



# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: Marjukka Grover

1996, Vol. 13 No. 1

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## EDITORIAL

Culturally-based social codes and communication rules are absorbed from our 'mother's milk' and therefore more difficult to learn later in life than a new language. My fellow Finn, Virpi Ylännä McEwen, points out in this issue's leading article the dangers of speaking a language fluently but not knowing all the underlying social codes. I am well aware of these pitfalls. Even after twenty years of living with the gently-spoken Brits I have occasional communication problems - specially highlighted after a 'culture bath' back at home. My family will again need a good sense of humour when, in few weeks time, I return from a trip to Finland refreshed in my language and cultural behaviour.

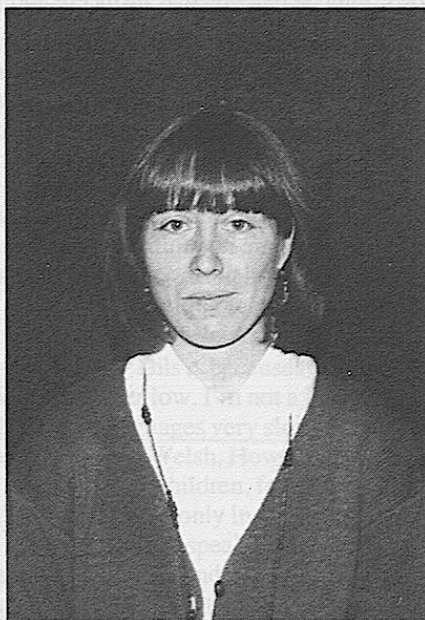
Can children be taught the minority language in Saturday Schools? 'Two years of my Saturdays were wasted' recalls pop-singer, George Michael of his parents' attempt to teach him Greek, his father's language (see page 4). But what is the best method of raising a child bilingually? The debate on the subject continues in this and forthcoming issues.

I have a good example of success for readers using the 'one language -one parent' method but who are worried about their partners not understanding the minority language. My friend, Kirsti, has always spoken Finnish to her children in front of her (so she thought) monolingual husband, Graham. After 17 years of marriage on one sunny morning Graham woke up and declared 'from now on I will speak only Finnish to you and the children'. And I assure you, his Finnish is excellent!

Marjukka Grover

## INSINCERE AMERICANS, SILENT FINNS AND ARROGANT GERMANS: CROSS-CULTURAL MISCOMMUNICATION

Virpi Ylännä-McEwen



Readers of *The Bilingual Family Newsletter* are likely to be, in the main, multilingual, and familiar with and at ease in cross-linguistic and cross-cultural contexts. However, they may have experienced communication difficulties in such settings, for example in their relationship with their spouse and/or relatives who come from a different linguistic and socio-cultural background. This may be the case particularly in the early stages of these relationships. The difficulties are not necessarily due to incompetence in a particular language on the linguistic level - such as grammar or phonology - but may spring from a transfer of communicative rules of the speaker's native language into the non-native language.

In verbal interaction, the speaker is intending to produce certain effects on the hearer, whereas the hearer tries to recognise these intentions. Miscommunication occurs when there is a mismatch between the speaker's intention and the hearer's interpretation. Some researchers divide miscommunication into misunderstanding and incomplete understanding; in the latter case, unlike in the former, an attempt at remediation is made as at least one of the participants realise that something has gone wrong. Cross-cultural miscommunication has been defined as an instance of miscommunication in which the causes are the same as in intracultural miscommunication but are exacerbated by cultural differences.

The more participants in a conversation know about each other, the less the likelihood of miscommunication.

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*"...it is typical in face-to-face interaction in the Nordic countries that you only speak if you have something to say..."*

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Conversely, when participants have little shared background - cultural, linguistic, or personal - the conversation is likely to involve interruptions for clarification of the message content or language form. When the participants do not share the

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same native language or the same socio-cultural rules of communication, the possibility for miscommunication is great. Of course, miscommunication between native and non-native speakers should not be seen as inevitable nor characteristic only of these encounters. Even a fluent foreign language speaker may make significant socio-cultural errors and mistakes through language and these may have far graver consequences than grammatical errors. This is because such mistakes may lead to stereotypical labelling, such as 'Germans are arrogant'. When there are gaps in the fluent non-native speaker's knowledge of the culture, s/he may make errors at a totally different level from foreign language speakers' more typical errors: s/he may use a certain expression in a context where a native speaker would not use it. For example, Russian speakers are said to use the expression 'of course' in English (translating and transferring rules concerning the Russian *koneshna*) when they in fact mean 'yes',

