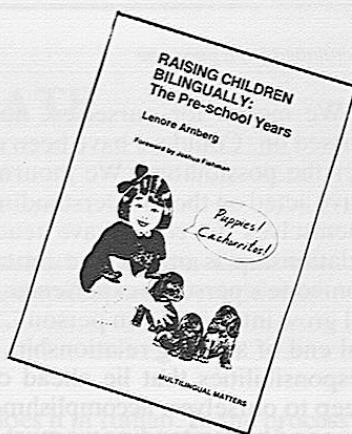


The Bilingual Family Newsletter



Editor:

George Saunders 1991 VOLUME 8 No. 2



EDITORIAL

With a recent issue of the *BFN* subscribers received a poster for advertising the Newsletter. We sincerely thank all of you who have helped by displaying the poster where it might be seen by other bilingual or potentially bilingual families or by passing it on to relatives, friends and acquaintances. (Further posters can be obtained from Multilingual Matters.)

The number of *BFN* subscribers tends to fluctuate somewhat as families subscribe for a few years while their children are young and then, when their bilingualism has become more or less established, feel that the Newsletter has nothing further to offer. We are aware of this problem and struggle to avoid being too repetitive for our longer established subscribers whilst still catering for the needs of new subscribers with very young children. We will continue to endeavour to cover as many aspects as possible of family bilingualism and biculturalism, from infants through to adults.

Your comments, questions and contributions are always most welcome.

George Saunders

THE CRAZIEST LANGUAGE

We'll begin with a box and the plural is boxes;
But the plural of ox should be oxen not oxes.
Then one fowl is a goose, but two are called geese,
Yet the plural of moose should never be meese.
You may find a lone mouse or a nest full of mice;
Yet the plural of house is houses, not hice.
If the plural of man is always called men
Why shouldn't the plural of pan be called pen?
If I spoke of my foot and show you my feet,
And I give you a boot, would a pair be called beet?
If one is a tooth and a whole set are teeth
Why shouldn't the plural of booth be called beeth?
Then one may be that, and three would be those,
Yet hat in the plural would never be hose.
And the plural of cat is cats, not cose.
We speak of a brother and also of brethren,
But though we say mother, we never say methren.
Then the masculine pronouns are he, his and him,
But imagine the feminine, she, shis and shim.
So English I fancy you will agree,
Is the craziest language you ever did see.

ANON

Published in *The Linguist*, No. 2, 1991

THERE'S NO PLACE LIKE HOME

Zoe Loukopoulos

Wrapped in the muffled roar of the airplane I sat and quietly scanned the events of the past two months, recalling the one which unexpectedly brought me back to the USA. An unmistakable certainty that I must anticipate new challenges in the wind blanketed me in a calm acceptance of meeting the test. My visit home returned me to what I jokingly call the "civilized world", to my roots, to the place and people who helped establish me as the person I am today. I have opted to live in a country where the yoghurt is sublime, the sheep are darling, the geography is a knockout, but nobody I know has

“My visit home returned me to what I jokingly call the “civilized world”, to my roots, to the place and people who helped establish me as the person I am today.”

a car phone and talking cash registers are far in the future. A country where hardly anyone asks me what I did for a living in the States because they assume, like themselves, I didn't have an opportunity to get that far. The KLM flight would be landing soon and unfortunately I didn't have a window seat to peer down on the dusty brown stretch of empty mountains encircling one of the world's most polluted cities and welcoming me back to Athens. Perhaps this is where I should call home if it boils down to definitions.

My mother having just departed from the earth was the reason for my journey back. I had always dreaded that moment. A phone call from far away, shocking me into a reality that can never be reversed. What fears, regrets, and uncertainties are stirred up in an instant. Guilt that one wasn't there when they should have been of help and comfort. Guilt of leaving loved ones to take up a new life in a foreign country. Death makes one come to terms and confront the deepest of anxieties, weaknesses, and the remorse of unfinished business. It is a trial of strength which offers a grand reflection of life past and throws a light on the path to the future.

