The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: **Marjukka Grover**

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EDITORIAL

Summer with it's lovely flowers, light, warm nights and joyful birdsong has arrived in this part of the world.

Whatever the weather or the time of year it does not stop us worrying about our children, especially if their development does not follow the norm.

Growing up bilingually does not happen the same way with every child. Some children's language is delayed a little, some start speaking two languages simultaneously, yet others refuse, for a while, to speak one language altogether. We should not try to force our children to fit into the norms laid down by child experts. Let's allow them time and a chance to develop whichever way best suits their own personality.

Are we also aware of our attitudes towards the languages and their usage in our family? Do we unconsciously put our own language and culture above our partner's? Have we got the dubious idea that there is only a single correct version of any language?

Bilingualism develops best in a positive and relaxed home environment in which cultural harmony exists. Not always an easy task - but something we could aim for!

Marjukka Grover

Rose-Marie Aghdami

BILINGUALISM - THE INSIDE STORY

Rose-Marie Aghdami

Just why is it that some children don't achieve fluency in more than one language even though all the signs in their linguistic situation say they should? Some parents work very hard to plan their approach to bilingualism. They try to be as consistent as possible and provide their potential bilinguals with as much exposure to each language as they can. However, this approach, although ensuring real achievements in bilingualism for many families, cannot guarantee that a particular child will become bilingual. For some children it is not sufficient to pay attention only to the factors within their linguistic environment, but it is crucial to examine the emotional factors which play a very important part in developing bilingualism.

Working as a psychologist in Switzerland I had many children from various linguistic backgrounds referred to me, usually by teachers concerned that the child was making little or no progress in German despite intensive language support. Working closely with these children made me very aware that the child's own attitude, albeit unconscious, was the deciding factor in determining whether or not attempts to raise the child bilingually were successful.

Becoming fluent in a language is not simply a means of communication, but is also a matter of identity. A fluent, accent-free speaker of, say, French will be regarded as a Frenchman, and it will be assumed that he has the values, priorities and background which we think - rightly or wrongly - that the French have. In contrast, someone who speaks French fluently but retains the accent of her mother tongue, e.g. English, will be regarded primarily as an English person. So the extent to which we allow ourselves to become bilingual and the efforts we put into the process reflect our willingness (or lack of it) to identify with the values of that linguistic group. As adults we can, with a bit of careful and honest scrutiny, pinpoint the reasons why we have reached our particular level of fluency in a language. Do we really want to be (mis)taken for a Swiss, or Frenchman, or English or whoever? Perhaps we are happier to clearly retain the cultural identity of our mother tongue, and to allow our accent to convey the role of, for example, an American-married-to-a-Swiss, or an Englishman-working-in-France, or a Pole-who-has-lived-for-many-years-in-England and so on.

"Becoming fluent in a language is not simply a means of communication, but is also a matter of identity".

The emotional factors in becoming bilingual are equally powerful in children. A child who identifies positively with the culture of his second language will achieve the fluency that his exposure to that language will allow. For example, a child living in Switzerland of foreign parents who speak little or no German can become completely fluent in German, as the language support for foreign children who attend Swiss schools is extremely good. To achieve this fluency the child must be keen to identify with his Swiss

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classmates, be able to adopt their values and feel supported in this by his family. In contrast, a child will not be able to benefit from the same exposure and language support if at home he experiences a negative attitude towards the host country. It is not uncommon for unhappy foreigners to blame their disappointments and inability to set down new roots on the host country. Exaggerated and negative stereotypes of the host country's nationals develop, while home and one's own countrymen develop glorified status. Naturally, a child raised hearing constant direct or indirect criticism of his classmates and teachers will have very divided loyalties. Depending on his age and personality he will either identify with his family and refuse to integrate with the host country linguistically or culturally, or he will feel more drawn to his new peer group and their values and quickly learn not only their new language, but also their social habits, sometimes to the chagrin of his parents.

