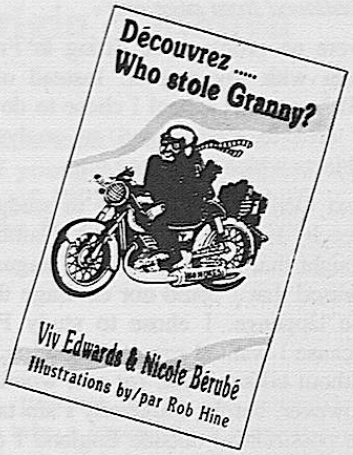
# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

*Editors:*
George Saunders and Marjukka Grover **1993 Volume 10 No.1**


## EDITORIAL

To some of our readers, raising children with just (!) two languages must appear a relatively uncomplicated procedure. These readers are parents whose children are exposed to more than two languages. In the last issue of the BFN we had a stimulating and informative article by Gerran Thomas, 'Problems in Bringing Up Children Multilingually', in which he described how his daughters acquired Welsh, French and English. In the present issue, we have a letter from Alain and Xiao-Ji Bertholet who are just embarking on bringing up their child with French, Mandarin, English and Dutch. As was seen in Gerran Thomas's article, the problems faced by multilingual families are very similar to those confronting bilingual families, as are the possible solutions to these problems. Of course, the situation becomes somewhat more complex as the number of languages increases, and more organisation is needed to ensure that the children receive adequate input in each of their languages and, just as importantly, produce output in them.

We would be very interested in hearing from readers who were themselves or whose children are being raised in three or more languages.

**George Saunders**

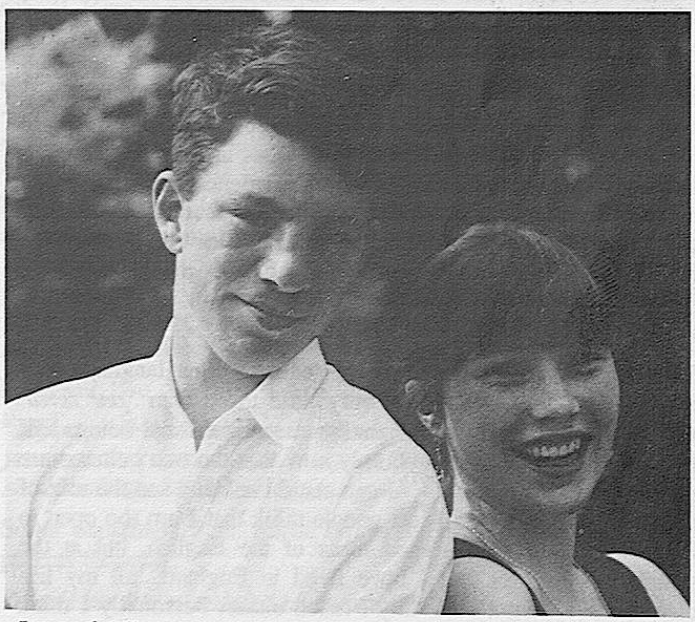
## BICULTURALISM: LOOKING BACK AS I LEAVE HOME


**Alice Byram**



**In Vol.1, No. 4, 1984 of BFN Alice's parents described their strategies in raising Alice (then ten years old) and her younger brother Ian, bilingually in French/English. This article shows how consistent strategies and positive efforts by parents can give children balanced bicultural identities and open minds towards other cultures and languages.**


We have continued to speak only French at home. While at primary school, we spent one afternoon a week at home to have French lessons with our mother, Marie-Therese, and we tried to continue this throughout Secondary School. During the first two years of Secondary School I took the opportunity offered by the school of learning German instead of French as a first academically learnt language but continued to do some French on an informal basis at home and during the holidays. However when I reached the third year and everyone was given the possibility of learning a further language, I started to go to an 'A' level literature class and the following year I attended a GCSE class (GCSE = General Certificate of Secondary Education, taken at the age of 16). At the end of this year I took the GCSE exam a year early and which my brother then proceeded to take two years early; the only disadvantage was



*Ian and Alice*

feeling slightly out of place in the exam room. While attending classes with pupils several years older, I personally experienced only increased social contacts, as other pupils felt at too much of a disadvantage to even think of mocking me. It was at this point I started to realise the advantages of being bilingual, although earlier on the extra classes and being different in a fairly conservative Primary School had at times seemed unfair. It is true that there were times when my being half foreign was used as an insult, but no more than having freckles or curly hair, as other children were invariably curious and always ended up by asking me to say "say some French".

