The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

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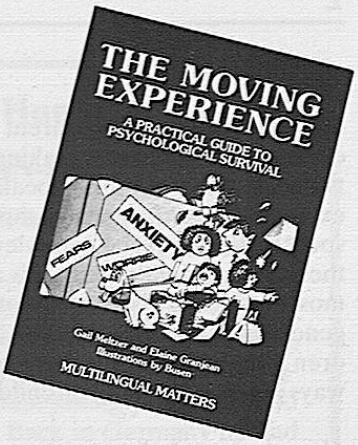

"SE ON SEMMONE, SEMMONE, ISÄ SANOO UGGLA"

Leena Huss

Translated by Marjukka Grover

This is a shortened translation on metalinguistic awareness of bilingual children of preschool age from an article entitled "Huomioita kaksikielisten alle kouluikäisten lasten metakielisestä tietoisuudesta" which appeared in Några Finsk-Ugriska Fåglar, 1987.

Bilingual children and metalinguistic awareness

Many researchers investigating children's bilingualism assumed that children who have grown up with two or more languages have more metalinguistic awareness than monolingual children of the same age. Some research has shown bilingual children differentiating a word's phonetic form from its meaning earlier than monolingual children. Word association tests have also shown bilinguals noticing more the meaning of the word than its form. This has been thought to stem from the fact that according to bilingual children's experience all meanings have at least two linguistic symbols and that's why it is more important to notice other characteristics than the changing symbols. Bilinguals seem to understand earlier than monolinguals the symbolic nature of the language.

> "A child from a bilingual family has to observe from an early age her environment and decide which language she has to use to be understood in different situations."

Research on bilingual children has shown bilinguals having to pay special attention to demands of the different speech situations when they are changing the language or code. A child from a bilingual family has to observe from an early age her environment and decide which language she has to use to be understood in different situations. She learns at a very early age to read from expressions, gestures, intonation, etc. and takes into account the needs of the person she is talking to.

Some of the following methods used by monolingual Swedish speaking children were observed by Strömkvist (1984) in his study of children's metalinguistic awareness. The methods showed children's ability to observe their own and other people's use of language and to gain from the observations in the following way:

— using language for their advantage in role playing
— language plays, puzzles, jokes
— correcting their own and other people's speech
— using metalinguistic vocabulary
— using, for their advantage, metalinguistic information which they have received from other people.

Leena Huss

Notes on bilingual Swedish/Finnish children's metalinguistic awareness

By using some examples I will try to give a picture of what kind of linguistic points children from bilingual families might pay attention to and how this arises in their own language and behaviour. My data is collected from 16 children aged 1–5 from bilingual Swedish/Finnish families, who took part on a two-year research programme (Huss 1987) and partly also from their siblings. Two of the principal factors, when choosing the families for my study, were that the parents wanted their children to grow up bilingually and that they followed the "one person/one language" strategy, i.e.

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the Swedish speaking parent would speak Swedish to the child and the Finnish speaking parent Finnish. In all except two families the Finnish speaking parent is the mother. The examples given are from tapes made from the children's speech and from the interviews with the parents. Because the number of children in this research project was small and most of the material taped not yet analysed I can't naturally generalise the results to other bilingual Swedish/Finnish children. It will, however, give some indication of the different ways of showing bilingual children metalinguistic awareness.

How the knowledge of using two languages develops

At the beginning children are not aware of speaking and hearing two languages. A child who is just learning to speak can use words from Finnish or Swedish indiscriminately and there doesn't seem to be any difference in the speech spoken to mother or father. It is possible that the child at this stage thinks that words from the different language systems are only different synonyms in the same language (cat/pussy). Gradually the number of Finnish words increases when the child is speaking to the Finnish speaking parents and Swedish words to the Swedish speaker. Finally the words from the other language are only borrowed occasionally. If the parent doesn't understand the child's speech a word might be offered from the other language as in the following example, a boy, age 2;4:

Mother (in Finnish): kato mikä täs on *(look, what is this?)*
Child (in Finnish): koira *(a dog)*
Mother (in Finnish): mikä? *(what?)*
Child (in Swedish): hund *(a dog)*
Mother (in Finnish laughing): mut sehän on leijona *(but it is a lion)*

> "It is possible that the child at this stage thinks that words from the different language systems are only different synonyms in the same language."

