The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

In this issue

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: **Marjukka Grover** *Academic Editor:* **George Saunders** *1995, Vol. 12: No. 2*

EDITORIAL

The observant reader would have noticed some changes in the last issue of the BFN, now in its twelfth year of publication.

The first of the changes is an editorial one. The long serving editor, George Saunders, has become the academic editor with his own column appearing in the first issue of each volume. In that column he will be looking into recent research and development on bilingualism/ biculturalism, as well as keeping the readers updated with news of his own family's bilingualism. George will also carry on answering some of the numerous letters we receive for the 'Question and Answer' column.

To get wider views on issues relating to the lives of intercultural people, and to encourage contributors from different parts of the world, we have formed a new International Editorial Board (see page eight). Some members are academics researching bilingualism, the others are parents who are successfully raising their children bilingually/ biculturally and are regular contributors to the BFN. The members of the board will usually serve a minimum of two years and can be contacted through the BFN Office.

The style of the Newsletter has also changed from two columns to a more flexible three. As most of our regular readers know we rely heavily on readers to send us suitable material for publication and are very grateful for all past, present and future contributions. The new style is particularly suitable for short articles, letters and interesting 'fillers' to liven up the pages. So as well as the usual letters if you come across any interesting bits of news, poems, anecdotes, quotations on intercultural lives please send them to us. The more we have in 'storage' the better issues we can produce.

Marjukka Grover

PLAYING FOOTBALL IN ESPERANTO

by Anna Lowenstein

In this Newsletter I have occasionally come across the expression 'artificial bilingualism', in which one of the parents makes a deliberate decision to teach the child a language which is not his or her own. I suppose you could describe our situation as 'doubly artificial', since my husband Renato speaks to our children in Esperanto, which is certainly not his own language, and which is usually itself referred to as an 'artificial language'.

Perhaps I should explain that Esperanto was created just over a hundred years ago by a Polish doctor L.L. Zamenhof, who intended it to be used as an international language. With this in mind, he tried to make it as easy as possible to learn, giving it a very simple but logical grammar, and the possibility of building up vocabulary quickly through a system of suffixes. Whether Zamenhof succeeded in his aim of making Esperanto into an international language is arguable, but it certainly is extremely easy to learn and use. This fact came home to me very forcibly in the summer of 94 when I took part in two conferences, of which the first was in Esperanto while in the second the working languages were German, English and French. Interpretation was provided in the second conference, but not at all sessions, and not of course for private conversations. The whole thing struck me as being terribly unwieldy and unsatisfactory after the ease with which I had been able to participate when the working language was Esperanto.

I am English, and I met my Italian husband Renato at the World Esperanto Congress in Lucerne in 1979. When I came to live with him in Italy, we did at first make a half-hearted attempt to talk Italian, but we always ended up by slipping back into Esperanto, in which we both felt much more comfortable. It is still the language we use together.

When our first child Gabriel was born (in 1982), we decided to use the 'one person - one language' method: I always talked to him in English, and Renato in

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Akcepto en la Landfstrejo de Stirio, Graz, Julio 94

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Esperanto. Gabriel did not have much contact with Italian until he was nearly two, when I was expecting my second child, and we decided to get a baby-sitter. Gabriel was amazed when he discovered that our baby-sitter had a new word for everything, and for some months one of his favourite games was simply to lead her round the house pointing at various objects so that she could tell him their names in Italian! Our second child, Fabiano, was in contact with the three languages straight away.

There are, of course, special problems involved in trying to bring up children in Esperanto, although I suppose no greater than there would be if we, living in Italy, were trying to teach them Lithuanian or Welsh. The main one has always been the problem of finding other children for them to play with near by. Fortunately, there is a week-long meeting for Esperanto-speaking families every summer, which usually takes place in Hungary. The activities depend very much on who is present, but in general there are songs, organised games and handicrafts in the morning, while in the afternoon there is an outing such as a visit to a lake or an open-air swimming pool. The aim is to give the children a chance to play together, and the better they know each other, the less need there is of organised activities. The children quite naturally talk to each other in Esperanto, since they come from all over the world, and it is their only common language. This year Gabriel and Fabiano became very friendly with a Canadian boy called Damir, whose other languages were French and Croatian. They spent most of the week playing Monopoly and football.