Naturally, in the course of my work I did not see the many well-integrated, fluently bilingual children I know to exist, but I saw those children who were having difficulties within their bilingual and bicultural situation. One child, whom I shall call Lydia, illustrates a situation experienced by many. As a daughter in a traditional Moslem family, Lydia was expected to retain the family's values and lifestyle. Her mother rarely went out, and the little contact she had was with relatives living nearby. There was little reason and no possibility for this lady to learn German, as going out to attend classes was out of the question. After three years of living in Switzerland her German consisted of only a few words of greeting. Lydia, despite average intelligence, did not appear to have learnt much German at all in spite of intensive language tuition. At school she was withdrawn and isolated, having contact only with two girls from her own country. Her father had requested that, as a Moslem, she should be excused from swimming (the class was mixed) and school trips which involved staying away overnight, and she was not allowed to socialise with her classmates outside school hours. Yet her father did expect Lydia to become fluent in German and shine at her school subjects. During my assessment of Lydia it became clear that the mother-daughter relationship was extremely close. What implications would Lydia's potential fluency in German have had on this relationship? Lydia revealed that for her this would have meant a rejection of her mother's values and lifestyle, which she felt would be equal to betraying her mother. Her mother remained as her role-model, and despite attempts by teachers to widen her horizons, this had not changed. This fixation effectively blocked her learning German and adopting behaviour which would help to encourage social contact with her Swiss classmates. Such an extreme refusal to integrate occurs when various factors concerning personality, family bonds, loyalties and identity coincide in a specific way, but similar difficulties occurring to a lesser degree are widespread.

"...Denise found it difficult to accept the Italian side to Antonio's personality..."

Sometimes, when achieving bilingualism seems difficult in bilingual families, it is necessary to look below the surface of the rules used, such as which language is being spoken, by whom, and in which context. One Swiss/Italian family living in Switzerland seemed to be doing everything by the book, using the 'one person - one language' approach. The Swiss mother (I will call her Denise) speaks German to their three children, and the Italian father, Antonio, speaks only Italian to them. Both parents are fluent in each other's language, but tend to use German between themselves. The children have exposure to German through the community, schooling and relatives, and to Italian through visiting relatives and regular holidays to Italy. However, when I first met the family the children spoke Italian only when absolutely necessary. Clearly, they had a fairly good passive knowledge of Italian, but their father said he would dearly love to be able to converse with them in Italian, without having dual language conversations. He felt at a loss as to what else he could try - they were following the rules regarding consistency, exposure etc. as far as possible. When we discussed the situation in more detail, it became clear that Denise found it difficult to accept the Italian side to Antonio's personality - his spontaneous, jokey, sometimes loud and expansive behaviour which drew attention embarrassed her. She also felt uncomfortable when they were among large numbers of friends and relatives, all speaking Italian together. In such situations she would react by criticising Antonio and his friends, and made sure that the children did not join in and behave in what she saw as a 'typically Italian' way. While recognising that compromise is essential in a dual nationality marriage, Antonio felt that it was largely through his 'Italian side' that he could feel truly alive and show his emotions - he wasn't prepared to suppress it completely. Denise, however, expressed her resentment through her attitude to the Italian language, too. Although she spoke German to the children, when she scolded the children she did use a few Italian words. At the table, for instance, a family vocabulary

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- What seems logical, sensible, important and reasonable to a person in one culture may seem irrational, stupid, and unimportant to an outsider.
- Feelings of apprehension, loneliness, lack of confidence are common when visiting another culture.
- When people talk about other cultures, they tend to describe the differences and not the similarities.
- Differences between cultures are generally seen as threatening and described in negative terms.
- Personal observations and reports of other cultures should be regarded with a great deal of scepticism.
- One should make up one's own mind about another culture and not rely on the reports and experience of others.
- It requires experience as well as study to understand the many subtleties of another culture.
- Understanding another culture is a continuous and not a discrete process.
- Stereotyping is probably inevitable in the absence of frequent contact or study.
- The feelings that people have for their own language are often not evident until they encounter another language.
- People often feel their own language is far superior to other languages.
- It is probably necessary to know the language of a foreign culture to understand the culture in any depth.
- Perhaps a person can accept a culture only after he or she has been very critical or analytical of it.

SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD
Deirdre Condon from Luxembourg

Name and nationality of your husband: Raimondo, Italian from Naples.
Names and ages of your children: David (13), Oreste (9).
How long you have lived in Luxembourg: 15 years.
Country previously lived in: France, 6 years.
Country you come from: England - born in Bedford, lived in The Wirral, Kent, Wiltshire, Lincolnshire, Suffolk and Norfolk.

