

# The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: Marjukka Grover

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## EDITORIAL

Years ago, a lady asked me: 'What is the point of teaching your boys Finnish – wouldn't it be better for them to learn a more useful language like French?'

Unfortunately, most languages outside their own territories are valued only if they are languages of economically and culturally powerful nations. It is therefore harder to maintain bilingualism and give the children a positive self-identity if the surrounding community does not value the languages spoken in the family – a problem faced by many immigrants around the world. In California, Spanish speakers are struggling to maintain their children's bilingual education; in Great Britain few schools teach Asian languages even though Urdu or Hindi might be the home language for the majority of pupils; in Germany the languages of Turks and people from the former Yugoslavia are looked down on while someone speaking English, French or Japanese is admired.

Why is it that governments spend a great deal of money on foreign-language teaching, but do not support the varied mother tongues spoken by parents to their children? Schools may not be able to offer actual teaching in every language but to recognise and encourage bilingual children's language skills would help these children to develop positive multilingual and multicultural identities – an extremely important issue as explained in the leading article by a psychologist, Nicola Küpelikiling.

Self-confident, tolerant and open minded citizens, speaking several languages fluently, are a great asset to any nation. Could we, as parents of bilingual children, influence the decision makers to see this?

Marjukka Grover

## MULTILINGUALISM AND IDENTITY

by Nicola Küpelikiling

Language is an integral part of identity. The language used by parents and their children is very individual and even private. In every family – whether monolingual or multilingual – there is a kind of internal family language, in which childish slips of the tongue or special names have been incorporated. Anyone using such words accesses a particular family tradition and history and brings back certain memories. If the internal language differs from family to family, how much more important for the relationship between parent and child must a native language be with its terms of endearment, nursery and counting-out rhymes and bedtime rituals. All the close relationships which are conveyed through language give the child individual attributes which combine to make up his/her personal identity.

Language is linked very closely to culture. Often a single word can suffice to evoke a long chain of memories and associations, associations with smells, sounds and feelings which are the foundation of the personal as well as the social identity. Fairy tales, stories and songs enable access to the collective knowledge of a society. Forms of address give important information about social hierarchies. For example, in Turkish, there is a whole spectrum of polite phrases for all different kinds of situations which reveal a great deal about social relationships within the society. In Turkish, the choice of words also indicates the political and cultural orientation of the person speaking. Religious norms and values are closely tied to language. It will be difficult to handle social situations if language has not developed in an age-appropriate manner.

In Turkish there is a saying, 'Two languages, two people'; in Czech: 'Learn a new language and you will acquire a new soul'. In the past there was a common prejudice that multilinguals were more prone to schizophrenia than monolinguals, a prejudice for which there is absolutely no proof. However, multilinguals' different languages often serve different functions (e.g. one language being used in the workplace, another within the family). A bilingual (French-English) American was stung very painfully at the beach. His friends

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*"It is obvious that language, culture and identity are interrelated in a variety of ways; that is why multilingualism always has an impact on the development of identity."*

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reported that he had called for a doctor in English but lamented his pain in French. There are numerous anecdotes which show that, particularly in very emotional situations, one language dominates. Furthermore, use of one language or the other is a very clearly defined and useful indication both of the preferred social identity at that moment and of the current role in personal relationships. That means that for a bilingual person both languages are necessary in order to ensure access to all facets of identity. Multilingualism is an integral part of the multicultural identity. Only someone who feels at home in all of his/her

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languages can act confidently in all spheres of the environment. However, a positive relationship to a language is not necessarily equivalent to high competence. Identity is a construct which answers the questions: 'Who am I?' and 'What is my relationship to other people?' i.e. identity contains the features which characterize each individual. These features label us as members of different social groups (e.g. as a young person, Moslem, female, black person, etc.).

The following examples demonstrate how multilingualism influences both the personal as well as the social identity. The continuing development of identity also influences the manifestation of multilingualism and the relationship to one's own languages. Furthermore, the question is raised as to how impaired multilingualism affects the identity.

One of the most important functions of immigrants' native language is as the family language where it plays an important unifying role. Again and again one encounters immigrant families in Germany in which (often on advice from uninformed 'experts') the parents speak German at home despite having little knowledge of German. Sometimes children are ashamed when their parents speak their native language in public. If this situation persists the result is a collapse of communication within the family and of the family's solidarity and identity.

