The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: **Marjukka Grover**

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In this issue

EDITORIAL

'Children will communicate about what they know and think with parents who accept and value them without conditions. Children who are emotionally healthy will not exchange correct answers for love'

writes Mike Rosanova in this issue's leading article about small children and second language learning in school. The article is a warning for parents who love to show off their offsprings talents and who may be disappointed when the child does not co-operate.

As parents, we are naturally proud of our children. They are, of course, the most beautiful, handsome, talented and clever children in the world. And don't we want to demonstrate how easily they switch from one language to another, making monolingual adults wonder with amazement? But children do not share our need to show off – for them bilingualism is natural.

Natural it may be, but raising children bilingually in a monolingual environment can be hard work. How many of us have felt the task too overwhelming when the child is mixing languages or refuses to speak the minority language? The common advice in this issue's articles is: persevere with your language policy, BUT listen to your child, give time, let the child develop without force or anxiety, relax, be patient.

And – don't forget to have FUN with your children!

Please keep sending us articles, letters, anecdotes, stories. We value every letter, even if it doesn't get published. Intercultural issues such as marriage, faith and adjusting to a new culture are areas in which we especially need material.

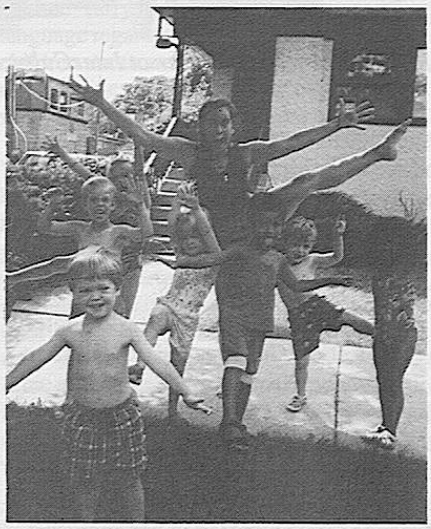
Marjukka Grover

BUT DOES MY KID KNOW ANY SPANISH?

Second Language Acquisition and Parents

M.J. Rosanova

In international schools abroad and in second language immersion programs here in the USA, parents expect that their children will become functionally bilingual. Despite many years in language classes, however, few middle-class Americans speak anything other than English. When it comes to second language acquisition, parents may feel that they know what they expect their children to accomplish; but for lack of personal experience, they aren't quite sure how to assess their children's progress.



InterCultura children dancing

Thinking back to their own school days, most adults think that language assessment consists in pop quizzes or a three-hour final. So when they wonder whether they're getting their money's worth in children's second language programs, they begin asking their children questions like, 'How do you say *snake* in Japanese?' or tell a child, 'say something in Spanish for your grandma'.

These questions come in part from the ghost of language classes past, but in part also from very real and current pressure in the parents' lives. For the last six months, Grandma and Aunt Maude may have been criticizing Mom and Dad. How can those two be so extravagant (and brainless) as to put poor little Suzie, who is just a three year old, into a second language immersion preschool? Back in the 1960s, respectable suburbanites didn't do such things. So it's very important to Mom and Dad that Suzie have a song to perform or something to say to the waiter at the local Mexican restaurant.

It doesn't cross the minds of the typical adult that delivering orders to waiters is not typical behaviour for children from three through five years of age. The average healthy child will not cooperate with inquiries and commands which he does not understand and for which he has no sympathy.

If the child doesn't cooperate many adults quickly conclude that the child simply has no talent for language or that the school is just not what it's cracked up to be.

Linguists, on the other hand, divide language assessment into at least five general categories: *vocabulary* (words), *morphology* (rules about the structure of words and word endings), *semantics* (rules about the structure of messages), *pragmatics* (social rules, the etiquette of language use), and *meta-linguistics* (the

Continued on page two

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ability to think about language). Progress in each of these categories varies; and accomplishments in one category affect the others.

In assessing any of these aspects of language, linguists warn against a Great Mistake which they call *decontextualization*. When you take language out of the context of its natural, meaningful use, you cannot discover anything truthful or useful about what a child really knows.

Among linguists there is a truism: most of the time, most bilingual children cannot explain all that they really know. Moreover, what is obvious and expressible for a child in one context may be mysterious and nameless in another. To one degree or another, this holds true of small children across the board. It is not the product of bilingualism; it is part of being young. The skills and reflections of small children lie, in a sense, not only within their heads, but also within their environments.