What languages are spoken in your family? My husband and I speak French together, my husband speaks French to the children and we all adapt according to the situation. The children, with encouragement only from me, have picked up some Italian and David now studies it at school as second foreign language. When my husband's family visit us Neapolitan is spoken and my husband uses Neapolitan, which is his mother tongue (Italian being his second language) for swearing! The children speak mainly English together. They both study French as first foreign language at school. Oreste is studying Luxemburgish as an out of school activity.

What is your children's preferred language? I asked them this one - David replied 'English, French and Italian in that order' and Oreste said 'Maths!'

What do you like most about the Luxemburgians? They are extremely tolerant of 'foreigners'! No, seriously the Luxemburgish population is rather outnumbered by other nationalities, due to the migrant workers - first the Italians in the last century and then the Portuguese in the 1950s. Add to that those employed in five European Union institutions and numerous foreign banks and firms and you have a really cosmopolitan country, but with a firm national identity. The Government is relatively honest and every effort is made to encourage 'foreigners' to integrate.

What do you dislike about Luxembourg? There's no sea!

Do you trust Luxemburgian doctors? Our Luxemburgish GP studied in Austria so he knows from first-hand experience what it is like to be ill in another country and is therefore very understanding. There is good and bad here, just like anywhere else, but the choice is perhaps wider. There is an English Doctor for those who really can't cope.

What about the TV? We are very spoilt - here we have cable TV and receive three French channels, one Italian, one Portuguese, one Spanish, four German, one Dutch, three Belgian (French language), one Luxemburgish, RTL French and RTL German, Eurosport and CNN. Why, oh why can't the BBC join us because there is no English language TV. You have to have a UK address to get any of the sky channels and I don't have one. That makes it difficult to give the children enough English language exposure.

How does the upbringing of children differ in your three countries? In Italy children attend school only in the mornings or the afternoons, watch a lot of television and go to bed late, especially in the south. Schooling is compulsory up to the age of 14 but education is not free and a school enrolment fee is also paid with each school change. As I left school in England in 1962, it would be difficult to compare with schooling there today.
The Luxemburgish state school system appears to me to be one of the best in Europe. All children are tri-lingual (Luxemburgish, French and German) by the time they are selected for secondary school. They go to a grammar school or technical school, depending on their abilities. Another language is taught at secondary level, usually English. Each town has a well-organised social life for children attending local schools, with a sports hall and organised parties and games. Help is given for foreign children whose parents do not speak Luxemburgish, French or German. Most local authorities run other language courses too, so an Italian or Portuguese child would be able to follow a course in their mother tongue.

How do you feel about the fact that you and your husband are both foreigners in Luxembourg? As far as our marriage is concerned, I feel it helps that neither of us is on 'home' ground! There are occasions when it would be useful to have a local on our side!

Do you think your children will settle in Luxembourg? It is hard to say. As there is no university in Luxembourg they would have to study 'abroad' if they go on to higher education. I imagine it would depend on what they would like to do when they leave school and where they can find work.

Where would you like to retire? Luxembourg is hard to follow because almost everything is so well organised here. Somewhere warm (but not too hot) by the sea perhaps. I honestly don't mind what language they speak as long at the people are friendly! I would prefer to steer clear of Italy as a permanent home and even my husband goes crazy because his home town lacks the clean and efficient organisation of our adopted home.

What do you miss most about 'home'? *My husband:* The FOOD!!! and his family. *Me*: Family, friends and the sort of neighbours I was always used to in the UK, policemen, nurses and real cheddar cheese.

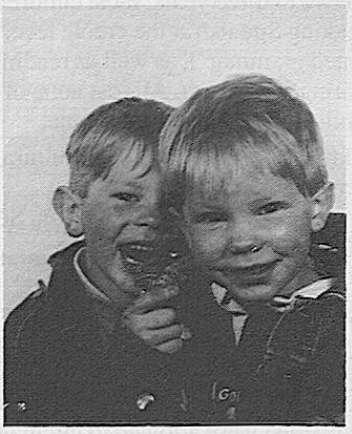
JUST LIKE MAGIC!

Sheila Georges-Skelly is British and lives in France with her French husband, Michel and two boys Brendan (7) and Guillaume (5). They have always used the 'one parent - one language' method. In the following article Sheila shares with us some ups and downs encountered when raising children bilingually.

It is 10 pm. Something wonderful happened earlier this evening and I want to share the experience.