Two of the children clearly mixed the languages for approximately a year, for the rest of the children the time was shorter. According to their parents some children have always used the correct language with the parents but some, although understanding Finnish, have used Swedish to both parents almost without exception. Two of the mothers noticed that their children first used so called "neutral words" – mixed between Swedish and Finnish, which the child could offer to either parent.

At approximately the age of two some children started to recognise the two language systems. A child might borrow words from the other language but the borrowing is "marked" differently. She might make a break, stutter, or mutter before borrowing the word. She might also look bewildered if she changes language by mistake. Occasionally the borrowed word is whispered or the child looks mischievous – she knows she has broken the rule and is waiting for the parent's reaction.

A typical way of marking the borrowed word is to use a metalinguistic comment; "mummy says", "daddy says" as in the following example:

Child (in Finnish): se on semmone, semmone, isä sanoo "uggla" *(it is sort of, sort of . . . daddy says "uggla")*

During this stage of language development the child tries to organise people into those who speak Swedish and those who speak Finnish. It could happen according to gender (women speak Finnish – men Swedish), age or place. Many parents told how surprised the children were on their arrival in Finland to recognise for the first time that the whole environment was Finnish speaking.

Some children seem to have difficulties in understanding that there are two linguistic systems in question or at least they themselves only want to concentrate on one. One mother who has always spoken Finnish to her three-year-old son recorded that the child tried for a long time to avoid speaking Finnish to her and time after time started the following type of argument:

Mother (in Finnish): kato potkulauta *(look a scooter)*
Child (in Swedish): den sparkkälke *(a sledge)*
Mother (in Finnish): ei se oo kelkka vaan potkulauta *(no it's not a sledge, it is a scooter)*
Child (in Swedish): mamma säger "potkulauta", jag säger "sparkkälke" *(mummy says "potkulauta", I say "sparkkälke")*

For several months running the same boy used to give his mother the routine answer "kan inte finska" *(I can't speak Finnish)*.

Awareness of pronunciation

McLaughlin (1985) in his book on bilingual children describes research which indicates that young English speaking children in the very early stages of learning French have understood the phonological rules of French. The children in my research also seem to understand from a very early age the Finnish and Swedish phonological rules. They have learned that, for example, removing or adding the end vowel to a word could make it sound either Swedish or Finnish.

Correcting speech

Almost every child at the age of three or four corrected their own speech. Occasionally the corrections or attempts to correct were about the loan words. One four year old, whose Finnish speaking mother read a story in Swedish to him and his friend, irritatedly corrected her pronunciation several times.

Changing the code in role playing

Three of the children in my research occasionally changed the code when playing with dolls. For example when playing with the Swedish speaking father the dolls may have been made to "speak" Finnish and vice versa. One of the children, who normally used Swedish to his Finnish speaking mother, would use Finnish when playing role games, even though he often had to seek help for the vocabulary from his mother.

Affective code change

Parents of the three to four year olds reported that their children when angry or tired, might use the language as a weapon: not speaking the "right" language was a method of showing their anger. The children knew that language was an important issue for the parents.

Changing the code as a joke

If the child understood from the parents' behaviour that she had said something funny she would pay special attention to it by verbalising what she had just said. One boy often used the wrong language as a joke. He might come and wish his Finnish speaking mother "gonatt" *(good night)* in Swedish and wait with excitement for her reaction. When the mother joined the game by wishing "gonatt, gonatt" both had fun. Most parents remembered their children occasionally playing similar games at the age of three to four.