During the GCSE years I again stopped doing French lessons and instead concentrated on nine other subjects so that at the end I had an additional GCSE. (Here again our two cultures came in useful as I did a study of my home area in France for my Geography project, and my brother made a comparison of the French and British electoral systems.) In the sixth form I studied four 'A' levels - French, German, English and General Studies - and Human and Social Biology A/S level. Due to the flexibility of the sixth form timetable with its free periods, there


*Continued on page two*

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were no problems in fitting in French lessons at home, once again with my mother. Instead of doing the literature-based syllabus of the school I chose to do a combination of a study of an area in France and an analysis of the year 1991, both subjects which interested me.

Next October I am going to study German and Spanish with French as a subsidiary at Cambridge. Although I initially thought that to continue with languages would be boring, I also realised that I could not envisage three or four years with only one language. I chose to study French only as a subsidiary because I wanted some recognition of my abilities in French but without taking what, for me, would have been the easy option. However, before University I am taking a year out; having seen the possibilities outside England I do not have a burning desire to start studying again straight away.

For a month after my 'A' levels I worked for a Gas, Electricity and Water Company in Moers, West Germany. Here I not only perfected my German but also gained insight into the German working life, something not possible on school exchanges, along with some valuable experiences. I was very lucky in having sympathetic people to live and work with, which made it hard for me to leave. During September I went inter-railing through Europe with a friend and again the experiences of adapting to different cultures made the holiday a big success. It was also useful to be able to change nationalities depending on whichever was most welcome, as along with my patriotism it depends on who is winning the rugby or football.

> It is true that there were times when my being half foreign was used as an insult but no more than having freckles or curly hair.

Now I am working as an au pair in Jerez de la Frontera, Southern Spain, for a family who speak no other language than Spanish and I, at first, knew very little more than '*por favor*' and '*gracias*'. Here I am always introduced as being half French and half English and, only now that the two cultures are accepted on an equal basis, I can stand back and see the mix of influences and cultures. Most people think that I am too open to fit in with their stereo-typed ideas of the English, but at the same time the fact that I have lived in England all my life means that I cannot be totally French either. Personally I think that many of my ideas about home life are more French than English, especially concerning food and meal times, but experience shows that my sense of humour is definitely more English.

That we have two cultures is something which my parents have always emphasised, with constant contact with France through frequent phone calls to family, French radio and magazines, a French attitude to meal times, time for discussion and appreciation, as well as yearly holidays to France. These holidays have long since been accepted as inevitable and necessary by our friends, for whom it is as if we disappear off the face of the earth. At the same time both my brother and I have not seen these in the same category as the two weeks in Marbella or Bordeaux of our class-mates. To us it was no different than anyone going to see their Grandma in Devon. For my brother dual-nationality has lead him to confront the problem of having to do military service in order to retain his French passport. My parents have been careful not to put him under any pressure - they feel nationality and cultural heritage are dependent on more important things than a piece of paper. In my case my defence of either France or England was at times too forceful and less than diplomatic, with the end result that I often took the blame for all that France did when I was in England and vice-versa. Sometimes this was because of the jealousy of friends who did not accept that I had two cultures.

Language-wise I prefer to speak French as it is my home and holiday language, although I think that I can express myself more eloquently in English, because it was the language in which I was educated. When speaking English I have no accent, other than a slight tinge of Geordie, but when speaking French people are aware, if not that I am English, then at least that I am not from their area. This is probably due to the influence of Parisian friends, holidays in Mayenne (Western France) and the standard French of my mother and French radio. Being bilingual also facilitated learning other languages, because I am used to swopping languages and thinking in a different language and also through the added motivation of seeing how languages had practical uses. Having the confidence to experiment with words until I was understood was my salvation when starting au-pairing and I am sure that my transformation into understanding almost everything, from a starting point of almost nothing, in the space of three months is due in no small way of being bilingual in French and English.

> It was also useful to be able to change nationalities depending on whichever was most welcome.

