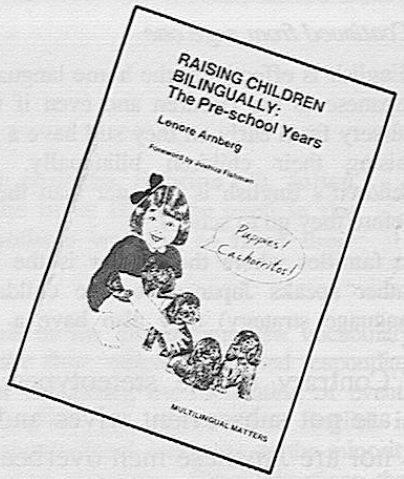
# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

*Editors:*
George Saunders and Marjukka Grover **1992 Volume 9 No.3**


## EDITORIAL

As the new co-editor and one of the founders of **the Bilingual Family Newsletter** I would like to introduce myself. I am a Finn married to an Englishman and have lived in Great Britain for the past twenty years. We have two bilingual/bicultural teenage sons (Tommi 16 and Sami 14) and therefore know very well at the grass roots level the problems and rewards of raising children bilingually in a mixed language family without support from the surrounding community.

When our children were small we didn't know anyone who had succeeded with a bilingual upbringing in a similar situation. If I enquired 'why?' the answer was 'we did try but it was too difficult because...'. Luckily we knew a German/ English family with the same aged children and the same determination to succeed and that friendship has turned out to be a reall valuable support. In this issue Frances Rodriquez describes how a group of bilingual mums (nine different languages !!!) has got together giving much needed support to each other. A good idea for other BFN readers struggling to find the same language combination families nearby. We also have an article on the mothers role in succesful bilingualism and a report from German Saturday Schools in Great Britain. I think all of us who are involved in running minority language Saturday Schools or Playgroups in different part of the world can identify with the problems faced by the German group in London.

Issues important to bilingual families are not only those concerning language. Bicultural issues are just as important - how do our children acquire two cultures; two sets of behavioural rules? What about their identities (and our own) - where do their loyalties lie when brought up with two languages/ cultures/ countries?

How have we, as parents, adapted to intercultural living? If we are the one who has had to make the move, do we still feel frustrated and angry with our daily lives, stages most people go through, or do we feel happy and adjusted having two countries and cultures? Intercultural marriages bring their own problems and delights. People who live with two languages and cultures are also aware of cross-cultural communication problems, how ever fluently we speak both languages. In crosscultural communication language alone is not enough, we need ear, mind, eye and heart for full understanding of each other. What about the emotions behind the language - how much more the word ''äiti'' means when addressed to me by my sons than when they use ''mum''.

In future issues of **the Bilingual Family Newsletter** we would like to see articles/ letters/ queries ( and humour too) to cover all matters intercultural. We also hope that the readers

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## ROLE OF *MOTHER* IN CHILDREN'S ACQUISITION OF MINORITY LANGUAGE

### by Mary Murata

Since my children were born I have read a number of books on bilingualism and started to subscribe to the BFN. But the one important point of children's acquisition of the minority language which I feel is overlooked is whether or not the MOTHER is the minority language speaker. In the book '*Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens*' George Saunders comments: 'If it were their mother passing on German, for example, the hours of contact the children would have with the language, particularly in the years before the commencement of school, would be significantly increased'. This is the only reference I have seen to the difference between whether or not the minority language speaker is the mother. It would be nice to put 'primary caretaker' instead of 'mother' but, however much we would like things to be different, the primary caretaker of all but a small minority of children is the mother. If the children are sent from an early age to a childminder or creche this is the mother's decision. Fathers are not expected to (and generally don't) give up their careers to look after children. Countries such as Sweden and Denmark have a reputation for having a large proportion of househusbands but these countries are not representative of the world in general. Even in Britain where we like to think men and women are treated equally the husband's/father's role is still referred to as 'helping'.

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I'm a British woman living in Japan, married to a Japanese and we have two children. For three years I have been running a playgroup for English speaking pre-schoolers, most of the members are from mixed marriages (although we have a few children who are from homes where neither parent is Japanese), so I have had a great deal of contact with bilingual or potentially bilingual children. These are my general observations (in all the families I'm referring to, the minority language is English and majority language is Japanese, so I shall refer to them as such).