Would that we could erase the errors and the problems but if we did we wouldn't have learned the lessons which came from them. There are always good memories extolling the life of the loved one we lost but life not being perfect for most people, there are also the dark shadows cast over a lifetime of good intention.

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We mourn for ourselves, not only for those who have passed on. Could we have been different or better? We ponder the possibilities. We mourn that if the deceased could have acted on their understanding of a more positive road for themselves we could have reacted otherwise. A parental relationship is one of the more powerful forces affecting someone's personal experience. It's the base from which we all grow into our "own person". Death is not only the physical end of a loving relationship. It is also a reminder of the responsibilities that lie ahead of us, of promises we must keep to ourselves, accomplishments there for the taking, of love and understanding we must generate as we pass through this world. My road had taken an untimely but inevitable turn and living in a foreign country complicated my introspection.

This experience of losing a loved one through death wasn't new for me, having lost my father several years before. Since then I had been haunted by a statement a close friend made to me: "When you lose the second parent, when they're both gone, that's the hardest." I ran the phrase through my mind so often it echoed – and I thought – I'm so far from home.

“Death is not only the physical end of a loving relationship. It is also a reminder of the responsibilities that lie ahead of us.”

And so it has come to pass and I am an “orphan”, I jest. But in actuality I don't feel lost or less. Maybe because I am old enough to have strength come naturally. Maybe the years of geographical distance from my mother made me used to her not being there. Maybe because I am a mother now and know that life is for the living.

As the plane started its descent I realised I felt neither happy nor sad to come back to Athens. It was just what I had to do and where I had to be to continue on with my husband and child. The two months in the States were hectic and filled with the sobering task of emptying out my mother's apartment – which items to keep (oh, the cost of shipping overseas!), which possessions to scatter among friends or give to the needy – wrenching decisions to make in a small period of time. The pain and sadness of separation and the loss of life so cherished and integral to my existence were reflected in numerous minute ways daily.

Not all was sombre. There were many good moments among family and friends and the city I left behind. My daughter, who was just over two years old, kept everyone on their toes, demanding attention in the charmingly innocent way toddlers do – another reminder that life can continue on at optimum performance. Being there happened at a time crucial to her learning to speak. She soaked up English easily – temporarily assuaging my selfishness in wanting her to have an early command of my native language. There was a renewing of friendships and strengthening of family ties, showing me that once again death is closing one door and opening others.

But now that mission was over, I had to leave because I didn't really live there anymore. However, if I ever moved back I could fit in easily enough, despite the fact that living

in a foreign country has set me apart in terms of viewpoints and attitudes – a secret I wear on my inner self that many of those closest to me in the US cannot fathom, even in their frugal attempts to understand.

I was going home to a husband who, I was absolutely sure, would weigh 15lbs and would have bought a completely new wardrobe since washing clothes is something as foreign to him as breaking rocks on a chain gang and transferring a slice of cake to his plate is his idea of working in the kitchen! Undeniable proof that I am needed! Aside from having to make sure my husband was still functioning properly, we have our child to look after together, a comfortable apartment, friends and certain goals and projects that would be easier attained, oddly enough, in this land of less opportunity.

As the plane was touching down I knew I really had to call Athens home. Although my dear older brother (my only sibling), whom I'll truly miss, cried as my daughter and I departed through the international security gate, I know that I do not figure in his life and plans with his wife. They love me but cannot be seized with pain inside as a mother might be for her only daughter who almost out of the blue chose to live in a foreign country, far from daily telephone conversations and Thanksgiving dinners. Now that I have a daughter I really do understand. I do have a home but it's not where it used to be. I knew I had to make better that which I started. I would never again hear my mother's resentful tones, nagging away in my heart, “I bet you'll never live in this country again. Nope. Never.” For her sake, I never wanted her to be right.

It hurts me to think I caused her pain but I know a phase of life is over and hopefully new chapters will be beginning. It's a testimony to her that I'm surviving in this place far away from where she bore me into the world, giving me the seeds of strength and perseverance I didn't recognise within me and a spiritual centre that is my foundation for life.

“It's a testimony to her that I'm surviving in this place far away from where she bore me into the world.”

