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News and Views for Intercultural People

Editors: George Saunders & Marjukka Grover 1994 Volume 11 No. 4

## EDITORIAL

Christmas time, festival time - time for families, friends and traditional celebrations. The celebration of a religious festivals, like Christmas, sends our thoughts back to childhood memories. On page five Deirdre Condon from Luxembourg describes her thoughts about the 'right' Christmas traditions and the balancing acts needed for Christmas in an intercultural marriage. Her letter made me think of my own childhood in Northern Finland, in the neighbourhood of Father Christmas, in contrast to the 20 plus Christmases I have spent in this 'green and pleasant land'.

To me JOULU (Christmas) means peace and quiet. Memories of a Finnish countryside covered with snow; silhouettes of tall pine trees against the dark, wintry, starlit sky; crisp, cold air on my face when walking, warmly wrapped, to the grave yard to light candles on the graves of loved ones. The peaceful, silent scene with thousands of those candles glittering in the snow and the soldiers standing, in -20° C, on guard at the war memorial. Back home, in the warmth of the fire, lots of candles, flags on the Christmas tree, the mouthwatering meal of ham and rice pudding and Father Christmas calling late on Christmas eve - they all belong to my Finnish Christmas.

The first Christmas in England came as a shock - how can you celebrate Christmas without snow? Walking in the country in December surrounded by green fields just did not feel right. And why is everyone going to the Pub on Christmas Eve, the sacred night when the whole world should be peaceful and quiet? And rooms decorated with balloons!!! Balloons belong only to May-day celebrations.

20 plus years later and I have found a perfect solution to my intercultural Christmas. No visitors are allowed after four o'clock on Christmas Eve when we start our Finnish Christmas celebrations with a hot, relaxing sauna. The whole Christmas Eve is magic; quiet music, lots of candles, Finnish food, the peaceful walk to candlelit Midnight Mass. On Christmas Day I am ready for English Christmas; the house filled with friends, noise and laughter and lovely, joyful English Christmas Carols. I know nothing better than combining the best traditions from our two cultures and making a Christmas which is just right for our family.

Please tell us your feelings, successes and failures combining different festive celebrations in your own family. The year goes by quickly and we would love to have plenty of material on this subject for next year's issues. The writer of the best letter will get a free copy of a book *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* by Colin Baker, due to be published in May 95.

**RAUHALLISTA JOULUA!**

Marjukka Grover

## LANGUAGE DISORDER - IS MONOLINGUALISM NECESSARY?

Anthea Fraser Gupta



In Vol. 11:2, 1994 Alison Hüneke wrote about her daughter's language disorder and the varying advice given by the professionals. In the following article Anthea Fraser Gupta from *The National University of Singapore* looks at the latest theories on language disorder and bilingualism from the viewpoint of speech therapists.

About 5% of children will experience difficulties in learning language. There can be various causes for this (for example, hearing impairment, intellectual impairment, cleft palate, cerebral palsy). In some cases ('specific language impairment') there appears to be no cause. Any part of language learning may be affected, including pronunciation, understanding, grammar, the social use of language, the ability to remember words. If your child has been diagnosed as having a speech and language disorder should you give up bilingualism?

Many speech therapists feel that it is essential to concentrate on only one language if a child is having difficulties and will demand that the family switch to only one language. The therapist should carefully assess which is the best language for the child, and will encourage the family to make an effort to change their behaviour so that the child is exposed to only one language. Therapy will take place in this language too. In many cases the language chosen will be the majority language of the community, or English. In the case of some severe disorders, signing will be advised, often in addition to

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some oral language. Other therapists believe that "the clinician cannot expect to advise that the child be exposed to just one language, without changing the family's natural pattern of communication" (Ara & Thompson, 1989). Even those who agree on maintaining bilingualism are likely to suggest that families should have a clear separation of languages on the principle of 'one person one language' (Miller & Abudarham, 1984; Ara & Thompson, 1989). For many families this too would represent a change in normal discourse patterns.