Firstly, families where the mother is the English speaker and the parents also speak together in English. In these families

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English is effectively the home language, even if father speaks Japanese to the children and even if the children go to a day nursery from early on they still have a high degree of success in raising their children bilingually. In many families the children's English is stronger than their Japanese in the years before they go to school.

In families where the mother is the English speaker and the father speaks Japanese to the children (i.e. one person/one language strategy) they also have a high degree of success.

> Contrary to the stereotypes, Japanese women are not subservient wives and devoted mothers, nor are Japanese men overbearing tyrants.

Pre-school children from this environment generally speak English and Japanese equally well, regardless of whether the parents speak English together, or even whether the father understands English at all. My own situation comes under this category; my husband speaks no English; we speak Japanese together; I speak only English to the children (to the point of being reluctant to say place names because they are Japanese!). Although we had regular contact with local children as well as English speakers, and watched Japanese T.V. programmes as well as English videos, at age of 3.6 my children entered Japanese nursery school with almost no Japanese ability. The main factors influencing their English acquisition, apart from having an English speaking mother, are firstly that my husband works very long hours and has little contact with the children. The second factor is that my two sons are twins. Right from the start they spoke English together. Having an English speaking playmate of the same age, who is around all the time, has helped their English enormously.

> I feel that in a misguided attempt not to be sexist or controversial, the factor of whether or not the mother is the minority language speaker has been sorely overlooked.

Of all the families I have been in contact with, where the mother is the minority language speaker, the children all speak and understand English. In the very worst cases the children reply to English questions in Japanese but will speak English if they have to, i.e. during a visit from monolingual relatives.

In the case of the father being the English speaker, and the parents follow a 'home language' strategy, they generally have a reasonable degree of success, with the children's English and Japanese ability being about equal in the preschool years. However it takes a great deal of determination for a Japanese mother to keep on speaking English to the children when they speak Japanese to her. A Japanese mother also has to be very keen to come a long way to a playgroup like ours (most people travel about one hour to our group) as she doesn't benefit socially herself very much from such a group; she can get together with other mothers of her nationality very easily. Of this type of family the English ability of the children varies from about equal with Japanese to almost barely passive understanding. (I do actually know of one Japanese/American couple who actually prevented their son from hearing any Japanese at all - only English videos, not allowed to play with local children etc., their son now attends the international school. Needless to say his English is good but they may have paid too high a price socially for it!)

Finally in the families where the father is the only source of English, I have not met any family whose children could speak English; at best they understand and reply in Japanese - passive bilinguals only. However George Saunders, in his book 'Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens', shows what can be done in this situation with a little effort.

I realise that as soon as readers realise I'm writing about Japan their reaction will be 'But Japan is known to be very traditional regarding roles of men and women'. Contrary to the stereotypes, Japanese women are not subservient wives and devoted mothers, nor are Japanese men overbearing tyrants. A higher proportion of women work in Japan than Britain or America; state-subsidised childcare is widely available, young Japanese fathers are actively involved with bringing up their children; the parks on a Sunday are packed with dads pushing prams, throwing baseballs etc., and men rush home from work to bath their baby. However here, as in England, full-time househusbands are rare.

Of course I am aware that there are many factors at work determining a child's ability in the minority language; availability of books, videos, playmates of a similar age, whether or not the child attends a minority language playgroup, frequency of visits to the minority language country or visits from relatives or friends from that country, and not least of all the time and effort devoted to the minority language by the parent. However, I feel that in a misguided attempt not to be sexist or controversial, the factor of whether or not the mother is the minority language speaker has been sorely overlooked.

## CONTRIBUTIONS

**Please continue to send us your "stories", anecdotes, jokes, useful hints or any other contributions you think migh interest our readers. Remember, this Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you.**

## BILINGUAL HUMOUR

### Not quite in the picture

A German tourist is walking through the streets of Palamos.

'Buenos dias!' says a smiling local.

The German waves her away and, by way of explanation, points to his camera:

'No, thank you, I'm not interested. I take my own photos!'

