The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

Editors:
George Saunders and Marjukka Grover

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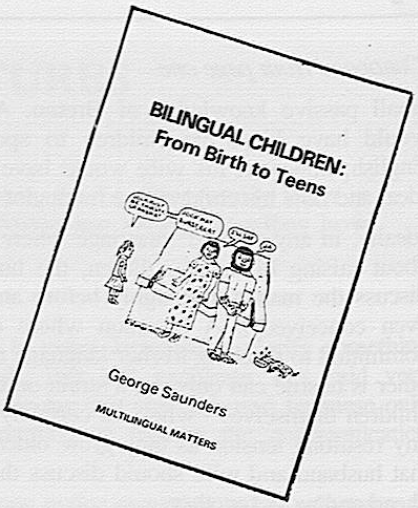


EDITORIAL

In the last issue of *'The Bilingual Family Newsletter'*, my new co-editor, Marjukka Grover, introduced herself to readers. Marjukka's new title is an appropriate acknowledgement of the role she has been performing behind the scenes for quite some time now. She also provides invaluable and much appreciated assistance in responding initially to most of the numerous readers' letters which go to the BFN's British address.

In her editorial Marjukka expressed the hope that I had had a good trip to Germany. My university kindly made available a research grant which enabled me to spend three weeks in Hamburg in September/October carrying out linguistic field-work and catching up with old friends and colleagues. Despite the catastrophic state of the Australian dollar vis-a-vis the Deutsche Mark, I decided to take my daughter, Katrina (11) with me. We always speak German to each other, but her German was getting a little rusty and she was finding it difficult to express complex ideas easily and spontaneously in German: a phenomenon no doubt many readers will recognise. (Her last visit to Germany had been in 1989.)

However, the three week visit, during which we stayed with friends who have a daughter the same age as Katrina, proved to be invaluable. Katrina loved the whole experience and wanted to stay! Her at first somewhat hesitant German became more fluent day by day as she played with her friend Sandra, watched television, joined in family activities, went shopping, and even attended a local school for two days. She returned to Australia with renewed enthusiasm for German and much greater linguistic confidence. I realise not everyone is in a position to do what I did, but I would highly recommend such a language bath for children whose fluency in their home language is waning.

In conclusion, I would like to take this opportunity on behalf of all at Multilingual Matters, myself and my family to wish all of you a happy New Year and every success with your bilingual endeavours.

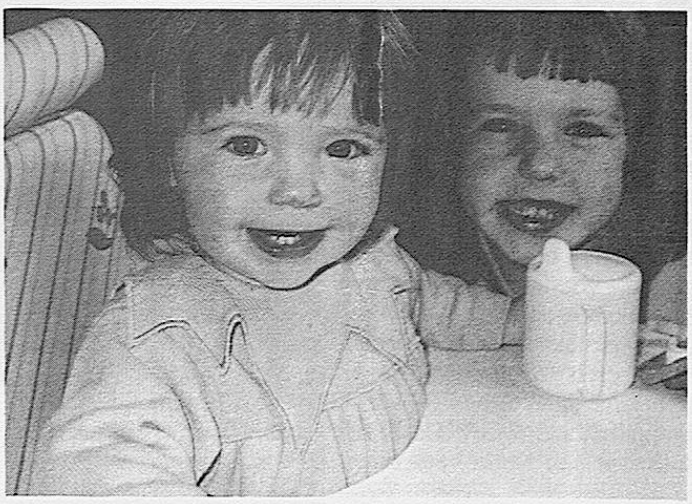
George Saunders

Marjukka Grover

PROBLEMS IN BRINGING UP CHILDREN MULTILINGUALLY

by Gerran Thomas

In an earlier article ('Natural Trilingualism', BFN 8:3, 1991) I described how my daughter Marianne had learnt to speak fluently in three languages (Welsh, French and English) by the age of five. The method used was 'one person - one language'; Marianne's mother spoke to her only in French, her childminder only in English and I only in Welsh. As I firmly believe in the value of a multilingual upbringing, the article was deliberately and explicitly encouraging to other parents who might be considering raising their children bilingually. On this occasion, I want to describe the problems which we as a family and some of our friends have encountered; I also make suggestions as to how these problems might be overcome by parents who are sufficiently committed and determined.



