The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editors: George Saunders & Marjukka Grover *1993 Volume 10, No.3*

In this issue

EDITORIAL

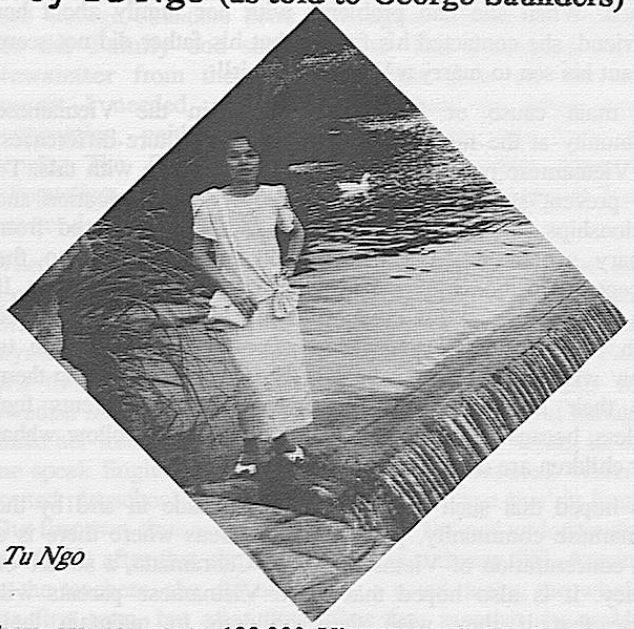
In today's world there are many people who flee from their own country and seek refuge in another. Their first concern is naturally to find safety and try to rebuild their lives. They seek employment, often finding only hard manual labour, and work hard to ensure that their children's future will be more secure than their own.

In this issue, an article by Tu Ngo, 'Susan's Story', presents the story of the child of such a refugee family in Australia. It shows the linguistic and cultural problems which can arise if parents do not spend an adequate amount of time with their children and do not do all they can to encourage them to use their native language within the family, so that family communication and harmony are not endangered.

George Saunders

SUSAN'S STORY

by Tu Ngo (as told to George Saunders)



Tu Ngo

There are now over 100,000 Vietnamese living in Australia. Whilst there have been bilingual people in Vietnam for a long time, it is a different situation from that of Vietnamese living in Australia. After 1975, many Vietnamese people escaped from Vietnam without any real preparation for living in a foreign country. Susan's family was among them. She was six years old when she arrived in Australia. Her parents were lucky to find work in a factory. They worked very hard to re-establish their lives. In the morning they sent Susan to primary school and collected her in the afternoon, and she started to pick up English.

Like many others, her parents were afraid Susan would lose their language. They asked Susan to speak Vietnamese at home. It was easy for Susan to do so, as the level of Vietnamese they usually used at home was not high, just everyday topics of conversation. So, initially, this was not a problem.

However, after she finished year 2 in primary school, it became more and more difficult for her to speak Vietnamese, and she began to prefer speaking English at home. Her parents were often upset about it, and they tried to stop her using English to talk to family members. She also was upset and tried to learn more Vietnamese in conversations in the family. Many of her Vietnamese sentences were incorrectly formed. When she had a vocabulary gap, she mixed the two languages.

Day by day she found it harder to talk to her parents. She liked to talk to her brother and sister, as they understood her easily;

> *"Most Vietnamese parents have worked very hard for their children to have a better future, but in fact many of them have lost their children. They did not realise that by acquiring a language children also acquire its culture."*

of course, English was spoken when her parents were not there.

Susan liked reading and also loved her school very much. Her teachers and friends respected her as she was the top student in her class. They always talked nicely to her.

Susan was sent to Community Language Saturday Morning School, and her parents were happy about it. But most of the Vietnamese teachers there were trained in Vietnam and did not know how to teach Vietnamese as a *second* language. Susan still remembers that on the first day she attended she was put in a year 6 Vietnamese class because her age was 13. She was very afraid. The other boys and girls in that class had just come to Australia and they spoke and wrote Vietnamese very well. Susan wanted to stop going, but her parents shouted at her.

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From that day Susan became very quiet in her family. She was disappointed with her parents' reaction. They pushed her to learn Vietnamese, but they did not know how difficult it was for her to learn in that particular class. She only had a short time in the evenings and at weekends to use Vietnamese, and this was not enough to bring her level of Vieatnamese up to the level of her English which she used all day at school, for reading and for watching television.