Metalinguistic questions and comments

From three years onwards children would also use clear metalinguistic questions very often to find the word they had forgotten from the other language, for example:

Mother (in Finnish): missä sä oot ollu? *(where have you been?)*
Child (in Finnish): mä olin vain mennyt talon . . . mikä "runt"*(round)* on suomeksi? *(I just went to . . . what is "runt" in Finnish?)*

A good example of a child's semantic observation was a four-year-old boy who told his mother that the Swedish word "klippa" *(cut)* and "skära" *(cut/carve)* had only one word in Finnish "leikata" *(cut)* and that "jalka" *(foot)* in Swedish could be "fot" *(foot)* or "ben" *(leg)*. He thought Finnish was an easier language since "Suomessa ei asioita tarvii sanoa niin tarkkaan" *(In Finnish you don't need to be so precise)*.

Translating from one language to the other

Many children, even two year olds, would translate words and sentences from one language to the other when asked. Many parents were amused how, at some stage, their children have been translating the father's words to the mother and vice versa, despite the fact that the parents spoke to each other in Swedish and the Swedish speaking parent understood Finnish. Some children acted as translators for visiting relatives from a very early age. One three-year-old boy translated word by word the Swedish speaking grandmother's conversation with him to his mother and another translated into Swedish, sentence after sentence, a book his mother was reading to him in Finnish but which he had already heard from his father in Swedish. Another four year old was having fun with the literal translation of words such as in the following example:

Child (in Finnish): äiti, pannaan kärpänen kaulaan *(mum, let's hang the fly on my neck)*
Mother (in Finnish and very puzzled): mikä kärpänen? *(what fly?)*
Child (in Swedish, laughing): fluga *(means fly or a bow tie in Swedish)*

Bilingual Humour

A DRAGON-FLY?

Richard (aged 7;7) said: "When I am 18 I will get a dragon-fly for my birthday." I was a bit puzzled and wondered whether he wanted a live or dead one, and anyway what would he want it for. But from what he went on to say it dawned on me that he meant a hang glider. He had seen some during our holiday in England and we had promised him jokingly that he could have one when he was 18. Back in Germany he had been using the German equivalent "Drachenflieger", literally "dragon flier", meaning hang glider pilot, when talking about them to his friends. Having temporarily forgotten the English word, he used an ingenious translation of his own (which may have been influenced by his vague familiarity with the name of the insect).

Reinhold Trott, Glinde, Germany

Parents' observations and attitudes

Effects of a monolingual environment

The difficulties of "one person/one language" methods were raised by the parents in my interviews with them. Many felt that speaking Finnish in a variety of situations like children's parties, Swedish speaking nurseries, or large family gatherings was difficult and they felt that it was impolite to use a language which other people couldn't understand. Many of the parents had noticed times when the children themselves didn't want to stand out from the crowd and preferred to speak Swedish, or spoke Finnish very quietly, when Swedish speaking friends were near. Parents also observed that switching from one language to another after a long day in a day nursery sometimes felt difficult and it took a little time before the children who were just learning to speak were worried that they didn't get enough feedback, or comments were only negative, from the Swedish speaking environment. Non-Finnish speaking relatives and friends were not always able to understand correctly the child's attempt to speak and the communication was distorted time after time.

Parents' attitudes to children's word borrowing and code switching

Parents themselves didn't seem to have difficulties in understanding their children's imperfect language or mixing