Marianne and Colette

The first hurdle in any attempt to allow a child to learn several languages is often the negative attitude of one parent or of other near relatives. It seems to me crucial that both parents should support the principle of bilingualism, if the child is to be bilingual. My wife's grandmothers and father all spoke Breton as a first language; however, her mother was hostile to the language despite having a good passive knowledge. As a result my wife grew up as a monolingual French speaker with a very

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small passive knowledge of Breton. A good friend of mine would have liked his children to speak Welsh as well as English; however, his wife would have nothing to do with the idea, and now his children are monoglot English speakers.

Ideally, in any 'mixed' marriage where one spouse has doubts about raising bilingual children, the husband and wife should discuss the matter thoroughly before any children are born (or even conceived!). A situation where one spouse is strongly committed to teaching his/her language to the children while the other is hostile can only put a strain on the marriage, and on the children themselves - who will certainly not remain unaware of any resulting tension as they grow older. It is clearly important that husband and wife should discuss the matter carefully, plan ahead and work together.

In our case, I was fortunate that my wife (a native French speaker) was also fluent in English; her own bilingualism was undoubtedly a factor in her decision to support (with reservations) our attempt to raise Marianne trilingually. On the other hand, my mother-in-law was not keen for Marianne to learn Welsh, which she clearly regarded (along with Breton) as a waste of time. She was also very much afraid that Marianne would not learn to speak French properly, so that she would have difficulty in communicating with her granddaughter. When Marianne began to speak, my mother-in-law had a competitive attitude, willing her to speak 'more and better' in French than in her other languages. Fortunately, this attitude did not last as my mother-in-law came to realise that Marianne was making good progress in all her languages, and that progress in one was not being made at the expense of the others.

The husband and wife should discuss the matter thoroughly before any children are born (or even conceived!).

This brings me to the second hurdle for parents - the choice of a method for enabling their children to acquire the two or three languages in question. It is clear from reading the BFN that several approaches are possible - and that different approaches can and do prove successful. These approaches are often designed to suit individual family circumstances, which vary greatly readers show ingenuity in devising methods which suit their family needs. I can only speak at first hand of the 'one person - one language' method which we used with Marianne. This method does provide children with a clear rule which they can understand from an early age. In our case also, as Marianne heard each language from a native speaker she had no difficulties with accent or with idioms. So long as this method is applied carefully by both parents, and so long as this provides sufficient practice in both languages for the child, there is no reason why it should not succeed. The method does, however, require parents to be aware at all times of what language they are speaking. Some friends of ours (English father, French mother) have also adopted the 'one person - one language' method. The parents speak together in English, as the wife is more fluent in English than the husband is in French; at times, the wife will continue speaking in English when she addresses her children - because she is fluent, she has forgotten what language she is speaking! This may well be one reason why the children at times form sentences containing a mixture of English and French words, as the 'rule' has been broken.

My wife has also on occasion made this 'mistake' and has spoken in English to our children. I am always aware of which language is being spoken (perhaps because I have been bilingual in Welsh and English from an early age) and have been quick to remind my wife to speak French to Marianne and our second daughter Colette. As a result, until very recently Marianne rarely mixed up her three languages, except when consciously 'borrowing' a word which she did not know in the language she is speaking. Unfortunately, many pupils in Marianne's Welsh-medium school are far from fluent in Welsh, and her tendency to borrow English words has been far more pronounced since we moved to Wales! My friends' daughters, on the other hand, should benefit greatly from the fact that they have now started to attend a French-medium school; this should help them to separate out their two languages.

the 'one person - one language' method does provide children with a clear rule which they can understand from an early age.

When Marianne was very small, if she used an inappropriate word I would tell her (for example): 'Yes, you say 'main' to your mother, but you should say 'llaw' to Dad'. In this way, both correct words were accepted, but Marianne was reminded which word to use with which parent. As she grew older, I would point out to her that she was speaking different languages, and mention which language to use with various friends and relatives. This explicit approach has certainly not been a hindrance, and may well have helped her to understand why she should not mix different languages. We have also been very fussy about correcting her when she borrows words, though without any hostility to the other languages.

The third problem which many parents have to overcome is to ensure that the child has sufficient opportunity to hear each language. Parents must make a conscious and sustained effort to talk, sing and read to their children over a number of years - starting with chatting to their newborn baby. This is, of course, especially important in the case of a language which a child hears only in the home from one parent. In Marianne's case

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HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Ching, Chang, Chong that's 'BONJOUR'.