Children are constantly reading their environments for clues and logical connections. In the acquisition of literacy, for example, there are at least three *cueing systems* in play: the phonics of the letters on the printed page; the grammatical clues embedded in the text ('I want to g...' is probably 'go' not 'gate'); environmental clues (the illustrations on the page or next Thursday is Thanksgiving, and we've been working on this theme for a week); and prior experience (oh, I remember what Thanksgiving is about, and this is what we would have done at our house).

"... the parents should follow the child, taking their hints from the child's point of view."

So when Dad says, 'How do you say *snake* in Japanese' or when Mom says, 'Say something in Spanish for Grandma', most small children are not going to be able to perform. The reason is that mom and dad are *decontextualizing* their child's language. The child may be tongue-tied at such times; but this reflects the situation which the parents have constructed, not the child's actual knowledge of the target language.

But what would happen if Mom or Dad were to allow the very same child to engage in his normal routines in his usual haunts but in the presence of other children whom the child accepts as authentic speakers of the target language? Talking, talking, talking. Gesticulating, guessing, environmental cueing. All of which demonstrate that the child has acquired considerable mastery.

Small children are deeply committed to process. They don't generally care too much about product or performance. Another way to say 'process' is 'having a good time' or 'doing what makes sense'. Product or performance may involve neither of these factors But 'process' is nothing without them.

Emotionally healthy children don't care too much about pop quizzes or about performing to defend Mom and Dad from critics. Children have a right to have issues of their own. Other people's issues confuse and consternate most children. Children are looking for successful communication; and their pleasure in accomplishing this is a major part of the experience, the 'intrinsic motivation' for their efforts.

A child who can respond quite accurately to the question *Qué hora es*? (What time is it?) may be thrown by the question, what does *hora* mean in the expression *Ya es la hora de irse* (It's time to go now)? But the very same child might be perfectly capable of dealing with that utterance while bundled in her snowsuit, eagerly waiting to go out. The parent who tries quizzing a child is decontextualizing learning, and is robbing the child of the courage he needs to experiment and succeed.

Given a good beat, some rhyme and rhythm, children may memorize and reproduce remarkably long poems and songs – even nonsense syllables. Some parents may assume that the child who can do this must know what it is he's singing. But instead this may simply reflect good 'muscular memory' and 'TPR' ('total physical response', a lamguage teaching methodology).

So, if you can't quiz your child's knowledge the way your high-school Spanish teacher tested you, how can you assess what your child has accomplished?

For the first few years, always look at the big picture. Remember that language is more than what you can test with a pop quiz. You will get much, much better information about what your child can or cannot do, does or does not know, when you see your child engaged in real life situations. You need to become an attentive observer, always on the look-out for authentic, meaningful situations involving your child.

Raising the school banner at InterCultura's beautiful new home

In other words, you need to do what a Montessori teacher does every day. That same teacher purposefully designs environments and activities to give children opportunities both to learn and to display their knowledge. While you may not be able to devote the time necessary to design, if you set out to be a good observer and a perceptive, supportive listener, you will be amazed at all the information your child showers upon you.

If your child is not sharing his knowledge with you, please think a bit more before you conclude that your child knows little or does not care. Adults can and should develop communication strategies that enable children to share their knowledge and their lives with the adults whose opinions and affections means the most to them. Children will communicate about what they know and think with parents who accept and value them without conditions. Children who are emotionally healthy will not exchange correct answers for love.

Continued on page seven

Sound advice to parents on bilingualism

Three important questions to consider:

Do you want your children to grow up bilingual?
Who will speak the minority language with them?
How much time and energy are you prepared to sacrifice in order to achieve bilingualism?

Children model themselves predominantly on their parents. We do not inherit a language, but learn it from our parents, and that language requires nurturing for it to develop properly. When parents decide to bring up children bilingually, it is very important that they consider carefully how to go about this.

In a bilingual home, both the parents are jointly responsible for ensuring that their children's language develops adequately. By always talking in their own mother tongue, the parents give their offspring the best possible language pattern. If you are bilingual yourself, you will need to choose one of your existing languages. That way your children are motivated to learn them both and will find it easier to distinguish between the two. It is therefore best for the parents to follow the 'one parent-one language' method. Try to give your children the best possible example by avoiding mixed language speech yourself.