( *dias* (Panish) = 'day' ; *Dias* (German) = 'slides')

## THIS WON'T CHANGE YOUR LIFE

### BUT IT MIGHT HELP!

### Elizabeth PITMAN

This book presents a general approach to understanding everyday behaviour and communication, suggesting that we need only be 'good enough' and that we can learn to like ourselves, warts and all.

The ideas in this book are based on the view that there are some relatively simple but constructive ideas about understanding and, if necessary, changing behaviour that can be used in everyday living. The content is based on some of the ideas to be found in thetheory of transactional analysis. Transactional analysis explains how and why: our personalities develop as they do; we communicate with varying degrees of effectiveness; we behave in a variety of ways to get our needs met; we develop the beliefs we hold.

Pbk. 1-873150-00-8£6.95 ($15.00) 124 pages 1990

# MULTILINGUAL MUMS

## by Frances Rodriguez

**Frances Rodriguez and her Mexican husband live in Great Britain with their three children, Sabrina (4), Julian (3) and Daniel (1.5). She is English, but speaks fluent Spanish, and Spanish is the main language used in the home. In this article Frances describes how she started a support group for mothers wanting to raise their children bilingually.**

Ever since my first child, now 4, was born, I have been looking for other bilingual English/Spanish speaking families with children of a similar age. I thought that if Sabrina heard other children speaking Spanish, she would grow up understanding that both English and Spanish were valid means of communication.

My problem was finding such families; I did try to make contact with a couple of Spanish families, via the local Spanish Embassy children's classes, but I think these Spanish ladies may have been slightly alarmed by an Englishwoman with a Mexican accent ringing them up out of the blue. It's not a very Latin thing to do! Anyway, no contact was followed up.

It seemed to me that whatever the second (or third) language you want your children to speak, the problems are very similar and I began to develop the idea of gathering together other mothers bringing up children bilingually, so that we could share strategies and experiences, with the aim of encouraging each other mutually.

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So much conspires against children speaking a language different from the majority one, and I have heard of many sad cases where a parent has just given up speaking their native language; sometimes it is easier to surrender in what seems an unequal battle. Then there are the horrific stories we've all heard, of some health visitors, doctors and teachers who have been known to advise parents NOT to use their own language with their children. I am generally happy with my nationality and my country, but I have to recognise that a shocking number of my compatriots have a closed mind when it comes to multilingualism and multiculturalism. In the same way as a child may find it difficult to understand how one can love more than one sibling at the same time, some adults find it difficult to understand how one can assimilate more than one language or culture at the same time. For all these reasons, and more, I thought we all needed some mutual encouragement.

I had alerted my Health Visitor to my search, and thanks to her met a French mum living locally who has become a very good friend - wrong language, but same interest in our children's bilingualism! When I first mentioned my idea of a multilingual group to Evelyne, she supported me enthusiastically. Between the two of us we knew of several people bringing up children in different languages, so we contacted them, and the first Multilingual Mums gathering took place at my house early in 1992.

Of course, one of the first 'problems' that came up was the one we have all faced, that of speaking to our child in one language and the child answering in English, and it was fascinating to hear all the different ways people cope with this. For example, when your children come home from school, all excited about what they did during the day and they want to tell you about it in the language in which they experienced it, what do you do? Some of our group have tried insisting on using the minority language, even though this means introducing new vocabulary and thereby interrupting the flow, others have tried responding in the minority language, but letting the recounting of events come tumbling out in English; yet others allow English in certain cases, i.e. talking about school, but insist on the minority language in other prescribed situations. Other situations that have been discussed since include: at what stage do we introduce reading in the minority language, to what extent

Bilingualism is like breastfeeding - it doesn't just happen, you have to be determined to do it

should we involve our children's teachers and schools in what we are trying to do, and whether we should oblige older children to speak to younger siblings in the minority language.

Our meetings are always informal, but gradually after four meetings we have evolved a format of about forty minutes of chat - interspersed with multilingual instructions to little Julian/Stefan/Alain to stop pulling little Rebecca/Sabrina/Mary Rose's hair - followed by forty-five minutes of more formal discussion. We considered trying to find speakers, but there are not many professionals who have carried out research into what I call 'mixed marriage multilingualism'; there has been considerable investigation into bilingualism in ethnic and linguistic communities, both here and in the U.S., and no doubt in other countries where such communities exist, but the search for experts in our kind of bilingualism seemed hopeless.