*"The more aware we are of both the existence and the nature of different linguistic and socio-cultural norms, the less likely we are of experiencing miscommunication..."*

thus implying something very different from the mere affirmative. It is difficult for the native speaker to understand that the non-native speaker has made an error concerning language use because there is nothing grammatically or phonetically wrong in the message. Alternatively, there may be a mismatch between a grammatical structure and its function between languages: in English 'would you like to read?' typically functions as a polite request, whereas a Russian would understand this as a question about his/her willingness to read and would answer by either yes or no. Also, if a Finn says 'give me some milk' (applying Finnish rules of requesting in informal situations) at a British dinner table, this is likely to be interpreted as very impolite by the British.

Languages differ greatly in what is and what is not accepted linguistic behaviour. For example, in Britain it is accepted and expected of people to chat at the dinner table, whereas in Finland this is done to a lesser degree and mealtimes tend to be quiet occasions. Indeed, there are notable

differences concerning silence between Nordic cultures and Western European / North American cultures, which may result in the Nordic people being perceived as particularly silent. For example, Nordic people tend to be unwilling to appear in public and to speak in situations where a large number of people are present; their participation can be said to be passive and consequently may be interpreted as uncooperative. Also, it is typical in face-to-face interaction in the Nordic countries that you only speak if you have something to say; being together without speaking is accepted and not found embarrassing. This type of silence may be interpreted as hostile or found problematic by those non-Nordic participants who are used to engaging in small talk to avoid silence.

Another example is the frequency of compliments in North-American culture and their absence in Finnish culture. An American visiting Finland who constantly offers compliments to his/her hosts, may be perceived as insincere and his/her motives may be questioned. Conversely, a Finn who does not offer compliments to his/her American hosts may be seen to be unfriendly. On these occasions, the non-native speaker fails socially.

Of course, it should be noted that cultures or nationalities are not uniform and that different rules and norms concerning linguistic behaviour apply - for example, in different age, social status, education

and gender groups within a particular culture. However, in cross-cultural encounters the participants are easily viewed as prototypical representatives of their culture or nationality, thus evoking stereotypical labelling: this is what all British people must be like. The more aware we are of both the existence and the nature of different linguistic and socio-cultural norms, the less likely we are of experiencing miscommunication with people from different linguistic backgrounds. Children growing up in multicultural environments and in bi/multicultural families are likely to gain such awareness and may consequently be more competent at handling cross-cultural miscommunication if and when it happens, and also less likely to arrive at stereotypical perceptions which, after all, tend to be highly subjective and ill-grounded.

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本世紀中  
國的大  
作家如周作人  
魯迅 林語堂  
梁實秋 胡適  
不都是因為他們能學貫  
中西 融合兩種文化  
才作出偉大 成就來的嗎?

c.c. xu 徐家禎

When one is  
conversant in different  
languages,  
one is able to see those cultures  
or languages from outside and  
thus to see them more whole  
than can the people  
imprisoned within  
a single language  
or perspective.

Amy Ling

**Tai Chi Diagram**

Reproduced from a book *Mother Tongue Literacy Maintenance among the Children of Recent Chinese Immigrants in Brisbane* by Lorena Sun Butcher with kind permission of the publisher, Helios Art and Book Co.



## BILINGUALISM IN THE WELSH MOUNTAINS

Colin Baker, a member of the BFN Editorial Board and the author of *Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* is Professor of Education at the University of Wales in Bangor, and Director of Research Centre Wales. Born in Essex, England, he became an undergraduate in the University of Wales at its northern-most college in Bangor. As an undergraduate, he received two different introductions to bilingualism. First, there were undergraduate lectures on bilingualism from W. R. Jones, who was producing internationally famous research on bilingualism and intelligence. Secondly, and more importantly, he met his future wife. He fell in love with the daughter of a local vicar. Having made eyes at her across the choir pews in church, he was eventually invited to the vicarage for food. This was his first experience of a bilingual family. The family spoke Welsh to each other, but switched into English to talk to students and the many visitors to the vicarage. The vicarage food was very attractive; the daughter even more so. In 1973, Anwen and Colin were married in a bilingual church service conducted by Anwen's father.

