# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

*Editors:* **George Saunders & Marjukka Grover** *1994 Volume 11 No.1*


**In this issue**



## EDITORIAL

I would like to begin by quoting a few lines from a recent letter from a new subscriber:

*"Are most of your readers British? I don't know of any comparable publication for Americans, but some of the articles are only relevant if one lives in England. Help! We need even more support in the U.S., as we have a history of linguistic isolation and ignorance of other languages besides English."*

The BFN is published in England, it is true, but one of the editors is Australian, the other Finnish. Since the Newsletter is published in English, it is perhaps inevitable that a lot of our contributions come from families where one of the languages is English (but not necessarily British English!)

We try to make our publication as international and as geographically widespread as possible, but to a large extent we are reliant on the contributions we receive. There are, however, very few articles which could be considered relevant only to readers living in one particular geographic location. The information contained in most of our articles on bilingualism can be transferred to similar situations in other countries.

We are always happy to receive contributions from anywhere in the world, particularly from areas which have so far been under-represented in the BFN, whether in the form of a letter describing your own situation or commenting on previous issues, or in a more substantial article. So please sharpen your pencils - or warm up your word processors - we look forward to hearing from you.

**George Saunders.**


## FOOD FOR THOUGHT

Look at this stamp. Isn't it a child's right to get to know the language and culture of both his or her parents?

**Familie Bruckner**
**Wien, Austria**

## RAISING YOUR WIFE WITH YIDDISH

**Binyumen "Ben" Schaechter**

The challenge for me isn't raising children with Yiddish; the bigger issue is raising my wife with Yiddish.

We met at a Yugntruf picnic. It is worth noting that just because someone shows up at a Yiddish picnic, doesn't mean that person necessarily speaks Yiddish fluently. Or even unfluently. My wife was, at that time, taking her first Yiddish course. Her grandmother had recently passed away, and Carol wanted to get better acquainted with her roots. While taking the course, she heard that there would be a Yiddish picnic in


*"She considered herself an eternal beginner at the Yiddish language. And I silently agreed".*


Central Park. In her great enthusiasm to get better acquainted with the Jewish language, as well as with a Jewish man, she showed up. On that day, she was successful, unfortunately, in but one of the two goals.

Since then, she took two more beginner's Yiddish courses. She considered herself an eternal beginner at the Yiddish language. And I silently agreed. For us, the answer was to forget about the courses, and to speak together in Yiddish. Not much at the beginning, but little by little, in due time, after many "lessons", after many corrections, with a lot of love, care, and patience, Carol has finally attained the level of speaking a true broken Yiddish. She understands practically everything I say to our child, Daneel Leyvi. The words I use with him that I know she doesn't understand, I translate, unobtrusively, mid-sentence, and then continue talking.

My wife works for the New York City Public School System, and says that the best method of teaching a child language in the language-development stage is to further the conversation while correctly incorporating the word or phrase that the child has misused or mispronounced. Correcting him/her by focusing on the error could only stifle a child. I myself know that it's important to show that you're truly listening to what a person is saying, not only listening for the grammar or pronunciation. So this approach made a great deal of sense.


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Anyway, at 8 months, our son Daneel doesn't speak a word yet. So we don't belong to that set of parents that can show off their child's fluent Yiddish. But I use the aforementioned helpful hints when I speak Yiddish with Carol. In the course of these Yiddish conversations, several mnemonic devices have developed. Familiar to some may be the holding two fingers aloft, to indicate that the verb comes in the 2nd position: "Maybe I eat another dessert" is, in Yiddish grammar, "Maybe eat I another dessert"; "Tomorrow I will fast" would grammatically change to "Tomorrow will I fast"; and "That I did hear before" would become "That did I hear before". But I also came up with a three-finger symbol. It indicates that the object (or the delayed subject, such as in the three just-mentioned sentences) comes in the 3rd position. Not "I will tell him" but "I will him tell"; not "He doesn't understand me", but "He understands me not".