One day, when she was 15 years old she was invited to come to her friend's birthday party. She wore a short top with floral trousers. It was an enjoyable party and everyone was happy, and that was the reason she came home late. When she opened the door, her father and mother were angry and shouted at her about what they considered her inappropriate clothing.

Socialising is a very normal event which is encouraged by the school, but it is not allowed by Vietnamese culture. She would have liked to explain this to her parents, but they did not have enough English to understand her, and she did not have enough Vietnamese to explain. She felt that she had been born into the wrong family. The activities in her family were not suitable for her. She liked pop songs, her parents listened to Vietnamese songs of 20 years ago. Susan would have liked to have cheese for breakfast, to eat hot dogs, etc., but at home she had only Vietnamese food.

Susan thought that she was more Australian than Vietnamese. She had little knowledge of Vietnam. She felt a bit guilty when she thought about her origins. She tried to read some books about Vietnam, but they were in English and her father said they gave incorrect information. But he did not explain any further. It was a long story and hard for her to understand, he said.

At school Susan demonstrated such a good command of English that sometimes her teachers asked her to speak to the school assembly. She made many mistakes in using her Vietnamese. Sometimes she tried to translate literally and was laughed at, for example when she translated 'dirt cheap' literally, using the Vietamese word for 'dirt' (dat). She felt bad when she made a mistake and did not feel comfortable speaking Vietnamese to anyone. She felt lonely among her own relatives. After saying hello to everyone, she avoided becoming involved in their conversation and talked to other children (in English).

Her life continued like that, until when she was 17 she met a nice young man three years older than her, and they began to spend a lot of time together. They decided they would get married, but would wait until they had both gone to university. However, she was shocked to learn that her parents did not want her to marry the young man because he was Australian. They wanted her to marry a Vietnamese man. But how could she? She was very unhappy about this and one day she decided to leave home.

Susan's situation is not unusual, and the Vietnamese community in Australia is beginning to realise that it is a real problem. Most Vietnamese parents have worked very hard for their children to have a better future, but in fact many of them have lost their children. They did not realise that by acquiring a language children also acquire its culture. Susan understood and accepted Vietnamese culture more than many young Vietnamese born in Australia, but this does not mean she followed the traditional Vietnamese ways. She thought and reacted to everything as an Australian 'with a bit of Vietnamese'. But Australian society also did not accept her absolutely as she wished. When she had problems with her family about her boyfriend, she contacted his family, but his father did not seem to want his son to marry a Vietnamese girl!

The main cause of lots of problems in the Vietnamese community at the moment is language and culture differences, and Vietnamese parents have no training to cope with this. To help prevent such breakdowns in family communication and relationships, I believe bilingual books should be used from primary school on. Children should be introduced to the concepts of mathematics, science, etc. in their two languages. If such bilingual texts were used, children's bilingualism would be much better, and moreover their parents would be able to follow what their children were doing at school and help them with their homework. At the moment, many parents feel helpless, because their English is not adequate to follow whhat their children are doing at school.

It is hoped that such initiatives will be made in and by the Vietnamese community, particularly in areas where there is a high concentration of Vietnamese, e.g. Cabramatta, a suburb of Sydney. It is also hoped that more Vietnamese parents will realise that if they wish their children to maintain their Vietnamese language and culture, they have a responsibility to use the language as much as possible with their children and to encourage their children to use the language as much as possible.

CONTRIBUTIONS CONTRIBUTIONS

Has your child just said something funny by either mixing his/her two languages, or by inteference from his/her second language? **Please share the joke with us !**

Your 'stories', anecdotes, jokes, useful hints are all welcome.

"She would have liked to explain this to her parents, but they did not have enough English to understand her, and she did not have enough Vietnamese to explain."

AN ENGLISH-SWEDISH SUCCESS STORY

by Elisabeth Mossler-Lundberg

My husband and I are both Swedish and have lived in Britain for 13 years. Our two daughters, Christina and Anna, now 12 and 10, were both born here and have dual nationality. They have never lived in Sweden. I would describe our family position after these 13 years as 'integrated' to use the Tuomi-Nikula terminology from Volume 10, No 2. It is important to mention this, since the strong emphasis put on the Swedish side of our lives in the following text could make readers think we have built a Swedish fortress in England. This is not the case!

Christina (far left) and Anna (far right) with a friend in English school uniforms.