I feel that this is an issue about which bilingual families need to make their own informed decision, and in this article I hope to give a cost benefit analysis of changing their language behaviour.

In 1993 a conference *Speech and Language Disability in a Multilingual Environment* was held at the National University Hospital in Singapore. The therapists in this conference came from Singapore and Malaysia, countries where the vast majority of families are bi- or multilingual. The guest speaker was Professor Ann Zubrick, who contributed her experience in Hong Kong. It was clear that some of the therapists strongly encouraged a switch to monolingualism whereas others thought this was undesirable or impractical.

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*"In making a decision which may affect the whole future of your child it is essential to assess the role of all the languages in your family's life".*

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Zubrick felt it important in many cases of language disability to reduce confusion by promoting only one language. The choice of language should be based on a close and careful assessment of the family situation. The therapist must understand the implications of language choice for the client. The nature of the languages may also be a factor. In particular, Zubrick pointed out that tone languages (such as Chinese, Thai and Vietnamese) may be helpful for children with hearing impairment, and with many kinds of pronunciation difficulties.

There are of course different kinds and degrees of speech and language disorder. Zubrick argued that the more severe the condition the more important it was that just one language be used with the child. In this case it is often easier to teach adult family members a language they do not know (including signing) than to continue to add to the child's difficulties by continued exposure to more than one language. The problems are multiplied when more than one term of reference is used and in particular, cognitive difficulties are greater.

Zubrick recommended that even if the family do continue with more than one language, the therapist should concentrate on getting just one language up to the mental age of the child. The therapist may wish to treat only features in the other language which greatly impair intelligibility. It is likely that some of what is learnt in therapy in one language will transfer to the child's other language(s).

Where one of the child's languages is the language of education, many advisors throughout the world feel that families should be particularly encouraged to expose the child to the school language. This is the Singapore governmental recommendation for all children, and has

resulted in tremendous language shift in Singapore. One danger of this recommendation is that family members who do not know the school language may simply end up not speaking to the child, reducing the child's overall language exposure, as well as diminishing family life.

So the benefits of a switch to monolingualism appear to be:

- monolingualism is easier cognitively
- child may make faster progress in therapy
- the child may cope better at school if a switch to the school language is made.

The costs include:

- loss of other language(s)
- some family members may be unable to speak to the child
- interference with normal patterns of communication
- child may be disadvantaged or alienated by monolingualism

As there are costs and benefits, families need to assess their own situation before making a decision. The following situations may indicate a switch to monolingualism:

- child with severe speech and language disorder
- child with problems in cognitive development
- child with word finding difficulty
- child with disordered comprehension
- child with problems in the social use of language
- when there is one language that everyone in the family can speak
- when the dominant family language is also the school language

The following situations would be more likely to predispose the maintenance of bilingualism:

- child with phonological disorder (pronunciation) only
- where there is no language that everyone in the family can speak
- belonging to a community in which it is required to be bilingual
- family where the dominant language is not the school language

Families who belong to a community where bilingualism is widespread are also unlikely to be able to maintain the 'one parent one language' approach. In these communities, where most people are bilingual, rapid code-switching is the norm, and the socially correct use of codeswitching is an important part of life. Although many people have advocated the 'one parent one language' method of achieving bilingualism, I feel myself that it is not a requisite of bilingualism, and for many families is actually impossible. In 'promiscuously' bilingual communities like Singapore most children grow up in linguistically complex situations where nearly everyone speaks two or three languages, often simultaneously. They separate the languages by the age of two, just like children in linguistically more ordered places, because there are some settings where mixing is not correct.

In making a decision which may affect the whole future of your child it is essential to assess the role of all the languages in your family's life, and guess whether on balance monolingualism or bilingualism is going to give your child the greater likelihood of a good outcome, cognitively, socially, linguistically, and educationally. At this stage, the professionals simply do not know what is the best recommendation. It will not be an easy decision, and you may never know whether you made the right one...