*"Every time, though, I gave her wrist a little squeeze, and she immediately knew what it meant, and corrected herself".*

In specific cases, more idiosyncratic methods of correcting grammar evolved. For example, I explained to my wife several times when "zenen" should be used as the auxiliary verb in the preterite instead of "hobn". One day my wife tried to relate to me what she had done that week: "Ikh hob gegangen", "Zi hot gekimne", "Mir hobn geforn". After I tried to "further" the conversation several times with the correct auxiliary verb, I gave her once a squeeze on the wrist, and she stopped, realized, and corrected herself. It goes without saying that she continued to make that error many times. Every time, though, I gave her wrist a little squeeze, and she immediately knew what it meant, and corrected herself.

She also regularly made the error "er vel", "zi vel", and I regularly corrected her. One time I went over to the window after one of these particular errors, and I threatened (jokingly) that I'd jump out. She realized that I was threatening in honour of her "er vel", so she corrected herself. Every time in the future that she "er vel"-led, I threatened that I'd jump. I wonder what would've happened if she had ever chosen not to correct herself...



## HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

When I pointed out to my son, Ben (age 4 years) the "Schneider" (Daddy Long Legs) in the hall he immediately went over to his father and said:

"Look Dad, there is a `cutter' in the hall."

His translation from Schneide (schneider = to cut) made the Daddy Long Legs into a "cutter".

**Birgit Winnington, Cheshire, U.K.**

In addition, we created songs as a memory aid. For example, I came up with this lyric to the tune of "Let's Call The Whole Thing Off":

**Itst zugsti "gisn", un frier "host gegosn".**
**Itst darfsti "nisn", un frier "host genosn".**
**Mit gisn, gegosn, un nisn, genosn,**
**Dus heyst a gringe shprakh.**

**Itst vil ikh "blabn" vi di "bist geblibn"**
**Itst vilsti "shrabn" vus ikh "hob geshribn"**
**Mit blabn, geblibn, un shrabn, geshribn,**
**Dus heyst a gringe shprakh.**

A non-literal translation, to give a sense of the rhythm & rhyme:

**Now, you say "pour", when before you said "poured".**
**Now you say "snore", when before you said "snored".**
**With pouring, and snoring, it never gets boring.**
**Yiddish is such a breeze.**

**Now I would "stay" where before you had "stayed".**
**Now you would "play" where before I had "played".**
**With staying and playing, I can't help in saying,**
**Yiddish is such a breeze.**

I always knew that I would speak Yiddish with my child, that is, if I were to be blessed with a child. I also hoped to marry a woman with whom I would be able to speak Yiddish. When Carol and I fell in love, I lost a little bit of my optimism about speaking Yiddish with my wife. And I worried that if we should get married, and we were to have a child, it would be a lot harder to raise the child in Yiddish. Still, time went on, and Carol understood how important Yiddish was to me, and I respected her limits regards tolerance to learning a language, and together we reached the level that we're at now, and we're reaching further. It's true that a father and mother alone, can teach a child Yiddish. But if the second half of the couple adds not only their silent agreement but their assistance as well, it makes it a lot easier and more joyful.

Whether it be with a wife, with a husband, or with a child, my feeling is, if you really love one another, then that which is important to you will become important to him or her, and vice versa. Within such a loving environment, Yiddish can flourish.

(This is an edited version of an article from the Yddish magazine "Yugntruf". Thanks to the editors for their permission to publish the article in BFN.)

# TWO OF EVERYTHING - BILINGUAL TWINS

## by Mary Murata

When my twin sons were born here in Japan I was determined to bring them up bilingually - but how? I knew that it is possible to bring children up speaking two languages because my niece was learning English from her British parents and French at school near Paris where they lived. But their home/school language strategy clearly wouldn't work for us, as my Japanese husband doesn't speak English. The only mixed-marriage couples I had met at that time had children who spoke almost no English. I was panic stricken.

In retrospect the success I had teaching Takuma and Yuma English was due to chance more than my good management, but I did start off with some kind of policy. It was obvious that they needed as much exposure to their second language as possible, especially in the years before school. So, being their main source of English, I decided to shelve any plans of going back to work for the time being. When the boys were a month old my husband started a new job which kept him away from home five days a week. This was a disaster not only for their Japanese but for their whole relationship, and it wasn't until they were about four years old that they really started to get along with him! So their first year was spent in an English oasis in Japan hearing only snatches of Japanese when we went out shopping or when my husband was at home.