Since those days, Colin has produced six books and over 70 articles in his academic career - most on bilingualism and bilingual education. His *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism* has become an international bestseller, reprinted four times and now in a second edition. His very successful *Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* was published in 1995.

*Colin, what sustained your interest in bilingualism over the years?*

Anwen switches so easily from Welsh into English and we live in an area which is predominantly Welsh speaking. Therefore, as a self-confessed people-watcher, I'm continuously fascinated by the way bilinguals operate.

*How has your interest in bilingualism been influenced by your children?*

We have a daughter of 16, and two boys of 14 and 10. All are fluent in Welsh and English and have taken most of their education through the medium of Welsh. We attend church regularly and attend Welsh-only services. So Welsh tends to be the slightly stronger language among the children. They speak Welsh to each other and to their mother. To me, they speak English. I continuously bombard them with questions about their bilingualism. They've learnt to accept this with good grace and with humour.

*Has the children's path to bilingualism been easy?*

For Sara, speaking in Welsh and English was easy from the very beginning. Our only problem is getting her to stop talking in either language! One of the boys has an interest in pop music and sports, and therefore tends to be particularly interested in Anglo-American teenage culture. He tends to regard the English language as high status. This occasionally provides some tension with the status given to Welsh.

One of the boys had language delay when he was very young, requiring the help of a speech therapist. So the movement to bilingualism has not been, nor is likely to be in the future, totally trouble free.

*Do you follow the advice given in your own books?*

By and large 'yes'. Just occasionally, matters are so complicated that simple advice cannot be followed to the letter. For example, the theory is that Anwen should have talked Welsh to the children when they were young and I should have talked English only. Around the food table, Anwen will usually speak Welsh to the children but if she wants to include me, will speak in English. I speak Welsh to the children on some occasions, partly to show that I value the Welsh language.

*Do you speak Welsh then?*

I tend to describe myself as an apologetic monolingual. This is because my level of Welsh is rather low. I'm not a linguist at all. I learn languages very slowly, and I lack fluency in Welsh. However, when I'm with young children, for example, who speak Welsh only in the home or in a nursery school, I speak Welsh to them. In the home, I can understand much of what is being said between Anwen and the children, and between the children when they are talking to each other.

*Do you regret not being able to speak a number of languages fluently?*

Yes, I have a great envy of linguists who learn other languages so quickly. However, if I spent a lot of time learning languages, I doubt if I'd ever have written the books on bilingualism.

*As a family, do you consider yourselves Welsh or British or European or what?*

Anwen and the children definitely consider themselves to be Welsh first and foremost. They are very proud of their language and culture, and are very secure in the identity of being Welsh.

*But what about you, what is your identity?*

When Wales play England at football or rugby, I always pray for a draw. When I'm with Anwen and the children and with Welsh people, I don't feel Welsh in the same way that they do. However, when I go back home to Essex, I don't feel English any more as there are many aspects of Welsh culture I love and wish to identify with. So in recent years, when I'm with English people, I tend to feel partly Welsh. I enjoy being a hybrid with all the tensions of variable identity. My identity changes according to whom I'm with.

*So what aspects of Welsh culture do you identify with?*

Since undergraduate days, I've always loved Welsh music, particularly male voice choirs. As a family, we attend Welsh church services in a village with the unlikely name of *Llanfairpwllgwyn-gyllgogerychwyrndrobwlllantysiliogogogoch*. I'm very proud to be one of the organists in this church and have a passion for religious music.

*What are your plans for the future?*

At the moment, I'm working with two colleagues on an **International Encyclopaedia of Bilingualism**. This is intended to be a popular Encyclopaedia, celebrating bilingualism and multilingualism, with lots of pictures from around the world to complement what will hopefully be straightforward but authoritative text. I also plan to improve my organ playing because it makes a small but important contribution to the local people whom I love.