*...we decided we were probably the best experts...*

I pestered my Health Visitors and doctors for more information on bilingualism, and although I must say I have had full and unreserved support from them, they could locate no such information. At the risk of sounding immodest, we decided we were probably the best experts, so we share our own slowly acquired expertise, and we leave meetings feeling encouraged and often inspired.

*Continued on page seven*

# GERMAN SATURDAY SCHOOLS - A PROGRESS REPORT

## by Alison Hüneke

German Saturday Schools in Great Britain are open to children from bilingual English/German homes and aim to improve their knowledge of German language and culture. Particular importance is placed on making the classes enjoyable for the children, so that they will develop a positive attitude towards being bilingual and bi-cultural and an increased appreciation of the German side of their background. There are currently five schools, all situated in the London area, which together form the Association of German Saturday Schools. The schools were founded between 1988 and 1990 by enthusiastic parents, and continue to be run by parents of children attending the schools.

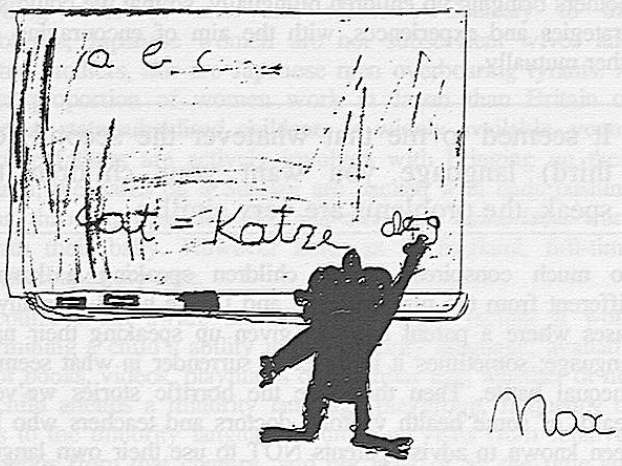
In most cases, the children coming into the schools have few problems understanding German but, with a few exceptions, cannot speak it to anything like the same standard as children of their own age living in Germany. In the worst cases, the children cannot, at first, be persuaded to produce a single word of German! Faced with this situation, the schools have generally found that the best approach is to concentrate on motivating the children to communicate in German, thus activating their largely passive knowledge of the language. The lesson content, therefore, focuses on free and guided conversation and games, with some written work and grammar exercises for the older children. The German government has regularly donated copies of the Worwarts International course *Wer? Wie? Was?*, which was recommended for use in the schools by the adviser on the teaching of German attached to the Goethe-Institut in London, and most of the schools use this with their older children (those over eight). The classes for the younger children (those aged between three and eight) are generally based around a different topic each week.

In common with most voluntary activities for children, the schools have found that there is a marked drop in attendance when the children reach about twelve. Some of the schools are hoping to combat this by preparing the older children for GCSE ( General Certificate of Secondary Education), at age 13-15 years. Although GCSE German is taught in many secondary schools, not all the children will have the chance to take it at their ordinary school. It is also thought that some children may prefer to take it as an extra-curricular subject, thereby freeing time on their school timetable for other subjects.

In common with most voluntary activities for children, the schools have found that there is a marked drop in attendance when the children reach about twelve.

Becoming established has, however, been far from plain sailing. The schools have faced a number of difficulties, of which the greatest is, perhaps, their tight financial situation. Some Saturday Schools serving other nationalities (e.g. the Finnish and Spanish) are given substantial financial support by their governments, and the German Saturday Schools also hoped for comparable levels of funding from the German government. Apart from the donation of materials mentioned above, however, none has so far been forthcoming. Some of the schools are given some support, in the form of a grant or provision of subsidised rooms, by their local authorities, for which they are very grateful. The Association, working on behalf of all the schools, has made strenuous efforts to attract sponsorship from companies, but so far with little success. There has been some fundraising on a small scale, but virtually all of the schools' funding comes from the fees paid by the parents of the children attending the schools. The fees, consequently, have to be set at a fairly high level (between £3.50 and £5.00 per child per morning, depending on the school), which for a few parents, particulaly if they have large families, or are single parents, have proved too expensive.