Just before their first birthday we went on an extended visit to my parents in England for five months. It was in England that they spoke their first words - English of course. When we got back to Japan, I was convinced their Japanese would catch up on their English within a few months as they were old enough now to play outside with the local children. What I didn't realise was that English was already established as the language they used together. Single children pick up the local language very quickly in order to make friends; Takuma and Yuma didn't need friends, they had each other. When their friends came around to play the poor friend got totally ignored and usually cried to go home after about twenty minutes. Takuma and Yuma had no incentive to learn Japanese as the most important people in their lives their mother and each other - all spoke English.

*"Single children pick up the local language very quickly in order to make friends; Takuma and Yuma didn't need friends, they had each other".*

The situation continued until they were about three and a half. All this time I was sure their Japanese would catch up on and overtake their English at any moment so I was busy concentrating on giving their English a good start - collecting books, videos, starting and running a playgroup and being very careful never to speak Japanese to them. I even made up English names for food items that we don't have in Britain.

But by three and a half they still had no Japanese ability worth mentioning - five words perhaps. We were beginning to worry about their Japanese, particularly as my husband doesn't speak English. It also seemed a pity to send them to school without any Japanese ability, so we decided to send them to a day nursery full time until they started school (Japanese children start school at the age of six).

After they started nursery I was convinced that THIS time their Japanese would really catch up on their English in about three months. But I hadn't reckoned on the strength of the English bond between them. After two months of nursery their teachers told me that Takuma and Yuma played together in English at nursery and were not really learning Japanese. They suggested at this point that I speak Japanese to them at home but by then I had read enough books about bilingualism to reject their advice. My husband made a bit more of an effort to talk and read to them, but he was away from home such a lot that there wasn't much he could do. I also relaxed my ban on Japanese TV shows and videos.

Takuma and Yuma are now five years and three months. They've been at nursery for almost two years. Their English acquisition hasn't lost pace at all and they'd easily pass as monolingual children in a British primary school. Their Japanese is still lagging behind. Yuma's Japanese is probably about a year behind his peers. Takuma's Japanese is two or more years behind and he relies heavily on his brother for interpretation at school. His Japanese is liberally sprinkled with English. If he doesn't know a word he just says the English with a Japanese accent and hopes for the best! As we're planning to stay in Japan and send the boys to regular school this should not be a long term problem.

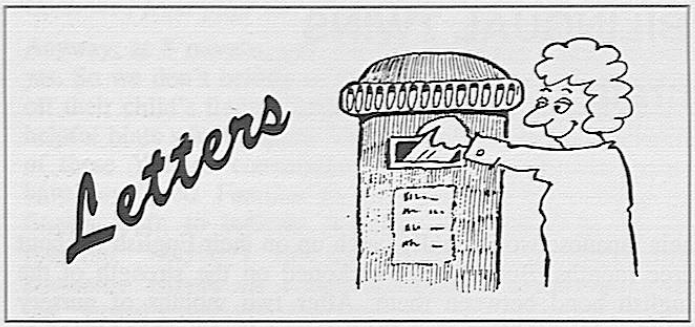
They both feel themselves to be "English" - Takuma wants to be an English Gentleman when he grows up. They both try to speak "proper" English and would rather make up a word than use the Japanese. Last Summer they had two types of large beetle at the nursery which they were keeping as pets, neither of which I knew in English. But the boys coined the terms "snapping beetle" and "poking beetle". I later found out that one of them is a stag beetle and Yuma promptly named the other a stab beetle! Like me, they never mix languages but interestingly they have a number of games with Japanese speaking characters - the narration of the game is in English but the dialogue is Japanese, e.g.:

**T:** Then the boy sees us and says "kenka da". *(Oh, a fight).*
**Y:** Yes and then he says "Yuma ga tsuyoi da". *(Isn't Yuma strong).*

They haven't gone through the phase that many bilingual children do of refusing to speak English, nor are they shy about speaking English in front of non-English speakers. When my husband is at home we simply say everything twice. They always tell me what they just said to Daddy, even though they must know I understand Japanese. My husband understands quite a lot of what's being said in English, so he quite often joins in the conversation without needing translations.

Our success in bringing up the boys bilingually has been largely due to good luck. I simply hadn't reckoned on the "twin" factor. I realise now that had things been different - say they'd gone to nursery from six months while I worked - the balance could easily have swung in the other direction and left me fighting an almost futile battle.