When we moved here, we met several Swedish friends whose children, having grown up in England, replied in English when spoken to in Swedish. I knew I would not want that, so I was determined that this was not going to happen in our family. I read George Saunders book **Bilingual Children: Guidance for the Family** and subscribed to **The Bilingual Family Newsletter** from the beginning. This gave me the moral support I needed, since there has been no other support forthcoming, neither from official sources nor from other people. The English society is not one that appreciates bilingualism and the knowledge of other languages; at least it has not done so in the past.

When Christina was born, it was not only natural for me to speak Swedish to her in all circumstances, in fact I found it totally impossible to speak English to a baby. As for nursery rhymes, songs etc. I did not even know them in English. For the first three years of her life, she therefore really only learnt Swedish since our outside contacts were not plentiful enough to make her learn English. People were constantly trying to make me speak English to her, but I stubbornly persisted. When she started playschool at three, she only knew 'bye bye' in English. The first two days were difficult, with her not understanding a word, but after that she made a friend and was OK. According to the teachers, she did not speak a word during the whole of the first term, but after these first few months, she suddenly spoke English, albeit not with the same wide vocabulary as in Swedish.

When Anna was born, her exposure to English was greater than Christina's had been, since Christina brought home friends and since the family's whole pattern of contacts with English people had increased. However, even so, she, too, did not really learn English until she started playschool. Both girls progressed to an English school, and all their English knowledge has since come from the school and friends.

Apart from always speaking Swedish in the family, I read Swedish books, sang Swedish songs, borrowed and bought Swedish audiotapes to play in the car and was given many videotapes with Swedish children's television programmes from family and friends in Sweden. We were fortunate to be able to spend summer and Easter holidays in Sweden, and to welcome many Swedish visitors here. The Swedish Church also contributed, since visits to their family services and celebrations of festivals such as Christmas, Lucia and Midsummer added to the development of a Swedish identity in the children. They also met other Swedish speaking children there.

In fact, when Christina was around 7 years old, she was asked by an American lady, who had heard that we spoke another language, from where she came. I was jubilant to hear her explaining that 'I come from Stockholm but I live here'.

I knew it is difficult for children in this situation to learn to read and write in the minority language. I had prepared myself with reading-books, bought very ambitiously in a shop supplying schools in Sweden. I tried to interest the girls in these books, but it proved impossible. However, once they had learnt to read English at school, I struck gold in that I subscribed to Donald Duck and another comic in Swedish. Eager as they were to read these, both girls in practice taught themselves to read Swedish. The combination of knowing the reading technique as such and knowing spoken Swedish worked wonders after initial difficulties that were very soon overcome. They then soon progressed to Swedish books. Writing is even more difficult, but the acquisition of plenty of Swedish pen-friends have made the girls able to write nearly perfectly in Swedish, without any formal tuition.

"Once they had learnt to read English at school, I struck gold in that I subscribed to Donald Duck and another comic in Swedish. Eager as they were to read these, both girls in practice taught themselves to read Swedish."

The girls always speak Swedish to each other. There was only one situation during all the years when they spoke English together and that was when playing with the so called 'My little ponies'. The ponies had English names, and maybe therefore it seemed more natural. As soon as the playing switched to something else, they switched to Swedish. Neither of them likes it when we say anything in English to them. It is accepted when an English person is with us, but never feels quite natural. Also, at an early age, they realised the wonderful advantage they had over their friends to communicate with me and with each other in a 'secret' language. They have always used this to their advantage and been proud of their ability to speak two languages.

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Once Swedish seemed firmly established, I sometimes also read English books to them. (Thus obtaining the advantage of having my own pronounciation corrected!) Interestingly however, when the girls were ill, they always wanted to be read to in Swedish. They both consider Swedish to be their 'first' language.

In fact, the Swedish upbringing has been so successful that we found it necessary to let the girls have English lessons outside school before sitting exams to senior schools. There was the feeling that their vocabulary in English was not quite as good as that of their friends. Although they learnt much at school, there were always topics that families discuss at home, which we would always discuss in Swedish. Also, during family holidays, they spoke no English at all and the English structures and vocabulary were temporarily pushed to the back of their minds.

"Also, at an early age, they realised the wonderful advantage they had over their friends to communicate with me and with each other in 'secret' language."