One day in our local breadshop here in Belgium I spoke to the lady in French. My four year old asked her for sweets in Flemish. I answered him in English saying ''no sweets''. The lady was impressed and said to my son ''you are a clever chap speaking French, Flemish and English''. My son replied ''yes and I speak Chinese, Ching chang chong, that's 'Bonjour'''.

Helen McLachlan Opdenakker, Diegem

NEWS, NEWS, NEWS, NEWS, NEWS, NEWS

ITV in Great Britain is starting **a children's programme in French** at the beginning of January 1993. The intention of the programme is to have fun with language and to encourage children to name things in French. "Even if children don't pick up the language, you are at least getting them used to the concept that not everybody speaks the same as them" says Christine Wilding, general secretary of the Association for Language Learning.

TWO LANGUAGES, THREE CULTURES

by Kathleen S. Foley

Kathleen Foley is American, married to a Chinese man and they have one daughter, An-Li. The family lives in Tokyo and An-Li is exposed to three different cultures in her daily life. The following article descibes how An-Li is coping with her different languages and cultures.

As a parent of a bilingual child of mixed heritage, I am naturally curious about whether she is developing a single or multiple ethnic identity. I am also interested in how her perception of herself is being influenced by the fact that one of her languages is not the first language of either of her parents but of the third culture in which she is growing up. I would like to share some of our family's experiences with language in this multicultural situation because I think that many of the readers of *The Bilingual Family Newsletter* are raising children in similar circumstances.

Our five-year-old daughter was born in Shanghai to an American mother and a Chinese father. However, she has spent all but three months of her life in Tokyo, where she has attended a Japanese day care center since she was five months old.

"An-Li, are you Chinese, American, or Japanese?"

"Chinese."

"Why do you say that?"

"Because I have a Chinese name."

This conversation with my daughter at age four shows that, although she was obviously still too young to question her ethnic identity, her sense of who she was was in the process of evolving even at such a young age and that language was making a contribution to that process.

Like many other bilingual children, An-Li acquired her ability to use English and Japanese simultaneously. English is the language of the home, and Japanese is the language she uses at the day care center and with other children in the park where she usually plays.

An-Li knows that her father can speak Japanese, but she rarely used that language with him until recently. She went through a period of almost a year in which she seemed frustrated when I tried to speak to her in my admittedly poor Japanese.

"When you were a little girl, you used to like to pick dandelions."

"How old am I was?"

"What?"

"How old am I was"

"What?"

"Ikutsu was I?"

This conversation between myself and An-Li took place when she turned four and is the clearest example in my memory of a time when she resorted to using Japanese to clarify something she had said in English. Her last exchange was said very angrily, and it was clear to me that she had used Japanese only because nothing else seemed to resolve the communication problem.

There has always been one major exception to her reluctance to use Japanese at home - the singing of Japanese children's songs. I would speculate that the reason for this exception is that she and I have always sung in Japanese together while watching Japanese children's programmes.

For the past several months we have noticed An-Li using more and more Japanese at home with her father. These occasions are primarily limited to authenticating some play activity they are engaged in or mimicking something that is said on Japanese T.V. My husband and I are both aware of the potential dangers of encouraging the use of too much Japanese in the home, so we are making conscious attempts to keep Japanese within the parameters of play.

An-Li's Chinese language ability is limited to the comprehension of about 50 words and phrases for various foods and activities around the house. She feels, however, that she can speak Chinese "a little" and she actually seems to take pride in making that claim when Chinese is not being spoken around her. There have been occasions, though, when the truth about her inability to speak Chinese has surfaced.

We have had several opportunities to visit with my father-in-law, who captains a freighter between China and Japan. On some of his trips to Tokyo, An-Li has accompanied one or both of her parents to his ship. Conversations between An-Li and her grandfather are extremely hindered by the fact that she speaks virtually no Chinese and he speaks very limited Japanese and English. Surprisingly enough, their inability to communicate seems to be more strongly felt by her than by him, and An-Li reacts to this by speaking very little or not at all. However, on the rare occasions when my father-in-law has had time to visit us at our home, the situation between the two of them becomes noticeably better. They speak a mixture of the three languages to each other, and An-Li seems far more relaxed about doing so in a place where everything around her is familiar. An-Li always insisted that her communication problems with her grandfather were due to his inability to speak Japanese or English, not to her inability to speak Chinese. Only on a recent visit to Shanghai did she confess that she couldn't speak Chinese.