This is only one of the many advantages I find in being bilingual. Generally I think I am more likely to appreciate, if not agree with, other people's points of view, because my upbringing showed me many contrasting opinions, all of which are equally valid in their place. It has also meant that I find myself to be very adaptable almost to the point of being blasé about some new experiences. Swopping cultures on a daily basis has meant that other areas, such as leaving home, did not hold any fears for me.

**Although I will never be able to feel a true Geordie and even less a true Mayennais, because of never being able to intergrate completely into one culture at what would be the expense of the other, I do feel most strongly that I have two homes, England and France.**

## CONTRIBUTIONS, CONTRIBUTIONS

Please continue to send us your 'stories', anecdotes, jokes, useful hints or any other contributions you think might interest our readers .

**Remember, this Newsletter is for you,**
***but above all, by you.***

## HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Elodie (4 years old French/ English bilingual, waiting with Mummy at a busy airport for Daddy's arrival): '*You wouldn't leave me on my own here, would you Mummy?*'

Mummy: *'No darling, of course not.'*

Elodie: *'No I'm too expensive.'*

('Trop cher' in French means 'too dear' to either heart or pocket!)

**Christine Frati, Vienne, France**

# BICULTURAL IDENTITIES: A Study of 'Asian Origin' Children

## by Paul Ghuman and Anita Kamoth

**Dr Paul Ghuman is a lecturer at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth. He has taught in multicultural schools for seven years and has undertaken a major research project on bicultural identities of young Asians in Britain and Canada. His book *'Coping With Two Cultures'* will be published in the autumn of 1993 by Multilingual Matters. Anita Kamoth works in Hounslow Support Services. This is their report on the findings of an inquiry conducted in a primary school in Hounslow, London.**

### INTRODUCTION

British schools, by and large, reflect the values and norms of the white Anglo-Saxon middle class. The key ones of these are: development of autonomy, encouragement of self-expression and gender equality. The following class examples illustrate this:

**Teacher:** *" It doesn't matter if you get it wrong, I want you to think for yourself - don't talk to others." "The Asian girls in my class are so hardworking, mature and thoughtful - if only they were more assertive."*

Most Asian parents, on the other hand, emphasise the importance of family cohesion and interests over individual self-development and unquestioning respect to older members of the household. For example:

**Sandeep:** *"My mum says do this and do that"*

**Anita Kamoth:** *"What sort of things?"*

**Sandeep:** *"Empty the dustbins, dry all the things that I have just washed. Do the hoovering, bring me this, bring me that. But never to my brother Mohinder - who gets away with doing nothing."*

According to a distinguished Indian scholar, Professor Parekh:

*"Indian society is not a bourgeois-liberal society, for not the individual but the family is its basic unit."*

Therefore, it is likely that Asian primary school children would experience a degree of conflict and anxiety because of the differing norms of the school and home. However, most multi-ethnic schools have made changes in their formal and informal curricula to bridge this gap. Bilingual and multilingual signs, for instance, are to be found in classrooms and school reception areas. Ethnic festivals have become as much a part of the school calendar as the celebration of Christmas. This is in marked contrast to the experience of Anita Kamoth, who also attended a primary school in Hounslow.

*"At the age of nine I remember standing by a white teacher at playtime. A younger white boy approached me and asked me if he could play with my ball and when I refused he retorted 'well go back home then.' The teacher beside me chose to ignore the incident. What was more significant was my own perception at that time. I felt powerless that I had no right to complain about it and if I had done I don't know how I would have expressed myself. Today children approach me in the playground complaining about racist behaviour with an expectation that the perpetrators will be dealt with.*

*At the age of 6 I also remember being asked by a teacher what sort of food I ate: when I told her my favourite was rice, yoghurt and pickle - she repled 'what a strange combination'. After that my answers for any questions to do with food and what I ate at home became standardised egg and chips. Children nowadays reply confidently 'subsi', 'roti' and 'delhi'. If you don't know what these dishes are most Indian children will explain in detail and translate quite accurately into English for those who are less knowledgeable."*

### SCHOOL AND CHILDREN

Anita Kamoth teaches in a primary school in Hounslow, therefore it was convenient to take a group of 10 boys and 10 girls from the school for in-depth interviews. All the children were born in England. They belong to the Muslim, Sikh and Hindu faiths. The school is 80% ethnic: the majority of the children are of South Asian origin. The staff of the school is mainly white, but there are a number of Asian and Afro-Caribbean teachers. The children were interviewed in a very informal way to find out their attitudes to school, home, language, food and personal identity.