Inevitably, they put English words into their Swedish sentences. This nearly always is the case with school terminology. Often, I will repeat whatever the term in Swedish, and they will say yes, yes. However, once in Sweden, these anglicisms disappear. In fact, once when on a skiing holiday in Sweden, when the children in the group were told to explain where they lived, they were not believed when they said they lived in London! On the other hand, some of their school friends do not know of their Swedish origin. This proves that they have no accent in either language.

Admittedly, the construction of sentences and vocabulary are subject to cross influence. For example, in Swedish you 'have' right, instead of 'are' right, a house can burn 'up' as well as 'down' and you are 'long' rather than tall. Such differences have to be pointed out many times. Of course, as has been discussed in this magazine, a bilingual speaker cannot achieve the same perfection in his/her two languages as a monolingual speaker, but even 95% + 95% is very worthwhile!

Swedish may not be a very important language with only around 9 million native speakers. However, it gives access to the girls' roots and heritage and enables them to speak to grandparents and to be wholly part of another culture. Also, they have realised that they can understand spoken Norwegian without difficulty, read both Norwegian and Danish and communicate with the Swedish speaking minority in Finland. Christina has also discovered that knowledge of Swedish helps her tremendously in her German studies.

Christina and Anna will in due course take a formal qualification in Swedish and thus be able to study at a Swedish university, should they so wish later. They feel at home in both cultures and have a wider choice of possibilities in the future.

I do not need to explain all the advantages of being bilingual and bicultural to the readers of this magazine. I would just like to agree strongly with the message it has been constantly promoting that it is always possible to bring children up with two or more languages. Just be persistent, speak your language to the children all the time, get comics, videos and books in the minority language if possible and **be proud of your own national identity and culture! Success is bound to follow.**

STUDENTS' INITIATIVE

by Birgit Szymanski

In Western Europe, bilingual and to greater extent multilingual families are very often seen as unusual, if not abnormal. They are frequently under fire from prejudiced people in their locality. It's not surprising therefore, if those families feel somewhat insecure when it comes to the issue of bringing up children with more than one language spoken at home. Students of linguistics, on the other hand, frequently get bored with being taught only the theory of bilingualism only. So why not bring both groups together to learn from and with each other ?

This is exactly what happened at Bremen University in North Germany and, anticipating the outcome, it was a huge success for everybody involved. A group of twelve students, had studied infant bilingualism for two terms, and the more they studied the literature, the more they wanted to see for themselves how such multilingual families live. Having noticed the high motivation within the group, the students' tutor finally decided to initiate a meeting with bilingual families. A workshop was what the students wanted to do and following two articles in the local press, the response was beyond anything ever expected. About 20 families tried to enrol for the venture, but because the students preferred working on an individual basis, only twelve families could be accepted for the workshop. Among the families volunteering were bi- and trilingual ones, using a total of eight languages altogether, namely English, Spanish, Persian, Swedish, Italian, Norwegian, German and Portuguese.

Erfahrungsaustausch über Kinder, die mehrsprachig aufwachsen

Vorteile und viele Vorurteile

Bremen. „Grau, teurer Freund, ist alle Theorie" – das, was Mephistoteles in Goethes Faust schon vor unzähligen Jahren zum Besten gab, hat sich jetzt auch eine Gruppe von Bremer Linguistik-Studenten zu Herzen genommen: Nachdem sie sich während ihres Studiums zwei Semester lang mit der kindlichen Muttersprachigkeit beschäftigt hatten, wollten sie nun sehen, was es eigentlich heißt, wenn ein Kind zwei- oder mehrsprachig erzogen wird.

Die Idee eines mehrsprachigen Familientreffens war schnell geboren. Die Tutorin Birgit Szymanski nahm die Organisation in die Hand. Und zum ersten Treffen meldeten sich gleich eine ganze Reihe von Familien. „Über den riesigen Zulauf, waren wir selbst überrascht", räumt Szymanski ein, „denn wir mußten sogar Familien wieder nach Hause schicken."

Von Götz Werner

Diejenigen, die kamen, boten aber auch so eine bunte Mixtur an Sprachen und Kulturen: Deutsch, Englisch, Französisch, Italienisch, Norwegisch, Persisch, Portugiesisch und Schwedisch – acht Sprachen, zehn Familien und ein Problem. „Mehrsprachige Familien", so die Tutorin, „sind schon immer den wildesten Vorurteilen ausgesetzt, so daß bei vielen eine gewisse Unsicherheit festzustellen ist."

