The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: **Marjukka Grover**

1997, Vol. 14 No. 2

In this issue

EDITORIAL

How often have you heard people saying to parents moving abroad '*your children will pick up the local language in no time at all*'. And it is true, of course. Children will quickly make friends and start playing in their new language. But is the language sufficient to follow the complexities of the school curriculum? Will teachers assume that the child, who seems to be speaking his/her second language fluently understands the more abstract ideas in that language? And what can parents do to help the situation? In this issue's leading article Colin Baker, the author of the now well known **A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism** and a member of our editorial board, explains how communicative competence differs from academic language proficiency.

How do those brought up bilingually/ biculturally feel about their upbringing? I asked this question of my eldest son, Tommi, presently studying in Finland for a year. I thought I knew the problems my children have, yet I was unaware of the identity crises Tommi has gone through during his teenage years (see page four). Whether they were more difficult than a monolingual/cultural teenager would have had is hard to tell. The identity issue, however, is worth keeping in mind when we try to understand our youngsters' sometimes bizarre behaviour. But teenagers do grow up (although it is difficult to believe it at the time) and start again to value their parents efforts. I had tears in my eyes when reading Tommi's conclusion about his bilingual upbringing

'...it is the greatest gift my parents have ever given me and I lift my hat to all parents who have done, are doing, or thinking about doing the same.'

Marjukka Grover

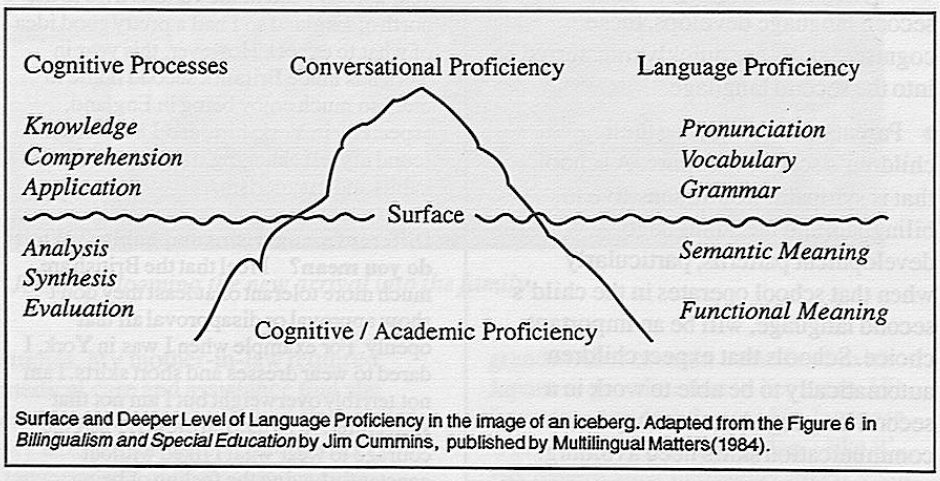
STREET AND SCHOOL LANGUAGE

Colin Baker

One influential idea in understanding bilingualism in children of school age is a distinction between two different kinds or levels of language that are used. Such a simple distinction highlights a problem that some bilingual children experience in school.

One kind of language may be called **street language**, for example, holding a simple conversation with other children or a shopkeeper. In this kind of everyday communication, we all tend to use plenty of gestures to support communication. It is easier for another person to understand what we are saying when we point, make shapes with our hands and bodies, use our eyes and other facial gestures such as smiles to give cues and clues to support our words. For example, when we speak to someone who is just beginning to learn a language, we use plenty of non-verbal gestures to support verbal language. Many nursery school teachers are particularly skilled in using body language to accompany what they are saying in words. In the language of academics, this is called *Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills* (BICS).

Such basic communicative language is often not **the language of the classroom**. Within a few years of primary schooling, the language of the classroom tends to have very few actions and gestures to accompany words. The language of the teacher and curriculum material becomes more abstract than concrete, tends to introduce more and more complex ideas, and requires a language that is more cognitively and academically demanding.



Surface and Deeper Level of Language Proficiency in the image of an iceberg. Adapted from the Figure 6 in *Bilingualism and Special Education* by Jim Cummins, published by Multilingual Matters(1984).