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*"English-German or French-German bilingual children are often complimented, while their Pakistani, Greek or Turkish peers receive little or no recognition for their linguistic achievements."*

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The native language also serves to connect the nuclear family to members of the extended family. While young children can communicate non-verbally with grandparents, uncles and cousins, this becomes a problem for older children and teenagers. The relationship to an extended family and the opportunity to explore one's nationality are important factors in the development of a multicultural identity, which represents a unique synthesis of the cultures involved. It is therefore important for children and teenagers to discover what, for example, 'Turkish' or

## INSIDE THE READER

### An Important Piece of Research

#### Colin Baker

One concern that parents often have is whether to bring up their children to read in two languages at the same time, or to develop literacy in one language, leaving the other one until a few years later. A famous Professor from York University in Toronto, Canada, Ellen Bialystock, has shown that children who learn to read in two languages early on have the edge over their monolingual peers, including when the script is different (Mandarin Chinese).

Ellen Bialystock's experiment is to show monolingual and bilingual children two pictures: a picture of a dog and a separate picture of a tree. She then shows children a card with the word *tree* written on it. She firstly places that word *tree* under the picture of the tree. This is seen to be correct. Then, when the children are distracted, she moves the word *tree* to underneath the picture of the dog. When Professor Bialystock asked the children what the card said with the word on it, only a third of the monolingual children got it right. Two thirds of such monolingual children said that the word *tree* referred to the picture of the dog. The bilingual children got it correct.



Professor Bialystock suggests that children who are familiar with print and story books in two languages (e.g. French and English, or English and Chinese), more quickly develop an understanding that words are symbols that correspond to specific meanings. When bilingual children are shown a picture accompanied by a word, they understand early on that the word contains the meaning as well as the picture. Processing in two languages enables that to occur. This hints that there are early thinking advantages to bringing up children to read in two languages. What is not clear is whether these advantages are temporary, or whether such an early advantage gives bilingual children a permanent lead over monolinguals.

#### Reference:

Ellen Bialystock, 1997, Effects of Bilingualism and Bilinguality on Children's Emerging Concepts of Print. *Developmental Psychology*, Volume 33, No. 3, Pages 420-440.

Colin Baker is Professor of Education at the University of Wales, Bangor.

'Moroccan' means, especially as they regularly find themselves confronted by nationality labelling. What does the culture look like in the country of origin? Which aspects of one's family culture have evolved here, which travelled with the family when it emigrated? The lack of a common language can make going back to the family's roots very difficult.

Multilingualism also plays an important role in its own right. Those who grow up with a positive attitude toward their multilingualism gain a positive self-image, as they often hear themselves described as having a 'gift for languages' or as being 'flexible'. Well-developed multilingualism also has cognitive advantages, especially metalinguistic competence, which again contribute to a positive self-assessment.

The loss of a native language often means the loss of a part of one's personal history. The roots of language go back even further than the first spoken words – back to the womb. Given the fact that language is one of the earliest human experiences, it is easy to imagine what can happen when one is separated from the language of one's childhood and family. If a language is disapproved of, the culture which it represents and the identities of those who speak it are perceived as being worthless. What effect does such a negative attitude have upon identity? Unfortunately, minority languages such as Turkish or Arabic

aren't visible in daily German life. Not only that, they are consistently denigrated when they do appear. One often hears of 'speechless foreign women', as though the fact that they are capable of speaking their own languages – Turkish, Arabic, Kurdish or Berber – was meaningless. This demonstrates that immigrants' language skills are considered significant only if they are able to speak German. It is a kind of 'linguistic racism' or 'linguicism'; English-German or French-German bilingual children are often complimented, while their Pakistani, Greek or Turkish peers receive little or no recognition for their linguistic achievements. Those public signs, which have been translated into minority languages, are almost always negative messages, of the 'Do not walk on the grass' type. This destabilisation of the multicultural identity is the beginning of a vicious circle: if the cultural heritage is seen as worthless, then it isn't necessary to support the mother tongue, which means that the relationship to the culture becomes weaker and the chances of breaking this pattern are further reduced.