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Over the past few months An-Li's awareness of language has grown a great deal. When her playmates direct questions to me in Japanese, she quickly interrupts by explaining that I don't speak much Japanese but that I speak English. This is a big step away from the not too distant past when she would ask me in confusion why her playmates couldn't speak English. She also used to alternate between finding humour in and withdrawing from situations in which Japanese children would approach her in a park and say "Hello. What's your name?" in English.

Several weeks ago An-Li had the chance to use English for the first time with the daughter of a colleague of mine. The other little girl is a year older than An-Li and speaks Cantonese and English. Immediately upon being introduced in English, the two of them held hands and stuck to each other speaking conspiratorially in English for several hours.

It is important that An-Li be allowed to outgrow any remaining confusion she has about language and, at the same time, that she receive our support and reassurance when problems involving language arise.

Her father and I feel that it is important that An-Li be allowed to outgrow any remaining confusion she has about language and, at the same time, that she receive our support and reassurance when problems involving language arise. In this way we hope to alleviate any negative feelings she may have about her lack of Chinese and promote the positive feelings that arise out of contacts with her Chinese relatives.

As far as her ability to speak Japanese, I am still not sure what that might mean to her in terms of how she identifies with, in particular, other Japanese children. One of the childcare workers at the day care center told me that An-Li doesn't use English there but that her Japanese classmates know that she can speak English because they overhear her conversations with me when I pick her up and drop her off each day.

"An-Li, when do you speak English?"

"When I have brown hair."

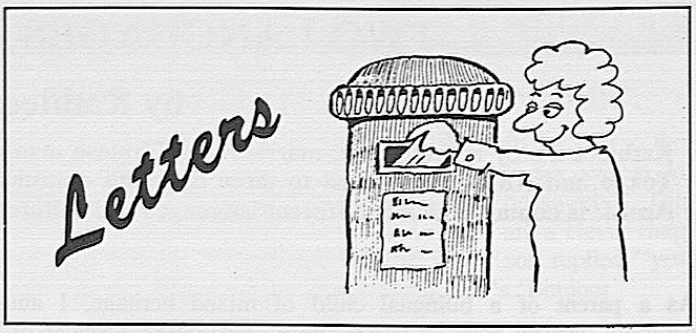
"When do you speak Japanese?"

"When I have black hair."

When I told a friend of this conversation, he asked me if she hadn't meant that she speaks English to people with brown hair (like mine) and Japanese to people with black hair. At the time, I also thought that was what she had meant. Later, however, I wondered whether An-Li might feel she has the chamelonic ability to change her appearance to adapt to the appearance of persons with whom she associates English and Japanese.

I feel strongly that An-Li's life is being enriched by her contacts with the U.S., China, and Japan, not to mention the increased awareness she has of other languages and cultures through her participation in the activities of the international community here in Tokyo. The question of ethnic identity is not as polarised for her as it is for many other mixed heritage children. Perhaps, in the words of sociologist Robert E. Park, An-Li (and children like her) will grow up to become **"the individual with the wider horizon, the keener intelligence, the more detached and rational viewpoint . . . always relatively the more civilized human being."** (pp. 375-6)

(Park, Robert Ezra (1950) *Race and Culture*, London: The Free Press.)



MULTICULTURALISM, GLOBAL NOMADISM AND THE THIRD- CULTURE KID SYNDROME

I subscribed to the *'Bilingual Family Newsletter'* for the obvious reason that my husband and I are raising our daughter (Rossella, three years and two months) to be bilingual in Italian and English. He is Italian, I am American and we are probably permanently settled in Italy. So your articles are interesting and often useful. But I feel there's a side to this discussion which (in the three to four issues I've read) has been addressed only obliquely, in the article by Zoe Loukopoulos (the American woman living in Greece), and that is multiculturalism.