#### References

- Ara, F. and Thompson, C. (1989) Intervention with bilingual pre-school children. In D.M. Duncan (ed.) *Working with Bilingual Language Disability* (pp. 132-53). London: Chapman and Hall.
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## WHAT TO EXPECT OF AN INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION

Coreen Sears

Nowadays, a period spent outside your home country is an increasingly likely occurrence in a working life, and amongst all the other implications of such an assignment, the one that looms largest for families with children is the question of schooling. In this article Coreen Sears from *The International School of Brussels* describes some of the options available, what you can expect from an international education and some points to consider in choosing a particular school for your children.

Firstly, there is no such thing as a typical international school. Each school is unique because it tends to reflect the needs and expectations of parents and children in a certain location. There is, too, a whole range of schools which are not properly speaking international schools at all which cater for expatriate communities, such as the French Lycees to be found in major cities all over the world. The lycees make few concessions to the speakers of languages other than French, their purpose being in reality to provide uninterrupted education through the French system to French children.

Yet other schools cater for specific groups of students, such as the British Schools which offer a curriculum based on the United Kingdom National Curriculum leading to the GCSE (*General Certificate of Secondary Education*), taken at the age of 16 and A-Level (*Advanced level*) examinations, or the European Schools which provide a unique educational environment for children of European Union officials.

Alongside these schools exists a range of large and small International Schools with a variety of names, ethos and nationality mix, offering an English-medium education. An international school may have a large majority of one nationality, often American, but with a wide nationality mix amongst the rest of the student body. Such a school may offer a largely American based curriculum or draw its methodology and curricula from all parts of the English speaking world. There exist, too, schools such as those serving the

repertoire, but as a linguistically aware family, such an experience may be very appealing to you. In any case, international schools invariably offer an extensive programme of studies in the host country language, as well as a far greater exposure to language learning than is usual in national schools.

A further educational opportunity offered by international schools is the two year course for 16-18 year olds leading to the *International Baccalaureate*. This qualification is well liked and recognised by universities and institutions of higher education all over the world.

International schools as a whole, offer a notably friendly and informal atmosphere. This arises consciously out of the need to make both children and parents feel at home and at ease as soon as possible. At the same time the better schools offer a high degree of professional help and support to new families in the way of informal and formal counselling. Frequently, too, the school is a community centre for expatriates, offering a range of extra-mural activities and sporting opportunities.

The body which offers accreditation and membership to international schools, and which will give you some guarantee of educational respectability, is the *European Council of International Schools (ECIS)*, which operates also outside Europe. You would be well advised to consult their handbook which is certainly obtainable at the British Council, and at most public libraries, in order to ascertain the status of a particular school.

So, to turn to the practical task of choosing a school for your children. Firstly, it is wise to do as much homework prior to your visit as possible. If a visit to your new location prior the move is not possible you will have to depend more on advice from employers and colleagues and handbooks of different organisations. Ideally you should have seen prospectuses from schools in the area and asked colleagues living in the new location what are their experiences of the school in question (treating this input with caution). Is the school accredited by ECIS or inspected by a national government inspectorate? What are the fees (sometimes very high) and who is paying them? What are the transport facilities and the length of journey from the possible home location? (You may wish to make your choice of school before choosing your house). In visiting the schools look if the campus is attractive and find out that the school offer adequate facilities in areas such as sport, drama and art? An international school usually plays a far more important role in the life of the whole family than a school at home. Usually it provides not only in-school facilities, but also a valuable meeting-place for after school and weekend activities. Children, who have recently undergone the major dislocation of a foreign posting, tend to prefer to turn to the familiarity and security of the school environment for much of their recreational activity.

Any school accredited by one of the major organisations will offer a comprehensive programme of studies, but you will want to ascertain for yourselves whether the content and style

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Chateau: The International School of Brussels

United Nations in New York and Vienna, where there is a truly international student body and curriculum, as well as schools, frequently found in Spain, Italy and South America, where the majority of pupils are from host country families who want an English medium education for their children.