It is obvious that language, culture and identity are interrelated in a variety of ways; that is why multilingualism always has an impact on the development of identity. Under positive circumstances, multilingualism represents an

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## TWO POLYGLOTS, THREE LANGUAGES

Barney Bérubé

Adventures. Gifts that keep on giving. Little polyglots discovering a shrinking planet. The trilingual child-rearing process commenced with the birth of daughters Kyra in 1986 and Chantal in 1988 and with an unshakable confidence and determination to nurture that regenerative gift. Each was raised in the Vietnamese language from their Mom, in French from their Dad, and in the community's English language from anyone else not functional in the family's heritage languages. Their early childhood language experiences were neither strange nor exotic – only a natural process nurtured since birth.

At age five, each girl seemed linguistically advanced to her kindergarten teachers. Screening for language proficiency using McGraw-Hill's Language Assessment Scales revealed full English proficiency for both girls. Those teachers appeared awestruck as they observed these polyglots switch readily from one language to another without hesitation, thereby enjoying their

– English. Surely, concerns might arise about language bumps on the way to kindergarten. Not to worry. These popular anxieties were laid to rest on day one, never to resurrect.

A misguided view held by many otherwise intelligent adults is that one should raise children solely in a community's dominant language. Many monolingual and bilingual Americans believe that bilingualism confuses, even harms children. Yet the research literature compellingly argues the need to encourage early childhood bilingualism. The consensus appears to be that when a child is of school age, the second language acquisition process is strong enough so that second language acquisition does not occur at the expense of losing the heritage language along the way. The most credible literature of the past two decades suggests that bilingualism is associated with a plethora of wonderful advantages such as:

- \* positive scholastic outcomes,
- \* higher cerebral function,
- \* advanced processing of verbal material,
- \* higher IQ scores,
- \* higher scores on tests of mental flexibility,
- \* strengthened reading and writing development in the non-heritage language.

The more that bilingual families resist assimilation and maintain their heritage languages, the more intellectually successful the children are likely to be.

Kyra and Chantal use their languages selectively. For example, conversations they have with each other will depend upon either the content of their conversations or the proximity of others to them – or both. When they are at home with Mom only, Vietnamese prevails with her as well as with each other. With Dad, the medium is invariably French. With each other, Vietnamese or French are used.

Their trilingualism, clinically referred to as *compound bilingualism*, is acquired from birth. A *coordinate bilingual* child, on the other hand, learns a new language later in life. Conversely, the girls' languages were simply used, rather than taught. As their conversations emerged and vocabulary grew, they spoke their parents' languages appropriately and instinctively. English was reserved for partners not fluent in either French or Vietnamese.

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## When inter-cultural families are also inter-faith families

Marriage to someone from a different country sometimes means marriage to someone of a different faith. It's not just a matter of what you eat for Christmas dinner, for instance, or whether you celebrate Christmas on the 24th or 25th December, or even on January 6th, but whether you celebrate Christmas at all.

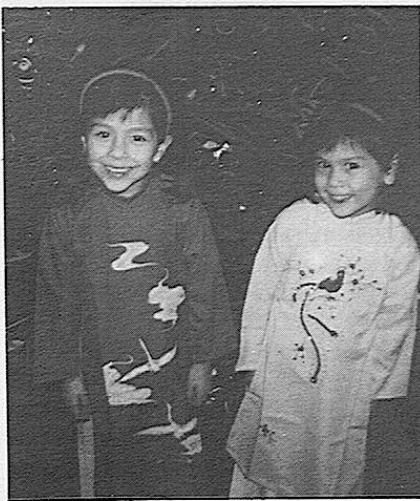
It may be a matter of whether you maintain your own faith or convert to your partner's. For instance, if a non-Muslim man wants to marry a Muslim woman, he has to convert to Islam himself. Even where there is no such obligation, there may be social pressure to convert. You may find that in your new country you are defined by your supposed religion, as Westerners are automatically defined in North Africa as *nasrani* – Christian – whether they are or not.

Then there is the question of how you bring up your children. Tolerance and respect for all faiths may seem the ideal, but it isn't always easy to achieve. Younger children may be more receptive than teenagers, who are under greater pressure to identify with the faith of the society around them. Sometimes partners, who didn't think that religion was very important when they first married, come to believe later on that it is. A partner who has been tolerant enough initially becomes less so later on. Or someone who did not think they had any special religious affiliation may realise how much their own values have been influenced by their religious background, and rediscover an interest in it. Would other families who have faced the challenge of two religions (or two different denominations of the same religion) under one roof like to write about how they have coped? Or would anyone who has grown up in such a family like to share their thoughts with other readers?

If you don't want your letter to be published but would like to correspond on this subject please write to Alatheia Anderssohn, a member of the editorial board of the BFN, at the Multilingual Matters office (see page eight for the address).