The majority of the children said that they liked coming to school. Here is a typical reply:

*" Well, when you stay at home in the summer holidays sometimes you get bored because you don't really have anything to do. At school I like maths a lot. The thing I like about school is you can meet your friends everyday. You can do lots of things."*

Nearly all the children (18/20) felt that school was important and related this importance to their future employment:

*"It'll help you in the future to get a better job."*

*"If you don't get any 'A' levels and 'O' levels, you just get a rubbish job - cleaning toilets or something."*

However, two did express a different view,

*" If you didn't go to school and somebody asked you a question you wouldn't know what to say and what the answer would be, so schools are important to get a good education".*

Some expressed their initial responses by relating what their parents thought:

*"Yeah, my mum and dad always say so"*

### HOME LIFE

All the children lived in the nuclear family set up - a pattern radically different from the Indian sub-continent where joint households are quite common (extended family). From the responses we gathered that children spent most of their 'home time' watching TV. The most watched television programme was the Australian soap 'Neighbours'. Reasons for watching this were:

*" Its like the day in the life". "Ordinary films are just action - there is no meaning to them like in Neighbours". " Things happen in it; you can't wait for the cliff hanger.".*

Three boys said they preferred to watch 'Family Pride' when it was on. This soap-opera is based on the life of an Asian business family in the West Midlands. Comments on the programme were:

*"It's something from the same culture as me". "It's about our Asian people."*

Although soaps such as Neighbours are very popular, a considerable number (12) watched Asian films at least once

*Continued on page four*

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a week. This was the only occasion at home when most, if not all, the family assembled together. Typical comments were:

*"It's fun to watch with all my family." "I usually watch when my mum's got a day off 'cos then it isn't very exciting, its only me in the house watching". "My mum mainly watches all the Indian films. So if I haven't got anything to do then I watch it with her."*

Half of the sample listen regularly to Sunrise Radio, a local Asian radio station that has programmes in English as well as many Asian languages. It also broadcasts current news and stories from India and Pakistan.

**FOOD**

The whole sample described their home diet as being a mixture of Asian and Western style food, pizzas, chilli burgers, roti and subsi were frequently mentioned. The reasons for this mixture was best summed up by Shruti.

*"I like roti and bhangan, bhindia and that's about it - I do like it but sometimes I have to have a change, 'cos I do get sick of it."*

**RELIGION**

The religious composition was as follows: 10 Sikhs, 8 Hindus, 1 Muslim, and 1 mixed Sikh/Hindu. This is a representative sample of the school's population as a whole. 17 children thought religion is important to them for their personal development and 3 did not answer. 14 children went regularly to their place of worship and 6 on special occasions. 15 children had a copy of the holy book at home and 5 did not. 18 children could say something about their religion and 2 did not know anything. The reasons given for saying religion was important ranged from:

*" It gives you a bit more, if you're in religion it gives you a bit more force to help you cope maybe." "Miss, it's hard to live without believing"* to *"I think religion's very important because if there's a kind of war going on between two religions then those other religions will know who are between the war."*

All children explained their routine when they visited their holy building by explaining it in terms of the religion's rituals and etiquettes, e.g. removing shoes, giving money. However one child remarked:

*"I have a laugh, my cousins are always there. My mum goes to pray, but I go half to pray, half to play."*

**LANGUAGE**

All twenty children speak another language apart from English. 3 Hindi/English, 1 Urdu/English, the rest Punjabi/English. They all agreed that it was important to speak their mother tongue. The reasons they gave for considering it to be important fell broadly into two categories; to communicate with older members in their family and to use it when they went back to their parents' homeland; and for reasons to do with culture.