(Editors Note: If you are interested in bilingualism and twins, see also Vol.8:4, 1991)




## ONE PERSON, ONE LANGUAGE - PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS

I have always considered the bilingual upbringing of my children to be particularly successful but I am now questioning the wisdom of the "one person/one language" system from a psychological viewpoint.

I began speaking English to my son Patrick (now 12 years) before he was born. His French father spoke to him in French which we also spoke between ourselves even though he speaks English quite fluently. I continued to speak English to Patrick both inside and outside the home. As the sentences were initially short and easy for other people to understand, there was no social barrier to my speaking English to him when he was little. People were even very positive about it.

When my daughter Lisa was born three years after Patrick, I continued the same system. She was much slower to speak and often mixed languages, which Patrick had never done. However, she had far more contact with French speakers as she went two or three times a week to a child-care centre from age two onwards. When she was three and Patrick six he decided that henceforth they would always speak French to each other and they have done so ever since.

*"...for it is unnatural and anti-social to converse with one's child in the presence of people who cannot understand what is being said".*

A couple of years ago, I realized that by continuing to speak English to my children in the presence of non-English speakers, I was excluding them. Patrick had changed schools and his friends were constantly asking for a translation of anything we said. I started to speak French to both children whenever a French speaker was present. Lisa made the transition without the slightest problem. Like many second children, she is less bilingual than her brother. She always speaks to me in English when we were alone but her sentences often have quite a few French words thrown in.

Patrick, after two years of my consistently refusing to speak English in front of non-English speakers, still gets angry about it. His father and I are now separated, but his refusal is prior to the moment of actual separation, so I do not think that this explains his reaction.

I now think that it was a mistake to talk to my children in English in the presence of other people who were not able to understand everything that was being said. I think that children have enough difficulties in finding their place in a family and in society without creating a potentially exclusive situation. Added to this is the question of a son's relationship with his mother. It is obvious to me that Patrick's refusal to speak French is linked to his very exclusive attitude towards me, in a family situation where his father has never played a very parental role, acting as his children's companion rather than their father.

Patrick is a child who has always had difficulty in group situations. Despite that fact that he now attends a school where much emphasis is placed on group interaction, he often remains apart. I do not think that my strict application of the "one person/one" language system has helped him to develop harmoniously in this respect. On the other hand, his individual relations with people are very spontaneous and affectionate, regardless of their age. It is only in group situations that he has problems.

Lisa, with whom I have always been less strict in this regard, although initially shy, quickly finds her place in a group. The two children obviously have different personalities, but I think that there is a potential danger in the creation of an unnatural and anti-social situation, for it is unnatural and anti-social to converse with one's child in the presence of people who cannot understand what is being said.

How would the rule of speaking English only in situations where everybody understands the language affect the level of bilingualism? Both my children speak, read and write English fluently, yet I have never used videos and we have very few English cassettes. The children rarely see other English-speaking people as I come from Australia and we do not often have the opportunity to go there. However, I have always read to them a lot and we are a very "verbal"family. The children watch very little television (two to three hours a week maximum) and, since I work from the home as a technical translator, we spend a fair amount of time together. Before they went to school at the age of three, I reduced my work load so that I could bring them up myself.

The lack of input in the presence of non-English speakers would not, in my opinion, make a big difference to the children's level of bilingualism and I certainly think it would have helped rather than hindered Patrick's development in group situations.

I am interested in other readers reactions to my reflections. I am also interested in studies which have been done, not on the linguistic aspects of bilingualism, but on the psychological aspects.

**Rosemary Kneipp, Fontenay sous Bois, France.**

## COMMENTARY

BFN is a very interesting publication. As a father of a bilingual child and a foreign language instructor I regularly find useful articles that aid me with my son's bilingualism and in the French and Spanish classes I teach. In the last issues I found topics on which I would like to comment.

**Alice Byram's** article **Biculturalism: Looking back as I leave home** (Vol.10, No. 1, 1993) was especially appealing to me since it presented the experiences from the point of view of a teenager. It was gratifying to read Alice's positive experiences with French and English and her interest in other languages. I would very much like to read other articles by teenagers and pre-teens about their experiences with bilingualism. As we all know, maintaining interest in more than one language in children is often difficult particularly as they grow up and parents' influences in their offspring decrease. Alice's parents must have done a wonderful job.