"Whether Zamenhof succeeded in his aim of making Esperanto into an international language is arguable, but it certainly is extremely easy to learn and use".

Another problem for families who want their children to learn Esperanto is the lack of children's books. There are a large number of illustrated books for small children, but as they get older, the situation becomes more difficult. Some classic books such as 'Winnie the Pooh' 'Tales of the Moominvalley' and 'Treasure Island' have been translated into Esperanto, and several children's books were written in Esperanto by the Yugoslavian writer Tibor Sekelj. However, there is very little choice compared to the variety that can be found in English or Italian. For children who prefer non-fiction, the situation is particularly unsatisfactory. When it comes to the beautifully illustrated books about trains, animals, castles etc. which are now available in most languages, it must be said that Esperanto is almost totally lacking.

When the children were small, Renato and I realised that it would be useful for Esperanto-speaking families to have a magazine along the lines of BFN so we started to contact other families. Our newsletter was produced in a very simple way: we collected letters, photographs, newspaper cuttings, announcements etc. from the families who wrote to us, pasted them together with our own comments, plus interesting articles from other Esperanto magazines, photocopied them, and sent them out to the families on our list. From time to time we also included the full address list, so that the families could get in touch with each other directly. We did not have a formal subscription, but many people sent us small sums to cover our postage costs.

This approach turned out to be very successful. The number of families on our list has grown to nearly 300, and we are constantly getting news of others in different parts of the world whom we had not known about previously.

The Newsletter has encouraged many of the readers to use Esperanto with their children, while before they felt completely isolated. A lot of people wanted advice on bilingualism, and this led us to translate an attractive little booklet produced by the Australian Advisory Council of Languages and Multicultural Education called **Bilingualism: Some Sound Advice for Parents,** with a few adaptations to Esperanto speaking parents.

It seems that there is a need for a special organisation not only for families, but also for young couples in general, who often tend to slip out of the organised Esperanto movement once they get married and have a family. For this reason, at the most recent meeting of Esperanto-speaking families it was decided to set up a new association called **Rondo Familia** (Family Circle)* for couples with children up to the age of 16. All Esperanto-speakers who fit this definition can be registered and receive the newsletter without paying a subscription.

'Rondo Familia' has set up a small committee whose members will be taking on particular tasks. One person is in charge of publications to stimulate the production of children's books in Esperanto and booklets on bilingualism for parents. Several people will be concerned with the problem of organising meetings for Esperanto families with young children in different parts of the world. Another person will be compiling a dictionary of home terms in Esperanto. Esperanto dictionaries, like most others, tend to be rather poor when it comes to such everyday words and expressions as 'nappy', 'high chair', 'bib', 'dust pan', 'drip-dry' etc.

What are the advantages of bringing up your child to speak Esperanto? Giving your child a bilingual education is always an advantage, in that he or she will have an enhanced awareness of language in general. The other advantage, of course, is that the child becomes aware of different cultures. This is particularly true of Esperanto, where the children are brought into contact with many different cultures, and have a chance to meet and talk with other children from all over the world.

Contact details removed

THE GOOD LANGUAGE LEARNER

- **The good language learner** is a willing and accurate guesser.
- **The good language learner** has a strong drive to communicate, or to learn from communication. He/she is willing to do many things to get his/her message across.
- **The good language learner** is often not inhibited. He/she is willing to appear foolish if reasonable communication results. He/she is willing to make mistakes in order to learn and to communicate. He/she is willing tc live with a certain amount of vagueness.
- In addition to focusing on communication, **the good language learner** is prepared to attend to form. The good language learner is constantly looking for patterns in the language.
- **The good language learner** practises.
- **The good language learner** monitors his/her own and the speech of others. That is, he/she is constantly attending to how well his/her speech is being received and whether his/her performance meets the standards he/she has learned.
- **The good language learner** attends to meaning. He/she knows that in order to understand the message, it is not sufficient to pay attention to the grammar of the language or to the surface form of speech.