Kein Wunder, ist doch bis vor kurzem von Ärzten und Verhaltensforschern Erschreckendes in die Welt gesetzt worden: Mehrsprachigkeit sei autismusfördernd, habe schlechtes Wachstum und psychische Entwicklungsstörungen zur Folge – wie der Erfahrungsaustausch zwischen den Familien zeigte, sind das alles Vorurteile, mit denen viele schon konfrontiert wurden.

Neben diesen persönlichen Gesprächen riefen aber auch die Vorträge der Linguistik-Studenten großes Interesse hervor. Ob Bilingualismussätze, Kommunikationsstrategien oder passive Mehrsprachigkeit – auch damit konnten die Eltern einiges anfangen. „Während der Vorträge war bei vielen ein Grinsen und zustimmendes Nicken zu beobachten", erzählt Szymanski. Und auch über etwas anderes waren sich alle einig: Mehrsprachig aufgewachsene Kinder haben viele Vorteile. Sie sind – neueste Forschungsergebnisse bewiesen dies – flexibler, offener gegenüber anderen Mitmenschen und sprachgewandter.

Dies kann Maggie Bouqdib nur zu gut bestätigen. Die gebürtige Engländerin, die mit einem Araber verheiratet ist, bringt ihren Kindern „dreieinhalb" Sprachen bei: Englisch, Deutsch, Französisch und ein bißchen Arabisch – ein Sprachschatz, von dem viele Erwachsene nur träumen können, der aber auch Probleme mit sich bringt: „Irgendwie haben die Kinder kein richtiges Zugehörigkeitsgefühl."

Solche Sorgen müssen sich Uwe und Divna Schulken bei ihrem zweieinhalbjährigen Sohn noch nicht machen. Doch auch für die Zukunft befürchten sie nicht, daß das gleichzeitige Erlernen der deutschen und italienischen Sprache irgendwelche Probleme bringen wird. Auch die Italienerin Cosima Forst glaubt, daß ein großer Sprachschatz den Kindern im späteren Leben nur Vorteile bringt: „Denn, was die meisten in der Schule erst noch lernen müssen, kriegen sie schon in die Wiege gelegt."

Vorteil oder Nachteil? Für die Teilnehmer des mehrsprachigen Familientreffens war klar: Wir sind froh, daß unsere Kinder mehr als eine Sprache lernen. Foto: Jochen Stoss

As they knew this beforehand, the students got stage fright, but they still worked with great energy and dedication in organising the meeting, especially because the whole project was entirely their own initiative. Several students had even done some kind of serious revision the day before to make sure that they could answer every possible question competently. Once the families turned up at the venue, the students became calm and sure of what they were doing. Some of the families had brought their children which helped to create a natural and easy-going atmosphere.

While the kids devoured biscuits and enjoyed drinks, their parents introduced themselves to each other. This in itself laid the foundation stone for an exchange of experiences later in the meeting. The workshop included short and easily understandable talks given by the students and dealing with more introductory aspects within the field of bilingualism. Among the subjects were simultaneous bilingualism, the notion of dominance, code-switching phenomena and communication strategies. Advantages of and prejudices against bilingualism were presented in the form of short scenes performed by the students: worried parents talking to doctors, teachers and linguists. The families seemed to be more than familiar with what the students presented and very often they described their own experiences.

A large part of the workshop was taken up by individual interviews with the families about their particular situation.

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MY ARABIC LANGUAGE

Words of my language are expressive and dear to me.

That's how I feel about my language.

No matter how far I go
No matter where I go
I'll still think of my precious language.

Some people think that a language
is something that is just spoken.
It is in a way
But there is more to it.

It's something
that is very precious,
It's something
that a person is born with,
It's something
that I would never swap
It's something
that can't be destroyed
It's something
That is all yours and the people around you.

My language
My heart is throbbing
My heart starts to beat more
when my language is mentioned
I think of me
and what I am going to do.
My language might give me work?
A home?
a good education?

That's what I will always hope for and dream of.

I hope it will come true one day.

Khadeegha

A class of ninth year students in a British Comprehensive School were read a a poem, 'Speak', by the Pakistani poet, Faiz Ahmad Faiz . 14 year old Khadeegha from Syria, now living in Great Britain, wrote this poem in response. Thanks to the headteacher of Earl Marshal Comprehensive school for permission to re-print the poem.