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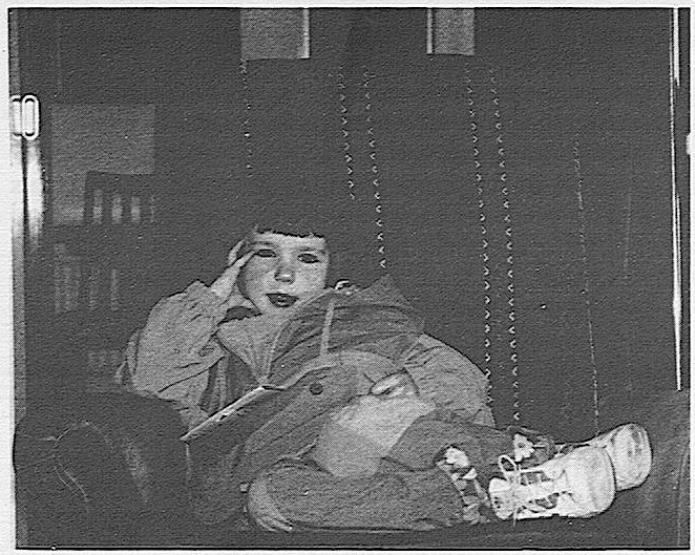
NATURAL TRILINGUALISM

Gerran Thomas

It seems to me, as a subscriber and reader of the *BFN* for the last five years, that its most valuable function is to enable parents of multilingual children to compare notes, describe their experiences and learn from the experiences of others. As each family finds itself in a unique situation, the methods and techniques used by parents to ensure that their children master more than one language show considerable variety; however, parents can at least draw encouragement from the success of others, and can copy the techniques employed where they seem to be appropriate. It is with the intention, therefore, of encouraging others and of providing a pattern which – in the case of our family at least – has proved successful, that I set out to write this brief description of our daughter Marianne's language acquisition.



Trilingual Marianne

Marianne was born on 18.11.85, in Paris. Her mother (Marie-Hélène) is French, but is also a fluent English speaker, having studied English at university and worked as an English teacher. I am "naturally bilingual" in Welsh and English, having been brought up in Wales by Welsh-speaking parents. By the time of Marianne's birth, I was reasonably fluent in French (though it remains my weakest language) after several years spent working in international schools in that country. Before Marianne's birth, my wife and I spent a considerable amount of time thinking about and discussing which languages to teach our baby. I was keen to teach the baby Welsh, as it is my first language – and also, perhaps, because it is a language which will disappear unless Welsh-speaking parents take a conscious decision to teach their children Welsh even when only one parent can speak the language. My wife naturally wanted to speak to her baby in her own language (French), and as we usually talked to each other in English, we asumed that the baby would need to learn English as well. We were also keen that the baby should learn English because it is something of an "international language" nowadays, as well as being an exceedingly rich language in terms of vocabulary. Our dilemma was simple – would three languages prove to be too much for Marianne to cope with? My mother-in-law (who is a monoglot French speaker) was sceptical, and clearly thought that an attempt to teach Marianne Welsh would be a waste of time, and perhaps damaging to her acquisition of the other (more "useful") languages. My wife, too, was doubtful; although her English is excellent, she started to learn the language at 11+, and so could remember the effort required in the early stages. However, I was confident that we could succeed; I had myself grown up knowing two languages, without ever having to make a conscious effort to learn them. I did not see why a child could not cope equally well with three languages, so long as she knew when each one was appropriate. It was important, therefore, to find clear "rules" which our baby could follow, and which we would have, also, to impose on ourselves.

> "Our dilemma was simple – would three languages prove to be too much for Marianne to cope with?"

The pattern which we decided on was as follows: each parent would speak to Marianne in his or her own language, and *only* in that language. There were two reasons for this: firstly, Marianne would hear the language used by a native-speaker, so that she would develop a correct accent and use of idiom; but secondly – and even more important, in my opinion – the baby Marianne would recognise a clear "rule" – and hear, understand, and later speak Welsh with Dad, and French with Maman. As far as English was concerned, we felt that she would develop a good passive knowledge of the language through hearing her parents and other friends speaking it, and that it would prove fairly easy to convert this into an active knowledge at an age when we felt she was ripe for it.