Thanks to TESOL for their permission for the above which appeared in TESOL Quarterly, 1975. It will also appear in a forthcoming book of Multilingual Matters, "The Good Language Learner" to be published in January 96.

AN ALBANIAN ACCOUNT OF LIFE IN EXILE

Albania, a small Balkan nation couched between Greece and Serbia, emerged from the prison of one of the bitterest communist regimes in the post-war period in 1991. Student demonstrations brought an unexpected end to 50 years of communist rule and launched the country, like other eastern block nations, on the perilous journey of democratic reform. The first free elections, monitored by EU and US observers, took place in March 1992. Soon after that the country, which had been completely isolated from the rest of the world, began its re-integration into the world community. Over three million Albanians live outside the borders of their nation. Nearly two million live in in Kosova, a province of present-day Yugoslavia and the rest are scattered all over the world. The largest exiled communities are to be found in the USA, Germany and Belgium. Those who have returned to Albania since the dramatic political changes have had to come terms with harsh realities: dire poverty, loss of tradition, a changed language, and a prevailing sense of despair.

Marjukka Grover met KIMETE BASHA, an Albanian who was brought up in Australia and Canada, in the International School of Brussels, where she works as a librarian.

Kimete's Background

I am Albanian. I was born in Australia but, as both my parents were Albanian, I never had anything but Albanian blood running through my veins. We lived in an extended family situation with my mother's family in Australia. My father's family was literally wiped out after the war in Europe in 1939-45, and he was left alone. My parents moved to Australia after the War. I think it would have been better if they have stayed in Europe where my father might have been happier. He had doctoral degrees from Bologna and the Sorbonne which were not recognised in Australia. I was brought up to speak Albanian, because my grandmother did not speak any other language. She never really adapted to any other country except her childhood home. I have also lived in Canada where I completed my two university degrees and now enjoy my life in Belgium.

Kimete Basha

Did you learn to read and write in Albanian?

My father was a writer and lawyer. He published the first Albanian newspaper to be published after the war and continued his leadership role long into his exile. Since we all participated at one time or another in the production of the Newspaper, which we were not always enthusiastic about, we had to learn to read and write our language. This became a question of pride as we got older. Albanians abroad didn't expect youngsters to speak the language but to me it was important that my father could say 'yes, my children speak, read and write Albanian'. My family had a strong national identity that was reinforced by a long history of service to the nation at the highest levels. The first three children married Albanians and my eldest sister and her husband are now living in Tiranë.

You have lived in three different continents. How has it affected you?

I have been lucky. I had a childhood in Australia with lovely weather, lots of sunshine, freedom and happiness. When I was 16 years old my father was invited to take over the major Albanian newspaper in exile so we moved to America, to Boston and from there to Toronto. First I missed Australia, I was doing well in school and I was also attached to my grandparents whom we left behind. It was the teachers in my new school who helped me to adjust. They gave me a lot of confidence by telling me how good I was at school and encouraging me out of my timidity in my new surroundings. I began to believe that it can't be that hard! Canada offered me free university education, which made my studies possible with very little pressure. After my marriage I moved to Belgium. I didn't like it at first, I felt people were very unwelcoming and cold, but now, after 15 years, I am quite settled here, where I have had my children.

What about your husband?

My husband, Ydriz, spent his first ten years in Albania, the next eight years in Kosoro in Yugoslavia. Two of those years were spent in a concentration camp, which has once served as a Nazi prison camp. This was because his father had applied to leave the Eastern Block Countries. He came to Belgium in 1956 and decided to study medicine at Louvain, which was a mistake for him. He was still functioning with his father's mentality that if you study medicine and become a doctor you are successful. He ought to have studied political science. He became a psychoanalyst but his first passion is politics. He was the leader of the Albanians in exile in Europe and is a very dedicated man.