## CONTRIBUTIONS PLEASE

Thank you for your letters and articles. They are greatly appreciated, even if every letter does not get published. Please keep sending us your contributions – the more we have – the more varied the BFN can be.



*Kyra and Chantal*

preferred modes of expression to their parents as well as to each other. Yet, even then, each demonstrated a proud but humble reflectiveness about their ease in using multiple languages. That is a level of language awareness rarely observable among monolingual kindergartners. Their paediatrician, too, observed that their psychosocial development was indeed 'normal.'

Why all the fuss? After all, a small, almost bucolic city in Maine whose residents are overwhelmingly English hardly suggests any functional need to carry on in any language other than theirs

## POLYGLOTS ...Continued from page 3

### How Does One Begin?

Well-meaning parents, with an apparent ambition to sustain the family's native language, often postpone this event until several years into their children's youth. Such good intentions are founded on the belief that this is an appropriate period in a child's maturational development to become 'introduced' to the parent's native language(s). The regrettable consequence of this practice is that coordinate bilingualism becomes a promise never fulfilled. Why? From birth, children *acquire* language – they do not *learn* language. Learning a second language is, of course, always possible but with far less retention and usage than otherwise comes with the language *acquisition* process. Steven Krashen, a professor from the University of California, a nationally renowned expert on language acquisition, argues that acquired language leads to natural proficiency, unlike the rule-governed process one associates with foreign language learning. Learning for the coordinate bilingual is academic. Acquisition from birth of compound bilinguals, by contrast, is natural and instinctive.

To help your would-be polyglots reinforce what comes so naturally, begin with the basics: relaxation, fun, spontaneity, vibrant interaction and everyday natural behaviours. It seems effortless and has worked best for our children. English-as-a-second-language educators refer to ours as the 'direct method.' Direct, it is!

Raising children bilingually in a monolingual community requires minimal effort but maximum commitment. Using one language over another requires only the decision of both parents to do so, assuming those parents are sufficiently fluent in the heritage language. If only one parent is fluently bilingual, that's fine, too. That parent obviously becomes the purveyor of the family's second language.

### Of Pitfalls and Poor Practices

Some parents seek to nurture the dual language acquisition process through artificial approaches, for example, setting 'language time' for the family, a time when everyone shifts to the heritage language – say, after supper, or on Sundays. The predictable result is that fluency in the heritage language is nearly unattainable.

What about the bilingual parent who laments that carrying on in the native language at home is too demanding? Since the time it takes to verbalise anything is roughly equivalent in any language, that posture is intellectually

indefensible. A low priority for the practice of bringing up baby bilingually will likely be mirrored in obvious consequences. The password, again, is commitment. The more enthusiastically the parent carries on in the home language, the better the child will perform in the dominant language of the community and school and in the heritage language(s) at home.

Some parents postpone the process until their child is older. The matured child, they assume, will somehow be more academically prepared, given a deferred bilingual family experience. As noted

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*"Raising children bilingually in a monolingual community requires minimal effort but maximum commitment."*

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earlier, our family began its adventures in trilingualism at the womb. The girls have not demonstrated difficulty with any of their languages. We debunked, too, the myth that a foreign accent would surface if too much takes place too soon. Without regret, we followed our most natural instincts from day one.

### Other Anxieties Along the Way

Many parents who were themselves reared bilingually recall the gradual loss of their heritage language over time and feel that the same loss will inevitably occur with their children. Citing peer pressure at school, they would reasonably discourage any practice that may cause their bilingual toddler embarrassment. Those parents have also indicated regret that kindergarten was the point at which they lost their heritage language. Many among them have struggled to renew their heritage language as an adult after rigorous study. Au contraire: our children's monolingual playmates wanted to learn segments of our home languages, and their monolingual teachers were sincerely supportive of their bilingualism at home. Their Dad made frequent visits to school as a guest speaker in their classes. Those attitudes and practices have, of course, made bilingual parenting that much easier and valid for the children – and assuredly more of an affirmation of the school's valuing of cultural diversity.

### What not to do?

We mostly use the heritage language at home. It is not a teaching regime. Production of language is not forced; there is almost no correcting. Both the commission of errors and slow speed of acquisition in one language over another

is normal. Sound parent modelling and reassurance lead to the child's independent if not conscious scrutiny of her own language. Errors and omissions are part of the polyglot's wonderful world of language discovery. As such, they hardly warrant serious interruptive parental prescription. Technique is not critical – usage is.