At this moment, fate intervened to give Marianne a much better foundation in English than I had expected; the school where I worked ran into financial difficulties, and so we moved to England, where I took up a post at Portsmouth Grammar School. Marianne was nine months old when we left Paris, and in Portsmouth she was looked after during the day by an English child-minder, as my wife also obtained a post teaching French at the school. She now had regular native-speaker input in all three languages. As we saw so little of Marianne during the day, we made a special point of talking, reading and singing to her in the evenings, so that she would hear a substantial amount of Welsh and French.

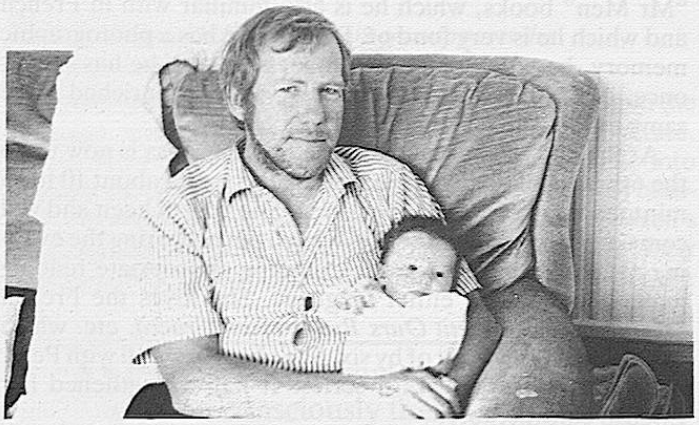
> "She had had regular native-speaker input in all three languages."

Her first words were spoken when she was aged about 11 months: Ma-ma (= Maman) in French (this was a real word and not a repeated syllable, as she was clearly calling her mother at the time), and na-na-na (meaning "no"). Soon afterwards she added to her vocabulary – one of her earliest words was "go-e" ("gole" or "golau" = light) in Welsh – I can still remember the thrill of hearing her say this, as she stared and pointed at the light-bulb (repetitions in the next few days proved tht she knew what she was saying).

After this, things went very quickly during our first year in Portsmouth: by the age of about 15 months, Marianne knew 80 words in total, fairly evenly shared between all three languages. As she was spending a lot of time in an English environment, we tried to compensate as much as possible in other ways – most of our holidays were spent in France, with some time also being spent in Wales. Marianne's French grandmother and Welsh grandparents came to stay from time to time. I also arranged to have Welsh-language children's programmes videod, and would play these to Marianne regularly. Unfortunately the French TV SECAM system is incompatible with the PAL system used in Britain, so we were unable to show Marianne French videos; however, my wife bought a large number of tapes of French children's songs. In these ways, we attempted to let Marianne see that the languages she heard from Dad and from Mamam (but from no-one else for much of the year) were indeed spoken and used as means of communication by many other

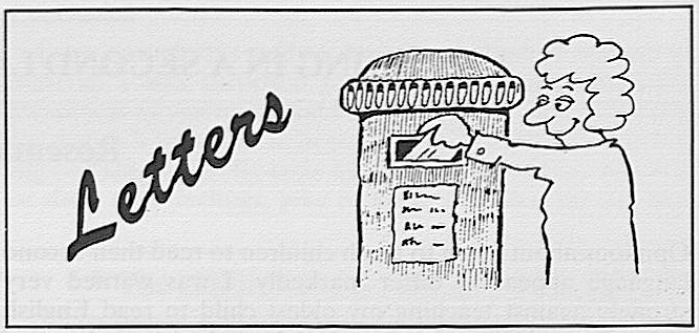
> "One of her earliest words was "go-e" in Welsh – I can still remember the thrill of hearing her say this . . ."

people. At times, too, we were able to meet up with various French/English speaking couples, to provide their children and Marianne with the opportunity to speak French. Marianne developed her ability in all three languages at roughly the same pace; we spent three years in Portsmouth, and by the time we left there was very little difference in her acquisition of all three languages, although English might have been slightly ahead as she was by this time attending play-school.