*"One must attempt to stress the positive aspects of the minority language by increasing the cultural experiences in the "weak" language".*

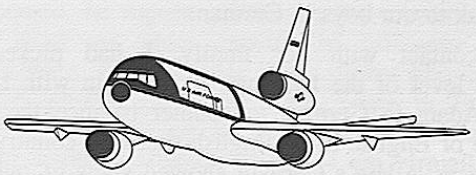
**Sue Wright** in her article **The Role of Literacy in Bilingual Development** (Vol. 10, No. 2, 1993) also raises another important and interesting issue: bilingualism is not always seen as a positive thing. Although readers of BFN certainly see the value of bilingualism, society at large does not necessarily share that perspective. There are even some bilinguals who do not see a second language as an asset. This happens when one of the two languages is viewed by society (and bilingual people themselves) as non-prestigious and of little practical value. To a certain degree this situation exists in the USA where Spanish is considered by many the language of lower class people. In my college classes I often find young Hispanics who can communicate in both Spanish and English but show a definite preference for English. They even insist that I pronounce their last names with an English pronunciation. There is no easy answer for parents who find themselves in that situation. One must attempt to stress the positive aspects of the minority language by increasing the cultural experiences in the 'weak' language. In my particular case, since my son Angelo (nine years old) hears the language only from me, it's been very useful to have my wife's support in presenting everything Italian as worthwhile, whether it's food, music, art, etc. Angelo therefore has a positive view of Italian and at times continues to correct people who mispronounce his name.

The question of certain languages' superiority also comes up in **Gerran Thomas's experiences in raising his children with French, English, and Welsh** (Vol. 8, No. 3, 1991 and Vol. 9, No. 4, 1992). His mother-in-law's comments about Breton and its lack of importance call to mind Welsh and its relevance. I totally agree with Mr. Thomas that Welsh is indeed important and worthwhile for his children to learn.

A final point related to **bilingualism and nationality** is raised by **Deirdre Straughan Lang** (Vol. 9 No. 4, 1992), an American married to an Italian and living in Italy. She does not feel completely at home in Italy nor when she visits the USA. As an Italian married to and American and living in the USA, I have often asked similar questions since I do not feel 100 percent Italian nor American. When I am in the USA I feel mostly Italian and when I am in Italy I feel mostly American. My problems about nationality are further complicated by the fact that I teach both French and Spanish. When I travel to other countries the answer is even less clear. Overall, though, I feel lucky to be able to function in more than one culture and be able to move with relative ease from one country to another. I try to show my son that although one may be a citizen of a certain country, it is perfectly fine to speak other languages and know about other cultures. Deirdre Straughan Lang is absolutely right when she says that the answer to her question about nationality cannot be given in "old-fashioned nationalistic terms". It seems to me that the "answer" she found for her is also valid for her daughter Rosella provided that the husband supports the ideas of bilingualism and multiculturalism. I look forward to reading about Rosella's development in future issues of BFN.

**Domenico Maceri, Santa Maria, California, USA**

Domenico Maceri has got PhD in Comparative Literature has written a number of articles on language and literature. His son speaks English and has strong passive skills in Italian (See BFN Vol. 6, No. 2, 1989, and Vol. 8, No. 2, 1991).



The following sign was sighted beside the emergency exit on a US Air Express plane and reported in the Sydney Morning Herald of 2 February 1994:

**PLEASE CONTACT A US AIR EXPRESS CREW MEMBER IF YOU ARE UNABLE TO READ, SPEAK OR UNDERSTAND ENGLISH, OR UNABLE TO UNDERSTAND THE GRAPHIC DIRECTIONS OR CREW COMMANDS.**

## GENERATION GAME

I come from an English family, with no trace of any other nationality as far back as records go. When I married Maryla, however, our children were at least the fourth successive generation on her side of the family to grow up bilingually.

Maryla is of Polish descent, born in (then) West Germany, educated in England and we met in Switzerland at Geneva University. Her mother is perfectly bilingual in Polish and German but her father, who is no longer alive, never perfected his German although he lived in the country for over 20 years. The first thing that struck me about Maryla's languages when I met her was that she spoke German with her mother, Polish with her father and English with her brother and sister. This requires some explanation.