Multiculturalism, global nomadism, and the third-culture kid syndrome are all closely related topics which, as you probably know, are beginning to be seriously studied by psychologists. One such person I've met and corresponded with is David Pollock of Interaction Inc. (address: PO Box 950, Fillmore, NY 14735-0950, USA), who does workshops for missionary kids and other 'returnees' during and after the tough transition from life overseas to life in America. He gives a very stimulating and often healing lecture on what it means to be a global nomad, and I highly recommend it to anyone who can manage to catch him on his wide travels (contact Interaction for his schedule, I suppose).

I am myself a global nomad, having been born in America of American parents, but then raised all over the globe, mostly in Asia and partly in the U.S. I attended Woodstock School, a boarding school in India, where the student body was extremely international - at the time 1/3 Indian, 1/3 American and Canadian (mostly missionaries) and 1/3 'other', which ranged from Irani to Thai to Finnish. In that environment even kids who had been born in India and never left their home country became to some extent multicultural.

Most BFN readers seem to be on the forefront of this trend of global mobility and our experiences may someday (even soon!) prove valuable to others who will follow in our footsteps.

Multiculturalism, plurality of religions, beliefs, and viewpoints, was the rule rather than the exception at Woodstock. Most student romances were of mixed-race/bicultural couples. Many students went on to marry people (schoolmates or not) not of their home culture or of a different race and/or religion, and many have settled in countries other than their native ones.

I feel that our experiences during and after our school years represent in microcosm a phenomenon which is growing rapidly in the world, and which obviously affects many subscribers to BFN. In today's highly mobile and fluid world, many of us choose (or are forced) to live in and adapt to cultures not originally our own. Whether we marry foreigners and move to their countries out of love, or flee or homes for reasons of war,

persecution or poverty, we all face similar difficulties. Most BFN readers seem to be on the forefront of this trend of global mobility and our experiences may someday (even soon!) prove valuable to others who will follow in our footsteps. So it's important that we work together to deal with the stresses and enjoy the advantages of being multicultural people, and help our bilingual children to do the same.

What does it mean to be multicultural? (In spite of my pontifical style, I don't claim to have all the answers, and am hoping to stimulate a dialogue here!) We who have lived for long periods in foreign countries are no longer wholly citizens of our native lands, at least not in cultural terms. But in most cases neither are we so assimilated into our second countries that we feel we belong entirely to those cultures. I do not feel 100 per cent American, especially when I'm in America, but neither do I expect ever to feel 100 per cent Italian. What am I?

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I've come to terms with the fact that, for myself, that question can't be answered in old-fashioned nationalistic terms. But having a child brings up a whole new set of questions: What would I like Rossella to be? (And how much choice do I get?) Do I want her to be wholly Italian? On the one hand, it might save her some of the pain I experienced returning to America when I realized I'd never quite fit in. But as I've grown older I've also learnt to appreciate the advantages of my multicultural viewpoint, and would not want to deny her those strengths. Beyond the American part of me, I would also like her to grow up to appreciate the things I love about Asia, particularly India.

I feel that we as multilingual, multicultural parents have far more to offer our children than just bilingualism. Many of us, by the examples of our lives, are also demonstrating just how small the world is growing, and how we can be enriched by open attitudes and a willingness to accept others' differences. It's an important lesson for the world in these days of ethnic strife and I hope we can explore together ways of teaching it, first to our children, and then to the world.

Deirdré Straughan Laeng, Milano, Italy

You must have read my thoughts when writing your letter in October. As you will see from the editorial in the October Newsletter, for a long time I have wanted to address in the BFN other aspects of multicultural living. From time to time we have had a few articles on biculturalism but, as the majority of readers have experienced intercultural living, I do feel it is an area we could explore more fully in the forthcoming issues and your letter was like an answer to my request.

I made my 'big move' twenty years ago when falling in love with an Englishman brought me to England. Moving from a very mono-cultural, small Finnish town to multicultural Great Britain brought its own emotional upheaval, which I had not fully anticipated. I agree with you that by sharing our experiences we may help others . Being open about the problems and being aware of what kind of emotional difficulties we may face when moving countries will help us to settle in quicker and better and, as you say, having multicultural children will raise other important issues.

We look forward to receiving more material on this very important topic.