How did you meet?

I met Ydriz in New York at a congress of the Albanian exile community. My father had recently died and it was very important to me that a member of my family attend this first Pan-Albanian meeting. My presence, which came without any parental pressures, proved that he had been successful in raising his children to have a sense of service and duty to the Albanian community. Incidentally, this participation was the best thing I ever did in my life: Ydriz, my future husband, was there. He presented his candidature for the leadership of the exiled Albanian Community. When my godfather introduced me to him, I asked 'Do you really want to be the leader of these people?' and he said 'Yes I think it is important that we work for the Albanian people'. I said 'I don't think you will be elected but it is very nice that you try'. I told him that I knew the Albanian community in North America and he would not be elected because he was an outsider. There was a sort of hierarchy, a kind of entrenchment that had occurred: Albanians from Europe thought they had a better understanding

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of what goes on in Albania because they were closer to the country. They were, however, looked down on by the North American community who considered them to be backwards, coming from the poorer regions of Albania. We met on the Saturday and were engaged by the Tuesday when I returned to Toronto. This was a good thing though I wonder how I would feel if my daughters did the same.

You have two daughters. How do they feel about their identity?

My older daughter, Sarah (15), speaks Albanian very well. There are so many Albanians coming in and out of our house that she is very aware of Albanian issues. Aurelie (13), my younger daughter, is not very concerned about Albania. I think she has a problem of being Albanian in Belgium. She wants to be something else. The other day she asked me if she could be Italian! I think Sarah sees herself as Albanian, but Aurelie sees herself as a child of Albanians. Sometimes they are angry with Albanians because they take a lot of our time. They do not see themselves as Belgians either. Aurelie has asked if she could spend the summer holidays in Canada with my family and already she is talking about studying in America. I think that they will move further away from the Albanian community before they return to their roots for a better understanding of themselves and their personal history. I am not frightened or troubled by this.

How do the Albanians view the Albanians in exile?

The first impression is that they feel we owe them something for having lived comfortably in the West. In some cases the families of those who left Albania were punished, since leaving Albania was considered a crime against the State. But even if that was not the case, most thought that those who moved to the West were basking in the ease and comfort of Western society. That is not true, of course. The majority of Albanians abroad were very poor. They had a great wish to go back to Albania once the situation changed and that is why they would not make any kind of commitment to the country they were living in. It was always temporary exile. There was great resistance towards integration. My brothers and sisters and I were lucky, we were encouraged to find our place in the society in which we lived, even though we had a strong

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RUNNING A PLAYGROUP

by John Piggin

Children have their own special uses for language where adults are never very helpful as models. Words and intonations for teasing, begging, and self-assertion have to be learned by trial and error or by watching other children.

In the German city of Hamburg, English-speaking children can attend a playgroup up to three mornings a week so that they pick up genuine 'kids' English. Most of the children also know German. When they start playgroup, they tend to borrow the grammar of childish German in moments of excitement.

In English, if you ask a group of kids if anyone wants a glass of juice, the normal chorus of response is 'me', which is accusative case. But in German, a child asserting themself cries 'ich', which is nominative case. When they start playgroup, the bilingual pre-schoolers of Hamburg shout 'I'. Adults do not draw attention to themselves in this way, so the child has to improvise.

Gently guiding the children towards standard infant English is one of the jobs of the playgroup, which was set up in the autumn of 1984. It helps children feel confident about speaking a 'foreign' tongue and staves off the day when they baulk at being 'peculiar' and try to conform with the language of the majority living around them.

Well over 100 pre-schoolers have attended the Hamburg playgroup during its first ten years. A group of parents hailing from the Commonwealth, US and Ireland registered an association, the *Verein zur Förderung der englischen Sprache,* to rent rooms for the playgroup and employ a playleader from Britain. The administration has been done entirely by volunteers, so the fees have been kept moderate. Parents help out at play sessions every few weeks, so that there are two adults present at all times with each group of twelve children.