Other schools which will particularly interest parents of bilingual children are those which offer a high degree of language exposure, such as one of the various types of bilingual schools. Obviously the language, other than English, which is offered, may not be part of your family's



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of the education offered is appropriate both for your children's personalities and academic strengths, as well as for the likely course of their future education. At the same time you should inquire in detail about the school's provision for coping with the great variety of nationalities, languages, modes of learning, levels of academic achievement and the whole array of differences to be found among the diverse student body of an international school. For you will appreciate, on reflection, that each child carries a unique educational profile which the school needs to recognise and to build upon. And so the good international school will have in place strategies for individualised learning, small group work, or where appropriate, ability streaming, as well as offering a flexible and adequate programme for teaching English to speakers of other languages.

Of course we want all schools to offer fine libraries and good access to new books, but it is even more essential for the international school to offer an enriched version of those facilities, since the local community may have very limited resources other than the books in the host language.

Every parent, however, and certainly every child will know whether the atmosphere of a particular school is one in which they feel at home. I would urge families to sit down together and discuss what aspects of a school they feel are essential to their children's happiness and success. You may, for instance, feel at home with a more structured and teacher directed approach as opposed to a more informal and child centred methodology. What is important is that you choose a school,

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*"For you will appreciate, on reflection, that each child carries a unique educational profile which the school needs to recognise and to build upon".*

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broadly speaking, which offers the style of education which you favour, otherwise it is possible that on occasion you will feel uncomfortable and even hostile to some aspects of your children's schooling.

For families who are bringing up their children bilingually, international schooling will probably offer a new experience: for the first time, perhaps, your children will be part of the majority amongst the student body. Alongside this new awareness that bilingualism is the norm will arise concerns about specific issues. Assuming that your children's English is of a high enough standard not to require special English classes, it would follow in most schools that your children would attend extensive classes in the language of the host country or other languages. It would be a natural concern that exposure to further languages might diminish your child's grasp of his/her second home language. Should you then enrol your children in further classes after school or at the weekend? As a general rule I have found that previous exposure in a consistent manner to other languages is a very positive basis for future language learning. What you can be sure of, in any case, is that the school will be experienced in concerns of this nature and will be able to offer you constructive advice.

Finally, I think it is useful to offer one general observation. No international school will look and feel like a school from a national system. What will make all the difference to the

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**HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR**

I recently bought a one piece pyjama for Elodie. She was delighted with it and asked me if I had had a similar pyjama when I was a child. On my negative response she said, 'Oh you only had two coin pyjamas'. (*Piece* in French means pieces or coins.)

Christine Frati, Vienne, France.

**BILINGUAL FAMILIES IN BREMEN**

What started as a seminar (see Vol.10:3, 93) for bilingual families and students at Bremen University turned out to be a huge success.

From autumn 1992 to summer 1993 I gave weekly tutorials for undergraduates dealing with infant bilingualism. The students were lively and enthusiastic and studying all the research work available, but the 'real life' experience was missing. As a consequence, we decided to invite bilingual families to visit us at the University. Many families with lots of different languages turned up for the first meeting and on parting, some of the parents expressed the wish to learn about bilingualism in more academic way. Why not meet regularly and work on the subject together? It took us a whole year to organise it properly. The department of Linguistics realised that a seminar with students and families participating would be something new and challenging in the curriculum, and we finally even got enough money to employ a baby-sitter for the time the families spend in the seminar.

The seminar started in April this year and what amazed us right from the beginning was the open and easy-going attitude of our families. It was the families who constantly asked questions, shared experiences, commented on research findings and analysed the theoretical frameworks of bilingualism. To fulfil the course requirements, the students conducted interviews with the families which helped to establish many private contacts. We covered general principles of language acquisition, code-switching phenomena, research findings back to the start of the century, social aspects of bilingualism and much more.