Marjukka Grover

GREETINGS FROM CZECH/ GREEK-CYPRIOT FAMILY

I am of Czech nationality and Czech is my mother tongue. During my teens I lived for four years in Great Britain, studied for A-levels and spent a year at London University. My command of English is good, but I never considered myself bilingual. While at the University of Prague I met my future husband who is a Greek-Cypriot. We live now in the north-eastern part of Greece in a Czech-Greek marriage. My husband's command of Czech is very good, having lived in Czechoslovakia during his university studies. We now have a son aged 4 years 6 months. The bilingualism of our child has always been at the forefront in my mind and I always try to think and plan ahead. Thus, when our child was nine months old I requested answers from you to some of my queries (July 1989 Newsletter).

I asked you then how we should speak to our child. Should we adhere to the 'one parent/one language rule'? I myself considered it not a very good idea in our situation because Czech is such a rare language, especially as we are living in Greece. I considered it best to provide as much exposure to Czech as possible. In your answer to my question you supported this view. So since our child's birth I have been speaking to him almost exclusively Czech and my husband approximately 75 per cent Czech. Until the age of one year eight months he had either myself, his Czech grandmother or another Czech caretaker at his side. After that he started to attend a Greek nursery school. He had no problem with the two languages, nor getting used to the Greek nursery school's environment. I have tried to obtain on an ongoing basis Czech children's books, audio cassettes for children and Czech video cassettes. Fortunately the quality of these children's entertainment products in Czechoslovakia is very high and as a result even now he often prefers the Czech books or programmes. I remember how happy I felt, and still feel of course, when I saw him engrossed in a Czech audiotape fairy tales, realising that, if we did not care, the sounds could mean nothing to him. Or the time when my mother came to visit us and my son would spend a whole hour conversing in Czech with his grandma in her room without any problem. Again I realized that to our son, not knowing Czech, she could be a completely foreign person and such an ease of approaching her would be lost completely.

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ADOPTION and BILINGUALISM

I am an American, a translator and copywriter and have lived in Germany for 22 years. My two daughters from my first marriage are now adult and are trilingual, with both spoken and written fluency in German, English and Polish. Although I was aware of the existence of 'The Bilingual Family Newsletter', the development of my daughters' trilingualism was natural, without problems, so I never subscribed.

The situation has now significantly changed. My second wife, Siggi - a German who, fortunately, is fluent in English - and I have just adopted two lovely German children, siblings: Marco, 5 and Nadine, 7. Other than a few stray words and phrases picked up from television and popular songs, they know not a word of English. I would like them to become fluent in English for three reasons: (1) English is a major part of my cultural background, which I wish to share with them; (2) knowing English would open up communications with my family in the States and (3) as the international language, attaining at least spoken English fluency will be highly useful for them as adults (and, incidentally, make life easier for them later when at school they begin learning written English as well).

The acquisition of trilingualism by now grown-up daughters came about naturally, without a fixed plan. My first wife is Polish and we spoke her mother tongue at home, so that became their first language. Then, through contact with the neighbourhood kids they picked up German - which, interestingly, has since become their 'native' tongue: they use it when conversing alone with each other. Later, when they were 3 and 5, my first wife and I separated. A positive aspect of an otherwise difficult situation was that this made it possible for me to begin more intensively to speak English to them during our weekend visits alone. English finally firmly 'set' as their third language when they moved in with me for some time, attending the English-speaking international school in our area for two years before switching to German schools (and moving back with their mother),

With Marco and Nadine, the situation is entirely different; if they are to become fluent in English, it must now be introduced 'artificially' at a considerably later age than was the case with my daughters.

As I see it, the burden must be largely on me as a native English speaker. Yet, the introduction of English within the framework of a primarily German-speaking family appears to be no easy task. Fortunately, the kids are lively, curious and quite intelligent. Most importantly, they truly want to learn English - I suspect their motivation is a mixture of curiosity about my language and the fact that English is used in most popular music heard in Germany (they've already picked up some phrases from American folk music and popular songs). They'd also like to be able to communicate with their American grandma, uncles and cousins.

As a first step, we've introduced a mixed strategy - deliberately speaking English to each other occasionally in front of the kids in order to tweak their curiosity, while at the same time teaching them some English words or phrases. This strategy is working to a degree (my father also picked up the language of his immigrant parents because they switched to it when he wasn't supposed to understand what they were saying). However they are now becoming increasingly irritated when we speak English between ourselves.