Reasons of Communication (9)

**Muhish:** *"Just in case there's an emergency and you need to like .... somebody doesn't understand English ...."*

Reasons of Culture (8)

**Suneeta:** *"It's just our culture, we just have to stick with it".*

Both Culture and Communication (3)

**Kiranjit:** *"It's my home language and it's important to learn so I can send letters to my home country."*

I asked Pardip and Kathna, a Sikh and Hindu respectively, whether they thought speaking their mother tongue was important, they said yes, because it was part of their religion. This is often something more common with younger pupils and also illustrates how closely children perceive the language and their religion. The idea of Punjabi language is associated with Sikhism and Urdu speakers with Islam.

**Table 1:** Language, Mother Tongue (MT) Literacy

| M.T. Literate/ | Semi Literate/ | Literate in English Only/ | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 2 | 6 | 12 | = 20 |

**Table 2 :** Mother Tongue Lessons out of School

| Have been / | Attend now / | Do not attend / | Total |
|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | 5 | 11 | = 20 |

As the table shows almost half the sample have or are experiencing some mother tongue tuition. When asked why some stopped, we got a mixed response:

*" I used to go to Punjabi lessons but boys kept on teasing me so I just left." "I only went for a couple of lessons and then I didn't want to go because then I started going to clubs."*

Most primary schools in Hounslow now let out their premises to community groups wishing to hold mother tongue classes. This compares favourably with the late seventies and early eighties when you could only learn some languages in Gurudwaras and Mandirs.

**THE USE OF MOTHER TONGUE IN SCHOOL**

Half the children used English only all the time, but 10/20 used the mother tongue when conversing with friends. Even the children who did speak to their friends in their mother-tongue, did so rarely. Here are some examples:

*"Sometimes with people on my table we have a laugh in Punjabi and my friend Natalie she gets angry, she says' What are you saying? Tell me' she gets angry, so we don't speak it much."*

*"Sometimes I speak it in school to Pardip and Gupreet then Pardip's going 'Oh Kidha' speaking in Punjabi. Sometimes she gets really silly and I say why do you keep going 'PAGAL' (Mad)."*

Over half the sample said they would teach/speak their MT to their children. This sentiment was best summed up by Shruti:

*"Yes, I would* (speak Punjabi to my children), *'cos I think its important to keep the traditions up."*

This contrasted with those who said they were indifferent: *"Could be, maybe, if they wanted to learn, that is"* to catergorically *"No English."*

**IDENTITY**

The children were asked three questions relating to their identities: had they encountered racism? did they feel British or Indian?; and did they think they belonged to this country? 14 felt that they were British, 4 felt only sometimes and 2 said they did not. Among the 14 some felt the need to expand and qualify the term British. Typical replies were:

*"I'll say I'm a British person but I'm an Asian." "I have to call myself a British person cause I'm living in this country, but I don't like being called one" "I don't know really, 'cos my mum and dad say to me you are British and I was born here and my mum and dad are Pakistani 'cos, they were born there, but some people say you can't because the colour of your skin, but when you were born here your nationality becomes British, but people say you can't 'cos of your colour."*

Seven thought Britian was their country, 6 felt it sometimes and 7 felt that Britian was not their country. There was a fairly equal split in terms of the children considering this to be their country. Some of the responses are as follows:

*Continued on page seven*

## FAMILIES IN MANY-TONGUED MAURITIUS
### by Ted Witham

We chose Mauritius for our family holiday partly to have what George Saunders calls a 'language bath'.We're not really a bilingual family, but I speak French and English, and we hoped to encourage our children's French learning during seven weeks on Mauritius. Our aim was reached by relaxing on superb beaches, travelling in ancient buses, and bartering in local markets.

Mauritius, however, raises a language dilemma: what language is spoken? English is the official language and the medium for all schools, but the language of the home is either French and/or Creole or a dialect of Hindi.

I expected to converse either in English or French, and to be baffled occasionally by Creole but my expectations were way out. Conversations switched in the middle from French to English to Creole with little warning, much as we might change the subject. Sometimes I could see the reason for the switch: some subjects are easier in one language than the other. As the wife of the Bishop of Mauritius said, *"We relate in French. English is for business."*. If people were stuck for a word, they either borrowed from the other language, or just as often, moved the conversation over entirely into the other language. Sometimes they changed to English deliberately to include my wife in the conversation.