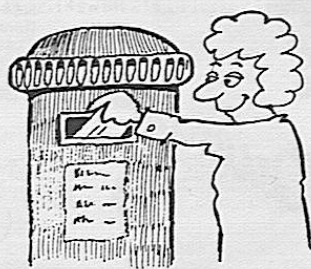
Once a month we had an extra meeting to discuss individual experiences within the families and it did not take long before we could celebrate the first report of success from a young Turkish mother. Divorced from her Turkish husband she found it nearly impossible to raise her two children bilingually in an all German environment. She has lived in Germany all her life which doesn't exactly help when trying to raise children in Turkish. A long discussion with the project group finally helped her to win her courage back and to bring up her children in Turkish. One day she came into the seminar telling everybody about Turkish songs she had sung with her kids, about Turkish words her children had learnt and about a new and strong interest they had in the language.

Towards the end of the seminar Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, a well known author in the field of minority education, gave us an exciting lecture on *How to make everyone multilingual*. It was her visit that has encouraged the families to continue the project with monthly meetings despite the fact that the university has no money to go on supporting it.

Birgit Szymanski, University of Bremen, Germany.



# Letters



## CHRISTMAS AND INTERCULTURAL MARRIAGE

I think Christmas must be one of those 'difficult times' for cross-cultural marriage partners. I always end up feeling frustrated, as though something is missing. I try hard to bring in the best of both cultures but it isn't always easy. Every Christmas up comes the question of what to eat when. I do love my traditional English meal but turkey cut up into tiny pieces and roasted the way the Italians cook chicken is, to my mind an awful waste. It just doesn't taste the same either. And after a huge plate of pasta (what no pasta? my God we will starve then!) we never manage to get to the pudding. Would anyone like a three-year old home made Christmas pudding?

My husband (Italian) does not know how to carve as they don't have joints of meat for Sunday lunch in Naples the way we did in the UK. Do I need to persuade my husband to take carving lessons or take some myself? For me carving is essentially a male domain. My happy memories are so strong - memories of my Father picking up the carving knife and ceremoniously sharpening it every Sunday and at Christmas time of course, and of the dog racing to his side as he heard the ping the carving knife made as Father picked it up, are part of my soul. I realise I am going wrong by trying to recreate my past Christmases for my children and thus tying myself in knots. It just isn't possible. I have resolved to try and create our own Christmas and let's forget about the turkey. Has anyone any bright ideas?

I know I am not alone - my Danish colleague spent Christmas in Germany with her husband's family and sighed longingly for traditional Danish Christmas Eve fare because she had to eat sausages and potato salad. Perhaps, as we have the chance, we should try to have a party with all of us producing our Christmas fare and letting the others taste a little. I had to smile when my husband turned to his nephew and said 'Oh for a plate of whatever they like' and his nephew nodded wistfully. It just doesn't occur to them that I might be sighing too because, as everyone knows, English food is so awful.

Deirdre Condon, Steinsel, Luxembourg.



## MULTILINGUAL NICOLE

Hello to all bilingual families! I (Stefania) am Italian, and have grown up with French and Italian. My parents are both Italians, but Mom speaks perfect French due to her cultural-religious background. I think and dream in both languages. I learned English in school and studied chiropractic for five years in Canada. I was taught German for three years in High School, but I did not like it, because of the teacher and because I always thought 'I will never use it!'

How wrong! Christian, my husband, whom I met in Toronto, is Swiss-German. He speaks fluently 'real' German - Swiss dialect, English, French and he has learned Italian. When we met we spoke French together, because it was less 'technical' than English, which we still use for professional topics (we are both Doctors of Chiropractic (DC) and we studied in English). Now we speak Italian together.

We live in Italy with our two and half year old daughter, Nicole. We want Nicole to hear all the languages we speak. When Nicole was born we happened to find a Peruvian baby-sitter, who speaks only Spanish to her. So, very unconsciously, we followed the 'one person one language' method. My mother, who lives very close and sees Nicole daily, speaks only French to her. I chose Italian, because it is the language of the country we live in. My father speaks also Italian to her. Christian speaks only Swiss-German to her which is the language of her other grand parents, whom we don't see often.