Gerran Thomas and baby Colette

In 1989, we moved to Aberystwyth to live, Marianne was old enough in September 1989 (3;9 years old) to be accepted part-time in the Welsh medium primary school. After a few weeks, I asked the teacher how her Welsh compared with that of other pupils brought up in Wales from birth. I was reassured to hear that Marianne's Welsh was as good as, or better than, that of her classmates. By now, with Marianne aged 5;3 years, all three languages are firmly established and we are confident that we have succeeded. The next step will be reading – Marianne can already read quite well in Welsh, and is prepared to have a go at shop-signs or corn-flake packets etc. in the other languages (even coming very close to pronouncing "supermarché" correctly at 4;9 years on our last visit to France!). However, Marianne now has a sister (Colette, aged 7 months). We are just about to begin the process all over again!



BILINGUALISM IN VIENNA/ ZWEISPRACHIGKEIT IN WIEN

Yesterday I attended a meeting of a group called Americans married to non-Americans (or AMNA for short.) The topic of discussion was bilingualism. The living room of the woman who volunteered to hold the meeting was packed! We touched on several topics which I later read in some back issues of your journal/newsletter. How happy I was to learn of its existence!

I was raised bilingually Spanish/English, English being a foreign but common language to both my parents, in South America. I attended a British school there, whose instruction was part-time English and Spanish and of course my nanny and everybody else around spoke Spanish. I was seven before I realised I was a minority! I now live in Vienna, Austria. I came here 12 years ago not knowing much German and have since become fluent. (Except for the problem of not knowing whether a noun is masculine, feminine or neuter, which at times is the opposite of what it is in Spanish!) My husband is Austrian. We have a four-year-old daughter (born December 1986) – Margaret. We both speak English at home with her, unless we have visitors, and she attends a local kindergarten. She still mixes words and grammar especially after having been in one language for more than two hours. She sometimes demands that I speak German to her, only to have her turn and say to me – as if she's testing me . . . "and how do you say it in English?" Apparently she gets asked to do this by many student teachers at her kindergarten! My concern these days is with her preference to play with German speaking children in our mixed "English play group" which I organise once a week. Why is this? Is she, perhaps, associating age-groups with a certain language? I was most baffled when she took to translating bedtime stories, which she only knows from me in English, into German for our neighbour's girl and for her German baby sitter! Vice versa also!

Last summer we spent a few weeks in Spain. Margaret (then 3½) was quite perturbed to hear me speak to people around us (waiters, hotel employees and the like) in Spanish. She protested vehemently to me when someone would approach her and speak to her in Spanish. She'd hide behind my skirt and then shout at me that they should stop! After eight days or so of this she started to imitate some sounds and just as we were leaving demanded to learn how to say things in Spanish! Now she asks me to sing her songs in Spanish and can even recognise when Spanish is being spoken by others on our (shortwave) radio or by passers by!

When she was 2½ we went to The Netherlands to visit my father. There at a local shop a lady spoke to her in Dutch. She piped up: "Are you speaking English oder Deutsch" (We'll see what happens this year!). I could go on probably with all sorts of incidents of this kind. But I'll save these for another letter.

Connie Bruckner, Vienna, Austria

READING IN A SECOND LANGUAGE: WHEN TO START

Rosemary Kneipp

Opinions about when to teach children to read their second language appear to differ markedly. I was warned very strongly against teaching my oldest child to read English before he had become a fluent reader in French so I waited until his second year of primary school to do so. Not really convinced that this was the best method, I changed tactics with my daughter and am much happier with the results.

I am an Australian living in France and have always spoken French with my husband, who is a native French speaker, although he speaks English quite fluently, having lived in South Africa for three years. My French, however, has always been far more fluent. From the outset, I spoke only English to the children and their father speaks to them exclusively in French. This worked very well with my son Patrick, now nine, even though he has only been to Australia twice. My parents have visited us several times and we have had occasional Australian visitors. When he was small, I often visited English speaking friends so he had a fair degree of exposure to English.