As the mother often spends more time with the children during their formative years, it is common for them to absorb her language more fully. If the parents master each other's languages, they can jointly decide to speak the language that the children get less practice in. This results in greater exposure to the language that the children would otherwise hear less in the course of their daily lives. It is very important for the parents to be consistent in speaking their chosen language to the children even when there are other people, relatives and friends present.

Children learn language from their parents, relatives, siblings and friends. Make sure you use the language in everyday situations: 'Now we take out the vacuum cleaner'. Speak, sing, play and read with your children as much as possible. Besides the initial 'chatting' to your children and the proper conversations that follow in later years, reading aloud is of utmost importance with children of any age. It draws a child close to the adult reading, and forms a bridge between the spoken and written language. At the same time, the children's vocabulary increases, their understanding of the language improves and their own love of reading develops. Exciting adventures, happy laughter and rich imagery draw the parent and child closer together and supply them with experiences to share in both languages.

Imbalance in language development

Even after children have learned to distinguish between languages, there is often an imbalance in their language development. This imbalance may result from differences in the level of exposure to the two languages. If one parent is at home and talks to the children all day in one language, and the other parent only sees them in the mornings, at nights and at the weekends, it is clear that the children cannot develop at an equal pace in both languages.

The imbalance may also be the result of the child's concentrated efforts to learn something in one language, at the expense of the other. A monolingual child's language also develops in stages. When the child has reached a certain state of maturity in one language, it is time to make advances in the other. You cannot hurry this development. The only thing parents can do for their children is to continue being good examples linguistically, and to talk with them and read to them as much as possible.

Refusal to talk

Small children may find it tiring to switch languages according to whom they happen to be talking with. They may wonder how to say something in two languages and what the newly learned word is in both of those languages. If they suddenly refuse to speak or even listen to your language, it may be simply that they want a rest from the sheer effort that being bilingual can mean.

If this happens, the parents are advised to continue with the 'one parent-one language' method: carry on speaking your chosen language regardless of which language the children use to answer back. Try to arrange opportunities for them to meet other children who also speak your chosen language!

Your children may also refuse to speak your language as a protest in the same way that they may argue over meals in order to gain your attention. Do not give up, try not to get angry or disheartened, but stubbornly continue speaking your language! If you give up when your children refuse to speak, you run a risk of wasting all your previous efforts. If the children get used to having another language spoken to them it will be very difficult to motivate them to continue talking with you in your chosen language.

The children will try to manage with the least possible effort, just the same as any adult would. Show your children that it is possible to experience things in your own language. Be patient, take your children with you when you meet with others who speak your language. Allow your children, and their language, time to grow and develop!

Translated from a Finnish/Swedish booklet *Anna lapsellesi lahja/Ge ditt barn en gåva* by Kirsti Gibbs.
Used with the kind permission of Svenska Finlands folkting,

Contact details removed

Disheartening for some

I do not begrudge anyone the experience of rearing a child successfully in two, three, four or five languages, but sometimes I find it a little disheartening reading yet another story of a six-year old Wunderkind, chatting in Welsh, joking in Czech, writing novels in Kanji and being the brightest in his Venezuelan school.

I sometimes despair of the demands that two languages present to my son and wonder whether they aren't too much to cope with coupled with the fairly high requirements at school. In theory, I strongly believe in the mind-broadening effect and great opportunities that being confronted with two languages offers but in practice Laurence (5 years) is quite clearly not at the same developmental stage as his schoolmates, and I wonder if that is merely coincidental.

For me, being German, there was never any question that I would speak to him in anything but my mother tongue. His teacher has recently confirmed my suspicions, telling us that he is generally way behind everybody else, not just in the linguistic department, but frequently in an apparent state of bewilderment and absent-mindedness. His teacher has also denied ever having experienced this kind of problem in a bilingual child before. Not being anything like an expert, I could well imagine that the double amount of vocabulary, plus a certain element of identity crisis (in England, you just can't get away with German frankness and lack of etiquette, particularly as a child) must be a highly confusing experience. It doesn't seem generally acknowledged that it requires an extra portion of concentration to follow information in your second language. Myself, being a singer, I find that when a little tired, I often sit in rehearsals realising I haven't registered anything that's been said in the last 10 minutes. So what it must be like for a 5-year-old, from 9am to 3pm every day, I dare not imagine.