For example, when teachers set mathematical problems for children, or want children to think through a scientific experiment, or to discuss the causes of war, or to understand particular metaphors, the language used tends to lack any supports to prop up teaching and learning. When we analyse,

Continued on page two

Continued from page one

evaluate, discuss and argue, the language we use is given little support from the context or environment. The language of the curriculum is more advanced and complex than ordinary conversation. Among academics this is called *Cognitive Academic Language Proficiency* (CALP).

When children are learning in the classroom through a second language, they may find it is insufficiently developed to cope with the language of the curriculum. The danger is that the teacher thinks that, because the child has conversational skills in the second language, the child can cope in the classroom. However, the reality is the child's language may not have developed sufficiently for the demands of the curriculum. Therefore, children need to have sufficient language proficiency in the school language to cope in the classroom.

It takes approximately two years for a second language learner to reach the same level of proficiency as a monolingual in ordinary street, conversational skills. However, it takes five to seven years or more for the second language learner to reach the same level of proficiency as the monolingual in the language used in the classroom and school.

What can parents do to help in this situation?

- The parent should not ignore or devalue the first language of the child. The child tends to develop thinking skills quickest and most efficiently through the first language. As the second language develops, these cognitive skills are quickly transferred into the second language.

- Parents need to choose their children's school with care. A school that is sympathetic and sensitive to bilinguals and their language development patterns, particularly when that school operates in the child's second language, will be an important choice. Schools that expect children automatically to be able to work in a second language because they have communication skills need avoiding.

- If bilingual children are failing at school, one frequent cause is that their academic language is insufficiently developed. Therefore, an effective school will concentrate on developing language through appropriate teaching of different content areas and with a concern to develop language across the curriculum.

Continued on page seven

SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD
Birgit Szymanski from Germany

Country of origin: Germany
Profession: teacher
Languages spoken: German, English, basic knowledge of Spanish

You neither have a bilingual husband nor bilingual children. Why is it that you are nevertheless involved in bilingualism? I have loved English ever since my first lesson at school. Hence I ended up studying it to become a teacher. The 'bilingual virus' finally hit me when I was a visiting student at York University, England, in 1990. I then discovered a scientific interest in the ins and outs of using languages. As a consequence I did some research work in the field, wrote my final exam thesis on infant bilingualism, did some teaching of the subject at university level and completed my teacher training at a bilingual school.

You said you spent a year studying in the UK, how did you feel about being a foreigner in Britain? Well, before my year abroad I had made various trips to the north of England so I had a pretty good idea of what to expect. However, this year in York has made Britain a second home to me. I so much enjoy being in England, especially in Yorkshire, and I have often found myself changing..taking on different habits and mannerisms.

Different mannerisms and habits ? What do you mean? I feel that the British are much more tolerant or at least they don t show approval or disapproval all that openly. For example when I was in York, I dared to wear dresses and short skirts. I am not terribly overweight but I am not that slim either. In Britain, however, I had the courage to wear what I liked without constantly having the feeling of being stared at. Germans, on the other hand, often let you feel what they think about you. After my year in England I now still wear what I like and every so often I get asked if I am a foreigner. Everything that breaks the 'blue jeans-norm' gets openly commented upon but having lived abroad has given me confidence to live with it. And on most Sundays I still go for a walk to get my Sunday paper.....

What is your fondest memory of England? Ever since my first visit I have made an enormous effort to get rid of a German accent. When I first arrived at York everybody noticed something foreign in my pronunciation and took me for an American. After a few months people thought I was Scottish, which I saw as a big step towards my target accent. Just before the end of the year I ended up having a chat with an elderly couple from York and they were actually convinced that I was from Durham which is not far from York. Can you imagine how proud I was?

It sounds as if you've really managed to pick up the accent! Yes, I think so and it was hard work. Actually, the dialects and corresponding accents in the North of England have become my great passion. Now, I have got lots of poetry and stories written in various dialects at home and my pupils at school love it when I suddenly change from Standard English to Cockney and on to the broadest Yorkshire.

What do you take back after a visit in England? Dresses and blouses because in Germany you hardly find the feminine British style of women's wear at reasonable prices. I also mostly bring back tea, tons of books and videos and at least one bottle of Newcastle Brown Ale to save for a very special occasion.