### Practical Practices

□ **Consistency:** One person, one language is the 'family language', even if that is indeed three languages.

Absolute consistency in the simultaneous use of the heritage language will assure a child's natural motivation to acquire that language without the appearance of coercion. Unless parents share the same language natively, use one language per parent with the children

□ **Harmony:** The warmth and security of the family unit makes for easy bilingual language management. Will the child become equilingual? Perhaps not, but relax. Few become equilingual. One can only sustain a positive, natural communicative experience.

□ **Read and Write:** Tell stories and acquire books in the native language. Create a dictionary with the children, using magazine cutouts, their drawings and labels in the heritage language. When presenting gifts, include print-dependent items. Help the children to create greeting cards using the heritage language. Many conventional games are accessible in multiple languages.

□ **Television:** Seek out programmes and videos produced in the native language. Even commercials and chantable jingles help children develop complex language structures. Engage the child in amusing situations using a camcorder. Playbacks can be hilarious, and will reveal a good deal about the progression of language acquisition over time.

□ **Music:** Sing or make up songs and acquire music tapes in the heritage language. Enjoy popular sing-a-long children's songs.

□ **Technology:** Exploit the tremendous potential available in current technologies. Computer software in non-English languages is widely accessible. The potential available on the Internet is virtually limitless.

□ **Travel:** Take family excursions to communities that use the heritage language exclusively. We travel to Québec each summer where our children camp with francophone playmates.

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## SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD

## Jayson Campeau from Canada

**Jayson's languages:** English, French and Flemish.  
**Wife:** Arlette Aerts from Belgium who speak Flemish, English, French, some German and Spanish.  
**Children:** Sarah (5), Jacob (3½), Benjamin (2).



## How do people treat foreigners in Canada?

This is a very interesting question for a country such as Canada which essentially is made up of foreigners. We are blessed with about 10% of our population each year in new immigrants. Despite these facts 'immigrants' are not always received favourably in the rural parts of Canada, and there are many rural parts of Canada. Ironically enough, new immigrants are discriminated against by old immigrants. It is a strange thing to see. I guess it is a question of squatters rights!

Interestingly enough nearly all of my friends are immigrants of sorts. Either their parents or they themselves have come from another country. This is quite unusual since we live in the epitome of rural Ontario, Kent. I think that I acquired a liking for foreigners because as a child we hosted many foreign students in our home from the time I was an infant until my high school years. We had students from Malasia, Japan, Holland, Belgium, France, Hong Kong and England.

## How Belgians differ from Canadians?

Belgians are an extreme example of politeness and courtesy. Canadians like to pride ourselves on the fact that we are very polite and humane. Compared to the Belgians we are barbarians. Ask any Dutch person, they will attest to the politeness of the Belgian people, in particular the Flemish people. There is an expression in English which best describes this phenomenon. The Belgians wouldn't say shit if they had a mouth full of it!

## What is your children's preferred language?

Our children are still too young to say with any confidence which is their preferred language. I can say that Flemish is my preferred language for the children to use, and English is my wife's. This is an interesting statement about valuing each other's languages.

## Have your children got bi-nationality?

Yes, and we sincerely hope that they choose to keep both of their cultural heritages as they

grow older. Keeping one's nationality is extremely important to us. Arlette has kept her Belgian nationality despite qualifying to become a Canadian. There is a distinct advantage in terms of employment when you maintain your European citizenship. We recognise this and will encourage our children to keep both. However, bi-culturalism is much more than legal status. We work hard to balance the Flemish and Canadian cultures. This is most easily accomplished by returning to Belgium as often as the budget allows. We are extremely fortunate to receive Belgian visitors every year. I did say fortunate, didn't I?

## What about the TV?

Well, since we live in North America, and very close to the border, there is little international television (other than that marvellous American neighbour). We have chosen to limit the children's exposure to English TV to about 2 hours per week. Although with the recent broadcast of *Teletubbies* we may allow an extra half an hour very week.

## What about the food?

When you speak of food and Belgium, you are really speaking of only one item, chocolate. We import more chocolate yearly than the Easter Bunny. The quality of Belgian chocolate is so far superior to the Canadian standards that once you have tried Cootie door there is no going back. This is true even with the reduced cocoa content regulations that have effect the Belgian chocolate industry adversely.