As a family, and readers of the 'Bilingual Family Newsletter', we wondered how families achieved this remarkable trilingualism. The families we met were relaxed about their children's language education. Adults spoke both French and Creole at home. Pre-schoolers were busy learning a language which could have been either French or Creole! Our neighbour encouraged me to speak both French and English to her little children. Mauritian parents hope that any confusion will be sorted out at school.

The language of the public and cultural life was the same glorious mix as family life. The TV news, for example, was read in Hindi at 6.30, English at 7 and French at 7.30, with a 5 minute 'rizime' in Creole at 8. The main newspapers were in French and English with cartoons in Creole.

This public mixture of languages combined with instruction in English at school seems to give children both sufficient motivation and experience in English to learn, and maintain, all three languages as distinct languages. However, educators pointed out the cost of this process. As all learning is done in the second language of most students (English), learning efficiency is said to be impaired.

Also it was evident that standards of French and English were varied. Some newspaper articles were in the convoluted English of 19th Century imperialism, others were simply bad English, or bad French, by people obviously writing in a foreign tongue. Other articles, however, were excellent: incisive, modern journalism at its best.

I'm a preacher by trade. I found quickly that I had to avoid all complicated expressions both in French and English. What I say naturally here in Australia was not understood there. The Mauritian way to subtlety is to switch from one language to another. Their relaxed and pragmatic attitude to language is illustrated by their indifference to the many puns and double entendres spawned by the borrowing between the two languages. A fatalistic estate agent had a slogan painted on his office. *'Your deal is my will'*. Not only does it rhyme in Mauritian English, but it makes clear sense when you remember

*Continued on page eight*


## HOW MANY IS TOO MANY?

**I am Belgian, my wife is Chinese and we have a one-month old baby, Jonathan. My main language is French and I can't speak Chinese; my wife speaks Mandarin but not French. Together we communicate in English, which we both speak very well but which is not the main community language (French). We intend to speak our native languages to Jonathan to encourage infant bilingualism, but the situation is complicated by the following factors:**

**-Belgium is a country with two languages (French and Flemish, Dutch) where nationwide Dutch is spoken by about 55% of the population.**

**- In Brussels, constitutionally a bilingual city, most people speak French (85%). When he's 3 or 4 though, we intend to put Jonathan in a Flemish kindergarten so that he develops a native speaker ability also in Flemish.**

**- My wife, Xiao-Ji, has another child from a previous marriage, who will come and stay with us next August. Joan (6) speaks only Mandarin, but will be spoken French to by myself and will enter a Flemish speaking school as well.**

**- Jonathan has a Japanese godmother living in Japan who in a few years, might be keen on looking after him for a few months.**

**I was wondering if we should introduce English actively, as a way of addressing both Mum and Dad simultaneously, or restrict it to a passive language, heard but not spoken, so that we are each clearly associated with one language?**

**French will be the least spoken language in the immediate family, but environment will catch up eventually. I would like to develop his reading skills in French and Chinese. Should we maybe wait, before introducing English actively, until he's able to read French and therefore some English?**

**We know quite a few 'successful' bilingual children, but none of them was exposed to more than two languages at first. Despite Glen Doman's theory about babies' incredible abilities, might there be some risk in exposing the child to at least four languages before the age of 3-4? I will go ahead anyway, even in a more passive way for one or two of them, but there might be some precautions to take or suggestions to follow which my wife and I are unaware of?**

**Alain & Xiao-Ji Bertholet, Bruxelles, Belgium**

*Continued on page six*

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***Below we publish two contrasting answers to this interesting question. Do readers have other views?***

**Editor George Saunders's comments:**

You have obviously given much thought to how you intend to raise Jonathan multilingually, and I see no significant problems with your plans. Exposing a child to several languages at a young age is not considered abnormal in some societies (e.g. Asia) where people have a fairly relaxed attitude towards linguistic norms and recognise that speakers may well not be equally proficient in their various languages. Such a tolerant attitude is also important in a multilingual family situation.

In Jonathan's case, French will most probably become his strongest language, as it will receive support both at home and from the environment. Mandarin will be the language most at risk once Jonathan goes to kindergarten and school, thus reducing contact with his mother.

I would be inclined to keep English as the language you and your wife use to each other, but each of you to use just your first language to Jonathan. Since he will constantly hear you both speaking English to each other, he will inevitably acquire some passive knowledge of it and as it will also be the only language which you will all have in common, he may well begin to speak it, too.