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## George Michael's thoughts on his bicultural upbringing

But our upbringing wasn't very Greek. It's completely different when you don't have two Greek parents. The only Greek thing about it as far as I could see was that in comparison with the girls I was allowed to do as I liked. When I came home they would be there. They weren't out with their boyfriends because there weren't any boyfriends. The only time we had any Greek culture forced on us was when we went to Greek school - they wanted us to learn Greek. From the time I was seven until I was nine, when obviously you want to be out with your mates, every Saturday this really crappy little van would come round and pick up all the children and take us to this terrible classroom in Willesden where some extremely excitable Greek guy would try to teach us the language. But everyone else in the classroom had two Greek parents and they could speak it already - they just couldn't write or read it. So I was sitting there writing things parrot fashion and not understanding what anything was about. I used to go home to my mum and dad and say - I don't understand what the teacher's saying! He's talking in Greek and I don't get any of it. But they kept sending us and sending us and I never learned a thing. Two years of my Saturdays were wasted...

I have never felt any ethnic connection between the Greeks and me other than how hairy I am. Hirsute. That's a good word. But although I don't feel any real affinity with Greece I'm glad that my father is Mediterranean and I'm not just of English stock. I think I would be a different person, I think I would have grown up with less belief, more reservations about what I wanted to do with my life. I think one of the things that's inherent in British people is that they think they are doing something out of the ordinary if they aspire to be something more than they are. Any kind of social or upward mobility is regarded with suspicion. Well, it was never questioned in my home. I saw it around me all the time. And today when I see people who don't have the nerve to realize their potential, who are too afraid to try, it frustrates the hell out of me. I see it constantly and I think it is a very English thing.

George Michael was a lead singer in the famous pop-group 'Wham'. This extract is from the book **BARE** by George Michael and Tony Parsons, ISBN 0-7181-3435-4, published by Michael Joseph in 1990.

Used with the kind permission of A.P. Watt Ltd on behalf of Robobuild Ltd and Tony Parsons.

## Woman ordered to speak English to her daughter

Associated Press

*Register Tue Aug 29*

**AMARILLO, Texas** — A judge overseeing a child-custody case told a Mexican native that speaking only Spanish at home constituted abuse to her 5-year-old daughter.

State District Judge Samuel C. Kiser told Marta Laureano that she must speak English in conjunction with Spanish when talking to her daughter.

Language became an issue in the case when the girl's father, Timothy Garcia, who was seeking unsupervised visits with his daughter, claimed that the only English she was learning was what he taught her. Kiser granted the father's visitation request on Aug. 16.

At a hearing this summer, Kiser equated lack of English proficiency with ignorance and abuse.

## Everyone benefits from bilingualism

I was shocked to read that a judge in Texas ordered a Hispanic mother to speak English to her daughter. In his opinion, by speaking her native language to her daughter, she is abusing that child and relegating her to the position of a housemaid. I am amazed that any judge's decision could be so blatantly prejudiced. It certainly was not based on knowledge about raising children bilingually. He later apologized for his comments.

Bilingualism brings negative images in many people. The speaking of a minority language is viewed as a political problem - a problem that should be solved by short-order assimilation into the majority language.

In our home, bilingualism brings up positive images. It implies that we can communicate with more people and that we are better able to understand more than one cultural group. We see that as very desirable. The more we try to understand each other, the better we will get along.

My husband and I made the conscious decision to raise our children as bilinguals. My husband grew up as a trilingual in Puerto Rico speaking German, English and Spanish. I am from Austria where German is spoken, but English is taught in school. Our family language at home in the USA is German.

From the first day on, we only spoke German to our sons. They learned English from their playmates, friends, television and everybody else who spoke English to them. By the age of three, they already understood a lot of English and entered nursery school. Within one month it was not possible to distinguish their English from that of other monolingual, English-speaking children. Now our two sons are 6 and 8, and fully

bilingual. They appreciate the fact that they are able to communicate with more than one language.

There are no language barriers when we visit family in Austria. They feel completely at ease with their relatives and friends in Austria just as they feel at ease with their friends in the United States.

Because of my husband's positive experience in his

family and because of my own belief that we will enrich our children's lives, it never occurred to us not to raise them as bilinguals. Every skeptical individual we know who has watched us grow together has helped us formulate our hypothesis of the benefits of bilingualism and has in turn been converted.

We believe the second language provides important social, cultural, educational and economic advantages to our children. It in no way detracts from or interferes with speaking English and being American. They learned both languages with minimal effort. Ask anyone who has tried how much effort it takes to learn a new language as an adult. By giving our children the chance to experience fully all aspects of their heritage, Austrian and Puerto Rican, we raise them as true Americans, as people who feel connected because they know their roots, as tolerant people who can communicate with and understand other cultural groups.