## Your thoughts on multilingualism!

Although we are sometimes looked down on for our multilingual and multicultural endeavours, we believe fervently in them and are prepared to defend them to the ignorant ethnocentrics out there. We are very happy in our complex and sometimes confusing existence as multilinguals. We take active steps to educate others about the benefits of language and try and foster an appreciation at best and a tolerance at least for the diverse nationalities which make up the world.

## POLYGLOTS... Continued from page 4

❑ **Reinforcements:** Seek out activities conducted by native speakers of the heritage language. Our girls are taught piano lessons by a native Québécois who lives in our community. The language of instruction is – voilà, French! No extra charge!

❑ **Attitude** is everything! Reassure school personnel of your support of the school language even though it is not the medium of the home with school work. There is nothing to gain from adverse posturing against the language of the country. Work to prevent xenophobia; affirm diversity for all people, all languages, all cultures, all differences.

## What an Impact!

As our girls pass their eleventh and ninth birthdays, trilingualism continues to grow. Reading and writing bilingually remain frequent. Play at home is decidedly executed in French or Vietnamese, except when English-speaking friends join them. Amusements enjoyed with their playmates in the English media are not enthusiastically sought in their absence. Games, books, and videos in non-English languages remain ubiquitous. Songs for children and adults performed in French and Vietnamese add to their self-selected entertainment repertoire. Piano lessons, too, continue with their native Québécois teacher. There is no remote indication of a reversal of these practices in sight.

Strong academic performance continues. Language proficiency testing at school for both children reveal full fluency in English. Kyra's reading scores on the Stanford Achievement Test were among the highest for students in her grade nationally. State assessments also reveal above average verbal performance. Comparable testing for Chantal is scheduled for 1998. Both girls average 'A' grades in most subjects.

Reasonable questions may persist. What other variables should one cite to account for these additive effects on the girls? Class? Gender? Verbal aptitude? Intelligence? Congenital factors? Parental education? Family intimacy? Cultures? Yes. Sure. Those variables, however, are deliberately absent from the language acquisition framework presented here so that this family experience can stand on its own, as it has.

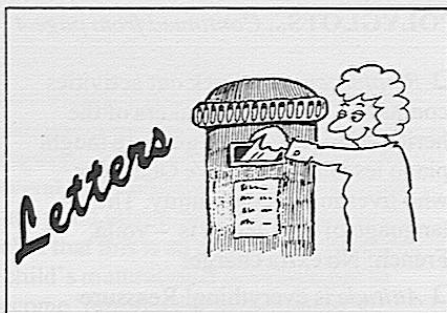
Despite our disclaimers and caveats, one unshakable conclusion: Kyra and Chantal remain cognitively better off for having command of three languages than they might have been with one.

## HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Jael (15 month old, brought up speaking German, Danish and English) is very fond of animals and loves to imitate their sounds. One of her favourites is the owl (*Eule* in German, which says 'OO-HOOH'). While we were in Denmark we went to visit Jael's great-grandmother. We asked Jael to say *oldemor* ('old mother' Danish for great-grandmother). She successfully did so and added 'OO-HOOH!'. With the *d* in *oldemor* not being pronounced, it reminded her of *Eule* and she thought it meant 'Owl mother'!



Judith Sørensen, Hull, England.



### WANTED: Experiences from trilingual teenagers and adults

We are an American (myself)/ Hungarian (my husband) family living in France. I am pleased to find an increasing number of articles concerning trilingualism and have had more or less similar experiences. I agree with the approach used by M.T. Turrel (Vol. 14: 4, 97). I follow the same 'rules' as it is a common-sense approach to me. We have three boys aged 5 years, 3 years and 1½ years. Our eldest son, John, is in his second year of *ecole maternelle* and has picked up French well. He speaks English with me and other English speakers, and Hungarian with his father and other Hungarian speakers. He does not mix languages and he is very competent in all three languages. Our second son, Mark, speaks English and Hungarian well for his age (3 years) and says a few words of French. Paul (1½ years) says words mostly in English (a few in Hungarian). I believe that all of our children are developing normal language skills and will easily become trilinguals. We value all three languages equally and are raising the boys in a multicultural way. So far, so good!