So far, with the children's language development, there have been moments of joy, pleasure, and amusement, punctuated by periods of doubt, analysis, or times when we have needed to recharge our batteries! I do try to be consistent with the 'one language, one person' method although it's not always easy. However the results are promising, the boys communicate well in both languages and Michel's English has also improved!

Two years ago we moved from Calais (by English Channel) to Aveyron in SW France and the boys' contact with English suddenly decreased enormously, (no more access to British TV, English at nursery school, or hearing tourists speak the language in town). The boys started



speaking to me almost exclusively in French. We were very disappointed, but afraid to force them in case this triggered off a negative reaction. Faced with this new situation I have to fight my natural impulse to reply to them in French. It's difficult, but if I do answer in French, I get back into English as soon as I can.

I started to look for new ways to increase their exposure to English. Grandma's and Grandpa's 'red-cross parcels' containing magazines and video recordings were of course a great help, but would this be enough? Perhaps some positive discrimination in favour of the minority language was needed.

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SISTER SCHOOLS/ESCUELAS GEMELAS

M. J. Rosanova

On a sunny afternoon in May, a dozen of InterCultura's older children (Kindergarten-age) went to visit the developmental kindergarten at Cárdenas School, a public school in Chicago. Most of the children at Cárdenas were born in Mexico, and have arrived in the U.S. within the last year.

The Board of Education in Chicago characterizes the children as 'category A bilingual students', even though they're just beginning to acquire English, and are still mostly monolingual speakers of Spanish. The InterCultura children are native-speakers of English, but their families have sent them to InterCultura in the hopes that they will become Spanish-English bilinguals, too.

InterCultura is a foreign language immersion Montessori school, accredited by the American Montessori Society. The teachers offer the full array of normal Montessori activities, but are restricted to the use of Spanish only. Though the children are free to speak either English or Spanish, as they see fit, most children begin to produce pidgin-level Spanish (understandable, spontaneous Spanish, generally at lower than sentence level) within one year. Within two to three years, most children are speaking Spanish at the creole level ('invented grammar'), as well as reading and writing in Spanish. Almost none of the families speak Spanish at home.

As budding bilinguals, the InterCultura children and the Cárdenas children clearly have a great deal in common. So how did the first meeting with the Cárdenas children go?

The teachers at Cárdenas set up a series of activity tables and offered lessons 'on the carpet'. The InterCultura children were assigned two by two to each activity table, and then were allowed to circulate and select other activities or games. A few of the InterCultura children were able to read from Spanish storybooks (to the great amazement of the Cárdenas children). The Cárdenas children were very kind: at one point, two InterCultura girls wanted to sit together, but there was just one chair; one of the Cárdenas girls got up to get another chair *'para qué no tengan miedo'* ('so they won't feel scared').

Despite these occasional delightful exchanges, the two groups mostly did not mix. Some of the children of InterCultura parents who had helped drive the children to Chicago's *Villita* (Little Village) neighbourhood, also tended to cling to their parents and hide behind them. Those who didn't hide behind parents seemed to be hiding behind each other. Two of the children dominant in the Cárdenas class's social structure approached an InterCultura boy whom they perceived to be of similar rank among the InterCultura children.

- ¿Cómo te llamas? (What is your name?)
- Danny.
-¿Cuántos años tienes? (How old are you?)
- Tengo seis años. (I'm six)
- Yo tengo ocho. (Well, I'm eight.)

The Cárdenas children laughed but Danny was taken aback, somewhat. This exchange of information about social rank and power is an expectable feature of an inter-group encounter.

A few weeks later, about fifteen of the Cárdenas children came to visit at InterCultura. Our teachers had arranged a number of activities and children had some fun together at the playground with the monkey bars, the slides and the sand. One of the InterCultura teachers organized a circle game called *El Lobo* which called for Spanish descriptions of miming - putting on pants *(poniendoso los pantalones)*, shirt, hat, and finally, *afilandose los dientes* (sharpening his teeth) building to a climax of a game of tag.

It was interesting to see how intriguing the Cárdenas school (a public school), children found our practical life materials. The InterCultura children spontaneously volunteered to help the visitors engage in pouring, sponging, sorting, washing the doll, and so on. It was the time of richest exchange in Spanish. The Cárdenas children were able to tolerate the pidgin-level Spanish of the InterCultura children who had been at InterCultura for less than a year. Previously, the native-speakers of Spanish had ignored or rejected this lower level of competence. But during spontaneous activity in practical life, this barrier fell.