Each play session includes free play, a shared activity such as a board game or arts and crafts, a story , a snack and a spell of more boisterous games such as 'What's the Time Mr Wolf?' outside or in the hall. Membership of the Pre-school Playgroups Association in England has provided us with fresh ideas on learning through play.

Parents often become discouraged about bilingual child-raising, so coffee mornings are a chance for them to regain confidence by talking to other people with similar problems. One such problem is unrealistic expectations. Some children refuse to speak the weak language once they start school, but they retain a passive knowledge of English. If this gives them some access to the foreign parent's culture and is useful later at school, that is surely something the parent should be pleased about.

Another problem is motivating a child without being domineering, and the playgroup may be the only place a child will speak the weaker language. The other playgroup adults can also help build up a child's English.

As our association enters its second decade, demand for places in the playgroup has become so great that a second play leader is to be engaged and additional sessions are to be offered.

Contact details removed

HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Here is a little conversation I overheard at our bilingual nursery (English/French).

Child: My father learns me French.
Adult: Maybe that's because he is French.
Child: Yes he is, and Spanish too.
Adult: Gosh, so he's quite a mixture, French and Spanish.
Child: (sighing) Yes, he's very mixed up.

J. Morfey, Chalcot Montessori School,
9 Chalcot Gardens, London, U.K.

"ONE PERSON - ONE LANGUAGE" ??? The Debate Continues

I was rather disappointed that my article entitled **The Psychological Repercussions of the One Person - One Language Approach** (Vol.11:1, 1994) did not elicit any response other than 'Don't you think it's all your fault anyway' (Vol.11:3, 94). I would have liked to hear from parents of older children concerning the ultimate social appropriateness of speaking a language to a child in front of other people who do not understand that language and its repercussions on the child's development as a social being.

I witnessed a very blatant example of this quite recently. The mother, French, and father, English, now living in France after four or five years in England, speak to their three children (two from the mother's first, entirely French, marriage) in English. The youngest child (approx. four years old) conducted an exclusive relationship, in English, with both her parents throughout the time I was there. No one else even existed for her. She was very exclusive and demanding. In a large group of adults and children, my children and I were the only other English-speaking people there. Surely this is cutting the child off from the world around her?

When my children were younger, I was so determined to raise them bilingually that it not occur to me that this approach to the question could actually be detrimental. I always felt perfectly at ease speaking to them in English. Now, I am posing a much wider physiological question concerning bilingualism. Would it not be better to temper the 'one person - one language' approach with the proviso 'except when in the presence of people who do not speak the minority language'? And although it does not apply in my case, I would consider it even more important when it concerns the child's father or mother. Is it psychologically sound to exclude a child's parent from the relationship by speaking a language the other does not understand in front of him or her?

Naturally there is always the possibility of translating everything that is said. That would seem fine, though somewhat laborious, when the child is little but seems to me totally impossible and fabricated when the child gets older.

If a discussion is held in two languages, the child can pointedly exclude a person present by not using that person's language. I've seen it happen all too often. My children and I will be having a discussion in English and my son will ask a question in English, therefore directed at me. If his sister answers, he is quite likely to say, in French, 'I wasn't talking to you'. It is a very subtle way of excluding her from the mother/son duo. He successfully did it with his father before I realized what was going on.

Perhaps I am wrong, but I do not think that this situation applies only to my son. It certainly could have been avoided, at least to some extent, if we were all used to speaking to each other in French in front of non-English speakers and vice-versa from the outset. So, once again, what do other readers think?