Still, I wonder which continent I'll ultimately spend this lifetime on. I've grown used to Greece, as backward as it may sometimes be but it seems I'm really attached to both places (and maintain a critical eye on both). Two years ago I tucked away in my head a remark made by a Danish male ballet dancer in an interview aired on Greek TV, “When you've been away from your home for a long time you don't belong there anymore. When you've lived in other places you don't belong anywhere, you belong everywhere.” I had to agree.

A week after my arrival, we went to old, familiar Crete to spend the rest of the summer where my husband was working. I sat at a taverna, so far from the trendy chic of US eating places, thinking about the external things that Greece has to offer: the lovely island summers on the sea bathed in a clear, brilliant light that would captivate any painter, delicious healthy food, hospitable people, charmingly graphic villages, no doubt a photographer's delight, festive name's days, and a mixture of foreigners and locals to share views and learn from. I thought with resolution, smiling inwardly, “Yes, dear husband, I will always be a tourist, much to your vexation because for you that symbolises lack of permanence. I can have a home and still see things through the eyes of a traveller. After all, there is so much to observe in life's scheme and aren't we all travellers in life's eternal flow?”

Thanks to the Cross-Cultural Association of Athens for permission to reproduce this article from their quarterly newsletter, No. 39.

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.

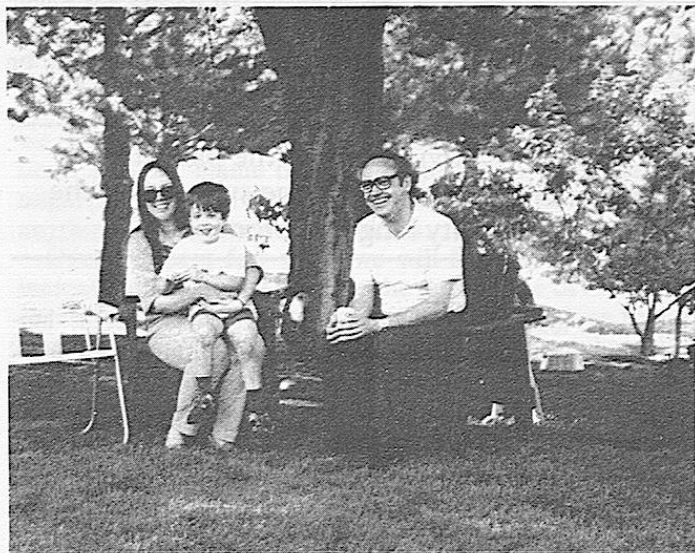
ANGELO'S BILINGUALISM: AN UPDATE

Domenico Maceri

A few years ago I wrote an article (published in Vol. 6:2 1989 of the *Bilingual Family Newsletter*) on my son whom we are raising with two languages – Italian and English – in California, USA. What follows is an update on his continuing bilingualism. He is now aged 6½ years.

My wife and I continue to speak to Angelo in our native languages – English for her, Italian for me. Yet, in spite of the fact that Angelo hears both languages, English is definitely the dominant language. This situation was already evident two years ago, but since then it has increased considerably.

The reasons for English dominating Italian are obvious. We live in an English-speaking country, Angelo goes to a school where English is the language of instruction, his classmates speak English, etc. Also, my wife reads to Angelo a lot, much more than I can do. And Angelo is already reading English books on his own. His ability to express ideas in English is therefore much more developed than it is in Italian.



Angelo enjoying a summer's day with his parents

Because of the limited opportunities to hear Italian – I am the only source – there have been moments when I was ready to give up. As the saying goes, if you cannot beat them, join them. Yet I have not done that. I continue to speak Italian to Angelo. In many cases he responds to me in English except for brief exchanges when he still uses Italian. Angelo seems to accept that I speak to him in Italian. And I have learned not to push him into speaking Italian. He can use whatever language he wants and so can I. Angelo is thus not really growing up bilingual. He is growing up with two languages – a major one and a minor one.