Even though the InterCultura teachers had asked the Cárdenas children to speak Spanish with the InterCultura children, most of the Cárdenas children had preferred to display their skill in English - perhaps a reflection of the status of English as the power language in the USA. It was wonderful to see these 'culture struggle' considerations dissolved in the children's pleasure with practical life activities.

In our planning session, the InterCultura teachers considered utilizing paired, non-competitive games but the visit was too brief for experimentation with any of these things. In the end, the practical life activities served as paired, non-competitive games - a happy accident.

Because the Cárdenas children were able to come on a City of Chicago schoolbus, no Cárdenas parents were present. We didn't see any of the problems with dependent, clinging behaviour. Also, the visit from the Cárdenas children was just one and quarter hours in length, not the whole afternoon. This also seemed to contribute to the success of the visit.

"It was wonderful to see these 'culture struggle' considerations dissolved in the children's pleasure with practical life activities."

The second visit seems to have generated both more comfort and more talking among the children. Cutting down the length of the visits, restricting participation to children and teachers, and emphasizing paired, non-competitive activities - all seemed to help. Considering the large differences in social class and ethnic background between the suburban and the city children, this represented a meaningful discovery. We were able to bridge, at least in part, what later might become impenetrable barriers.

If you have similar experiences- especially with non-competitive activities for small groups please contact Dr. M. Rosanova, InterCultura Montessori School, 208 Harrison St., Oak Park, IL 60304 USA. Dr. Rosanova (a Ph.D. in social pychology) is certified as a Montessori teacher. In 1985, he and his wife founded InterCultura as a foreign language immersion school, reviving in North America a tradition created by Montessori in India in the 1930's.

Some Books decribing non-competitive games:
Terry Orlick: *The Cooperative Games and Sports Book.* New York, NY, 1987: Pantheon Books. ISBN 0-39473494-7.

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GLOSSARY

Metalinguistic:
Language about language. Thinking about one's language.

MAGIC *Continued from page three*

The boys have always loved their bedtime story and therefore we decided that I would put them to bed whenever possible. This tactic appears to be working, as they never ask me to read in French and are willing to communicate in English at bedtime.

Last year Brendy started learning to read at school and in spite of being surrounded by books in both languages, he hated reading and writing. There followed a year of conflict, many tears and a lot of soul-searching. Luckily he had an enlightened teacher who thought that perhaps Brendy wasn't ready to read yet and wondered if his bilingual upbringing might be delaying his reading development. The teacher didn't criticize us and was more than supportive, reassuring us that Brendy had a rich vocabulary and that things would improve in time.

Our attitude and pressure didn't help - we panicked. Reading in French was difficult, it meant hard work and naturally he no longer associated his French books with pleasure. I have always been quite militant about bilingualism, but all previous convictions can fly out of the window when your child is having problems. I got to a stage where I tried to read to him in French and it did make me feel better, but Brendy wasn't very impressed! Meanwhile our nightly story time in English continued. In contrast it was fun and undemanding but then I wasn't teaching him to read!

It is now one year later and I'm pleased to say that things have changed. His reading has progressed, there are no more fights over homework and all is calm again in our household.

Although the boys continue to surprise us with new words and expressions they have picked up, nothing could have prepared me for what happened this evening. **The Twits** by Roald Dahl was on tonight's menu. Brendy was so involved in the story, that he pleaded with me to read two more pages. When I refused saying that it was too late, he took the book from me and said, 'I'll read it to Guillaume then'. And he did just that! Revelling in my reaction, he then picked up Eric Carle's **The Hungry Caterpillar** and read that to his brother.

The boy who detests reading was so pleased with himself. With an enormous grin he explained that he had wanted to surprise me at Christmas but wasn't ready! 'You know Mummy', he added, 'reading in English is easy-peasy, it just happened like magic'.

Sheila Georges-Skelly, France.

'One Person - One Language' Is it always the best?

It never occurred to me that I would use anything but the 'one person - one language' approach. I now feel that perhaps it would have been better if we had used a more situational approach.

We are, however, in a slightly unusual situation in that my husband Renato and I both speak a **minority** language to our children. I always speak to them in English, while Renato always speaks to them in Esperanto. Renato and I talk to each other in Esperanto. Living in Italy, we have left Italian to take care of itself, which it has done most effectively.