Even at this level, the fees only provide enough income to pay for a barely adequate service. With the exception of one school, none of the schools has been able to expand beyond 30-40 pupils at any one time. As they cannot then afford to run more than three or, at most, four classes, this means that each class has to accommodate a wide age range (three years or more) and a large variation in the standard of German spoken. This does make it difficult for the teachers and, sadly, it has on occasion meant that some children have not been properly catered for, and have then usually left, putting further financial pressure on the schools to fill the vacancies created. More substantial funding would enable the schools to run classes according to the natural groupings of the children, rather than purely financial considerations.




It would also enable the schools to pay for suitable premises. Those schools not fortunate enough to be given subsidised rooms by their local authority have sometimes had to make do with less than suitable accommodation, such as church halls, with two or more classes sharing a room. The cost of renting more appropriate rooms, such as school classrooms, at the usual rates (around £20 a room per session) is way beyond what the schools can afford.

Funding would also be useful to help pay for the administration of the schools, which is a very complex task, requiring compliance with a large number of statutory bodies. It would be made a lot easier if the schools could, for example, pay for secretarial services, advertising for teachers and for new members, and professional services, such as auditing. At the moment, most of this work is undertaken, often at their own expense, by a very small number of dedicated parents.

Right from the start, the schools have adhered to a policy of employing qualified teachers, who are native German speakers, to teach the children. It has not been a problem finding such teachers, as there are a surprisingly large number living in London. However, they are usually secondary school teachers, or teachers of adults in colleges or evening classes, and rarely have much experience of teaching young children. Regrettably, many are unable to make a successful transition to the Saturday School situation, which requires lively and imaginative teaching of the children's weaker language. Inadequate or boring lessons

have usually resulted in children leaving, creating further financial pressure on the schools. It is also, of course, very sad if children find attending the schools an unhappy experience and, perhaps, view the German language more negatively as a result. That was certainly not the intention that lay behind the schools!

The schools have tried to devise ways to help the teachers perform more effectively. In some cases, the school committees have attempted to advise new teachers on the most successful teaching approach. Some teachers have, however, ignored it on the grounds that, as professionals, they do not need to be told what to do by unqualified people. An alternative is to employ a 'principal' teacher who can guide the others. Some schools have tried this, but with limited success. The schools cannot afford to fund a teacher in addition to the class teachers, but if the principal teacher has to teach a class herself, it is virtually impossible for her to supervise the other teachers.

The Association, acting in conjunction with the Goethe-Institut, holds a seminar for School Saturday teachers approximately twice a year, which acts as a useful source of information and a discussion forum for the schools' established teachers, but is certainly not sufficient to provide much help for new teachers struggling to get to grips with the situation. The schools really need to establish a comprehensive training programme, which is dependent on having sufficient funding. The provision of suitable courses by local education authorities would be one way in which they could give very practical help to the Saturday Schools, and not only to the German ones.

The schools have found that many parents have been less than consistent in their use of German, and some had made very little effort to speak it at all.

A final unpleasant shock for the founders of the German Saturday Schools has been the fairly low level of support given to the schools by many of the other parents. This is despite the fact that the schools were set up to support parents' efforts to raise their children bilingually, and, it was expected, would be able to rely on commitment from parents, especially in the difficult early stages. Sadly, as I have already indicated, very few parents have been prepared to put any time and effort into keeping the schools going. Many seem to take the view that, if someone else is running such a school, they will come along and stay as long as they feel they are getting their money's worth. As soon as the school encounters a problem, however. (e.g. with an ineffective teacher), many parents just stop re-enrolling their children.

It was also stressed that parents must support the work of the schools by using, and encouraging their children to use, as much German as possible at home. However, the schools have found that many parents have been less than consistent in their use of German, and some had made very little effort to speak it at all. When challenged, such parents will often say that it feels 'unnatural' to speak German in England. What has become clear is that German people living in England, especially those married to British people, tend to assimilate totally into the prevailing English-speaking society, to the extent of abandoning their native language and culture, except when visiting, or receiving visits from, Germany.