In order to keep the minor language alive I realised in the past that it must be presented in a positive manner and never force the issue. What I try to do is to have activities in which Italian is the language of communication. Obviously, one such area is reading books to him in Italian, which I do occasionally. Another way I discovered recently is to tell him stories just before he goes to sleep. For some reason Angelo fell in love with the activity. So for quite a while I have been telling him stories in Italian which he later goes and tells – without leaving out many details – to my wife in English. At

times *he* tells me a story. He does it in Italian. In the process he struggles since his vocabulary in Italian is much more limited than it is in English. And at times I realise that he has forgotten very simple things that he has not used in quite a while.

In spite of this apparent regressing in his ability with Italian, I noticed that the language must be an important part of his subconscious. And even when he is in distress, if he has to talk to me he does it in Italian. For example, about a year ago, Angelo fell and got hurt. We had to take him to the doctor right away. He was crying much of the time. While we were waiting for the doctor, I asked Angelo something. While he was still crying, he replied to me – in Italian. I was stunned. I thought that it would have been difficult for him to use his “minor” language while he was obviously in pain as well as scared. Yet he did it. Even in a very difficult situation when one would expect a response in the dominant language, Angelo opted for the use of the weaker language because he has always associated Italian with me. Even in pain and fear he could not undo that association.

Growing up bilingual does not mean, as one might think at first, that the two languages will develop at the same rate and that the speaker will be equally fluent in both languages. Everything depends on what linguists call the “input”, that is to say the amount of exposure a child has with the languages. Children can learn two or even more languages provided that there is enough input, enough exposure to the language. The development, however, will not be evenly uniform. More exposure in one language will inevitably mean greater knowledge in that language and lesser in the second one.

But input is not the only thing. The languages must be presented in a positive manner. One needs to make a constant effort to associate the language, especially the weaker language, with positive things. In this respect, Italian has an advantage over English since Angelo loves Italian food (he also likes Mexican and some things Chinese a lot). Angelo enjoys pasta in every form. But that's not all. Angelo also knows the names for many of the different kinds of pasta we see in the grocery stores, including one that bears his name *capelli d'angelo*.

A Resource Directory for parents in the US who are trying to raise their children with German as a second language

The directory lists over 200 addresses covering such areas as book publishers, schools, books for parents of bilingual children, aids, newsletters, newspapers and magazines, language camps, student exchange programmes, videos, churches and much more. This directory will be available in the US for \$4.95, overseas add \$2.00 for postage.

Please send request to:

**McLaughlin Parenting Resources,
189 South Spencer Road, Spencer, MA 01562, USA.**

BILINGUALISM – ATTITUDES, EXPERIENCES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

Reinhold Trott

This is Part 4 of the article entitled "Language Development of a German/English Bilingual Child". Part 1 and 2 were published in Vol. 5, 2 and 3, 1988 and Part 3 in Vol. 8:1, 1991.

Bringing a child up bilingually is very rewarding in our experience, and we think it is really a shame if this marvellous opportunity is denied to a child by his or her parents out of unjustified concern or lack of commitment. Anyone who has toiled at acquiring another language at school or even in adulthood – and this applies to a large number of parents in nationally mixed marriages or in an expatriate situation – will appreciate the gift of a second mother tongue which is put into the child's cradle so to speak. No special effort is needed on the part of the parents apart from the obvious requirement that they use their own mother tongue consistently when talking to the child or allow and encourage their partner to do so. Being a parents' representative at Richard's school, I tried to point out the importance of maintaining two "mother tongues" while talking to the principal of Richard's school who expressed the opinion that immigrant parents should also speak German at home to improve their children's command of this language. What he and others who share his view do not seem to realise is the fact that the difficulties these children have with the German language are most probably caused by social factors and that the use of German at home could well be counterproductive if neither of the parents is a native speaker of German: parents and children would end up reinforcing and even increasing each other's mistakes, and the children cannot learn much from their parents in this respect anyway because it is usually them who are the more proficient speakers of the new language.