I would love to hear from parents facing similar problems, if just to comfort each other.

Constanze Vanryne,

Contact details removed

Copying errors

Is error fossilisation, when a parent speaks his or her non-native language, really a problem as long as the children hear the language spoken by enough native speakers? (see *Trying for Trilinguals*, Vol.14:4, 1997) Many children of immigrant parents hear their parents make errors in the language of the host country, but still grow up speaking that language correctly. If there are enough immigrants the language may change under their influence, but that is a normal process. Throughout my childhood I heard my father speaking non-native English, but I didn't copy his mistakes. My daughters hear me speaking less than perfect French (I'm a bit vague about *le* and *la*) and atrocious Arabic, but far from picking up my bad habits, they are the ones who correct me. And as far as the Arabic is concerned, they are so happy that I even try to speak the language that they enjoy hearing my efforts. For me, speaking Arabic with them is one of the best ways to learn the language, since they make the effort to correct me and explain what I've been doing wrong. Furthermore my daughters hear a great many Moroccans speaking bad French, and they seem able to work out which speakers are using good French, and to model their use on these speakers. What enables them to figure that out? I suspect it isn't strictly speaking a linguistic skill at all, but a social skill: they use a whole range of clues which reveal which speakers are most educated, most likely to speak the correct form of the language.

Would any of the linguists on the editorial board like to comment on this?

Alathea Anderssohn, Morocco

DID YOU KNOW THAT...

'It is likely that Jesus was trilingual at least. He was probably a native speaker of *Aramaic*, a language used widely in Palestine at the time. In his religious training, Jesus would have learned *Hebrew* and later used it in talking to the Pharisees. He may also have known *Greek* and *Latin*. Latin was the language of the occupying Roman forces and was used in the in the Law Courts and in trading. Greek was used by the upper classes and sometimes by the Romans.'

from **Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education** (page seven)

WIE WIRD MAN MEHRSPRACHIG?
A Report from a multilingualism seminar

Ingrid Piller

The question 'How to become multilingual?' was discussed at a round table talk at Hamburg University. The event was organized by HAZEM, a research institution which also serves bi- and multilingual communities and operates a help desk.* As about 130 languages are taught at Hamburg University it is possible to find specialists for most problems.

So, how does one become bi- or multilingual? Professor Meisel, the current chair of HAZEM, gave a brief introduction to the topic before three discussants described their experiences.

"About two thirds of the world's population are bi- or multilingual, and if one also takes people into account who can use a dialect and a standard language, it is the monolinguals who are the exception!"

Meisel distinguished various types of multilingualism: *simultaneous multilingualism*, where two or more languages are acquired at the same time, and *successive multilingualism*, where one language is acquired after the other.

Other distinctions concern the societal aspect: *multilingualism in the family,* where multilingual acquisition is due to the different first languages of the parents in a largely monolingual setting, differs from *multilingual societies* in which two or more languages are habitually used.

Linguists, furthermore, distinguish between multilingual *competence* and *performance*. Competence is the knowledge about the structures of the languages, and may often be better than performance. Having to search for the appropriate word in a language in which one is fluent, is usually due to a problem in performance, but not in competence.

Evelyn Fogwe was the first one to describe her language acquisition. She was born to a Batu-speaking mother and a Batibu-speaking father in Cameroon, where 286 different languages are spoken. The only problems she remembered with growing up bilingual was that she would sometimes use the 'wrong' language with the 'wrong' side of the family. She later acquired Cameroon Pidgin English, which is widely use as a lingua franca in Cameroon, and her schooling was in the two colonial languages English and French. Having also studied German and Meta, her husband's language, she has seven languages today. Her recommendation for raising multilingual children was 'patience and hard work'.

Conxita Lleó grew up in Barcelona, and only realized that she was bilingual when, at age seven, a monolingual friend asked her to teach her some Catalan. Although Catalan-speakers are in the majority in Catalonia, the use of the language was discouraged and looked down upon during the Franco regime. She did not learn how to read and write in Catalan in school but was taught these skills in Spanish only. Today she is a professor of Catalan at Hamburg University! In Germany, she raised two daughters with her Argentinian husband. She speaks Spanish with her husband, Catalan with her daughters, the husband speaks Spanish with the daughters, and German comes from outside the family. Now, in their early twenties, the daughters' strongest language is German but they know both Spanish and Catalan. Professor Lleó's advice was not to get frustrated when the children only reply in the majority language and refuse to use the minority language/s. To her daughters, immersion into the minority languages through travel and visits made all the difference.