Clearly, if German parents are to be enabled to maintain their German here in the UK, and pass it on successfully to their children, they need social contact with other German people in a context where it feels natural to speak German. Such provision has been virtually non-existent before, other than at the German-language churches, which do not, of course, appeal to everyone. Some parents openly seek social contact with other parents from the Saturday Schools, and some of the schools are now placing more emphasis on this aspect, to the extent that they are able. Some of the schools simply do not have the resources to provide a separate meeting-room for parents, for example. In some cases, the schools have on occasion used school time, and premises, for primarily social activities, upsetting other parents who feel that the main function of the schools, that of providing properly structured classes for children, is being undermined.

Providing such social facilities may, of course, be a sound investment in the longer term, especially if it enables the schools to reach German people while their children are still very young or as yet unborn, and inform them about raising children bilingually, and encourage them in their efforts to do so. On the other hand, many parents may decide that they are unwilling or unable to put any effort into it, and will content themselves with the smattering of German their children will acquire from hearing it spoken by the adults at the Saturday School, and occasional visits to Germany. Certainly, the experience so far suggests that many parents will tend towards this attitude.

The schools, therefore, are being asked to provide, on the one hand, a social club, as much for the parents' benefit as for the children's, and, on the other hand, an appropriate German-language education to children over a wide age spread, whose command of German can vary between near-native and virtually non-existent. Unfortunately, satisfying both these requirements calls for more resources, in terms of money, space, and willing workers, than several of the schools can muster at the moment. However, in the almost four years of their existence, the schools have successfully overcome many serious difficulties, and so far none has been forced to close. This gives grounds for optimism that they can continue to thrive and to make steady improvements in the tuition they offer.

*For further information contact:*

Contact details removed

PLEASE SEND FOR OUR RECORDS INFORMATION ON EXISTING MINORITY LANGUAGE SATURDAY SCHOOLS AND PLAYGROUPS IN DIFFERENT PARTS OF THE WORLD.

## Everything you always wanted to know about Germany and could never find!

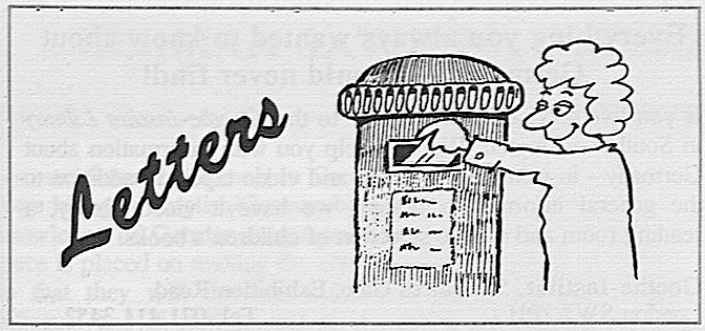
If you live or visit London come to the *Goethe-Institut Library* in South Kensington. We will help you with information about Germany - in print and on audio and video tapes. In addition to the general information library, we have a video library, a reading room and a large selection of children's books.

**Goethe-Institut,** 50 Princes Gate, Exhibition Road,
London SW7 2PH Tel: 071 411 3452
*Opening Hours:* Mon. to Thurs. 10 a.m. - 8 p.m.
Sat. 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. The Library will be closed in August.

## WINNIE THE POOH

One day when we suggested Thomas listen to a cassette. he announced that he wanted 'Monsieur caca'. His father was completely nonplussed and it took me a few seconds to realise that he wanted the cassette he'd listened to the day before: a man reading 'Winnie the Pooh'!

**Penelope Vincent-Sweet**




## BABIES AND BABYLON

The scene is a familiar one. Mother talking to her baby while chatting to a friend in the street: 'You had a good dinner didn't you?' (baby gooes helplessly, or ignores her completely) Mother continues: 'But you were not so good last night, were you? We had to sing and daddy had to rock you for two hours, didn't he?' (Baby, as before) Friend (to the baby): 'Oh, that's awful, your poor mummy and daddy must be exhausted!' Mother (to the baby): 'Well, mummy and daddy are used to it now, aren't they?' etc.

We have all seen it and we have all done it. Or most of us have. I always had a problem with this kind of communication. Not because I think it is stupid - if babies are included in conversation early, their social skills develop early. My problem is of a different nature. As a Serbo-Croatian speaker living in England, I always wanted to address my daughter in my language only. So whenever I met someone, I would let them talk to the baby in English and just mumble in approval.