The children,(now 10 and 12 years), are equally strong in English and Italian. They go to a bilingual school, where they study in both languages. Esperanto is very much in third place, since in spite of our efforts to go to international meetings etc. (see BFN Vol. 12: 2, 95), it obviously cannot compete with the influence of school, television and friends. I would like to even things up by talking to them sometimes in Esperanto, but in one sense our 'one person- one language' policy has been totally successful, as the children absolutely refuse to let me speak to them in any language other than English.

I now think that we could have used a system by which I spoke to them in English when we were on our own, but when the whole family was together, we could all have used Esperanto. Two situations would have been quite distinct (i.e. when Daddy's there, we speak Esperanto; when he's not there, we speak English), and I don't think there would have been any risk of confusion.

I'm not saying that the 'one person- one language' policy isn't the safest under most circumstances, particularly when the minority language is spoken by only one parent. However, there may be specific situations where another method might be a more appropriate choice. For this reason, parents should think carefully about the pros and cons of each system before their children are born, if possible, since it may be difficult to change later on.

Anna Lowenstein, Zagarolo, Italy.

Shared Language Modelling

I too am not convinced that the 'one parent - one language' strategy is necessarily the best way. When stating that not respecting this principle can lead to language separation delay, specialists fail to give supportive evidence for their claims, undoubtedly because there is none. In their book, recognised as a reference in the field of bilingualism, Hamers & Blanc (1983)[1] state that '*this hypothesis, also known as Grammont's law (1902), insists on establishing a strict one language - one person correspondence. This idea can be found deeply anchored in various biographies of bilingual children without any real proof of its validity. (...) However, there are remarkably few researchers who have tried to verify this hypothesis. The rare few who have raised the question have not found experimental support for Grammont's law. (...) It would therefore*

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HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Nicholas-Don is three and a half years old, he is a French-English bilingual. He lives in France and has a French father and a New Zealand mother. The following conversation happened between the mother and the son:

Nicholas-Don: *Bûcheron* (woodcutter, a word he heard in school).

Mother: That's a woodcutter, a log-cutter. He cuts wood from trees.

Nicholas-Don: *Des arbres?* (from trees?) - *Bûcheron.*

Mother: Mmm.

Nicholas-Don: Catalogue (catalogue/'cut-a-log').

Mother: (laughs) No.

Nicholas-Don: '*Catalogue' c'est quoi, alors?* (what does 'catalogue' mean, then?)

Melane Giancarli, Croutelle, France

SHARED...*Continued from page five*

seem that the separation of languages between speakers has relatively little effect on the linguistic and cognitive development of the bilingual child.'

Our own experience as a bilingual family also contradicts the hypothesis of Grammont's law. I am Australian, my husband is French and we have lived all our married life in France. We both speak English and French fluently and have always used both languages with our three boys (aged 6, 5 and 2). I conducted my Master's in Linguistics thesis on the two eldest boys in 1993-94 (University of Nancy). I found that the children used mixed utterances and codeswitching in bilingual situations such as within the family (although not to a great extent), but never in monolingual situations (for both English and French). They appeared to be balanced bilinguals, with above average scores for their age in both English and French on a number of language tests. They could identify words in their active vocabulary as being either English or French, and the eldest could also classify unknown words in either language with a 100% success rate.

Both boys were attending the local (monolingual) French Ecole Maternelle, and were if anything above average for their age. During a two-month holiday to Australia the eldest attended an Australian primary school for four weeks, where he immediately adapted and according to his teacher was above the class average. It would seem, therefore, that the strategy used in our family has in no way impaired our children's development. Rather than referring to a 'mixed language environment' which carries negative connotations, I prefer the term 'shared language modelling', reflecting the fact that both my husband and I share the responsibility of modelling both languages. This made the task a lot easier than it would have been if I was the only parent providing English input.

Kathryn Goepfert, Laval, France.

[1]Hamers, J. F. & Blanc, M. *Bilinguality and Bilingualism*, Cambridge University Press, price £17.95.

RICHNESS OF A LANGUAGE

We have received more reponses to the letter 'Errors in German' (Vol.13:1, 96) than for anything else we have published. Below are some of the comments.