I'm not sure where to go from here. One minor problem is my wife's accent. Although fluent in English, she has a pronounced accent. As a result, I feel I should be the primary English speaker with the kids. Fortunately, this is feasible, as I work from home and Siggi and I are sharing the parenting, so I am often alone with the kids. I'm planning to get them interesting children's books in English and perhaps some Sesame Street videos. But the International School alternative, which made things so easy in the case of my two daughters, is not now feasible. What else? Have any readers had similar experiences? Besides adopting children, the problem could also arise, for example, in connection with an international marriage with one spouse with children from a prior marrige.

Stephen A. Klain, Riedstadt, Germany.

You write that Nadine and Marco appear keen to learn English, and that is certainly a good start. The fact that you are American and that the children now have American relatives should provide a good source of motivation.

Your home situation could be made to resemble immersion programmes which operate successfully in various parts of the world, e.g. French immersion programmes for English speaking children in Canada. That is, you could have a home English immersion programme, in which you speak English to the children as much as possible, at first preferably in situations where the children can deduce the meaning from the context. Explain to them what you plan to do, telling them that whilst it will be strange at first and they will not understand everything initially, they will learn a lot of English if they are willing to try. Don't attempt to stop them speaking to you in German, but give them encouragement whenever they say anything in English, even if it is only inserting one English word in a basically German sentence. Don't suddenly pretend not to understand German, but acknowledge the children's German utterances with an English reply. They will undoubtedly regularly use their German to seek confirmation that they have understood your English: ''Meinst du..., Bedeutet das...?'' This is fine and shows that they are learning. Read them English stories and show them English videos, explaining difficult words or phrases in German if need be.

Whether you can change over completely to using just English so suddenly or will need to phase it in gradually for certain periods of the day/week is something you can best judge for yourself. Doing so does increase the amount of English the children will hear, and if it is not done to the extent that the children feel excluded from family conversations it should not be any danger to family harmony. If you can visit your American relatives, or get them to visit you, the children's learning of English will be given a real boost. Contacts with other English-speaking families in your area would also be very useful. We wish you every success with your plan. Please let us know what happens. We would also be very interested in hearing from readers who have faced a similar situation.

George Saunders

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both my wife and I were working full time until she was aged 3:9 years; our only opportunity to talk at length to Marianne came between around 4.15 p.m. and her bedtime. Despite our tiredness after the day's work, we made sure that we did talk, play and read with Marianne in the evenings and at weekends. As we were both working as teachers, we were fortunate in having long holidays which gave us another opportunity to help her progress. In term-time, she heard mainly English from her child-minder and at play-school, so English tended to take a bit of a lead - with the other languages catching up in the holidays!

In other families wherse one parent may be absent for long periods in connection with work, other strategies must be found to provide sufficient language input, e.g. audio and video tapes, visits by children who speak the absent parent's language, holidays to the parent's country etc. It is essential to provide sufficient input in each language; fortunately, readers of the Newsletter often find ingenious solutions to problems of this type.

Many - perhaps most - of us will have been stared at in the street by people startled to hear a foreign tongue.

Another common difficulty arises from the attitude of society at large to hearing a 'strange' language being spoken. Many - perhaps most - of us will have been stared at in the street by people startled to hear a foreign tongue. It would not be so bad if this attitude was confined to strangers, but unfortuantely many of us have acquaintances who also show their unease when they are unable to understand a conversation between parent and child. One is made to feel that it is somehow impolite to speak to one's own child in one's native tongue - even if the conversation does not concern them and/or is translated for their benefit!

This type of insularity can at times approach cultural terrorism: I shall never forget an occasion when I, my wife and the French 'assistante' sat together in the school canteen, and started to speak together in French. Halfway through our meal, a group of English-speaking teachers sat at the same table, most were quite happy to talk among themselves and let us get on with it, but one 'lady' started to make a series of increasingly rude and hostile remarks about our French conversation, so that we were eventually obliged to switch to English. Many other people, in a less blatant or overt way, convey the same message: 'We don't like it when you talk that language'. One (French-speaking) friend of ours responded by speaking English to her daughter when in the presence of English people. It is, perhaps not surprising that her daughter went through a period of refusing to speak French to her mother. The message to the child in this type of behaviour seems to be: 'There's something to be ashamed of in speaking this language!'. To avoid giving the child this impression, parents should be encouraged to develop a thick skin and continue to speak their own language to the child on all occasions. When the reasons are explained, I have found my friends to be invariably sympathetic. The attitude of strangers in the street should not matter to those who are really committed to their children's bilingualism. Fortunately, our friend persisted in speaking French to her daughter, and now gets answers in the same language - the problem (when it occurs) is usually temporary so long as the parents do not give in.