America's strength lies in diversity. Languages don't separate people: ignorance and intolerance do. I agree that we should all have one common language in the United States to communicate, but this should not mean one must lose one's native language. In teaching our children our native language we are not just handing on a language, we are giving them a part of ourselves, our heritage and a further link with our extended family.

Often, I encounter the view that a second language interferes with the first language. Interestingly, this is often the view expressed by monolingual people, and I think is based primarily on their personal feelings, not on knowledge about bilingualism. All too often, parents who want to hand down their native language to their children are



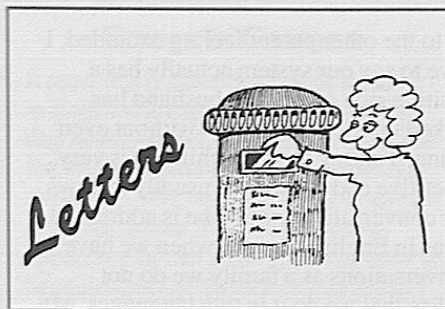
discouraged; they don't even try or give up too soon. All too often, I hear adults bemoan that their parents did not teach them their native language. Parents who are in the fortunate situation of being able to raise their children as bilinguals need reliable information to do so. The most effective advisers are other successful bilingual parents. Unfortunately, it is very difficult to find professional counselling on raising children as bilinguals. Being instructed to be your child's English teacher, however, when you yourself cannot speak the language well is more likely to be detrimental than beneficial, and leads to language mixing. Just consider the example of the judge in Texas. What right does any individual have to suppress any other person's heritage? Individuals who are in a position to advise or make decisions about bilingualism must have specific training in this area. A quote from former German Chancellor Helmut Schmidt shows a positive economical side of



bilingualism. He once said: 'If you wish to buy from us, you can talk any language you like, for we shall try to understand you. If you want to sell to us, then you must speak our language.' This statement reinforces the fact that the advantages of being bilingual extend far beyond the personal. If the United States wants to compete with the rest of the world, it is an advantage to have as many bilingual and bicultural people as possible.

#### **Lisa Velazquez, Hamden, CT, USA**

This article was first published in *New Haven Register* in October 95. Lisa Velazquez has organised workshops for parents raising children bilingually in her area. If you are interested please get in touch with Lisa. Her address is 153 Augur Street, Hamden, CT 06517, USA.



### **Intercultural Marriage**

#### **Do children of mixed parentage grow up with identity problems?**

In the BFN Vol. 12, No. 1, 95, Marjukka Grover stressed the factors within the partners' relationship which make for success. As a European woman married to an Arab man, living in a small town in my husband's country, I have learnt that in some societies the success of a marriage may be greatly influenced by the family and the community. Initially the closeness of the extended family and community seems very attractive; but balancing the claims of the couple against those of the extended family may take a lot of adjustment, on both sides.

In an extended family, other family members expect to play a large part in children's upbringing. The mother has less responsibility for her own children than in a nuclear family, and parents and children are less likely to do things together. The husband may be expected to take responsibility for a widowed mother and unmarried sisters, and for managing the family land as well as his own job. A foreign wife is subject to considerable family scrutiny, and the opinion of the older men and women is seen as very important. If a man clearly expects his western wife to meet family standards, she may feel that he does not care about her as an individual.

In small communities foreigners are watched to see whether they accept the rules of the society, and children of mixed parentage realise early on that they and their foreign parent are under scrutiny. While curiosity about foreigners is not necessarily hostile, it may be felt as such. And some people really do seem to fear that children of mixed marriages will grow up loyal to the foreign country, and pressurise them to identify wholly with the majority culture.

In resolving such conflicts the partners' ability to communicate is certainly important, but people may not agree about what good communication actually entails. There are cultural differences about what should be communicated, and if certain topics are

not usually discussed, it is hard to begintalking about them. Good communication is something which has to be worked at.

Different expectations about appropriate roles for husband and wife, children and parents, may be a far greater barrier to understanding than lack of fluency in a language. Even though the partners recognise and welcome the fact that their own marriage will be different from the model with which each is familiar, they may not be prepared for the extent to which their expectations of marriage and parenthood differ, and it takes time and commitment to deal constructively with their differences.