Kurt Braunmüller is German and uses Danish with his Danish wife. All members of his family are completely bilingual, and fluent with a native-like accent in both languages. Problems came with dialects: his parents-in-law do not speak standard Danish but a Jutland dialect, and his mother does not speak standard German but a Swabish dialect. While understanding has never been a problem, separation has. His children have a hard time separating these similar languages and dialects, and working out when to use which form appropriately.

During the discussion one participant asked about the possibility of confusing his son with the similarity of Spanish and Portuguese. Conxita Lleó's experience with her daughters was that they'd work it out more or less if the input was good, i.e. the two languages are separated consistently by the adults in the family.

Further questions raised were:

1. Is the use of more than one language in the family detrimental to family life?

A native English speaker, who is married to a Turkish speaker and has raised two children in Germany, explained that they spoke only German in the home because they felt that switching back and forth would have been disruptive. Although she had thus never planned to raise multilingual children, both children have also become fluent English speakers, and the daughter also speaks Turkish very well and now lives in Turkey. Most agreed that it is easier to teach a language if both partners know it reasonably well. Nobody reported any emotional problems related to using more than one language in the home.

2. What can I do to get my child to use the minority language?

This question was brought up by an American father whose daughter had first learnt English but stopped using it when she came to Germany at age three. For six years now, he has consistently addressed her in English and she has consistently answered in German. All researchers agreed that this pattern is *very* common in children but often changes around puberty. While young children want to blend in with their peers, adolescents want to be different. It is quite common for the children to think that the minority language is only spoken by adults, and they only start to use the minority language when they realize that other children speak it, too. One native English speaker reported that his daughter only started to use English with him in her mid-twenties when she got a job in an English-speaking computer company.

"...no one knows a language fully. Even monolingual native speakers reach various levels of competence, and there is not a single person who knows all the words in any one of his or her languages."

3. How do you deal with ignorance about and prejudice against bilingualism?

Paediatricians and speech therapists in monolingual countries are usually unqualified in this respect. Language is not only a function of the larynx, as some of them seem to think. About two thirds of the world's population are bi- or multilingual, and if one also takes people into account who can use a dialect and a standard language, it is the monolinguals who are the exception! Although the facts are there, multilingual parents and children may have a hard time with health care providers and educators.

4. Is code-mixing detrimental to language acquisition?

This depends on how you think about mixed varieties. Mixed varieties often exist in places where many people have been bilingual for generations. These varieties are languages in their own right. Children will acquire these mixed varieties perfectly if such is their input. However, if you don't think too positively about mixed varieties, you should avoid them in the input because the kids will probably pick it up.

5. How do you go about reading and writing skills?

Most bilingual schools still teach reading and writing in the two languages successively because they want to avoid confusion. However, some experimental simultaneous programs have been highly successful. All participants agreed that reading and writing should be taught in the minority language/s because this greatly improves competence and strengthens the language. Whether these skills should be taught successively or simultaneously is probably of minor importance. In reaching a decision, the child's interest and other individual factors should also be taken into account.

6. How much of a language does one have to know to be considered multilingual?

This is a question that cannot be answered because *no one* knows a language fully. Even monolingual native speakers reach various levels of competence, and there is not a single person who knows *all* the words in any one of his or her languages.

To sum up the message of the event: multilingualism is a perfectly normal state of affairs and children can acquire more than one language playfully. However, even for children, learning a language does not come easily: language acquisition is hard work, and needs effort, patience and persistence.

*HAZEM = Hamburger Zentrum für Mehrsprachigkeit und Sprachkontakte. The help desk operates Wednesdays and Fridays from 10 to 12 a.m Tel: +49 (0)40-4123-2560.

The article was first published in the *Polyglot*, a quarterly publication of ImF(Interest Group of Multilingual Families in Germany). Used by the kind permission of the authors and editors.

Dr Ingrid Piller is a researcher at the University of Hamburg.