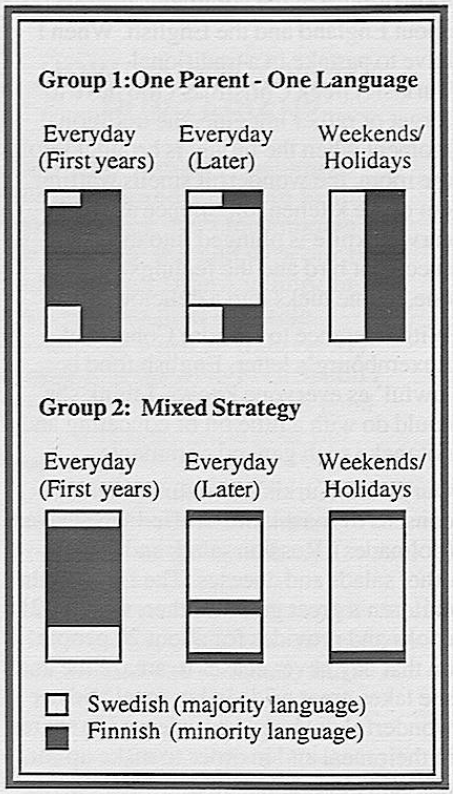
Rosemary Kneipp, Fontenay, France.

Since receiving Rosemary's letter we have had a response to her earlier article from a member of our editorial board, Alathea Anderssohn from Morocco, in favour of Rosemary's approach. We hope to publish it in either the September or December issue.

Before abandoning the 'One Person - One Language' strategy I would like, however, to remind the readers to take into account all the linguistic aspects of their children's lives such as

- *how much exposure the child has for the minority language outside home?*
- *how often and how long the child spends in the country of the minority language?*
- *can the child attend the minority language school?*
- *can the child hear the language from TV and Radio?*
- *can the child read and write in the minority language?*
- *prestige of the minority language (it may be easier to preserve English, an international language, outside English speaking countries than a language like Finnish spoken only by approx. 5 million people and mainly in Finland).*

If the mother or father is the only provider of that language, the time the child hears the minority language becomes very limited indeed, especially when they start school. Leena Huss from Sweden, also a member of the Editorial Board, wrote her doctoral thesis on simultaneous language acquistion of children from Swedish-Finnish families. The following figure from her research illustriates clearly how much the child hears the minority language when staying at home with a minority language parent, but the time to use it diminishes as the child grows older and enters into majority language day-care or school.



Leena would also like to point out the following results from her research:

- *only those children whose parents used consistently the 'One Parent-One Language' method became active bilinguals*
- *those Swedish mothers or fathers, whose partners did not speak Finnish to the children in their presence, never learned Finnish*
- *those Swedish fathers or mothers whose partners spoke Finnish in their presence learned to understand everyday conversation in Finnish and were later keen to learn it in a more formal way*
- *all parents using the 'One Parent - One Language' method were very sensitive when speaking in front of the monolinguals and tried to use strategies like speaking to the whole group in Swedish, or translating what they had just said*

My small scale observations among the Finnish community in England supports Leena's research. Those children whose mothers have consistently spoken Finnish to them are now more or less active bilingual teenagers. Some mothers started to mix languages once the children went to school and, although those children were fluent in Finnish at the age of four, they are now (some only one year after starting the school) struggling to make a sentence in Finnish.

Marjukka Grover

CULTURAL SENSITIVITY

The December issue of the BFN (Vol.11:4, 94) was very interesting to read but as an English person living in Greece and married to a Greek man, I took offence at the comments made about England and the English. When I have to partake in a traditional Turkish/Greek Christmas I too have to forget or rather imagine, the traditional moment when the turkey is brought into the room, the wonderful smells wafting out of the kitchen, the silence as the carving knife is plunged into the succulent bird and the feelings of being one, as one tucks into a delicious meal.

With reference to Deirdre Condon of Luxembourg's letter, English food is 'awful' as everyone knows. I think she could do with a little bit of educating and not make such general comments.

Our Greek/Turkish Christmas meal consists of roast lamb, stuffed vine leaves (dolmades), Russian salad, and various other salads and cheeses. The fact that the children's great grandmother, who is 82 cooks and provides for about 20 people on that day never ceases to amaze me and she takes great pride in her meal and her wonderful desserts. I am pleased to share in their meal and in order to make up for not being in England at this time, I invite my husband's family in the New Year and we have traditional Christmas dinner with all the trimmings.