Whether children of mixed parentage grow up with an identity conflict depends on several factors. Negative stereotyping of the foreign parent's culture makes it hard for children to reconcile their own positive feelings with other people's prejudices. But children who know other mixed families and foreigners in their immediate environment will probably feel more positive about their dual identity.

They may be conscious of conflicts if there are big differences between the value systems represented by each parent, particularly if there are differences of religion. If public opinion and the media emphasise the contrasts,

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*"Good communication is something which has to be worked at."*

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parents have to stress the values they share, and provide an environment where children can talk about the differences they sense.

Children of mixed parentage are not alone in feeling the conflicting claims of two different cultures. Western influence reaches across most of the world today: people from many different societies have to integrate their own cultural values with foreign influences. Children who grow up seeing two cultures from within may have a more realistic view of each, and be able to see members of each society as individuals rather than as stereotypes.

Lastly, Marjukka mentioned the importance of a 'solid, positive self-image' as one factor for success, but one's self-image is formed in interaction with one's social environment. Living in a country very different to the one in which you grew up, where you do not

*Continued on page eight*



## 'One Parent - One Language' Debate continues

### I would like to respond to Erica Baker's letter (Vol.12, No. 1, 95).

I too am a German national, speaking very good English with a husband who has no formal knowledge of German. I am therefore in the exact same position as Erica, but five years further down the road of bilingualism, as I have a daughter, Kelly, aged 5 ½, and a son, Robin, aged 2.

The 'one parent - one language' approach has worked well for us so far. I remember well how I shared a lot of Erica's worries (with more besides) but I am glad to say that all the problems I expected failed to materialise.

From the beginning I have only used German with the children and my husband English. I must say at this point that to start with I found it to be a conscious effort to speak to Kelly in German. Yes, we did get some strange looks at toddler groups, coffee mornings etc. but once I explained that I was bringing up my child bilingually, the response was always positive with a lot of people admiring the way Kelly could switch her languages. It is usually very easy to avoid awkward moments by explaining the situation in general and by giving translations where necessary.

Kelly went through a rough patch at about 2 ½ when her German would fade away until she used mainly English words with me. I did continue to speak to her in German and with a couple of trips to Germany this phase lasted only a few months. She is now totally bilingual, very proud of speaking two languages and speaks only German to her brother, Robin, who, if anything speaks more German than Kelly did at his age.

I don't think German has ever been felt by us to be a 'secret language' as we never used it as such, and Kelly has always been happy to act as an interpreter when necessary.

As to the other parent feeling excluded, I have to say our system actually has a positive side effect. My husband has picked up a lot of German without even trying. Talking to small children is very repetitive and by now he usually follows our conversations, while he is addressed by us in English. In fact, when we have conversations as a family we do not realise that we do it in two languages. My husband says he does not feel left out and that he learns all the time, despite his limited exposure to German.

I do think 'one parent - one language' is the best approach but no method will work successfully if all the participants do not feel happy with it. But I do think the first few years are crucial and need a clear and simple set of rules which everybody sticks to.

The whole process of bilingual upbringing really turns out to be a lot more natural than the theory makes it sound.

**Eva Doggrell, Petersfield, England.**

### I have a response to the letter from Rosemary Kneipp (Vol.12, No.2, 95).

My children are only young so I can't answer from a life-long experience of bringing up children bilingually, but I know a lot of families who have been extremely successful - both in teaching their children how to speak at least two languages AND how not to exclude those around them who only have the ability to speak one language. It is the parents' responsibility to explain over and over again to one's children how important it is not to exclude others around them.

My eldest daughter is only four and has no problems communicating within a group of people using two different languages. She feels it is her 'duty' to encourage and help others around her to get on with each other and always make sure that everyone knows what is going on. That doesn't mean just being a little translating machine but a natural part of everyone's conversation. Of course, the conversation can't flow quite as easily as with one language but we should explain to those present the importance of using both languages. My daughter, Jaqueline, is quick to recognise when people around her use a language that she understands and often joins in even when it is a foreign tongue - ever noticed how a monolingual child will hide behind his/her parents when a strange language is spoken?