With regard to reading: some researchers recommend that children should first learn to read in their stronger language before tackling reading in their second language, so as to avoid confusion. However, my own experience suggests that confusion is only minimal and temporary if a child learns to read in two languages simultaneously, provided that the child is already orally/aurally familiar with the written words he or she has to read. In the case of two languages with quite different scripts, such as French and Chinese, there is little possibility of confusion. You will certainly have a linguistically fascinating household. Do keep us informed of what happens.

**Charlotte Hoffmann, the author of '*An Introduction to Bilingualism*'* makes following comments:**

It is possible, but not easy, to achieve family bilingualism. It is important to have realistic expectations and to follow viable long-term strategies, based on the parents's, assessment of the various factors involved (human, psychological, linguistic, cultural etc.). Successful multilingualism is to a large extent determined by uncontrollable variables.

In order to have a harmonious family life there must be one language all members are happy and able to use. Language is a vehicle for communication, it should not be allowed to take a disproportionate part in the preoccupations of the family life.

I would not advise the parents of Jonathan to expose him to 3 or 4 languages right from birth but to aim at establishing infant bilingualism in English (the language his parents and sister speak fluently) and Chinese. Once they are established exposure to French can increase. When he is about 4 or 5 he will no doubt realise that French is his father's language and eventually he will use it to him, as living in the French speaking area, it will become his strongest language. At what point Flemish should be introduced is a matter for future consideration, as is the language in which the reading skills should be first developed, which, once acquired, can be easily transfered to another language with similar scripts.

* Longman, ISBN 0-582-29143-7 price £12.50

## SCHOOLING FOR BILINGUALS

**Born in the USA with American/German parents my first language was English. My parents had tried a bilingual education but stopped when I mixed the two languages, not knowing that this would eventually phase out. At age 5, we moved to Germany where I lived ever since. German became my exclusive language, so I am more of a German native now. During highschool I spent two holidays in the USA, during my university time I spent 1 year there, so I was able to brush up my English again.**

**Later I married and in 1990 when our first son was three months old we moved to England. Both my husband (German) and I spoke German with him. With my English being quite good, one day I started to talk to him in English only. Although quite startled at first, he understood me by the afternoon (as his then basic vocabulary consisted of simple sentences as 'Komm zu Mami'/'Come to Mummy'). What a success!! Ever since we have stuck to our scheme, though I nearly gave up when we moved back to Germany in 1991. Being 1 1/2, Felix wanted to know everything (do you know all the technical terms for vehicles on construction sites in your own language, not to mention a second language?). Knowing then that we would move on to Prague/Czechoslovakia only a few months later, I was very unsure about what to do. I was afraid that my English would rapidly go downhill if I had no opportunity to practice my English daily and I thought I would rather give Felix a thorough knowledge of one language, German, than having him know bits and pieces of two.**

**But after a few discussions with friends and especially my mother, I went on with English. And this proved to be just right: as it happens, the international community here in Prague is much bigger than we had anticipated and, of course, English is *the* language - which seems quite ironic considering where we are! So, Felix had no problems whatsoever when we joined an international playgroup, and I had my daily practice of English once again.**

**In the meantime, Felix speaks English with his little brother and his English has improved a great deal since he is attending a British pre-school. In fact, it is now much better than his German, especially as my husband is working long hours and often does not see the children before bedtime.**

**Am I on the right track? Should we continue even if I cannot offer the children the richness of the language I could in German, though I have learnt a lot already through Felix. (Concerning the deteriorating German, we are considering the advantages/disadvantages of an au-pair).**

**Which school should we aim at: German or English/ International, not knowing much about the whereabouts of our future life bearing in mind the situation of me speaking English, my husband speaking German and the question of the minority language (which is it in our case).**

**As you will understand, I am sure, I have thought about 'our case' a lot. Bilingual education is not something easy, but your *'Bilingual Family Newsletter'* helps and shows the many aspects it has. Thank you!**

**Barbara Egeree, Prague, Czechoslovakia**

I sympathise very much with many of your sentiments regarding English, as I have done much the same as you, except that the languages are reversed, having always spoken not my native English but German to my sons (now 19 and 17) and my daughter (12).