Maryla's father's wartime experiences were such that he remained fiercely loyal to his Polish traditition and therefore adamant that Polish should be spoken whenever he was in the house. Maryla's mother, on the other hand, felt that it was essential for the children to grow up speaking the language of their country of residence. The children therefore spoke German with their mother but they would all switch (mid sentence if necessary) to Polish if their father walked in. The bilingual pattern was thereby set.

At the age of ten all three children were sent to Polish boarding schools in England. Despite the Polish element, the children in these two schools spoke English to one another. A cassette recording of the two sisters speaking English a year

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later reveals a strong foreign accent although all three now pass as native speakers. The habit of speaking English to one another has remained, probably reinforced by the emotive nature at home of the German/Polish question. However, they all switch freely and comfortably into German when in the company of their mother or other German speakers.

My wife, her brother and sister have all developed their language skills further; Maryla speaks fluent French, her sister (married to a man who is half French and half Swedish) speaks French, reasonable Spanish and a little Italian. Their brother has studied Russian as well as classical languages. My own French and Spanish, both learnt the hard way, have become sadly rusty, despite a language degree and three years spent living abroad.

The latest developments have been in our own children, Adam (8) and Michael (6). We were keen from the start to bring them up bilingually. For a mixture of personal and practical reasons, we chose German as the other language rather than Polish. It was therefore obvious that Maryla would speak to our boys in German.

Through contact with her family, I had picked up a reasonable level of the language so to begin with I tried to speak to Adam in German to counter balance the obvious dominance of English in an English speaking country. I gave up as soon as Adam's German showed signs of overtaking.

*Three generations of bilinguals*

mine and I was struggling to express all that I wanted to say in the language. Adam took to it like the proverbial duck to water and by age two was chattering away quite happily in both languages. He even translating between them to enable his grandparents to communicate with one another. Certain ill advised professionals had warned that the bilingualism might slow down his development in English and generally. In fact, he now has an enormous vocabulary in English for a child of his age, no doubt helped by the fact that he is something of a bookworm. His German is less advanced but it is still the language he always chooses for speaking with my wife and he finds it peculiar if she talks to him in English. We are just starting to encourage him to read in German which he seems to manage without too much difficulty.

Michael, different in all respects from his big brother, had an experience which might have put us off the bilingual experiment had we not seen it working so effectively for Adam. He is clearly every bit as bright as his brother but in a totally different way. He spoke hardly a word in either language before the age of three. Aged nearly four, he spent a whole term at playschool without uttering a word (with the notable exception that he once said "rabbit" when the occasion required it!) and to prove he meant business he repeated the silence trick at a new school two terms later. He has since caught up in English, helped by the fact that he reads well ahead of his age, and now speaks the language 'normally' (in my subjective judgement) for a child of his age. His German is less good than Adam's was at the same age but once more it is his language of choice for speaking with his mother.

The only regular exposure of the children to German has been through Maryla and the visits to their grandmother in Germany. Having had no television for the first years of Adam's life, we finally succumbed lock, stock and barrel and acquired not only a television but also a satellite. The German cartoons have contributed greatly to the development of the second language. We have considered trying at some stage to let the boys attend a German school for one term. I think that would be enough to bring their language up to the level of other native speakers of German of their age. It is pleasing to think that, for Adam at least, the stage has probably now been reached from which he can be expected to retain his German for the rest of his life. Meanwhile our third child, Philip was born only few months ago and so we are ready to start all over again!

**Ray Chidell, Haywards Heath, England**

(Editor's Note: If you are interested in schooling in the minority language country see an article in Vol.6, No.3, 1989.)

## VIVA ENGLISH IN ITALIA!

I am the proud father of two young children (Steven aged three years and Silvia aged ten months) seriously committed to bringing them up as English/Italian bilinguals.

My wife, who is Italian, and I decided when Steve was born each to speak our own language to him. I have always spoken to my wife in Italian, as I was already fluent when we met, and she had done no English at school. I therefore had to make a conscious effort to speak English to a newly-born baby when all the feedback I received was giggling or chuckling on a good day or yelling and screaming on a bad day. Steve did his best to refrain from speaking as long as possible and, despite the research findings in contrast with this, the thought did cross our minds that he was not speaking because he was being spoken to in two different languages. This doubt was strengthened by the fact that most children around here seem to start talking around 18 months and are quite fluent by their second birthday. That made Steve seem rather slow on the uptake but I was reassured by my parents telling me that none of my family (I am one of five) said much before they were three.