The communication with someone via the baby is an important one and I probably don't know what I'm missing, but I just can't do it in English.

The communication with someone via the baby is an important one and I probably don't know what I'm missing, but I just can't do it in English. As I am mostly surrounded by monolinguals or bilinguals who do not speak Serbo-Croatian, I only speak to my daughter directly, which makes things a little awkward sometimes as she is not yet of an age where understanding of any language is her forte. It is extremely difficult not to be self-conscious while issuing commands, speaking tender words or giving directions to a 13 month old, while the rest of the company silently watches us in awe.

What could I be saying? That question usually annoys me. I am not likely to discuss trends in the economy with her, am I?

Still, I get ashamed of my own intolerance. I have been told that another language is always fascinating for those who do not speak it and very rarely or never hear it. So instead of my 'isolationist' attitude, I should try to make it interesting for everybody; that is to always translate to other people what I have just said to my daughter, and informally try to teach them a few baby words. Some people can do this naturally and make others respond with enthusiasm; some feel embarrassed and have to learn it gradually.

If it seems too much of an effort, smile and remember Babylon!

**Alex Oliver-Tomic**

*Our thanks for the editors of Bilingually Speaking Newsletter, Cambridge ( see Vol.9 , 2 of the BFN for details) for the permisiion to re-print the above letter.*


## B IS FOR PAPILLON

**Thomas' father speaks French to him, his mother English, but French is dominat due to mainly francophone environment. While Thomas was learning to talk, he often would choose a word in one of the languages and use it whatever language he was speaking; perhaps it was easier to pronounce, or he liked the sound of it better. Thus some of his favourite first words were 'fish' and 'papillon' but he would rarely if ever say 'poisson' or 'butterfly'. So when we bought a bright alphabet frieze to put on his wall, he soon learned to go through the letters: 'a is for apple, b is for papillon...'. This continued for a long time, however much I explained that it should really be ''butterfly''.**

**This makes me wonder if the 'look and say' method of learning to read is appropriate in a bilingual situation. I know some people have used it successfully, but if a child learns to associate a particular word with a particular object, will he or she remember which language the word shape refers to? Perhaps other children associate the languages better than Thomas, who at four, still mixes grammer and vocabulary quite a lot.**

**Penelope Vincent-Sweet, Laval, France**

The letter raises very interesting and important questions to which a series of answers is demanded. First, if Thomas mixes French and English grammar and vocabulary at the age of four he is a very normal bilingual. Such mixing is one stage on the journey, and is entirely natural and usual. Within the next two or three years, Thomas will increasingly separate French and English. To encourage this, try to use French and English in separate and different situations so he learns that the two languages are distinct.

Second, having a frieze on the wall, and other encouragers of the early steps of literacy is much to be applauded. Early encouragement without pressure, stimulating interest and a positive attitude to prints and books, is very effective in promoting literacy.

Third, one effective strategy in bilingual children learning to read is as follows. Try to develop a 'sight vocabulary' first of all. For example, locate a child's favourite words (e.g. fish, milk, teddy, mummy). Using pictures alongside these words, encourage the child to recognise and read these words. A sense of achievement will be gained. This is 'the look and say' method - but 'looking and saying' WHOLE words and not individual letters. It does not matter if the words are in two languages. It does matter that the words are important to that child.

When the child has a simple 'look and say' vocabulary, then (often around five to seven years of age) a 'phonic skills' approach can be introduced. This approach encourages a child to break down each word into its separate parts (e.g. the word shed is made up of three sounds: sh - e - d.). While different languages have different sounds to some letters and combinations of letters, the STRATEGY of 'phonic analysis' transfers

from one language to another easily, and will help facilitate biliteracy.

Notice that a phonic approach is best introduced AFTER a child has had a small 'look and say' vocabulary. This 'start up' vocabulary is the raw material on which a child can breakdown a word into its sound components. Phonic analysis of words will be more interesting to children if they use personal words.