Language differentiation

I am a German national living in England, married to a monolingual English man and working from home as a translator. Our family language is English, but when my husband is not present I speak only German with my two daughters, Maria (5/94) and Anna (5/96) .

Initially, Maria's bilingualism developed well; both her languages were equally strong and she had no difficulty switching from one to the other. We have plenty of German cassettes and books, and via satellite we can receive German television channels. My family visits us at least four times a year and twice a year I spend some time with my sister whose children are of similar age. There is, therefore, no shortage of exposure to idiomatic German in a variety of regional accents.

Clearly, Maria's exposure to English will always remain greater, and so I'm not really surprised that her German skills have dropped to about 80% of her English, although I am surprised at the constant effort required to get her to speak German. I am, however, concerned that she appears to have no idea that the two languages are structurally different, but happily applies English grammar and sentence structure to German words. She also literally translates English expressions into German and steadfastly refuses to learn the correct German versions. Most puzzlingly, she now speaks German with a very heavy English accent, something I had not expected.

It is too soon to say whether Anna's language development will follow the same pattern, although she already appears to prefer English wherever possible. I would be very grateful for any advice at all on how to improve Maria's knowledge and pronunciation of German, as well as tips on how to avoid the development of a similar situation with Anna. Or must I accept that my otherwise bright little girl has simply not inherited my 'ear for languages'?

Erika Baker, Ightham, England.

ANSWER *to the question on page five*

As a regular reader and sometimes contributor myself, I believe BFN is doing a great service to the multilingual families right across the world.

There is, however, still a lack of popular understanding of the various issues in bilingualism in the family, and many important questions are in need of answers. You have raised in your letter two related questions:

- a bilingual child's awareness of the structural differences of the two language s/he is routinely speaking;
- why Maria speaks German with a very heavy English accent'?

Based on extensive research evidence, I am almost certain that bilingual children are generally aware of the differences of the two languages they regularly hear and speak. It is, however, not always easy for us adults to tell whether the children are capable of differentiating the two linguistic systems. Often bilingual children mix languages, using one as the base and the other contributing various elements. Linguists, psychologists and educationists who have done research into bilingual children's speech generally accept now that mixed-language speech is not good evidence for the 'confused system' argument.

"Sometime, they want to identify themselves more with one language group than the other and they would use their linguistic resources to mark their identity."

Bilingual children's language development goes through different stages – just like monolingual children. They do, however, have to cope with two linguistic systems, and their usual way to deal with the situation is to bring one of the languages up to a certain threshold first and then let the other language catch up. So, at any given point in their developmental stage we may find that bilingual children's proficiency in one language is higher than in the other. Eventually, most bilingual children will achieve age appropriate levels in both languages.

Bilingual children like experimenting with their languages, as part of their normal development. At some point,

Continued on page eight

Adopted *and* Bilingual

I read with interest the article on *Adoption and Bilingualism* (14:3, 97).

I was adopted at the age of five weeks by a German couple who arrived in Australia in 1955. I grew up speaking German, mixing with my parents' friends, attending a German church etc. When I went to high-school I recall finding German lessons a breeze. The finer points of German grammar were unimportant to me – things either sounded right or they didn't!

I think I spoke German before I spoke English and as a I grew older I recall there being quite a mixing of the two languages. Nevertheless I did well at school in both languages and continued to be able to converse and understand the German.

Now I have two children, (Jordan, five, and Helena, three) who are bilingual. I have spoken to them only in German, their father speaks only English.

My parents arrived after the war, when being German was perhaps not the 'ideal' nationality to be. They gave me a wonderful gift, though, and in raising my children bilingually I am giving them one gift from their grandparents who, although not biologically connected to them, are my parents and whom I consider to be my family and the people whom I identify with as giving me my 'life'.

I did not discover I was adopted until I was 25 and since the children were born have found out about my natural parents. I felt a little like a fraud, in that I was raising them bilingually without being 'truly' German. It turns out that my natural father's family are German stock! My commitment to raising the children with two languages stems from the fact that my parents, the wonderful couple who adopted me, are whom I consider to be my real parents.

My husband and I separated at the beginning of the year. I am not concerned about the children's English as they speak it fluently (indeed my son started reading independently in both languages at the age of four-and-a-half!). My concern is, however, their German. I have continued as before but find myself as their sole (almost) input of German; my father died three weeks before my daughter's birth and my mother is in a home and suffers from dementia. I have no siblings or relatives.