Recently we came across your **Bilingual Family Newsletter** and started to think more consciously of what we are doing. Not long ago I told the languages we speak with Nicole to a kindergarten teacher who is an 'Antroposofa' following Rudolf Steiner philosophy. She is also a logopedist. She told me very aggressively that in Steiner's opinion children should hear only one language up to seven years of age. She also told me that some research done in England has proved that children of bilingual families suffer 'dislessia' (difficulties in making a proper sentence and in saying words correctly). This happens in a higher percentage in bilingual families, than in families with only one language.

After this discussion I was depressed but my husband and I decided she must have misunderstood the research. We know hundreds of people who grow up bilingually or with a dialect and a language and these people are all neurologically normal people!

Nicole understands Spanish and Italian very well, German and some French. She is naturally less exposed to German, as she sees her father only in the evenings and at week-ends. Sometimes she seems lazy to say a word in German, but she understands it.

So now you have a better idea of the language pattern in our family. Congratulations on your Newsletter I will tell others of it. We would also like to get in touch with other bilingual families.

Stefania & Christian Hubschmid Capitanio, Torino, Italy

*The reaction from the Kindergarten teacher is quite common of those who have no knowledge or experience on bilingualism. Results of some earlier studies on the subject did draw conclusions that children would not learn either language properly if brought up bilingually. These researchers had not, however, taken into account the social and economic factors when comparing bilingual children with monolingual*

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children originating from very different backgrounds. As far as we know there is no research showing a link between bilingualism and alexia (loss of ability to read), aphasia (loss of ability to understand speech) or dyslexia (word 'blindness', specific difficulties in reading).

Numerous research projects carried out in the past 20 years on bilingualism have concluded that, provided children grow up in a rich language environment, bilingualism can have a positive effect on children, and it certainly does not harm them. What is important, however, is that the children hear rich and varied language, are read to a lot and the minority language speaker spends 'quality' time with the children in activities they are interested in.

In your case using the 'one person - one language' method will help Nicole to recognise that there are three languages in question. How well she will learn to speak each of the three languages, depends on how much time each of you spend with her and the other sources available (trips to Switzerland, Germany, Spain, books, videos, German/Spanish-speaking playgroups etc.). Italian will most likely be her strongest language, if you stay in Italy, but there is no reason why she could not become fluent in German and Spanish too, provided she has enough input in these languages.

Marjukka Grover

### COMMENTS

In Vol.11:2,1994 issue I felt emotionally involved with just about every topic mentioned. I'd like to address a few of them, and perhaps someone might relate to my comments or find them encouraging.

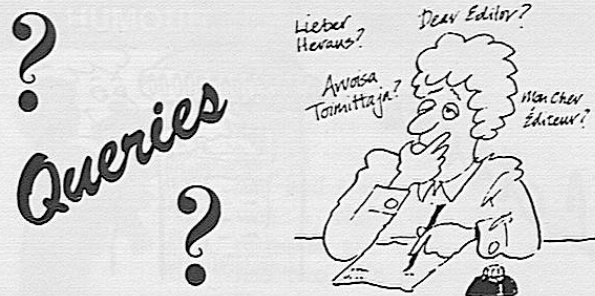
On language disorder I wanted to report that my brother, who is mentally retarded (down syndrome), is ambilingual/equilingual (to use my new term acquired through your Newsletter!) Growing up in Puerto Rico and the Panama Canal Zone, Spanish was spoken at home, with friends, and on TV, while English was spoken at the private American Schools we were fortunate to attend. If my brother, like many other Hispanics in his situation, had been taught in one language only, maybe that would have helped him to do better in other analytical situations. Perhaps. However, am I wrong to say that it would have been unnatural to force just one language? It would not be him, he is who he is today, even more special because of this skill. Just think, my brother, Charlie-Boy has an understanding of something that the President of this country does not, it makes me VERY PROUD!