How do older children (lets say from 10 years on) and adults who grew up trilingually deal with three languages? It's great to take pride in a 3 or 4-year-old who can say words in three languages, but what happens later on? Do older trilingual children learn to read and write equally well in all three languages? Do trilingual adults feel at ease equally in three languages? I believe that the trilingual families that are on-line in Jayson Campeau's group (Vol.14: 4, 97) have young children so I am looking for families with older kids (or adults) to let me know how they deal with trilingualism. Thank you!

Claire and Laszlo Ery

Contact details removed

*Letters or articles from bi/trilingual/ cultural teenagers and adults on their experiences are warmly welcomed for possible publication in the BFN.*

### COMMENTS FROM A DUTCH SPEECH THERAPIST

Unfortunately, I have only been able to read the *Comments on the 'Language Disorder' article* in Vol. 14: 3, 97.

I am a speech therapist, Dutch, but I trained in Britain. I have worked as a speech therapist in both England and Holland. My husband is English and we have two bilingual children, who enjoy using both their languages to the full. Because of my home situation I have always had a special interest in bilingualism, giving talks and advising parents in multilingual situations. I do agree wholeheartedly with Rob Oliver that parents should 'find out the extent of a therapist's knowledge of issues in bilingual language development before trusting a professional verdict'. And 'banning a language from the home' does not provide the solution to a child's problems! I know of parents in Holland who have actually been told by their GP: 'you should not speak English to your child, only Dutch', because the child was wetting the bed!!!

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*"Expectations with regards to the actual language abilities in the different languages involved will necessarily have to be adjusted for the language-disordered child to achieve the best degree of fluency in the school career language."*

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However, I do feel very strongly that children with a language disorder are a different kettle of fish altogether. I work in Holland in a school for children with language/speech and/or hearing disorders and have worked with children from bilingual backgrounds for almost fifteen years. In the case of a language disordered child who is exposed to more than one language, it is vitally important to assess the child's language abilities as extensively as possible as well as to consider the language background situation as fully as possible. Only after an extensive, elaborate assessment can decisions be made as to how to proceed with the languages involved.

The following examples will illustrate my point:

**A. 3 years old, Irish father, Dutch mother, older Dutch/English bilingual sibling.** In the past, parents had been advised to 'drop English'. However, as

mother pointed out: How can we? I cannot speak Dutch to my husband, it doesn't feel emotionally right. And what about grandparents? Father's Dutch was good enough for him to be able to use that language with A.

On assessment A's comprehension of Dutch was age-appropriate; her passive vocabulary (knowledge of words) was age-appropriate and even her active vocabulary (the use of words) was age-appropriate. She had a severe articulation problem as well as severe difficulties in sentence production, both of these being problems with the form of language. A's language content (knowledge and use of words and comprehension) in Dutch was developing normally. Her development in English was far below her age-level.

In this case there was certainly no need to advise the banning of one language (in this case, English). It was explained to the parents that they could not, however, expect equal fluency in both languages; Dutch, being the school career language, should become A's strongest language, and that's what the school should and would concentrate on to get A's articulation and sentence production up to age-level. A's English development would probably take place at a much slower pace.

**B. 4 years old, moderate hearing loss, Turkish parents, two much older siblings both balanced Turkish/Dutch bilinguals.** Father's Dutch was fairly good, but he was away a lot; mother's skills in Dutch were severely limited.

Assessment showed that B's language abilities were extremely limited in all areas of language in Dutch; in Turkish B's development was also far behind his age-level, but it was certainly more advanced than Dutch.

It would have been impossible to advise the mother to start speaking Dutch to B, as her own skills were so limited. It was agreed with the Turkish teacher in the school that she would prepare all the

### HUMOUR, HUMOUR,

**Doctor (to me):**

Est-ce qu'elle est propre? (meaning: she doesn't wear a nappy?)

**Me:** Non, pas la nuit (she still wears a nappy at night)

**Inès (aged 3 years) - indignantly, to me, in English:** YES! I had a bath last night!

**Andrea Belts-Trey, France.**



language projects in Turkish before they were offered to B in Dutch. In this way B could improve his stronger language, Turkish, and use that as a base for learning the weaker second language, Dutch, the language of the school.

**C. 5 years old, English parents, older English sibling.** Due to father's work, the family had to move to Holland, to an area where there was an international school with an English department.

Assessment showed that the main problem was a delay in both sentence production and articulation for which C had received speech therapy in England. As there was no immediate need to expose C to a second language the parents were advised to maintain the monolingual situation, which was possible due to the availability of English schooling. The introduction of the second language could thus be postponed till C's skills in his strongest language had come up to age-level.