In our opinion, apart from consistency, flexibility is also required on the part of parents who want to bring their children up bilingually. This seems to be a contradiction at first

sight. What I mean is that the rule "one parent – one language" should not be treated as a dogma. Of course, it is *absolutely essential* that the parent who represents the minority language sticks to it. Otherwise the minority language becomes something optional and the child may decide to opt out. In our experience it is advisable that the parent who speaks the majority language switches to the minority language, too. This can be done gradually in stages to stop the majority language becoming too dominant as social contacts with the outside world increase. We think this has helped Richard become a fairly balanced bilingual, and children whose parents do not use the minority language as the ordinary means of communication in the family find it much harder if not impossible to freely converse in this language. Of course, it may turn out to be too hard for a parent to acquire the language of his/her partner if he/she has never had the chance of learning it properly at school, and spouses are notoriously bad teachers. In that case, however, he or

“... it is advisable that the parent who speaks the majority language switches to the minority language, too.”

she can at least be expected to tolerate the "foreign" language communication between their partner and their child. The child would then be more a receiving bilingual, but a change of circumstances (coming into contact with other speakers of the minority language or learning the language at school) could activate or re-activate what had been dormant for a while.

What parents of bilingual children should avoid, however, is perfectionism as this can lead to dangerous illusions and frustration. I must admit I have become guilty here myself and still find it hard to do what I am "preaching" now. Perfectionism can prevent a relaxed atmosphere which is very important for a successful bilingual upbringing.

How bilingual can a bilingual become? Having read various books and drawing on my own experience I can positively say it will never be a hundred per cent in the sense that a bilingual could speak each of his or her two languages to the same degree as a monolingual of the same intellectual ability. One language, and this is usually the majority language, the one that is spoken in the country, will inevitably dominate. Failure to realise this fact could lead to two misunderstandings:

1. Parents may be disappointed with their child's progress in the minority language and give up, having decided it is not worth the trouble. But it is worth it! No matter how limited the child's command of the minority language may appear, any knowledge of another language is enrichment both in personal and probably also in practical terms. As we found ourselves, patience can be rewarded, and a sudden breakthrough, an explosion of knowledge and ability after a painfully long period of apparent failure should never be ruled out.

A Bilingual World FAMILY MEETING

10th November 1991 — 1.30 – 4.30 p.m.

The final session of the conference **A Bilingual World, Growing up in Sign and Word** will be open to families of *both* the hearing and the deaf who already have, or are considering the development of, a bilingual situation at home.

This session will focus on the family at home. There will be talks and discussion on the practical aspects of using two languages in the home. Presentations will come from bilingual families and from researchers.

There will be an exhibition of books and other materials. There is no charge for this session, though there may be a small charge for the use of the creche facilities.

Further details available from the Secretary at:

Centre for Deaf Studies, School of Education,
22 Berkeley Square, Bristol BS8 1HP, UK
Telephone: (0272) 303030, Ext. M377;
Minicom: (0272) 251370; Fax: (0272) 251537

2. Parents can come to the conclusion (usually following the "well-meaning" advice of people who know next to nothing about bilingualism) that the majority language suffers from the use of the minority language and the latter should therefore be reduced if not dropped altogether. It is important to remember that this is mere speculation and there is no way of proving it. Bilingualism might be blamed for something that is caused by totally different factors. When Maureen took Richard to the medical and psychological exam German children have to go to in order to be admitted to school the doctor mentioned that his German grammar was lacking, I suddenly felt obliged to do something about his German grammar (thinking maybe his grammar would be better if he heard me speak German). As I did not want to switch to German again I decided to do some formal exercises with him every day, which of course was unrealistic and had to be given up fairly soon. It just shows how easy one can be influenced by others in spite of good resolutions. Later on Richard's primary school teacher suggested that difficulties he had with reading could be due to his thinking in English. As I pointed out to her that if anything his German influenced his English and not the other

“ We should look for the real causes of any problems that might occur and not blame them on bilingualism. ”

way round, she admitted that she did not know enough about the subject and confirmed that Richard's German was not in any way inferior to that of other children. As parents I think we should look for the real causes of any problems that might occur and not blame them on bilingualism. Otherwise we might just end up giving up bilingualism without having done anything to solve the real problems.