I find it amusing that your correspondent admonishes you to 'check the linguistic facts' but has neglected to do so himself.

A carrot is indeed called *Karotte* in some areas of Germany. *Wurzel* (root), however, is the common name in many parts - and in my family the vegetable is known as *Möhre* or *Mohrrübe*. All the above terms can be found in the 'Duden', the standard German dictionary.

The German language is particularly rich in regional variations. During one of our German coffee-mornings, the Austrian member asked for translation of her dialect word for an apple core *Apfelbutzen*. Out of the five or six women around the table, everyone came up with a different term - even though two of us were born in the same city! Not one named the 'proper' word, *Kerngehäuse*, which my dictionary supplies.

Our bilingual/ bicultural children thus encounter an unusually mixed and varied version of their (literally) mother-tongue! This, to me, seems beautifully in keeping with a bilingual upbringing: exposure not only to different languages, but also to different versions of the one language.

Kirsten Baron, Reigate, England.

Perhaps Dr Neubauer has just never gone shopping in Bremen or Hamburg - even my supermarket bill details a bunch of carrots as *Wurzeln Bund*.

R. Heimburger, Lillenthal, Germany.

I for one use the word *Wurzel* when referring to a carrot! Okay, to be correct it is a *Karotte*, *Möhre*, or *Mohrrübe*, but in a strange dialectical, sub-cultural way I have enjoyed many *Wurzel-durcheinander* (which Herr Neubauer calls *Karotteneintopf*) meals during my childhood in North-West Germany.

Well, I suppose this is yet another example of how we not only try and pass on the German language to our children, but manage to mix this with a bewildering cocktail of customs, behaviour patterns and words that do not exist (generally referred to as 'culture').

Helga Steenweg-Wallin, England.

Up in the North we, the locals, generally use *Wurzeln* for carrots. I have hardly ever heard of anyone eating *Karrotten*. However, we do drink *Karottensaft* and to make the matter more complicated we eat *Möhreneintopf* (carrot soup).

Birgit Szymanski, Bremen, Germany.

What do you do when the child refuses to speak the majority language?

Tom speaking English in France

We have what seems to be an unusual problem and would like some advice. We live in France. My husband is bilingual German/French and I am English. I speak French to my husband and English to my children. My husband speaks French and English or a mixture to the kids.

The problem is that my eldest child, Tom (4 years) refuses to speak French at school or in the community. He has a few selected people with whom he will speak French, including his paternal grandparents and Aunt, whom he sees relatively rarely. They are also keen to give some German input for the sake of the monolingual members of the extended family. Tom's French comprehension seems good, but his spoken French is not nearly as good as his English.

My second child, at nearly three, speaks little and has many invented words. The children 'speak' English to each other. Our intention was to have 'one parent, one language', sacrificing German initially and encouraging English with books, videos etc. Tom, however, refuses to speak French to his dad and yells at him to speak 'in properly', i.e. to speak in English. For the sake of domestic harmony, he complies.

For Tom's social and scholastic development, we need to find a way to overcome his inhibitions at school. A whole day of silence and not defending himself or his ideas must be hard on a young child.

Alex and Fiona Ungerer-Chalmers, Thônes, France.

Nico speaking German in England.

I'm German, my husband is English and we live in London. We have two children, Nicholas (3 years), Anthony (nearly 2 years), and I'm expecting no. 3 in June this year. I decided right from Nicholas' birth that I would only speak German and my husband

only English to our children.
Nico did not start talking until he was 18 months. By that time the doctor recommended that I should stop talking German to him, advice which I totally ignored. His language (a mixture of German and English) developed very slowly and for a long time he didn't put more than two words together, although his understanding of both languages was very, very high.
At the age of 2 years 11 months there was a kind of explosion and he became very talkative in German. His German now is absolutely satisfactory (in my opinion), but he ignores the English language completely. Again, at his 3 years' check, I was told by my doctor (a different one) to start speaking English at home.
I would definitely prefer to continue speaking German to them, not only for Nico's, but also for Anthony's sake. My biggest worry is, whether the English language influences (his father speaks only English but is 50% of the time abroad, and Nico goes to a playschool and has English speaking friends) are enough to make sure his English is going to be all right when he goes to school? According to the books I have read, English should be the strong language and German the weak one (although I can't understand why, as I'm around them 90% of the time).

Sabine Kirschstein Smith, England.

