you how much I appreciate the news and articles in the *BFN*. It is really an interesting newsletter even for us who struggle for bilingualism in Sweden.

We are privileged in many ways, having "home languages" in our school schedules, too! Still, it's been a struggle ever since 1975 when the official Swedish policy for all of these mother tongues was launched. In November 1990 a report was published in which the investigators (a national, governmental bureau) found many problems and drawbacks in this field. At the same time, there could not be found a single phrase or line in the report about the positive sides of bilingualism!

Consequently, we *all* have to continue talking about the benefits (both individual and national/economic) of bilingualism. Good luck with your work – we'll try to do our best in Swedish.

**Helena Bicer, Uppsala, Sweden**

*Continued from page six*

ming" whereas the few Anglicisms are just English words used in German. This suggests that German has a much stronger influence on English structures than the other way round.

The results suggest that Richard is a fairly balanced bilingual. Whilst German is obviously the dominant force, its superiority is not all that considerable. Whilst German has a slight advantage in vocabulary, English is stronger in grammar and in the complexity and length of sentences. This may be due to the fact that the outside influence is ever increasing, which accounts for the larger German vocabulary and the Germanisms, while the English speech model is an adult language, which may explain that Richard's English is more complex and less faulty (although on the other hand, I am probably to blame for some of Richard's Germanisms as my English is not perfect either).

*(Continues in BFN 8:2)*



*Continued from page two*

Not everyone feels a sense of urgency about bilingualism or biliteracy. But there are good reasons to be interested in immersion programmes even if one is not particularly interested in multilingualism, multiculturalism or world peace. More than thirty years of empirical research have shown that children who achieve functional bilingualism during early childhood display a variety of advantages: greater cognitive flexibility, heightened creativity in problem solving (both verbal and mathematical), enhancd concept formation, greater vocabulary and other heightened language skills in English, and, not surprisingly, diminished social and cultural prejudice (Genessee, 1985).

While deciphering menus, enjoying foreign vacations, or dealing with foreign born servants may be the highest aspiration of many foreign language programmes, the Montessori environment offers profoundly more substantial potential.

Multilingualism and Montessori: what can be done? If you "follow the child", you might be surprised.

*About the Author.* M. J. Rosanova did his BA, MA, MPhil and PhD in Social Psychology at Yale. Having lived and worked in Europe, he speaks five languages. He and his wife, a native of the Principality of Liechtenstein, are raising their daughter multilingually.

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(A version of this paper has also appeared in *The Public School Montessorian* (1990).)

## CONTACTS

**If you wish your name and address to be included in the Contacts 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

**Did you know that . . .**

There is a German-speaking playgroup for children under

Contact details removed

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