Are you still actively involved in research work? I wouldn't call it research work actually. Due to my teaching post I'm fairly busy but I devote part of my spare time to doing Early English with monolingual German kids. One of my group is for kindergarten kids and one is for 10 year olds, just before they begin to learn English at school. On the basis of my scientific knowledge I have developed my own programmes and methods and enjoy this extra task on private ground. At the moment I am trying to find a way to get the little ones to speak whole sentences instead of single words only. I had wanted to open a centre of bilingualism in Bremen. Then I got offered a financially secure teaching post so I cancelled my original plans. It' s a pity.... but in these hard times I preferred security to making a dream come true.

Any dreams left? Naturally ! One day I'd like to learn Gaelic and Welsh and I'd also like the idea of having my own bilingual kids.... Well, time will tell....I also dream of attending a big international conference on bilingualism.

Any anecdote you've had with your own bilinguality? I had picked up the word 'crap' from my fellow students at York University and thought it meant 'bad/not interesting' in the softest sense. Well, in a tutorial there was this honourable professor of English literature and he asked me what I thought of James Joyce. I ended up telling him this author was 'crap'. In the end of term final report was a note from the professor: 'her idiomatic grasp of the English language is most astonishing'.

LANGUAGE ACQUISITION OF AN ENGLISH-JAPANESE BILINGUAL CHILD

by Peter Wanner

My wife is Japanese and I am American. Our son, Jessie, was born in Japan with dual nationality. I would like to describe Jessie as a simultaneous bilingual child, and how, in the past few years, living in many different environments has made a tremendous impact on Jessie's acquisition of Japanese and English.

Our son lived in Japan until he was three years old with my wife, my wife's parents and myself. During that time I spoke English to him in all circumstances. My wife naturally used only Japanese, especially since she conversed with her parents in Japanese. During these three years Jessie's Japanese was stronger than his English. Apart from speaking a little English, Jessie watched English television videos and listened to English stories from me. An International Library provided us with more English books than I could read during this interval. My wife read Japanese books to Jessie and let him watch Japanese shows on television. In most instances Jessie responded to me in Japanese when I spoke to him in English. I was beginning to get concerned that my son would become a passive bilingual and I felt a need to provide him with new English experiences in a context other than Japan. Hence, when I received an opportunity to do graduate courses in Washington, DC. I decided to take my family to America.

"...Jessie began to discretely manipulate the use of Japanese or English for when it was appropriate."

Jessie, my wife and I moved to Washington, DC when he was three years and three months old. Jessie did not attend pre-school or nursery school as his mother cared for him during the day. She continued to use Japanese with him and Japanese became the dominant language in the home. I also chose to speak Japanese at home because I was taking intensive Japanese courses and the home was the only other opportunity I had to use my Japanese. When playing with English speaking children Jessie would always let his mother express any desires he could not express with his limited English. He usually chose younger children to play with as he could express most of his desires non-verbally better with younger children.

In Washington, DC the public library was very close to our house. Hence, Jessie and his mother went to the library every day and brought home new books to read. Jessie preferred to have me read the books to him, but if I was very busy he would let his mother read them. Jessie also participated in children's events put on at the library. Almost every week he attended a story hour. He had an opportunity to meet many friends during this time.

After a month in Washington, DC Jessie, my wife and mother-in-law went to Oregon to live with my parents and my 16 year old brother, while I pursued my studies. My mother-in-law required medical care and assistance that she could only get in the United States. Only my wife and mother-in-law spoke Japanese and used this language to communicate with Jessie. This was the first time Jessie met my parents and he hesitated to speak in English with my family during the first two months. My parents expressed no concern over Japanese as the means of communication between Jessie and his mother or his Japanese grandmother. However, two months later, when Jessie was using more English, they were slightly uneasy when my wife or Jessie chose Japanese as the medium for communication. They attributed this to their inability to comprehend the intended meaning.

Jessie stayed with his American grandparents for eight months (from age three years and four months to four years). During this time Jessie began to discretely manipulate the use of Japanese or English for when it was appropriate. For example, at the end of one meal my brother said, 'I want the big piece of cake' to which Jessie said, 'Why eat cake?' My brother replied, 'Because I like it'. Jessie then turned to his mother and said in Japanese, 'Why does he want to eat cake when it is bad for you?'.