Contentment in bilingual families is all a matter of compromise.

Susan Kilikoglou, Athens, Greece

To give you some background I am British by birth, with a little Irish, a little Scottish and a little who knows what mixed in. I was brought up partly in the North of England and partly in the South. My parents were Londoners.

I have worked as a secretary in European institutions for most of my working life, and have lived in Strasbourg and Paris and now in Luxembourg. I have been with my husband, who comes from Naples, for ten years and we met when I was forty. In order to be able to communicate with his family I took an Italian course. However, I might as well have learned Chinese because my husband's family speaks Neapolitan and no, it is not 'similar' to Italian. I like to think I have a reasonable sense of humour.

Living as we both do in a country which is not our own (unlike Susan who lives, presumably, in her husband's native land), my husband felt it would help if we spoke French together, thus ensuring that neither partner had an unfair advantage in speaking their Mother tongue. That has worked quite well but, to my mind it is a shame that my husband has not spoken either Italian or Neapolitan with the children. I have kept to the rule of speaking English with them. I feel very strongly that it is wrong to deny children their roots and I don't feel it matters if one of the 'Mother' languages (in this case Neapolitan) is a minority language. My husband insists that Neapolitan won't be of any use to the kids. I don't agree because it is a means of understanding Spanish and Portuguese which are spoken in many parts of the world. In my view, learning another language is a good exercise in itself. I might add that I have done my very best with my limited knowledge of Italian (very rarely practised) to encourage the children to speak Italian, with the result that they both have some means of communicating with my husband's family.

I get on well with my husband's family though sometimes I feel I come from another planet and not just another European country. I was educated to think for myself not to be just the shadow of my husband and this has caused a great deal of conflict within our marriage. I am humbled and grateful for the experience because I no longer take my education for granted. There are many women, even in civilized Europe, as we approach the year 2000 who are living as domestic second class citizens. My sister-in-law caused scandal in her husband's family when she came to Luxembourg for our wedding. She was to travel by train alone with her twelve-year old daughter for 17 hours! Of course she managed it. I wonder though, what her in-laws would have thought of my mother crossing the Channel in 1947 (when it was still mined) with her small daughter to meet some friends in Belgium.

There is no doubt that sharing everyday life with another person is not easy without the added stress of different language/culture/education/religious beliefs etc. that mixed marriages bring, or the stress of living in another country, where your own language is not the national language. My husband does not like England and English food leaves him cold. He admits that his mother frequently quotes the Neapolitan proverb 'Cows and wives should come from the same village'. Believe me, now I can see why. (Probably the same reason why my Father used to meet the postman and confiscate any pen-friend letters from Italian boys.)

Last August we spent the month of July on a camp site in southern Italy, not far from Naples. One night, shortly after our return home, my husband and I were sitting, enjoying a warm evening, just chatting. 'Oh!' he sighed (I write this in English but don't forget my husband and I speak French together) 'I wish we could go back to Italy and prepare tomatoes for bottling and peppers and...' 'Do you?' I said 'No, I am quite happy to make do with what we have here'. 'In fact, I have to tell you that, whilst I eat with great relish all the food that it has ever been my great privilege to eat in whatever country I have visited, given half a chance I would still choose some of my Mum's cooking – meat pud with mashed swedes, meat pie, Irish stew, steamed syrup pudding...' 'God', he said, 'The ten years we have been together have been a complete waste of time – you're still so utterly British'

Deirdre Condon, Luxembourg

'God', he said 'The ten years we have been together have been a complete waste of time – you're still so utterly British!'