THREE LANGUAGES UNDER ONE ROOF

by Gitl Schaechter-Viswanath

Meena Lifshe's first word was *'tia'* (door). However, her first word was also *'pal'* (milk). If this sounds confusing, the reason is this: Meena Lifshe speaks both Yiddish (from her mother) and Tamil (from her father) and English (from her environment, as well as from home).*

Although at the age of two Meena Lifshe still had not uttered a single comprehensible word (and Meylekh and I were getting slightly worried), she is now three and half years old and can talk a mile a minute. Her dominant language is Yiddish, although she can express herself pretty well in the other two languages. (This sounds like Avrom Reisen's humorous Yiddish song 'A Golden Child', where the lyrics go: 'The child has just three years, but four languages!...')

Quite a few times, when someone hears her speaking one language with her mother and another with her father, he'll ask: 'Doesn't she get confused?' or 'Wow, isn't that hard to do?' My answer to the first question is: No, she's not confused. She knows perfectly well who she's speaking to. For example, when she tells Meylekh something in Tamil and I walk into the room, she tells me the same thing in Yiddish. Children are very smart, much more than we give them credit for. They pick up and switch back and forth very easily. Sometimes, when she does use a Tamil word in Yiddish (or an English word in Tamil, etc.), it's usually because she doesn't know the word in that particular language and she'll ask: 'How do you say ... in ...?'

Raising children in general is difficult -- physically, psychologically, emotionally. Compared to other problems with children (e.g. disobedience), I believe that the linguistic issue isn't as difficult. Both require that parents be strong figures that the child can respect.

From my experience I would say that **the three main problems in speaking Yiddish to children are:**

1. A dearth of modern Yiddish children's books.

You can still find children's books from the 1920s, 30s and 40s, but it's much harder to find appropriate modern books. So what can you do? You can create your own books (by cutting out and pasting pictures, and adding simple narrations) or you can take English-language books and read them to the child in Yiddish. (Since we are far from an organised Tamil-speaking community, Tamil books are also hard to find. So Meena Lifshe sometimes hears the same book, the same story, in two different languages.)

2. A dearth of Yiddish-speaking communities.

The child must have contact with other Yiddish-speaking children, otherwise she'll feel that she's alone in this world (or not from this world at all). So you've got to make the effort. If you know of a Yiddish-speaking family that doesn't live far, make a point of getting together with them. Even getting together once a year is better than staying at home. And if you live really far from other Yiddish-speaking families, at least have the child maintain contact with a Yiddish pen-pal or through telephone conversations. Any contact is better than none at all.

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* My husband Meylekh, who speaks Yiddish as well as Tamil, didn't want the two of us to speak Yiddish to each other in front of the children because he felt that the children would interpret this to mean that Yiddish is the 'preferred' language at home. So we compromised: we speak English to each other in front of the kids, and Yiddish (admittedly infrequently) in private.

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3. Competition with other languages

You don't have to be a sociolinguist to know that one language will always be the dominant one, whether it's a bi-, tri- or quadrilingual home. So how do you minimise that? Speaking Yiddish with the child has to be **absolutely consistent.** If you tell a child ' Tu zikh on dos rekl (Put on your jacket) -- it's time to go to school', or if you switch languages when you get angry and want to yell at her, it won't work. What will the child learn? That Yiddish isn't an independent language, that it doesn't have all the words you need for day-to-day life, and that there is no clearcut border between Yiddish and English. In the end, the child will develop little respect for the language and won't learn it. (I'm not referring to the occasional English word used when you can't run at the moment to look up its Yiddish equivalent in the dictionary -- that's understandable.)

Before Meena Lifshe could even speak, I worried about such things as our future family discussions at the dinner table. How would we hold a decent conversation at the table when not all are speaking the same language? (Although Meylekh is pretty fluent in Yiddish, my Tamil is weak -- I pick up words here and there, but rarely entire sentences.)

Well, now that Meena Lifshe talks and you can carry on a reasonable conversation with her, dinner goes something like this: if Meena Lifshe and I are speaking to each other and Meylekh wants to put his two cents in, he'll speak Tamil to her and English to me; if the conversation is between him and her, one of them will do a general translation for me (either she -- in Yiddish, or he -- in English); conversation between the parents is in English which she understands perfectly. So what if the discussions tend to be longer than monolingual discussions?

"You don't have to be a sociolinguist to know that one language will always be the dominant one, whether it's a bi-, tri- or quadrilingual home."