I tried the way mentioned - of only speaking English when we were alone -

*Continued on page eight*

## Stuttering and Bilingualism

I am an American and have been living and working in Germany since 1981. I learned German in High School, took some courses in German Conversation while at Purdue University (Indiana, USA) and also attended German classes at the German Cultural Center in Atlanta. My wife, Isa, is German. We are both fluent in English and German.

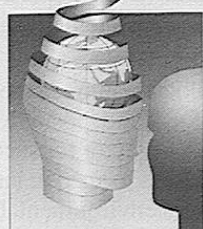
Before Tim was born, I decided that I would teach him to speak English so that he would be able to communicate with his grandparents and relatives in the United States. Also, I have personally seen what an advantage it can be to speak someone else's language and I figured that it would be a shame for him to have an American father and not know how to speak English.

I decided that I would speak English to Tim from the day he was born and 'see what happens'. At first I had no way of gauging my success, but, encouraged by letters and articles in the BFN, I was sure that I was doing the right thing with Tim. George Saunders recently wrote in the BFN Vol. 12, No. 1 that he was thrilled when his first son began speaking two languages. I, too, share his feelings. It continually amazes me that simply by speaking English to an infant from the day he was born results in an eight-year-old boy who answers a phone call from his grandparents in the US with 'Hi! How 'ya doin'?'!

We have lots of English books for him and I also bought some workbooks in America to help me teach him to read and write English. He also watches the 'Cartoon Network' which is an English-language station on satellite TV. I would say that his passive English vocabulary is about 80% of his German one and he is reading English at about first-grade level (he is in the second grade now). His active English vocabulary is another matter, though.

Because he is rarely obliged to use English, his active vocabulary is minimal. He seldom speaks English to me although I try to speak only English to him. I have never made an issue out of this because I want English to be fun and not a chore for him. I realise that he can express himself much more easily and better in German and he knows that my German is excellent, which is the reason he speaks German to me. He has twice spent a couple of weeks alone with my parents in the US. Within a few days in an English-only environment he has activated a large portion of his vocabulary.

FRED E. JANDT  
INTERCULTURAL  
COMMUNICATION



AN INTRODUCTION

Published by Sage (1995): London and Thousand Oak, Ca. ISBN 0-8039-7066-8. Price £22.95.



From the time Tim began to speak German he went through phases where he stuttered quite a bit. A number of friends suggested that his stuttering was caused by his bilingualism and they recommended that we put off teaching him English 'until he was older'. I noticed that each time he began to stutter, his German would take a quantum leap forward a short time later and the stuttering would disappear. However, his stuttering persisted and we began to wonder if bilingualism might not actually be the cause of this. We took Tim to a highly respected paediatrician here in the area.

To my amazement, the doctor stated flatly that in no way was his stuttering anything to worry about, nor did bilingualism have anything to do with it. He said that Tim's mind was just searching for a word and he just forgot to 'turn off' his mouth while he was thinking. This occurs quite frequently with many children, he said. He also even suggested that I was not speaking enough English to Tim! At any rate, Tim's stuttering disappeared completely at about the age of four and has never reappeared since.

In closing, I have an idea which I have not seen discussed in the BFN. Tim will be able to learn a foreign language in school in the fifth grade. We have decided to have him take French as his 'first' foreign language and English as his 'second' foreign language a few years later - hopefully at a higher level with children of his own age. Does anyone else have any experience - positive or negative - with this?

**Gregory Hilker-Schmele,**  
Flörsheim-Dalsheim Germany

## BILINGUALISM IN THE WELSH...

*Continued from page three*

*You declined to give us a photograph of yourself. Why is that?*

I'm kind of shy, and like a number of academics, semi-retiring in nature. Public exposure as a result of the success of the books has been a bit of a shock to the system.

Deep down, I believe that the message is important and the messenger is not. I hope that what I write is important and influential; as a person I don't want to be important. In any case, as the Welsh congregation at St. Mary's Church would reveal, the best place for an Englishman playing Welsh hymns is 'hidden from view'. The music is important; not the musician.

## Errors in German

It must really have been a hot summer in England and particularly so on the day when you wrote your last Editorial for the **Bilingual Family Newsletter** (Vol. 12:3, 95), because I was a little bit surprised about the German words appearing in that issue (perhaps only so, because George Saunders was always so careful about German).

The first surprise was the word 'Daum' in 'Daum drücken', because the appropriate word in German is 'der Daumen'.