Jessie also showed ability to simultaneously translate between his Japanese grandmother and American grandmother discretely when his mother was not around. One day his American grandmother brought some food to his Japanese grandmother in her room. His Japanese grandmother said in Japanese, 'I don't want to eat that. I don't like it'. His American grandmother asked Jessie to translate. 'She said she can't eat it right now', said Jessie in English. Jessie translated his grandmother's remarks more politely to avoid any bad feelings.

During the initial two months with my family, whenever I called on the telephone Jessie always responded in Japanese, despite my use of Japanese or

Continued on page four

Jessie welcoming the new arrival into the family.

Continued from page three

English. However, after that Jessie began to communicate in Japanese or English, depending on the mode of communication chosen by myself. If I spoke to him in Japanese he responded in Japanese, but if I changed to English he responded in English. At this point Jessie built up confidence in both Japanese and English communication. Jessie began to communicate with his cousins, American grandparents and my brother with more difficult vocabulary and greater fluency.

Jessie and my wife returned to Washington DC. to stay with me for the last four months in the USA because his grandmother had passed away. My wife and I used both Japanese or English and Jessie responded in the mode of communication we selected to begin

"If I spoke to him in Japanese he responded in Japanese, but if I changed to English he responded in English."

the conversation. He also interacted better with same age children as he was able to express himself with greater ease. He did not rely on non-verbal expressions as much as eight months earlier. My wife and I took advantage of the library and read English books to him daily.

When we returned to Japan Jessie (aged four years and four months) attended an International English School for three months in Kitakyushu, but I felt that he received more English instruction and opportunities at home. We started correspondence courses from an American Elementary School when Jessie was five years old and now, at the age of five years and eight months, he continues the course while attending Japanese kindergarten.

These experiences have shown that for Jessie the social environment was a very strong variable. I attribute a large portion of Jessie's simultaneous bilingual characteristics to his immersion in both the Japanese and American social environments. We are proud of Jessie's achievements and intend to pursue his formal studies through English correspondence courses and Japanese schools. We feel he is getting the best of both worlds.

THE TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS OF A BILINGUAL TEENAGER

Tommi Grover

I am a twenty year old Finnish/English bilingual and, perhaps more importantly, bi-national. I am presently studying in Finland, and having lived the first twenty years of my life in England I feel it is appropriate that I spend at least one, if not the next twenty, in my other home country. The reason I am writing is to reassure parents about the possible identity crisis that teenagers brought up in two cultures may go through, and hopefully to give teenagers encouragement while finding their identity!

I have since birth always been somewhat torn between England and Finland. Holidays in Finland would always end in tears, knowing that I had to leave half of my family for another year, but while I was in Finland I would miss England. I remember at one time joking that maybe my home was somewhere in the North Sea. This conflict didn't become a problem however until I reached those dreaded teenage years. Being away from

Tommi in his other home country.

Finland I would naturally miss it tremendously, and this made my patriotic pride of everything Finland did reach almost fanatic proportions. Hardly a day would go by without me preaching to my classmates about how Finland was an earthly paradise with the added bonus of the world's greatest ice hockey team. (For obvious reasons I tried to mention football as little as possible.) Children being cruel, and teenagers being positively evil, I would never hear the end of it. I would be constantly (it felt like 'constantly' at the time) wound up about not being English etc., up to the point where I was ashamed to be Finnish at all. Of course this change in my attitude undermined the bullying completely as I would no longer react to being called 'Commie Tommi' (some people still think SF stands for Soviet Finland), the bullies got bored and picked on the kid with spots instead. Eventually my confidence came back although I had learned not to be too outspoken in my praise: maybe I had already realised that Finland also had its downsides, and the ice hockey team lost a few important games. Naturally I am still teased about Finland, but coming from a Tottenham supporter, comments about sport don't hold much water!

The more noticeable 'problems' were within myself. Between sixteen and nineteen I felt a growing irritation at all

"Travelling was what finally resolved my identity crisis. Two months on my own in foreign countries, with a one month break in Finland, made me realise that all countries have their good and bad sides..."

things English and was annoyed at having to live in such a horrible country. My only thoughts were to get away as much as possible, it didn't really matter where. I sometimes wished that I could have had normal parents who lived in Finland and didn't try bringing up 'circus freak' children. This phase passed by the time I was eighteen, but having read an unhealthy number of Jack Kerouac books I still felt restless. Travelling was what finally resolved my identity crisis. Two months on my own in foreign countries, with a one month break in Finland, made me realise that all countries have their good and bad sides, and that England isn't necessarily the living hell that I thought it was. I came to the unavoidable conclusion that I will always be somewhat of a foreigner wherever I am, but I will also be at home in two countries, a valued member of the community with two different outlooks. Why should I have to choose between the two? It is true that I fit in better in Finland and feel more settled, but this is only because my personality is the kind that likes to sit quietly and only talk if there is something to talk about!