The article by Keith Thompson *What is in a Name?* was very interesting. I find a name so important: you introduce yourself with a name, your whole self is first introduced by THE NAME. I have lived it. I wanted very badly for my children to have Spanish names. My heritage and my mother tongue is the one gift for sure I can give my children. Marrying into a German/Anglo-Saxon family without much foreign exposure, and used to traditional American names, I was their culture shock. Fortunately, my husband is in

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### RESOURCE FILE

Pour une éducation bilingue by Anna Lietti. Published by Petite Bibliothèque Payot/ Documents, ISBN 2-228-88741-2.  
 "...und ich bin bunt": Bi-kulturelle Erziehung in der Familie by Heidemarie Pandey. Published by IAF, Mainzer Landstr. 147, 6000 Frankfurt/Main 1, Tel. 069-737898.



### CAN STUTTERING BE CAUSED BY BILINGUALISM?

I am a former bilingual teacher living in France. I taught bilingual education for five years near the Chicago area, in a Spanish to English classroom and during that time, I saw a lot of students. For the ESL classes, I also had students other than hispanophones.

One thing I never saw in my 5 years of professionally dealing with bilingualism (I have long dealt with it in my non-professional life as well), was stuttering. Now, I have a 4 1/2 year old daughter who has just finished her first full year of pre-school, and I have noticed her stuttering for about a month, in both minority (English) and majority (French) languages, but more so in English.

I know that most stuttering has affective causes and would be pleased if you can give me any insight on this problem. My daughter started speaking English at 16 months and at 18 months we returned to the US and stayed there until she was 34 months old, during which time we used very little French.

Mary Alice Sicard, Plaisir, France

It is not all that uncommon for both lay people and physicians to attribute problems, which children may have with speech development, to their bilingualism. To the best of my knowledge, however, there is no evidence that bilingualism *per se* causes stuttering. According to Edith Harding and Philip Riley, in their book *The Bilingual Family: A Handbook for Parents* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), countries with a high proportion of bilinguals do not have significantly higher numbers of stutterers than monolingual countries. Your own observations of bilingual children seem to confirm this. Some major studies of stuttering do not even mention bilingualism, such as Wendell Johnson's (Professor of Speech Pathology and Psychology at the University of Iowa), 100-page discussion of research into stuttering and its causes, in *Speech Handicapped School Children* (Harper & Row, 1967). However, what does become clear from his work on disfluency in speech, is that all children speak disfluently to some degree, but it is usually only becomes a problem for the child when it is seen as such by adults. Johnson writes:

"...in case after case, stuttering as a serious problem developed after it has been diagnosed. The diagnosis of stuttering - that is, the decision made by someone that a child is beginning to stutter - is one of the causes of the stuttering problem, and apparently one of its most potent causes".

Johnson stresses the importance of the attitude of parents and others towards children whose speech is not always fluent. To label them 'stutterers' will only aggravate the problem, whereas to accept them as 'normal' or 'good' or 'acceptable' speakers will most likely lead to quite a different kind of behaviour.



## DÉCOUVREZ.. WHO STOLE GRANNY?

V. Edwards & N. Bérubé

To read this book children will need to use French as well as English. *There is no way through without using both languages.*

Pbk 1-85658-000-8 Price £4.99 (US\$9.95)



Sometimes bilingual children have difficulty in expressing themselves in one of their languages and have to grope for words or struggle with various grammatical constructions, resulting in as a certain amount of repetition and hesitation. It is quite possible that this will attract the attention or even arouse the impatience of listeners and perhaps be considered stuttering. The children's self-consciousness and anxiety about their speech, or more exactly, about listeners' possible negative reactions to it, are the most likely causes of such disfluency. Indeed, the disfluency may be conspicuous in only one of a child's languages. When my son, Thomas, was a pre-schooler, he has what could be described as a noticeable stutter in his English - I think because he had to compete more for speaking time in English - whereas in German, which he spoke only with me, there was much less evidence of a stutter.