The above examples probably suffice to show that in the case of a language-disordered bilingual child, the balance between the different languages involved will be totally different from what we would expect from a normally developing child. That does not mean that there is no room for the use of a second language with a language-disordered child. On the other hand, the last example shows that in the case of a monolingual language-disordered child moving into a potential bilingual situation it is better not to make room for the use of a second language.

Expectations with regards to the actual language abilities in the different languages involved will necessarily have to be adjusted for the language-disordered child to achieve the best degree of fluency in the school career language. The language spoken outside school must necessarily take second place.

In the case of bilingual children with language problems it is impossible to state without further thought that bilingualism is possible. That is like throwing all caution to the wind. Each child with a language problem in a bilingual situation is a case in itself. No blanket solution or statements will do for that particular child. In order to judge the best way forward for each child, energy, time and considerable thought have to be given to his or her personal situation.

**Lea Baker, The Netherlands**

Correspondence can be addressed to:

Contact details removed



### Artificial bilingualism

I am an Italian teacher with one child (19 months) and I am expecting my second child.

I teach English here in Italy and have a great passion for everything that is English; I read only in English and listen to English speaking programmes on television.

I have been raising my child speaking to him only in English since he was born. I would like to ask you if it is good that I talk to him in English, even though I am not English myself, so my vocabulary and pronunciation are those of a foreigner.

Is it right that I always address him only in English, but he always hears me speaking Italian to others? Will it be confusing in the longterm?

Could you give me more information about raising my children bilingually, even though English is not my mother tongue.

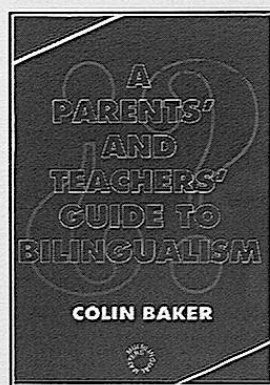
**Cesana Cinzia, Seregno, Italy**

I do not see any reason why it should be confusing if you use English with your son. He will hear lots of Italian around him (I assume your husband speaks Italian with him) and Italian will most likely be his stronger language – but English could become a good second! There have been a number of cases of what is called 'artificial bilingualism', where one parent adopts the role of a minority-language speaker even though that language is not his or her own mother tongue (see BFN Vol.14:1, 97). One of the most reported cases is the Saunders's family in Australia. George Saunders, a lecturer in German, has always spoken German to his three children even though his own mother tongue is English. The children are now young adults, and are fluent in German. Unfortunately his book *Bilingual Children: from Birth to Teens\** (a case study of his children's language development) is out of print, but you might be able to get it from a library or a second hand bookshop.

Stick to the tried and tested method of 'one parent - one language' – it will help your son to separate the languages as he associates English with his mother and Italian with his father. Barney Bérubé's article (see page three) has many practical tips on how to increase exposure to minority language. Your son will soon realise that English is the special language you use with him, even though you speak Italian with other people.

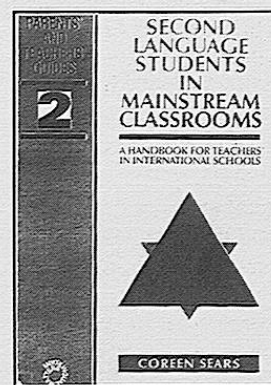
**Marjukka Grover**

\* published in 1988 by Multilingual Matters, now out of print. ISBN 1-85359-009-6



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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.

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

## Internet Sites for Esperanto speakers:

[http://www.algonet.se/~inko/rondo/rf\\_uea.html](http://www.algonet.se/~inko/rondo/rf_uea.html)

<http://www.helsinki.fi/~jslindst/denask-l.html>

## MULTILINGUALISM ... Continued from page two

enrichment to the identity, the enhanced self-esteem resulting from increased language skills and participation in different cultural worlds. This enrichment is only possible, however, with societal support of multilingualism. It is still a widespread notion that bilingualism, while a remarkable attribute, is far too demanding for children and even a detriment to their development – a viewpoint for which there is absolutely no scientific evidence. Children with a minority-language mother tongue all too often experience negative attitudes towards their language and their cultural heritage. Multilingual children need more intensive support, both from their parents as well as from society at large, in order to enable them to develop stable multicultural identities, of which multilingualism is a central element.

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