People still talk to me as if being brought up bilingually is the most amazing thing

Continued on page six

Bilingual Childrens' Foreign - Language Learning in School

I am English but have studied in Wales with experience of bilingual English-Welsh friends. I have A-level (advanced level) German and a degree in French and Italian. My husband is German and has studied English to 'Abitur' level. He has a degree in French. We met in France in 1976 where I was on a term's teacher exchange and my husband was 'assistant'. Initially we communicated in French as we were at about the same linguistic level.

After a year of commuting between Wales and Germany it was decided that I should move to Germany where I obtained a position as a teacher in a BFES (British Forces Education Servide) school in Gütersloh. BFES, now called SCE, provides English-speaking schools with a British curriculum for the children of serving Army and RAF members. I have continued to work for this organisation and am still employed by them here in Osnabrück.

We continued communicating in French for some time with blocks (6-12 months) of English and German. After much initial frustration my German improved as did my husband's English. One thing that we were always strict about was sticking to one language at a time.

Our daughter, Katrin, was born in 1985. At this point we made a conscious decision to drop the French. (This is not to say that we never use it - occasionally we lapse into it if we are watching French cable television. It's also useful when we don't want our children to understand!) We started with the 'one parent, one language' approach which we continued to use when our son, Kai, was born in 1986. When speaking to each other we continued (and still do) to talk in blocks of English and German.

Both children attended a German playgroup from age two and a half once a week and a British Kindergarten five mornings a week from age three. At this stage their languages were more or less balanced. However, since my husband found it unnatural to read aloud in German the children's breadth of vocabulary and grasp of grammatical structures started developing faster in English. Just before their fifth birthdays they both entered a Forces school where they learned to read and write in English. Initially we had intended transferring them to a German school at seven years of age but they were so settled that we decided to leave the transfer until the next natural break at the end of Year 5 (or the German equivalent 4 Klasse).

Katrin made the transfer in August 1995. Prior to the transfer she had had no formal teaching in reading or writing German. She has coped extremely well with the change, although it was certainly difficult in the beginning and she needed much support. Interestingly many of her problems are in maths. (One of the many definitions of bilingualism I have heard is that one is bilingual if one can calculate equally well in both languages! What do your bilingual readers think?) Her teacher insists on speed but Katrin still has to translate the sum into English, do it and then translate it back into German – no easy task when one realises that German numbers are 'back to front' (24 = *vierundzwanzig*, 4+20). Her German spelling is improving rapidly, her vocabulary, accent and grammar structures have improved dramatically. She is no longer taking the easy option of reading for pleasure in English.

" Her teacher insists on speed but Katrin still has to translate the sum into English, do it and then translate it back into German - no easy task when one realises that German numbers are 'back to front'."

As Herr Hilker-Schmele suggests in his letter (BFN Vol.13:1, 96) we too have chosen a school which offers French as a first foreign language. (Ironically it is the school whose English department co-operates with my school). Up to now she has experienced few problems other than that the tests, an inevitable part of German school life, are usually translations from German into French. This should not be a problem for Herr Hilker-Schmele's son. I would thoroughly recommend this course of action. The only point to be aware of is continuity. Katrin is at an *Orientierungsstufe* (4 & 5 Klasse). She can continue her French as a first foreign language at the neighbouring *Realschule* and *Gymnasium* but not at the *Hauptschule*. Although this should not be a problem for her, it was for a fellow Anglo-German member of her group. This pupil has been advised to transfer to the English group because of her low level of general ability. I also have an acquaintance who has done a similar thing with his children - but this time with Latin as a first foreign language. I think his experiences, too, are positive.

Kai will follow in his sister's footsteps this summer and we anticipate few problems. At present my husband and I are in a German block to give the children the maximum exposure to German. We shall be switching to English in September to maintain their English. I hope that in a year's time we shall be able to (re-)introduce French – perhaps at a weekend meal initially. There is a French 'bilingual' stream in the *Gymnasium*, where certain subjects such as geography are taught through the medium of French. Whether Katrin or Kai will choose this option remains to be seen. We still continue with the 'one-parent, one-language' approach but are flexible enough to answer in the 'wrong' language if necessary.