Over the past three months or so Steve has come on in leaps and bounds. He started off by naming objects in both languages and once he had built up quite a large vocabulary, began to put two words together. It was at that point that he was faced with the problem of keeping the two languages apart. He would occasionally put an Italian adjective with an English noun and viceversa but even at that stage, he distinguished quite well between the two. He is now at the point where he can describe events, "Stevie fell down, hurt leg", express preferences "apricot juice no, pear juice yes" and quaint observations "Sun having supper, moon getting up".

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**I have recently come upon a problem I had not expected in bilingualism. I'm Swedish and speak Swedish to my children (1 and 4 years). My British husband speaks English to them. I'm not 100% strict with the Swedish, but the children don't like me talking English to them. Now, my son has just started school, and the teacher is aware of the language situation. I'm quite happy to help Ian read, by reading the printed English text in his books. I also call the letters of the alphabet by their English names. The teacher now wants me to play "I Spy" with my son. In the first instance, I didn't actually know this game until it was explained to me. Secondly, I felt quite unhappy, because it feels a very unnatural thing to do with my son. I told the teacher that I will not speak English to him, and I won't play any games like "I Spy". I don't want to be seen as an awkward, unhelpful mother, but I feel I can't give up the "Swedish only" that I've stuck to for over four years.**

**Do you think my son will suffer if I don't "help" him in this way? (My husband is willing to play a bit instead, but won't be available as much). I worry now about future things like this, to be explained and argued over with each new teacher.**

**(Incidentally, we picked this school because of the Head's positive reaction to bilingualism. In our priority school the Head was more likely to put the bilingual child in remedial class).**

**Ann Giles, Cheshire, England**

In spite of being a multicultural country, bilingualism in England is often regarded as something odd and without any value. Many teachers do not seem to understand how children acquire two languages and the importance of being consistent when using the "one language - one person" method.

I agree with you that it is important that your children see you as the Swedish speaker, who does not speak English to them. When they grow up this becomes harder to maintain, but once Swedish is firmly established occasional switching to English doesn't matter. I do feel, however, that you would give a wrong message to your child if you started to play in English now, when his Swedish is not yet fully developed. I am sure it is enough if your husband plays "I Spy" with him. The most important thing is to show interest in his reading and to read him a lot, both English and Swedish books (you can read the Swedish ones, your husband the English books). Research has shown that if the parents can teach the children the love of reading they will, most likely, become good readers. The game of "I Spy" is not that important. I am sure you will be plesently suprised that once he has learnt to read in English, he will very quickly transfer those skills to Swedish, with a bit of help from you.

**Marjukka Grover**

**VIVA ENGLISH IN ITALIA** *Continued from page six*

At present there is almost a perfect balance between his knowledge of the two languages. We also occasionally break the "one parent one language" rule in that my wife gives an English answer to an English question/comment addressed to her and teaches him nursery rhymes. I have never spoken Italian to him though it is sometimes a bit awkward to stick to English in the presence of other Italian monolingual children. I try to get round this problem by repeating in Italian what I had just said in English.

We have backed up daily conversation in English with videocassettes and books. We bought a series of Walt Disney classics and my sister has sent us videos containing recordings of children's programmes on English television. One idea for the future is to buy a satellite dish so that we can get "live" TV programmes as well as prerecorded ones.

It's difficult to know exactly what a child of his age should be learning with regard to the use of a second language. We notice that he finds it easier to follow the children's TV programmes than the Walt Disney classics. As far as books are concerned, he enjoys picture books, identifying objects etc. but does not seem capable of following a typical children's story. We obviously don't expect him to be at the same level as a monolingual child living in England but would like to compensate for the fact that his environment outside the home is entirely Italian. I am virtually his only source of English and therefore we need to create situations which would widen his horizons and introduce him to a style of language that he may never hear from me.

I am basically looking for some kind of guideline to help us bring Steve up to learn English in as genuine a way as possible. A kind of preschool programme that children living in England are likely to follow. I wonder if BFN readers could suggest books or videocassettes that may suit our case. We would, in return, be happy to offer our help as far as Italian material is concerned to anyone interested.

Contact details removed

## 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 questions or contributions to**

Contact details removed

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

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