Lisa was born when Patrick was three and had just started "école maternelle", the French state pre-school, which lasts three years. He was speaking in sentences in both languages by the time he was two. He agreed to speak English to his little sister. The two languages have always remained very separate for him and he never mixes them. He will ask me the appropriate English vocabulary before beginning a sentence if he doesn't know all the words he needs.

> "One of the problems involved in bringing up children bilingually is that they have little opportunity to learn, in their second language, the 'play' language children use themselves."

Lisa said her first word apart from Mama, Dada and Papa (Patrick) on her second birthday – gâteau (cake). Next day, she added "bougie" (candle). She gradually began talking more and more, but very few of the words were English. I saw fewer English people at that time and she often went to a French day-care centre. When she was just over 2½, she spoke to me more or less in the following way: "Black cat entre home. Y a pas happy moi. Moi pleurs. Black cat parti, moi happy"; (rough translation – a black cat came into my house. I wasn't happy. I cried. The black cat left. I was happy).

After my much more positive experience with Patrick, I wondered whether she would ever really speak English! Her pronunciation in both languages was also very defective, whereas her brother had spoken very clearly from the outset. When she was 3½ and Patrick 6½, he told her, in my presence, that from that moment onwards, he would speak French to her – and they started getting on much better all of a sudden! One of the problems involved in bringing up children bilingually is that they have little opportunity to learn, in their second language, the "play" language children use amongst themselves. My children speak French to all their bilingual friends.

As Lisa got older, it became increasingly difficult to get her to speak English to me. I tried all types of attitudes but there was a tendency to let things slide after a while, although I have always spoken to her in English. We spent three weeks last August with some English friends on holiday in France and Lisa became very attached to their little girl the same age. She had no choice but to speak English so when she began first grade in September, I decided that I was going to make a really determined effort to get her to speak English to me. We have at last made it! Every time she spoke to me in French, I either interrupted and asked her to speak in English or waited until she had finished and repeated the sentence in English and asked her to continue in that language. Her vocabulary improved immensely after about a month and as a result she can now express herself more easily in English and is thus more willing to speak it.

By the end of first term, she was reading with considerable fluency in French (French is a much easier language to learn to read than English which requires more rote learning) so I suggested to her that she tell me when she was ready to learn to read in English. Her answer was "now".

Patrick could also read French by the end of his first term in primary school and one of my difficulties at the time was finding appropriate reading material. Anything he could read easily was far too babyish for him and he wasn't interested. By the end of his first year, he was reading Saint Exupéry's *Le Petit Prince* and at nine, he is reading *Oliver Twist* (in French). He read *The Lord of the Rings* in French last year. Finding appropriate English reading material was even more difficult as he lacks the vocabulary and proficiency to read such books in English. *Découvrez . . . who stole Granny* was the first book he read by himself in English. We are now working our way through his large collection of "Mr Men" books, which he is also familiar with in French and which he is very fond of. Because he has a photographic memory, he can usually remember a word if he has seen it once. As I had hoped, his vocabulary is being enriched at the same time.

At the end of a term of English reading, Lisa is now up to the 6th level of the Ladybird series. We spend about 10 to 15 minutes a day reading and writing. She is very keen and will come and do written exercises while I am preparing the evening meal. We have no trouble finding appropriate reading material for her in either language. She loves the French "Emilie" books, *Petit Ours Brun, Mimi Cracra,* etc. which Patrick had grown out of by six. She identifies well with Peter and Jane in the Ladybird series. It has strengthened her English considerably.

Both children have very rich vocabularies in French and I consider that they are fluent English speakers although their English is obviously influenced by their French, particularly

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HELP !!!

Stuart Black seeks families, where English and a European language are spoken with the children, for his Master of Arts Research Programme on Bilingualism.