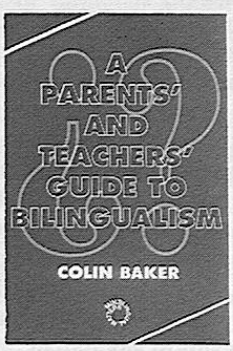
In some ways we have the best of both worlds in that both children have some basic reading and writing skills in English and hopefully in another year or two their German will be as good as that of their monolingual peers. The French is an added bonus.

Charmian Bilger, Osnabrück, Germany.

HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Robert (aged four, bilingual German/ English) while working in the garden with his father: *'Pflanzen wir auch die Bulben?'* (Meaning Blumenzwiebeln = bulbs).

Faith Gibson-Tegethoff, Swisttal, Germany.



Pbk ISBN 1-85359-264-1, price £9.95 (US$19.95)

The 'One Parent, One Language' Debate - A Different Experience

I've been following the 'one-parent, one-language debate' with interest, but also with some concern that we have not been following this method, which appears to be put forward as the prototype for successfully bringing up children as bilingual in a mixed-marriage family. Our own 'method' has been far less structured and more spontaneous, but I would like to contribute to the debate simply because it, too, has worked effortlessly - our two children (aged three and six) are perfectly bilingual.

I am English, my husband is Italian (or rather Sicilian) and we live in north-east Italy in the Veneto region. This means that besides English and Italian our children often hear Sicilian dialect, and local Venetian dialect. I have always spoken English to them, with very rare exceptions such as in three-way conversations at the doctor's where efficient communication in Italian seemed paramount. My husband is an English teacher and speaks both Italian and English to them, with a good dose of Sicilian occasionally as a deliberate spur to avoid them feeling that they don't understand on our occasional family holidays in Sicily. (I should add that both Sicilian and Venetian, like other Italian dialects, are so far removed from Italian as to be mutually incomprehensible).

"Italian is a far better language to let angry feelings rip, I find, and describing almost any Italian bureaucratic process in English is a non-starter..."

When we are all present, our conversations are a real mixture. Both my husband and I chop and change quite freely between English and Italian when speaking directly to each other, as do many other bilingual couples we know. Personally I think this is quite valid as a means of natural conversation between bilinguals – so often one language will provide exactly the right word or turn of phrase, which is not available in the other, and this will often depend on cultural factors relating to the topic of conversation or attitudes and emotions expressed. Italian is a far better language to let angry feelings rip, I find, and describing almost any Italian bureaucratic process in English is a non-starter, so turgid, like a stilted translation. This means that we do not provide a single language model for our children, which in the discussions I've followed, would seem to be considered central.

Our own experience is that our children understand English and Italian perfectly. They don't consistently speak one or the other language to either myself or their father, though the tendency is English to me, Italian to him, but they have the unerring facility to 'switch on' the appropriate language in whatever monolingual company (Italian or English) they may find themselves. Our children show no signs of being confused.

I should add that we decided to 'top up' the amount of English our children received, based on the advice of many friends in similar mixed families, that only having one parent speaking the minority language was simply not enough to achieve active use of that language by offspring. We had also observed two families adopting this method of the Italian father often speaking English to their children, in which the children were active and fluent speakers of English, in contrast to many friends we have where the children understand, but are reluctant and halting speakers of the language.

Alison Riley, Venezia, Italy.

GLOSSARY
Syntax: Word order and grammar. Rules about the ways words are combined and organised.

TRIALS AND TRIBULATIONS...

Continued from page four

in the world; to them maybe it is, and I am sure that it wasn't exactly plain sailing for my parents either, but how can I help the fact that to me it is the most natural thing in the world – the only thing I have ever known? Administratively it is still a nightmare as I have yet to find a computer system that doesn't have a nervous breakdown when I refuse to enter only one country in the nationality box!

Finally I can only say that I lift my hat every day to my parents for bringing me up bilingually. It is the greatest gift they have ever given me, and I lift my hat to all other parents who have done, are doing, or thinking about doing the same.