That's a small price to pay. (Sometimes -- as a joke -- Meylekh will respond to Meena Lifshe in Yiddish. She thinks that's incredibly funny, she laughs and says 'No, Appa ('father' in Tamil), you have to speak Tamil!'

Lately, our 20-month-old son, Arun, has begun to speak. And it's the same story all over again: his first word in Yiddish was *'gitvo'* (from 'git-vokh', the greeting used at the end of the Sabbath) and at the same time his first Tamil word was *'onu'* (from the Tamil word for 'one'). When the kids play together and I'm in the room, they speak Yiddish; if Meylekh is in the room with them, they speak Tamil; if we're all in the room together, they'll speak in whichever language was most recently spoken to them.

In the year since this article was written, my children's language skills have developed considerably; they also tend to slip into English much more when playing with each other. Since I can't really say to them 'Speak Yiddish' to the exclusion of Tamil, I say to them in Yiddish: 'What language are you speaking?'. They get the hint and switch over to Yiddish. Recently, my daughter has gotten smart: she says they're 'playing house' at an English-speaking house. The first few times I thought it was cute, but several weeks ago I put my foot down and said: 'No, you can play English-speaking house with your English-speaking friends'. To my surprise, she said 'O.K., Mommy.' They haven't played that since.

True, in about five years we'll face other problems when our children will find themselves in an English-language environment forty hours a week, and English will most probably become their dominant language. But we'll deal with that when the time comes. Our children speak Yiddish now and they will speak it twenty years from now. **The obstacles that'll appear over the years -- well, we'll manage.**

(This article first appeared in Yiddish magazine, *Yugntruf.* Many thanks to the editors for their permssion to re-print the article.)

BREAKING THE RULES!

I am writing to see what advice you can offer my husband and me in our attempts to bring up our son bilingually. I am British, and my husband Kai is Chinese (he speaks Mandarin and Kunming dialect). We both speak both languages, but neither of us is really perfectly bilingual. We met in China, and came to Britain five years ago. We have tended to use both Chinese and English together, depending on subject matter etc.

Before our son Joe, now 15 months old, was born, we decided to 'readopt' Chinese as our home language, as we are both very keen for him to learn Chinese. Our relatives in China do not speak English so this is very important.

So... Kai and I always speak Chinese to each other when Joe is around, and Kai always speaks to him in Chinese, I in English. At the moment we each only work 3 days a week, so Joe is hearing quite a lot of Chinese.

However, we are concerned that Joe will get very little exposure to Chinese, once Kai is working 5 or 6 days a week, as any childminder or nursery is fairly sure to be English speaking. Now I am wondering whether to break the 'one parent one language' rule and speak to Joe in Chinese some of the time too, for example at weekends, or on all the occasions when the three of us are together, continuing to speak English to him when we are alone. Do you think it would be more confusing for him if I use both languages on different occasions, or would this be a suitable way of letting him hear more Chinese?

A major problem of bringing up a child to speak Chinese in Britain is that annual trips home are not possible, and visits from friends and relations extremely unlikely. We have some books and tapes, but they are not of great quality. I would be very grateful for your advice to us in this situation, and would also be interested to hear from any Mandarin speaking families living nearby who might be interested in meeting occasionally.

Lydia Worthington, London

GLOSSARY
Code-switching means switching from one language to another for part of a sentence or conversation.

There are many methods of raising children bilingually. The 'one person -one language' method is often advocated because children seem to find it easier to associate one language with one person and it also ensures that the child hears (and hopefully uses) both languages. But as you have recognised, sometimes the 'minority' language in such an arrangement gets much less attention than the 'majority' language which is spoken in the surrounding community, and there is the fear that the minority language will wither as far ss the childen are eoncerned.

Your using some Chinese is going to help to redress the balance of input between the two languages to some extent at least. Joe will quickly work out on what occasions you use Chinese to him, although he may identify you as the English speaker of the family and answer in English. But rest assured that your use of some Chinese is not going to do him any harm - he will certainly get enough English in any case, and your use of Chinese will show him that his father's language is acknowledged as being an important part of family life.

George Saunders

HOW CAN WE SUCCEED IN RAISING OUR DAUGHTER BILINGUALLY?

I would be most grateful if you could help with a number of queries I have regarding the raising of my daughter, Sophie, as bilingual (French/English).