Contact details removed

"Se on Semmone, Semmone . . ."

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of the languages. All parents said that they understood at least satisfactorily each other's language and were able to interpret simple sentences from a child who was just learning to speak. The different attitudes parents had towards their children's word borrowing and code mixing came out when I was analysing the records.

I noticed particularly the following four strategies:

1. Parent does not correct the child's speech but strengthens it with the same language, as in the following example:

   Father (in Swedish): va gör dom där da? *(what are they doing there?)*
   Child (in Finnish): mm . . . pallo *(ball)*
   Father (in Swedish): spelar med en "pallo" ja *(they are playing with the "pallo", yes)*

2. Parent does not correct but strengthens the sentence with the correct language.
3. Parent pretends not to understand, repeats the question and often also offers the right answer.
4. Parent answers the borrowing with a straight metalinguistic question or comment as in the following example:

   Child (in Swedish): blodbudding *(blackpudding)*
   Father (in Finnish): mitäs se on suomeksi, muistatko? *(do you remember what it is in Finnish?)*
   Child (in incorrect Finnish): vertalettuja
   Father (in Finnish, laughing): vertalettuja, ei kun verilettuja *(you mean blackpudding)*

My observations from the recordings are that parents react to the borrowing of words which include plenty of information such as verbs, nouns and adjectives, but seem to take less notice of borrowing of other words, which carry less information.

How a bilingual home environment supports the metalinguistic awareness

A child growing up bilingually has to specially observe the language when trying to keep the two languages separate. She is often also in a situation where she has to take into account the other person's language ability. Parents of bilingual children seem to support consciously their children's language learning and many have bad consciences that their children don't get enough stimulation in one or both of their languages. Metalinguistic questions were used a lot, especially by the non-Finnish speaking parent (What do you mean?; I don't understand; What is it in Swedish?; Go and ask mum what it means in Finnish). I was surprised how many parents had made special observations of their children's language development and in five families parents even kept some kind of language diary of their children's first words and sentences. Most families remembered some funny or awkward situations regarding language and bilingualism. It seems to me that bilingual families also have lots of "language conversations". The bilingual children in my study seemed to enjoy situations where they could act as teachers and teach or translate one parent's language to the other parent or to a younger sibling. In some families this has created translation games.

> " Parents of bilingual children seem to support consciously their children's language learning. "

Conclusion

Even though this study is based on a limited amount of material I was surprised to find as much metalinguistic awareness as was mentioned by Strömqvist. The children in my research were able to benefit in various ways from knowing two languages. By code mixing they can stress the point or show their feelings, joke or make sure that the message has been understood. By trying to keep the languages separate and having to choose the code suitable for different situations they learn to observe their own and other people's language. They may act as an interpreter or a translator or analyse the language at its different levels. It became clear in the interviews with the parents that those, who use the "one person/one language" method take language issues especially into account and have "language conversations" or play various translation rituals with their children. They were probably more interested in languages than an average parent, which may partly have an effect on the children's language development. However, only a systematic analysis of data on a larger scale could show if other bilingual children are as aware of the language issues as were the children in my study or if these children were exceptional.

> " The children in my research were able to benefit in various ways from knowing two languages. "

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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.

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with regards to grammar. Both watch very little television and we do not have a video player so all their input in English comes from myself and other bilingual friends as well as their reading. I am a professional translator and am very strict about not mixing languages as I think it weakens both grammar and vocabulary and destroys the beauty of a language. Now that the children are older, I make sure that they are exposed to as wide a vocabulary as possible on my part. This complicates discussions of course – they are punctuated with "what does so and so mean" – but it is definitely an effective way of increasing vocabulary.

Recently, we visited some Swedish friends and on the way home, Lisa complained, "I'm not lucky. I only speak two languages, and they speak three – Swedish, French and English!" She is now learning German from her piano teacher!

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.

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