Bilinguals, don't worry if people think you're a bit different, be proud of it. It may not always seem so but I suppose we are kind of special!

How to teach children Grandmother's language?

I have a rather limited childhood knowledge of Finnish (my mother is Finnish), and therefore did not think it would benefit my son (nearly two years old) to bring him up speaking imperfect Finnish/ mother-tongue English (my husband is English). Moreover we do not have the possibility at present of frequent visits to our relatives in Finland; though I will take him whenever possible, and also try to contact Finnish groups in my area. Therefore I am now wondering about the best way of introducing him to Finnish, particularly as at the moment he is progressing very fast with English and I am anxious to avoid confusion. He seems able to imitate words/short sentences very quickly and accurately (like most children??), but should I wait until he has a better knowledge of English first, say at three, then start to introduce Finnish – and how? What are the implications/problems in speaking Finnish to a second child, whilst not excluding the first? If you, or any of your readers have any knowledge of how to help me in my ignorance I would be very grateful, since I would really like him to know something of Finnish and of his roots.

Elizabeth Siemaszko, Christchurch, England.

You say in your letter that your Finnish is not good enough to speak it to your child as a mother tongue and therefore you are really teaching it as a foreign language. I do not see that there is any problem of teaching your son some Finnish. If you create 'Finnish time', perhaps half an hour a day, when you play in Finnish, look at story books and point out words in Finnish, his English is unlikely to suffer. It may well be that the 'Finnish hour' will help his overall language development!

Try to explain to him why you are using this different language, the language of his grandmother. Perhaps you could also persuade your mother to speak to him in

Finnish, at least most of the time. Buy (or ask your relatives to send you) children's videos and cassette in Finnish and enjoy watching/listening them together with your son. No doubt your own Finnish will improve with this exercise.

You have to be realistic with your goals. He will not, of course, become immediately bilingual but at least he will have some knowledge of Finnish language and culture and when you go to Finland things will not be strange. It will also be easire for him to learn the language later in his life when he could attend a Saturday School and spend time in Finland with your relatives or in summer camps such as the ones run by *Kesälukioseura*, a society promoting Finnish language and culture to people living abroad.

If you want to raise your son bilingually you might think of hiring a Finnish au-pair who lives in and speaks only Finnish to your son. But remember, even a little is better than nothing.

You asked if there are any problems in speaking Finnish to the second child, but not to the first born. I do not see why you could not create a playful learning time for your first child as well. It is important to explain to the children why you are doing it and make it fun.

Marjukka Grover.

How to support a non-written minority language?

I would like to hear from people whose bi- or multilingualism includes a non-written minority language such as Swiss-German.
I have a friend here who raises her children using Swiss-German (her mother tongue) while the father and the environment are French speaking. She is quite desperate that her children should learn at least a minimum of Swiss-German so that they could communicate with their grandparents (who do not speak any French). The problem is that there is hardly any other language support e.g videos or cassettes for children in Swiss-German, which however differs so much from German itself that the children do not understand any German speaker and thus cannot follow any video or cassette in that language. My friend feels that the children are sometimes quite confused and she is tempted to drop Swiss-German and use only French.
Do other parents encounter problems with such languages?

Angela Pequiguet,
Ville-du-Pont, France

Bringing up a child using one of the lesser-used languages is obviously harder work than if the language were one of the world languages such as English. The lack of books and other material also adds to the problem. However, it is just as valuable that the children learn to speak Swiss-German than if they learn to speak German, in view of the family's connections and the mother-tongue. The best way for the children to learn Swiss-German would be to have a good, long 'language bath' every so often in that language. Could your friend take her children to spend longer periods with the grandparents, so that the children are immersed in Swiss-German? Later on, when they are older, they could travel there on their own and make friends with children who speak the language. It is important that the children see why they should speak a minority language, which doe not have any value in other people's eyes. Praising them for their efforts in speaking the minority language also helps, as children are usually very keen to please their parents.

Are any of the BFN readers in a similar situation? Do you have any ideas?

Marjukka Grover

STREET AND SCHOOL ...