Over the next few years we will have to continue and increase our efforts at keeping the dominance of German in check. It will prove to be more difficult as speaking English already all the time, we have no reserves to mobilise whilst the influence of German is increasing all the time (through school, the media, and peers). One way of doing it will be talking about his schools activities and subjects at home, which may imply acquiring some relevant knowledge and vocabulary on our part. There is a limit to it, however, as Richard tends to reject any exaggerated interest in his school subjects as an unwelcome intrusion.

Now that Richard has started school, the question of biliteracy arises. Being able to read English books would greatly enhance his English vocabulary. As he has now overcome his initial difficulties in the process of learning to read he is able to establish a connection between letters and sounds. Having grasped this basic idea, he should be capable

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Bilingual Humour

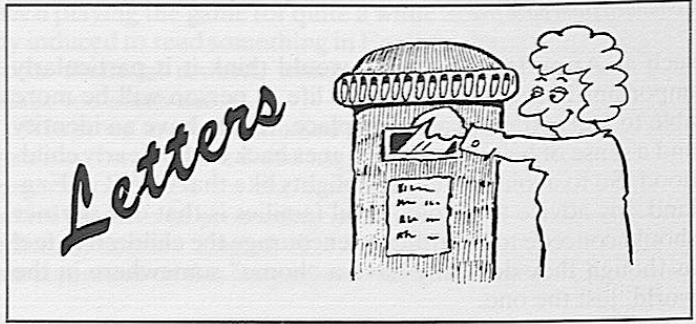
PUN FUN AT ONE

Nathan, the 15-month-old son of an English mother and a German father, points at his beaker of fruit juice and says, "Tea".

Mother: "That's not tea, that's juice."

Nathan: (Waving his hand as if to say goodbye and smiling at his own joke) "Tschüs!" (Which is German for "Bye!" and is pronounced similarly to English "juice".)

Alison Hüneke, London, England



MAINTAINING ENTHUSIASM

Every *BFN* I receive always brings up at least one point upon which I feel I could make a contribution, the last two issues being no exception. This time I am actually making the effort to write. This will also, I hope, reassure you that there are still people out here reading your Newsletter, although it does tend to get repetitive, and, as I commented many years ago, still concentrates to a very great extent on the younger children and those that can't yet speak any language.

My children are now 8;9 and 6;11, plus a toddler of 1;11 who is proving a very late developer and hasn't spoken at all yet!

In Vol. 7, No. 1, I was particularly interested by the letter about teaching children to read before school. On the strength of advice in one of your earlier issues, and instinct (which is my main guide at all times), I taught my oldest, Martin, who is now in his third year at school, to read English before he started school. This was a great success – he did also teach himself to read German and could read before he started school. I think it extremely harmful to suppress any inclinations a child may have at an earlier age, as you quite rightly state in your reply to the reader's letter. Unfortunately, this is the policy in German kindergartens – they even seem to want to delay reading as long as possible once the children are in school.

My second son is bumbling along in his own quite different way; of course, the enthusiasm has worn off a little on my side and time is far shorter with two at school and a toddler around – so he gets less training from home. However, he accepts that the letters have different names, just as "bread", "water" or "to run" have different words in German.

I shall not hesitate to teach my little one to read English before he starts school (in fact, if I'm lucky, the bigger ones will even do the job for me!). The results are so satisfying – the children are as likely to be found riveted by Roald Dahl as Paul Maar or by the *Beano* as their German comics (pause for winces among the purists).

In Vol. 7, No. 2, I found the letter entitled "Where do I belong" of particular significance. This is a point I have been aware of for some time. I am fortunate enough to have had a plain English upbringing, which was not even interrupted by thoughts of "abroad" until I left school. My parents – or my school – implanted an open attitude however, and now I live in Germany, I still don't feel I lack an identity. Therefore I encourage my husband and my parents-in-law to make the children feel as though they belong here in the Palatinate. They speak the dialect, sing the songs, eat the local dishes and go for hikes in the extensive woods. At the same time, they travel abroad a lot and learn about other cultures. We are fortunate that we shall always be living here and are not very far from where my husband grew up, so absorbing the local culture and growing roots here will not need to be forced.