I have been asked by the editor to write about my family's bilingual development, since our eldest son's early language developement resembled closely Tom's and Nico's.

We have three sons, Paavo, (19 years, now at university), Patrick, (17) and Tom, (12). My husband, Bernard, is English, I am Austrian/German. To this day, I only ever speak German to our sons and they to me. During my years as a teacher in a German school in Dublin, I met many positive examples of bilingual parenthood but also families who stopped speaking German to their children. They felt that the school should 'teach' them German, which resulted in the children not becoming bilingual. Therefore, when I gave birth to our first child, Paavo, there was no doubt for me that I should speak German only to him. Bernard, who spoke hardly any German at that time (and had no intention of learning more) spoke English to Paavo. But gradually, his German improved and he,too , spoke more and more German to our eldest son.

Paavo started speaking in German and developed 'normally' from one word structures to full sentences etc., but only in German. It was very clear that he understood English perfectly: he heard English every day in playgroup and from his friends, also from his parents speaking it to each other. As his language development was progressing normally in German we were not unduly worried. Maybe we were also lucky that no professionals (i.e. teachers, doctors) crticised our language policy. He was, and still is, a quiet and often shy child who seemed happiest in his parents' presence.

When he was four and a half years old, we spent some weeks with my family in Germany. Paavo lost a lot of his shyness and experienced something like a language 'explosion' in German. It was obvious how much he enjoyed talking to family and friends and to other children. When we returned to England he suddenly started speaking English at playgroup and to his friends. He spoke in complete sentences and by the time he started school nobody realized that he had only recently started to speak English.

His brothers' language development followed the 'ordinary' bilingual children's development. As the years went by my husband spoke more and more English to our sons, but even now we often use German as our family language when we are all together. In restrospect I think my husband's language use was probably the reason for Paavo's unusual language development. On the other hand if Bernard had spoken only English to Paavo, he might have refused to speak German to me as he was very jealous of his baby brother at the time and might have used the language as 'revenge'.

My advice to Tom's and Nico's parents would be to respect the children's wishes to speak the minority language to both parents. This might create the feeling of security and familiarity, especially in Tom's case, as he has started school. Since the minority language is developing well in both cases it does not seem that there is a language problem. As long as you help to equip the children with the knowledge of the majority language, they will use it when they are ready. Maybe you need to find a special adult for the children, who speaks only the majority language to them.

By the time you read this letter your children probably will have changed their minds and are speaking the majority language all day. You might then have to find more ways to persuade them to speak the minority language enough again, as the outside influence gets stronger.

Our sons are very glad about their bilingualism. Paavo to this day is the most German of our children and would very much like to live and work in Austria where he feels at home.

I wish you every success in your bilingual adventure.

Dagmar Zahlbruckner Lane, England.

The editors, with the help of the International Editorial Board, are happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism/-culturalism. We reserve the right to edit any letters published. All contributions to the Newsletter should be sent to:

Editor: Marjukka Grover
at Multilingual Matters

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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.

Contact details removed

THE INSIDE STORY... *Continued from page two*

had evolved which meant that Italian words were used to tell the children to 'eat up!' and 'chew properly!' This habit had spread to other times when the children were reprimanded, too. Looking at the situation from an outsider's perspective, it was clear that the children were picking up the negative undercurrents within the family regarding Italian. Once Denise and Antonio also saw this, they were able to work at the reasons for Denise's resentment and reduce it, monitor their use of each language carefully, and allow Italian to flourish within the family on an equal footing with German and so shed its black sheep role.

One six-year-old boy, with English parents living in Switzerland, refused to speak a word of German, despite attending the Swiss Kindergarten for 18 months. 'They're not like us', was his reason for this, 'so I won't speak to them!' His mother, unhappy with living as a foreigner in Switzerland, made the decision to move the family to an English-speaking country. She wrote shortly afterwards, to say they were all well settled, and that her son was outgoing and sociable.

As these examples illustrate, children are very adept at pointing out to us, through their behaviour, the importance of those attitudes, resentments and pent up emotions (theirs or ours) which we choose to ignore or dismiss as trivial. When looking at how a child responds to his particular linguistic context, then, it is wise to consider not only how the external factors are regulated, but also to take a step back and reflect on what is going on subconsciously inside the mind of the child.

SISTER SCHOOLS... *Continued from page four*

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