Lets return to the frieze. How about putting a whole word next to the picture of the fish and the butterfly? Letters and their individual sounds can be left to the phonic skills later stage. So how about pasting a whole word over the letter on the frieze (e.g. apple instead of the letter 'a'). The word could be in French or English. So 'papillon' will be attached to the picture of the butterfly. If you feel it is sensible and natural, why not put both 'papillon' and 'butterfly' next to the picture of the butterfly? This is good practice in many bilingual classrooms where wall displays are deliberatly bilingual. Above all, learning to read must be ENJOYABLE to ensure a continued love of print. For parents of bilingual children who look forward to biliteracy, this is doubly important.

**Colin Baker, Dept, of Ed. , Univ. College of North Wales**

## HOW TO EASE SPANISH BACK INTO THE FAMILY?

**When my older daughter was a baby my husband and I decided to raise her bilingually. She understood both languages quite well until she was about a year and half. Unfortunately, we weren't as dedicated or disciplined with this as we should have been, and in the past year and a half have slipped into an English only family. My daughter only understands a few Spanish words. We would like to get back into being a bilingual family, especially since we now have a two month old son, and will not want to make the same mistake with him. My husband and I are both bilingual, his native language being Spanish and mine English.**

**My question is how do we ease Spanish back into the family without confusing our daughter or making her feel isolated? We have thought of various methods but we are not sure what will work and what will be most beneficial to her. Any comments you have on this subject will be appreciated.**

**Lori Abreu, Kirkland, USA**

I think you are in a good position to 'revive' Spanish at home since both of you speak the language. Try gradually speaking more and more Spanish between yourself and your husband making it eventually your family language. If your husband were to use ONLY Spanish with your daughter, she might accept that easier, since Spanish is his native language. Once the communication pattern has been established in one language it is harder to change it to another, but with a bit of persevering it can be done. Do you have any Spanish speaking playgroups/ nurseries or Staurday Schools in your area? Although playgroup or Saturday School alone will not make a child to speak the minority language they can be a great help and morale booster to parents. Health visitors and libraries often have information on such groups.

I know couple of Finnish/English families in England where the minority language was dropped when the child was very small and started again when the second child was born. Long vocations in Finland where only Finnish was spoken established the minority language back to mother/child communication in one case, and the other family employed a Finnish au-pair with strict orders that she would speak only Finnish to the children.

**Marjukka Grover**

*Continued from page three*

After each meeting I circulate an updated list of group members and a short letter reminding people of any future dates we may have arranged. We have had a garden party and since one of the dads - they are mostly English- suggested that there should be an event for them to attend, we have organised a cheese and wine evening. Hopefully they will find that gathering begins to address any concerns they may have.

Our group has grown from six originally to 22 in less than a year - people attend one meeting then bring someone else along to the next one. Some of us have become decidedly evangelical about it and 'attack' people in shops and other public places when we hear a revealing conversational exchange with a child, for example the mother speaking in one language and the child replying in another! Languages represented so far include French, Spanish, German, Italian, Serbo-Croat, Swedish, Danish and Dutch, and we are looking forward to increasing these! At the end of our first meeting, one of my friends told the group that she had been advised not to use her native language with her daughter who had been diagnosed early on as having learning difficulties; she said if she had been part of a group such as ours back then, 6 or 7 years ago, she felt she would have insisted on continuing with the language. I think that rather wistful story sums up many of the attitudes and negativism that parents can face when trying to bring up children bilingually in the U.K. My own children are still quite small, so perhaps for that reason one comparison in particular springs to my mind. Bilingualism is like breastfeeding - it doesn't just happen, you have to be determined to do it, and to work hard at it initially in order for it to happen naturally eventually, but in the end both you and the child benefit for the rest of your lives.

## CONTACTS

**If you wish your name and address to be included in the contact section, please send us the following information:**

**Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the types of families with whom you would like to get in touch.**

**Please send your queries, answers and/or contributions to**

Contact details removed

c_

**Marjukka Grover at Multilingual Matters**

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to articles especially with controversial views. Intercultural life does require more effort but **being able to see the world from two windows instead of one is a rewarding experience.** Together we can help each other to overcome the obstacles which prevent us enjoying fully life with two languages and cultures.

I hope George Saunders has had a good trip to Germany and we will have his much appreciated editor's comments in the December issue of the BFN.

**Marjukka Grover**