Sophie is six and a half months old. I have been speaking French to her since birth (I am a French graduate) and my husband speaks in English to Sophie. My husband and I converse in English as my husband speaks little French. The three main queries I have so far are as follows:

1. Sophie is now beginning to talk, making distinguishable sounds such as 'dada'. Once she is able to say individual words ('daddy', 'mummy' etc.) should I encourage her by repeating the words in English, or should I say the French equivalent? Might the latter option confuse her?

2. We have bought several children's books in French on recent trips abroad. My husband suggested typing out English translations and sticking the relevant sentences under the French on each page. Would you see any problems with this - might it not confuse Sophie if she saw the two languages together?

3. Finally, my husband and I listen to a lot of music, the vast majority of which is in English. Sophie loves to listen to cassettes and enjoys being sung to. It seems odd singing along in English and daft to try and translate the songs. Do you think I should make music the one exception to the rule and sing along in English? This would seem a pity as Sophie doesn't get much exposure to French as it is, without my reducing it further. I would be most grateful for your thoughts on this.

Bridget Yhearm, Wallsend, England

1. Sophie won't be confused if you say the French equivalent when she says English words to you. At first she will use words from her two languages seemingly indiscriminately, but between age 12 and 18 months she will realise that she is dealing with two different languages, which words belong to which language, and who uses which language. Since you are Sophie's only source of French in your family, it is important that you use as much French as possible to her and encourage her to use as much French as possible to you. So if she uses an English word to you, say 'Yes, Daddy says 'book', but Mummy/Maman says...'.

2. When Sophie gets around to taking an interest in the printed word, there is little danger that she will be more than momentarily confused by having an English and a French text for the same story. After all, by that stage she will be well aware that spoken English and French are different, so why shouldn't they also be different when written?

3. I agree it would probably be daft (and strenuous!) to translate English songs into French as you sing along. More logical (and less demanding) would be to get hold of a collection of songs in French (cassettes, CDs) so that Sophie hears both languages being sung.

George Saunders

DID YOU KNOW THAT....

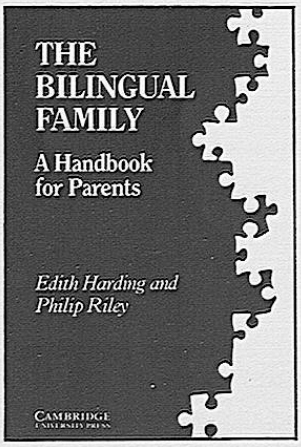
Bilingual and language learning material for young children are available from :

Languages for Children, 4 Wigorn Rd., Warley, West Midlands, B67 5HN, England. Tel/Fax: 021 429 4207

b Small Publishing Childrens's books, Pinewood, 3A Coombe Ridings, Kingston-upon-Thames, KT2 7JT, England. Tel: +44(0)81 974 6851 Fax: +44(0)81 974 6845

Partnership Publishing, Bradford and Ilkley Community College, Great Horton Rd, Bradford, BD7 1AY, England.

THE BILINGUAL FAMILY
A Handbook for Parents
Edith Harding and Philip Riley



This book provides parents with the information and advice they need to make informed decisions about what language 'policy' to adopt with their children. The book is divided into three main parts. In the first, the authors help parents identify the factors that will influence their decision to bring up their children as bilinguals. The second part consists of case studies of bilingual families, which illustriate a wide range of different 'solutions'. The third part is an alphabetical reference guide providing answers to the most frequently asked questions about bilingualism.

Published by Cambridge University Press, but available from Multilingual Matters Ltd. ISBN 0-521-31194-2, price £7.50.

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**

If you do not already subscribe to *The Bilingual Family Newsletter* use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues.

If you know of any other families please help to secure the future of this publication by entering their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

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Continued from page five

A questionnaire had been prepared investigating language attitudes, cultural presence of the countries involved, and, of course, the language development of the children. Finally, the families had the chance to get to know each other and to exchange experiences. This was fascinating for the students as well because the whole range of their background knowledge could be linked up with - so to speak - real life.

However, what was most rewarding for the group was that one family suggested regular meetings. In addition, everybody involved has been invited to an informal meeting at the home of one of the families. Maybe, if we are lucky, Bremen will sooner or later establish a private contact group of multilingual families to help and support each other and to give advice to 'freshers' in the field. The initiative of young and eager Bremen students might only have been the beginning.....