CONFUSING LANGUAGE SWITCH

I am English and living in the UK with my French husband. We have two children: Joshua (3½ years) and Megan (20 months).
We have made a conscious effort to bring them up with both French and English since they were born, and we used French as the home language until they were 2 years old and 3 months old respectively. We then spent a year in France where I started to speak English to the children, whilst my husband continued to speak French.
We returned to the UK last May and have once again returned to using French as the home language. Whilst the children understand both languages very well, Joshua uses predominantly English to reply, even when spoken to in French. To increase their exposure to French, I have recently employed a French nanny, and Joshua will start at a French school in January.
I am concerned that the children may start to become confused as I have switched the language I use with them several times. Could they cope with another language switch if I wanted to start speaking to them in English again? Also, I am worried about them keeping up with their English now that they will be attending a French school/having a French nanny, even though we are living in the UK. This is why I am considering going back to using English with them. My husband would continue to use French.
I sometimes feel that I cannot express myself as well in French with my children as I could in English, as it is not my mother tongue.
I would welcome your advice as my changing circumstances have now confused me as to how to bring up my children to be bilingual.

Sarah Prynn, London, England

For a full answer to your query, I suggest you have a look at the book recently published by Multilingual Matters, entitled **A Parents' and Teacher's Guide to Bilingualism**. This will provide fuller reasons for the answers given briefly in this letter.

It may be that you need to stop switching your language and give your children stability and clear expectations in their language communication with you. The usual advice is that children need to understand which language to speak to which person, and what language to use in different situations. Bilingual development seems to be aided when children are aware of when to separate their languages. This often relates to a 'one person-one language' situation in a family. Many families, similar to yours, have successfully raised their children bilingually by, for example, the husband speaking French and the wife speaking English (or the reverse). Establishing continuity and stability ensures that language boundaries are maintained. So the initial advice is for your husband to continue speaking French and you to speak English to the children.

When living in England, it seems very valuable that your children receive French language experience out of the home. Given that the present environment of your children will mostly be English in language and culture, it is important to aim for a language balance. Achieving such a language balance means obtaining language experience in French other than that given by your husband. So long as the French nanny and a French school provide effective, stimulating and progressive language practice, your choice seems very justifiable.

Colin Baker

HOW TO IMPROVE MY HUNGARIAN?

I am American, my husband is Hungarian and we live in France. We are using the 'One language - One person' method with our two years old son John and hope he will pick up French at the école maternelle when he is three. My husband is fluent in French and I speak it well. His English is good and my Hungarian is poor but improving.
At home I speak English to John and a combination of English-French-Hungarian with my husband. He speaks only Hungarian with John. I consider it a learning experience for myself to hear Hungarian on a daily basis. It is a way for me to improve my knowledge of my husband's language. I would like to know how other couples handle similar situations in which one spouse does not fluently understand that of the other.
Claire and Laszlo Ery

Contact details removed

The editors, with the help of the International Editorial Board, are happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism/-culturalism. Letters and contributions to the Newsletter should be sent to:

Editor: Marjukka Grover
at Multilingual Matters

If you want to get in touch with any member of the board please send your letter to c/o Multilingual Matters and we will forward it to him/her.

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CONTACTS

If you wish your name and address to be included in the contact section, please send us the following information: Name, address, languages spoken in the family, children's birth dates and specification of the types of families with whom you would like to get in touch.

Contact details removed

AN ALBANIAN ACCOUNT OF... *Continued from page four*

Albanian identity. When the Albanians in exile now go back to Albania they are judged very harshly. If you are not wealthy and rich you have somehow failed. They expect a lot from the exiled community.

If the opportunity arises would you like to live in Albania?

This question has been haunting me now for three years. First it was a very enthusiastic 'yes'. And now it is tempered with the knowledge that we would be outsiders. We would also be separated from our children as the education system in Albania is in chaos. It would therefore mean separating our family which, after all, is the most important thing I have. We are now waiting for the 1996 elections. Ydriz has been working very hard on this and continues to believe that we have a role to play in the difficult years ahead for our devastated homeland. I am not as involved as I was in the first years after the demonstrations in Albania. We will see if he runs for the election. For now, all is uncertain and undefined. What is essential is that we have continued to do what we consider is our duty as Albanians. At 16 this meant maintaining my language. At 40, it means remaining tolerant and modest in the face of the suffering and anger of our compatriots who are trying to build a democratic society on so many ruins.