The second surprise I encountered when I read in the humour corner that the German word for carrots is supposed to be 'Wurzeln'. I know that the English equivalent for 'Wurzeln' is 'roots', but lexically carrots have nothing to do with roots in German. Botanically the carrot we eat is the root of the carrot plant, but we still call this vegetable 'Karotte' in German and not 'Wurzel'!

The real joke is that the child in question must have seen the harvesting of carrots and made the conceptual association and overgeneralization between carrots and roots. The German language, on the other hand, does not make this parallel.

Trying to promote bilingualism should also mean to check the linguistic facts in question before going to print.

If you ever have any more questions on German vegetables or other German things, I would be pleased to assist you.

Yours sincerely,

**Dr F. Neubauer, Universität Bielefeld.**

What do children in different parts of the world do with their milk teeth? Leave them under the pillow for the tooth fairy (as in England) or for the little mouse ('la petite souris', as in France)? Moroccan children throw the tooth towards the setting sun, saying 'shmeesha, hek sinat l-himar w'atini sinat l-ghozel' ('little sun, take the tooth of a donkey and give me the tooth of a gazelle')...

**Alathea Anderssohn - El Hajibi**

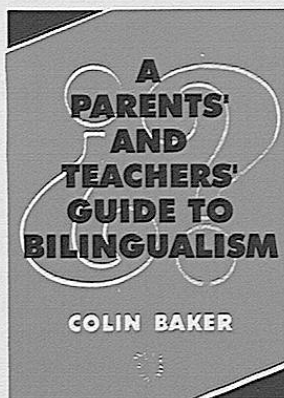
*Many thanks for your letter pointing out the grammatical errors in the German text in the autumn issue of the BFN.*

*We do our best to minimise the errors in The Newsletter, but mistakes happen from time to time. Some inclusions are made at the last minute of setting the BFN and therefore it is often impractical to check with outside sources the 'foreign' words, sent in by a native speaker of that language. We therefore hope and trust that the readers write clearly and check carefully any non-English words in the text they are going to send for the BFN.*

*Our linguistic representation amongst the staff of Multilingual Matters consists of native English and Finnish, university level French, school level German, rusty Swedish and some Spanish.*

*However hard we check and proofread the text before publication, occasional errors do happen from time to time and we apologise for them. I hope these will not put anyone off reading the BFN.*

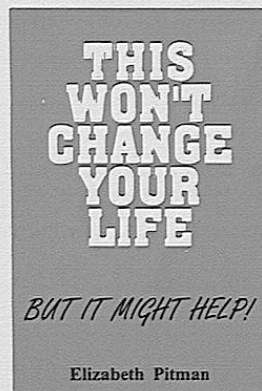
*Marjukka Grover*



*"The book gives much food for thought. I wish I had read it when my children were small. As well as bilingualism, it gives very good general advice on language, reading and writing development"*

Sue Powell, Primary school teacher

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Vol. 13, No.1, 1996

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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.

The following people would like to get in touch with either same combination language families or other bilingual families in their area.  
Canada

Contact details removed

## MARRIAGE... Continued from page five

speak the language well or understand the rules of behaviour, your sense of self may be severely shaken. But in confronting the previously unchallenged assumptions of your own society, you gain a clearer understanding of your culture of origin: you have the freedom to choose what is important to pass on to your children, and what you want to make your own from your adopted country.

Even if you remain an outsider, your children will grow up as members of two cultures; and seeing the foreign culture through their eyes can bring deeper insights and a sense of belonging that could not be gained any other way.

**Jane Teske**

## ONE LANGUAGE DEBATE Continued from page six

but Jaqueline became so confused with me using two languages that she mixed everything up. That led to her refusing to speak at all but after starting the 'one person - one language' method it took no more than two to three weeks before she had separated her languages. Maybe when the children have achieved the ability to speak both languages and are old enough to understand, one could in some circumstances choose to speak the prevalent language of the people present.

It is not an easy option to bring a child up bilingually and there are many times I wish that I could concentrate on just one language. But then I remember what a gift it is to have this second language, especially now in the international environment we all live in. It is, in my opinion, the parents' responsibility to teach one's children not just the words but the social ethics of being bilingual.

**Helen Sulebust, Maliseidvag, Norway.**