The solution to a child's stuttering often lies in the attitude of the listener, and much of the advice given by Johnson to parents, teachers etc. who have contact with children with disfluent speech applies equally well to people coming into contact with bilingual children:

- ✱ **Make talking enjoyable.** See to it that the children have as much a feeling of success as possible in speaking. (One) should do all (one) can to make the children's speaking enjoyable and rewarding. Certainly (one should) not make a point of criticising them for mistakes in grammar and pronunciation ... or for other things about their speech that are not important in relation to the fun and satisfaction they get from speaking as well as they can.
- ✱ **Try to be the kind of listener (the) children like to talk to ...** when they are 'talking over their heads' be patient, and now and then supply them with a new word which they had not yet learned but which they need at the moment. To a reasonable extent and in meaningful ways help them to add to their vocabulary - preferably at those times when they need words they haven't learned in order to tell you things they had never tried to say before.
- ✱ **Read to (the children) whenever you can.** In reading or speaking to them, enunciate clearly, be interested in what you are reading and avoid a tense, impatient, or loud voice. Enjoy this reading and make it fun and companionable. Do some of it every day, (if a parent) preferably just before bedtime, if possible.

(Wendell Johnson: *Speech Handicapped School Children*. New York: Harper & Row, 1967)

As can be seen, this advice, if followed, reduces children's anxiety about speaking and makes it an enjoyable experience for them. Whilst Johnson mentions these steps specifically as an effective means of building confidence in the disfluent speaker, they would seem to be a sound procedure for assisting also bilingual children who are having difficulty in expressing themselves.

However, I would encourage parents whose children do not respond to the above suggestions to consult a speech therapist, preferably one who her/himself is bilingual or one who is familiar with bilingualism. Unfortunately, I still hear of cases where health professionals advise the elimination of one of the child's languages as the magical solution to the perceived problem. Would monolingual parents with a child who stutters be advised to stop speaking to him/her!

Removing one of the languages could have a damaging effect, merely increasing a child's anxiety, especially since, in most cases, it would be the language of the home which would be the one to go. If children are suddenly told that they cannot use the familiar home language, the language associated with the warmth and security, perhaps even the language in which they feel most confident, they cannot fail to become aware that people consider that they have a speech problem. It is very doubtful that such an experience and realisation would lead to improvement in fluency in the language which remains.

George Saunders

### COMMENTS *Continued from page five*

love/obsessed with my culture and is fluent in Spanish. But when we first had our son *Carlos Raphael Moersen* (see what I mean?), it was difficult for his family. My daughter was little easier on the Anglos, we named her *María Elena*. In short, my children fit in beautifully in both of their wonderful families and in this country where they are part of such a vast melting pot.

I feel very strongly on this subject. I try my best to incorporate Spanish-Latin American culture at home. Luckily we have friends in the same situation in the area. Through our weekly Playgroup - Spanish Club, we read books, sing Spanish songs, and play games with our kids. It's fun.

Anyway, I finally subscribed to your Newsletter and won't have to wait for my friend, Lillian, to pass it after she is done with it.

Marta López Moersen, Bethesda, Maryland, USA

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Elizabeth Pitman



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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.

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## GLOSSARY

**Dominance:** The degree to which a bilingual is more proficient in one language than the other.

## INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION *Continued from page 4*

happiness and success of your children and to your own peace of mind is to adopt an open and tolerant attitude, and to view this whole new experience as a wonderful opportunity rather than a threatening interruption to your children's real schooling. I have frequently noticed that unhappy and wary parents may prevent or delay their children's integration into this new environment. Good international schools, however, are aware of all the justified concerns and cares that parents naturally feel for their children and will be willing to spend time in talking about these issues and drawing parents into the life of the school.

So, as someone who has had her own children in international schools and has worked in such schools for fifteen years, may I hope that if such an exciting and challenging opportunity comes your way you will feel ready to grasp it.