Finding somewhere for the children to feel they have a home to go back to must be difficult for nomadic families,

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such as Army families, but I would think it is particularly important in this case. Later in life, a person will be more able to feel settled in any one place, if they have an identity and a sense of belonging which goes back to their early childhood. So to avoid more sorry plights like that of AB of England, my advice to all bicultural families is that one partner should concede to the other to encourage the children to feel as though they do really have a "home" somewhere in the world, just the one.

Vol. 7, No. 2 of *BFN* also informs about German Saturday Schools in England. What opportunities are there for English-speaking children in Germany? Does the British Council support expats in any way? You mentioned the WES some years back – we sent for information from them, but they are very expensive. Our Italian friends have school every Friday afternoon. We seem to be isolated here in the south of Germany, and we know from experience that no mother is a substitute for a teacher. And how do these schools work? By Saturday our children are so tired (having been at school from 7.30 a.m. – 1 p.m. all week) that to expect them to attend another conventional class would be more than optimistic. Perhaps you could go into more detail on this topic in a later issue – starting such a school, getting material and teachers, who can offer support, and so on.

Finally, I would like to thank you for the work you have been doing and to reassure you that I recommend to all bilingual couples having their first child (a) your books and (b) your Newsletter.

Jacqueline Bruan, Germersheim, Germany

Thank you very much for your helpful comments. We will be dealing with some of your suggestions in future issues.

Editor

FRENCH TODDLER CLUB

I would like to tell you a little bit about our Club run by a French mother and I who am Pre-school Playgroup Association trained. The group caters for Franco-British children ranging from the age of 2½–5 years old, and meets up weekly. Our aim is to create a French environment which is pleasant and dynamic, working like any other playgroup but in French! Our impression is that the children are now able to identify with a French group of people outside the home, which is very encouraging.

However, the challenging aspect of it is that the children who have already started playgroup in English are more passive in French and some resent the language altogether; whereas the younger ones who are not exposed so frequently to the English Language speak French more spontaneously. Therefore, planning the sessions is not an easy task as we must take into consideration the differences first of all in maturity and secondly in the development of the spoken language. As a result we place the emphasis on language activities and we have a 20-minute sit-down discussion on a chosen topic where we try to get the children to participate with the support of language cards, puppets and items they have brought from home to show us. We also hand out a badge at the end of the session to reward them and encourage them to talk more in French. In order to follow up the linguistic support the other leader also runs a Saturday morning session for school-age children. **I would like very much to hear from any similar group in the UK, France or elsewhere and would welcome any constructive criticism and useful hints.**

Contact details removed



A "COP OUT"

I am an American married to a German and completely immersed in German society. I have been speaking English to my 4¾-year-old daughter Anna since birth and have done the same with one-year-old Maria Andrea as well.

My problem is that with time my own mother tongue has become more and more uncomfortable and unnatural for me. I hardly speak English to anyone else but the children. Although Anna spoke English at first, she has refused to speak it since starting kindergarten.

German is also the language used between my husband and myself, and attempts by us to speak English while all together have failed. Now my daughter has started to protest when I speak English, saying (in German), "When are you ever going to start speaking German with me?" and other such comments. So I find myself in a real "bilingual crisis".

Anna could desperately use a visit to her grandparents, but this won't be possible for the next few years.

My English is getting rusty and I find myself mixing German words in my sentences while talking to Maria, because the English vocabulary is not available right away. I wonder if this is good for her or not, since she's just learning to talk.

For my own well-being and "Entlastung" I may begin speaking German and reading German books to my daughter Anna and try to play in English with her to try and keep up her English skills until we do take a trip to the United States. Still, I feel like this is a cop-out and don't like giving up what we felt as the right thing to do.

Can you please comment on my particular situation?