The older child will encounter a new problem when s/he begins to read and write. Alphabets (and even scripts, of course) differ from language to language, and pronounciation of the same 'letter' differs widely. This is potentially a greater problem than learning to speak more than one language, for a conscious effort is needed on the part of the child to learn to read even one language. Six months ago, Marianne (who was then aged 6) was making good progress in reading Welsh, and was also often prepared to 'have a go' at reading English (including road-signs and cornflake packets!) though she found this more difficult. She was reluctant to make an effort in French, regarding this as being the hardest of all. My wife's policy was not to force the pace of reading in French, but to coax Marianne into the occasional effort. This has proved to be a very wise decision, as Marianne is by now far more confident in French and has continued to make progress in the other languages.

The final problem which I wish to mention is - strangely enough - Marianne herself; at least, she is a bit of a problem for her younger sister Colette (now 2 years old). Whereas my wife and I speak to Colette in our first languages, and the child-minder speaks to her in English, Marianne is equally likely to address her sister in any one of her three languages - and confuses the matter further by using 'baby-talk'! I do not know if this is the reason, but whereas Marianne already had a large vocabulary by her second birthday, Colette has been much slower to speak. I do hope that the garbled message Colette is receiving from her sister will not retard her language development, or confuse her in a way that Marianne herself was never confused. Having given my suggestions on how to solve a number of problems in this article, I'd like to finish by turning the tables on readers of the BFN and asking if anyone has advice for me? There must be plenty of readers who have lived through similar circumstances!

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

"THINK GLOBAL, ACT LOCAL" a seminar for bilingual families from Finland and German -speaking middle Europe is planned for 2nd-14th August 1993.

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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

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Marjukka Grover at Multilingual Matters

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His Greek, however, is beginning to dominate - he attends a daily Greek nursery school - and almost all his friends speak Greek as their mother tongue. We are fortunate that near to us live a Greek family, all born in Czechoslovakia, who speak Czech as their 'mother' tongue and who intend to bring their children up bilingually. Our last visit to Czechoslovakia was a year ago and that was a big boost to our son's Czech.

Despite our efforts lately he tends to speak Greek at home and I have been trying gently to impose the rule that Czech should be spoken at home. My husband supports me in this but it is sometimes more convenient for him, and sometimes even for me, to answer him in Greek.

In my letter to you in 1989 I asked about the possible confusion that could be caused by the fact that the Czech expression for 'yes' sounds completely the same as the Greek expression for 'no'. In the end this never caused much problem, only on occasion have we asked 'Do you mean a Czech 'no' or a Greek 'yes''.

Recently I have started teaching my son the Latin alphabet which is used in Czech, with the intention of teaching him to read before he goes to the Greek elementary school. He is very interested in the letters, has grasped very quickly the meaning of the syllable and has a very good memory. I was delighted to read in George Saunders' book '*Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens*' that this is what he suggests; to teach the child to read in the minority language before he starts school in the majority language. I am now trying to find out where I could obtain the two books suggested by Saunders: Glenn Doman* and Felicity Hughes**. I would welcome any help in locating them.

We have also started our son with lessons in English. By chance I found here in Komotini a nursery teacher who is Brazilian, but spent 7 years in England and is proficient in the Montessori method as applied to foreign language learning by preschool children. I like her approach very much and my son is definitely enjoying it. From the age of approximately two years I have been showing him some English video cassettes for preschool children and he himself sometimes asks for them and is capable of listening to them with attention.

To sum it all up, and at the risk of sounding too self-satisfied, I think that until now we have been doing the right things and, in looking back, I do not think I would make any substantial changes in our actions, except of course things like visiting Czechoslovakia more often, which is subject to limitations outside of our control - days off work are limited and the travel is financially demanding. I can only hope that we are as successful in the future as we have been up till now, though I realize that the main obstacles are still in front of us.

Thank you very much for your personal help as well as the support I get from the Newsletter and the other publications of Multilingual Maters.

Miloslava Ruzkova, Komotini, Greece

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