Continued from page two

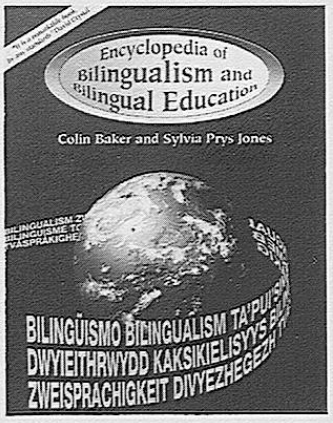
- Fourth, bilingual children working in their second language in school may temporarily lag behind their monolingual peers as they acquire the school language. Once they acquire the language required to meet cognitively demanding tasks in school, bilinguals usually catch up easily with their monolingual peers.

Finally, a warning needs sounding. Language cannot be simply classified into two categories: street and school language. Sometimes street language can be complex; school language can be simple. There are also many different dimensions of language such that a simple two-fold categorisation becomes a gross over-simplification. Nevertheless, this distinction has had a powerful influence on a more sympathetic understanding of bilinguals, particularly those who are learning in school through their second language.

Colin Baker is a Professor of Education at the University of Wales, Bangor and the author of several books on bilingualism and bilingual education.

ENCYCLOPEDIA OF BILINGUALISM AND BILINGUAL EDUCATION

Colin Baker and Sylvia Prys Jones



Hbk ISBN 1-85359-362-1, price £79.00 (US$150.00) approx. 750 pages, Format: 275x215mm. Publication date October 1997.

Full details of the Encyclopedia are in the leaflet accompanying this edition of the Newsletter. This major project, which is based on a celebration of the colourful diversity of languages in the world is being **made available to readers at the special price of £49.00 (US$89.00).**
More important, however, is the influence the project could bring to bear on an all too sceptical public. It is a wonderful celebration of the advantages of language diversity in the modern world and as such we feel that it should be made as widely available as possible. This means it should be in all major public reference libraries, as many local libraries as possible and indeed most colleges and some schools where there is a high proportion of bilingual students. It is especially important at establishments training professionals who interact more and more with bilingual families e.g. teachers, speech-therapists, health visitors, doctors and even members of parliament.
As individual committed to bringing up your own family in a bilingual environment, we would ask you, if you agree with us, **to bring this important publication to the attention of your local library, college and/or school.** If you would like more copies of the leaflet please contact us (saying how many) by letter, fax (+44(0)1275-343096) or E-mail (Multi@multi.demon.co.uk). Remember to indicate your subscriber reference number or snail mail address so that we can post the leaflets to you. If you are on E-mail have a look at Multilingual Matters home page on http://www.multi.demon.co.uk.

The editor, with the help of the International Editorial Board, is 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

Editorial Board:
Alathea Anderssohn, El Jadida, Morocco.
Colin Baker, Bangor, Wales, Great Britain.
Deirdre Condon, Steinsel, Luxembourg.
Renato Corsetti & Anna Lowenstein, Palestrina, Italy.
Nobuyuki Honna, Tokyo, Japan.
Leena Huss, Uppsala, Sweden.
Domenico Maceri, Santa Maria, Ca., USA.
Stephen Ryan, Osaka, Japan.
Birgit Szymanski, Bremen, Germany.
Helena Virtanen, Canberra, Australia.

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.

If you do not already subscribe to *the Bilingual Family Newsletter* use the form below to enter a subscription for the next four issues. If you know of any other families please help to secure the future of this publication by entering their address on the form and we will send them a free sample of a recent issue.

Multilingual Matters
Frankfurt Lodge, Clevedon Hall, Victoria Rd,
Clevedon, England. BS21 7SJ
Tel:(0)1275-876519; Fax: (0)1275-343096

Vol. 14, No.2, 1997

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

TOWN.....

COUNTRY.....PostCode.....

Please enter a subscription to BFN

☐ £9.00. Overseas £9.00 (US$18.00)

Payment or authority to charge your credit card must accompany each order.

Please send a copy of the following book(s):

☐ A Parents' and Teachers' Guide £9.95 (US$19.95)

☐ Encyclopedia of Bilingualism ... £49.00 (US$89.00)

Remitance enclosed for £/$.....
(please make your cheques payable to Multilingual Matters)

☐ Charge my Visa/ Master/ Euro Card

CardNo.....

ExpiryDate.....

Signature.....

Please send a sample copy of BFN to:

NAME.....

ADDRESS.....

.....

Printed by Severn Graphics, Clevedon, England.
ISSN 0952-4096 c 1997 Multilingual Matters Ltd.

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.

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

Contact details removed