Christine von Geulke, Würzburg, Germany

Many children in bilingual families go through a phase (or phases) when they show varying degrees of reluctance to speak the language with which they have least contact and which is not the dominant language of the world around them. As you have discovered, this can prove discouraging for parents. It is some consolation, however, to know that the evidence suggests that persistence with using the "minority" language (in your case, English) with Anna will eventually lead to her beginning to answer in English, or at least accepting your use of English to her. Even if she continues to speak German to you, she will still acquire a good understanding of English, if you persist in speaking to her in English. This receptive command of English will stand her in very good stead when she does eventually visit the USA or English-speaking relatives or friends visit you. It is much easier to begin speaking a language which you can already largely understand than one of which you have no knowledge (which would be the situation she would be in if you gave up speaking English to her).

Encourage Anna to use her English and praise her for her efforts (however small they may seem!) Tell her about some of the advantages of knowing English, e.g. being able to

communicate with her American relatives. Perhaps her American grandparents could send the children tapes with personal messages; this may inspire Anna to wish to make a reply tape. It does require quite a lot of effort and persistence to overcome children's reluctance, but keep telling yourself that any amount of English your children learn is better than no English at all!

With regard to your own English becoming rusty through lack of use, this is by no means an unusual phenomenon for people who spend most of their time using a language other than their own. You can overcome this rustiness by engaging in a personal language maintenance programme: listen to English-language broadcasts (e.g. VOA, BBC on short-wave), watch videos in English, read English-language newspapers, magazines and books, exchange spoken cassettes with your parents, etc. All this will help you lose the feeling that you are losing command of your native language. And when you visit the USA you will find that your old fluency will return in a very short time.

Bilingual Humour

Mother to four-year-old Lauri in Finnish: "Onpa sinulla maha täynnä – montako perunaa sinun mahasasi on, ainakin sata!" (*Your tummy is very full, I wonder how many potatoes there are, at least a hundred*).

Lauri: "Mummy, it is not raining in my tummy!"

sata = hundred

sataa = rain

Sirkka Love, Trowbridge, England

Bilingualism and Attitudes . . .

Continued from page five

of learning a new system (or rather a second system alongside the first one) of relating letters and sounds. The great problem is the English spelling system (cynics can be excused for doubting that there is a system). Whilst the German system is not exactly phonetic either, it is still a lot more regular than the English one (cf. e.g. words like "though", "tough", "trough", etc.). I started an experiment which yielded some encouraging results by making a series of cards with words which concentrated on certain sounds and the way they are represented in spelling (e.g. "read", "eat", "meat", "wheat", etc.). Ideally, Richard's reading ability in English will catch up with that in German within the next few years. If this could be achieved, he would be able to read more demanding books when he starts secondary school than the kind of books they use to teach children English as a foreign language, which might be pretty boring for him. Unfortunately, due to the rather inflexible German school system it is almost impossible to learn a foreign language other than English when starting secondary school. It would be nice if I succeeded in persuading Richard to learn another foreign language together with me in evening classes so that he would also have the experience of learning a language "the hard way", but I may be expecting too much.

A language game which we occasionally play at home during meal times and which Richard quite enjoys consists of one of us saying a sentence in German and the others competing for the right translation. We often let Richard win to encourage him, although we try to do this in not too obvious a way. It is also a good way of testing his grammar. We make it more enjoyable by allowing nonsense sentences such as "There is a blue goat on the moon."

Unfortunately, however, Richard quickly loses interest in such games and in learning English writing. We have not

been playing the game for quite a while now, and he can only be induced to read something in English when he is promised some financial reward, which of course I do not want to make too much use of.

Whilst we are very satisfied with the way Richard's bilingualism has developed and his positive attitude towards it in general, we hope for the future that he will take a more active interest in promoting it, for example, by making an effort to acquire English literacy and subsequently enlarge his command of this language by reading English books.

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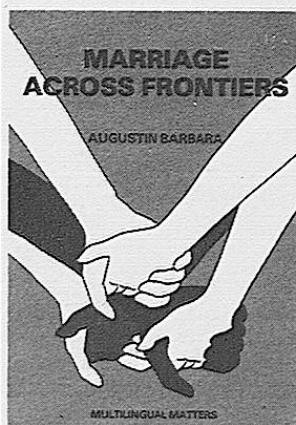
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