Non-native speakers in such a situation inevitably feel some uncertainty at times about the quality and richness of the language which they are passing on to their children. Such concern is only natural. However, as you have discovered, not being a native speaker is by no means an insurmountable obstacle and it is possible to continue to improve one's knowledge of the language. As the children get older and their interests diversify, this may well entail learning new words and concepts in both languages, including one's mother tongue!

So, by all means continue to use English to your children. It seems that the main problem in your case is how to ensure that the children's German does not suffer. Of course, if you return to Germany the problem will solve itself. However, for the present, if it is possible to have a German-speaking au-pair, this would certainly increase the children's contact with and use of German. Is it possible to have German relatives or friends to come for a visit?

With regard to future schooling, that is a difficult question to answer adequately, since it is not yet known where you will be living when the children start school. If it's to be in an English-speaking country, a German school, if available and affordable, would be well worth considering. Similarly, if it's to be a German-speaking country, an English/International school would merit serious consideration. In this way there would be exposure to one language through the school and to the other through the environment.

However, if it's neither an English-speaking nor a German-speaking country, the decision would be even more difficult and would depend on a number of variables, such as availability and affordability of English or German schools, children's relative proficiency in English and German, future plans (return to Germany?), proposed length of stay in the particular country (if long, should a local school in the local language be considered?). etc.

**George Saunders**

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*Continued from page four*

**Kiranjit:** *"Yes, I do* (consider this to be my country) *but I like India and I want to go there for holidays."*

**Dharvinder:** *"No, I just consider Africa to be my own country 'cos that's where my parents grew up."*

**Nadia:** *"Sometimes I do but now I've been there (Pakistan) I feel that yeah I want to go there and live there but sometimes I feel like I don't want to go there, I just want to stay here."*

**Shruti:** *"Yes and no, my dad's always saying we should be prepared for them to kick us out. They might say one day all you Indians and blacks go home. So my dad's always saying don't get too friendly or homely over here."*

**RACISM**

Twelve children had been called racist names in school. Comments were:

*"'Cos, they think it's their country they're the only people who live in it and that we've come from a different country and we are ruling them ." "Because they don't like their colour."*

**CONCLUSIONS**

The inquiry leads us to conclude that Anita Kamoth's generation (that of the 60s) of Asians followed the assimilation model. They lost proficiency in their mother tongue as there was no provision for it in schools and parents believed that they would be doing their children a disservice if they did not speak English to them at home. Teaching staff in mainstream schools were on the whole unaware of the terms "multicultural" and "anti-racist". If you had just arrived in England with no English you were sent to a language unit to be with those who were in the same linguistic need. The second and third generations, however do realise the importance of their home languages, partly because they are valued at schools. Their home life illustrates how they have not assimilated. Their attitudes reveal a synthesis of Asian and Western practices. They realise the importance of traditions, but also realise things cannot remain the same.

**Shruti:** *"I know that this country, this world is changing so you can't be the same all the time."*

The majority called themselves British, but when it came to a question of belonging their responses were equally mixed. This relates to the fact that over half the sample were victims of racial abuse.

*"One day a man came (into my father's shop). He asked for a cup of tea. My dad asked 30p please and then he said in Irish and spat in my dad's face."*

*' 'My mum was in a different section (of the shop) and these boys came and called me a Paki.'*

According to research this generation of Asian children are developing bicultural identities. This, however, has not changed the fact that they continue to suffer racial abuse both in and out of school and have mixed feelings about whether they belong here.

**Reference:** Ghuman, P. 1991 Have they passed the cricket test. In *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development* 12:5. 1991.

## 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

***or*** **Marjukka Grover at Multilingual Matters**

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*Continued from page five*

that the French 'volonte' means only volitional 'will'.

Some legendary confusions are told as jokes, like the story of the police officer who arrested two people for riding on one bicycle. On the official charge sheet in English he wrote: *'Offence: riding bicycle twice'.* And the bus conductor beckoning people onto a crowded bus translated curiously, *'Places debout, messieurs, dames, standing seats only.'.*

I came back from Mauritius curious to know if any studies have been done on this supple linguistic community and convinced that much could be learned, both about languages in contact and about multiple language learning from Mauritius.