I attend a German playgroup and obtain German books/cassettes for the children. We have no television, so videos are not a real possibility.

Now that the children's father is not here, I tend to read with Jordan in English as well. He started school in February and naturally will require assistance with schoolwork, which is all in English. The way I manage it at present is to explain things in German, e.g. if he comes across a word in a book he does not understand I will tell him what it in English but explain it's meaning in German. Spelling is another area – until now I had only taught Jordan to spell things in German. Now I need to do both.

Helena and Jordan

My questions are:

- Do you have any advice for my situation, keeping in mind that I want German to remain as it has been – the language that our relationship is based on?
- How will I manage as the topics become more involved to maintain German as 'our' language, when all that happens around the children is in English?

Anne-Marie Witte, Victoria, Australia

TRILINGUALS – PLEASE HELP!

Suzanne Hauwaert is researching for a masters degree. The subject of her dissertation is ***Bilinguals living in a third language country*** and the effect the third language has on the mother/father tongue or language use within the family.
If you are willing to complete a questionnaire please contact:

Suzanne Hauwaert,

Contact details removed

NEWS, NEWS, NEWS

BILINGUAL EDUCATION – THE BEGINNING OF THE END?
California adoption of Proposition 227.

'Proposition 227 violates children's rights to an effective education by re-instituting a state English-only instructional mandate which failed Latinos, Asians, Native Americans and other language-minorities for 95 years.' states NABE.

'The fact that every significant education group in California as well as most national education organizations opposed multi-millionaire Ron Unz's Proposition 227 shows that the initiative is not about what is best for children' says NABE Spokesperson, Jaime Zapata.

NABE = The National Association of Bilingual Education promotes educational excellence and equality for language minorities and the development of bilingualism by all Americans.
Address: 1220 L Street, N.W.
Suite 605, Washington, DC 20005 USA
Website:<http://www.nabe.org>

Send us your thoughts on Proposition 227.

ANSWER ***to the question on page six***

It is really nice to read how positive you are about your inherited language, German, and how keen you are to pass it on to your children.

I am sorry to hear about the break-up of your marriage. We have had quite a few letters about divorce and bilingualism and the problems it raises. However, if you are fluent in German, and that is your emotional language, you should not have any problems in carrying on speaking German. In fact, it may even become a stronger language in your family since your husband is not present every day, and therefore the children will treat English as the 'outside' language and German as the 'home' language. You are right in helping the children with their English schoolwork and yet, talking about it together in German. That way you maintain German as the home language.

With regard to the question of how you are going to cope when the children's language becomes more sophisticated, I think you just have to grow with them and increase your vocabulary of German as you proceed. Living in Australia, and attending an English speaking school, English will be your children's first and stronger language but German can become a good second with a bit of effort from you. They may teach German in secondary school as a foreign language and, no doubt, your children will find the subject very easy indeed.

Marjukka Grover

BUT DOES .. *continued from page two*

Parents interested in learning more about effective communications strategies should consider enrolling in seminars like STEP.* Knowing more about your child's language development is only one aspect of knowing more about your child. It's only one part of making the most of your life as a parent.

The acquisition of a second language involves a variety of predictable stages. When a child is first exposed to the second language, he may continue to speak his first language, until he realizes that no one else understands. And then he may say nothing at all; this is the so-called *silent period* when children are listening and hypothesizing. This is a period especially rich in non-verbal communication strategies which overly anxious, overly competitive parents may completely miss or even disrupt.

The next stage commonly involves the chunking of words and phrases which the child recognizes by context, but which the child cannot really analyse or successfully recombine. Meanwhile, the length of utterances is growing from a single-syllable holophrase to longer and more precise phrases. Much of this is identical to native language acquisition. What is important in any case is this: the parents should follow the child, taking their hints from the child's point of view Like the child, they should continuously look back to the big picture. Parents need to open themselves up to the poetry and the song and the great adventure which inspires their children.

The English-speaking monolingual parent who wants his child to learn Spanish should sing to him in English. And read to him in English. He should make eye-contact with his child, and continuously reference his talk to real objects and obvious experiences. He should observe and give names to his child's feelings. He should attempt to be non-judgmental at least part of the time, so that his child feels that there's room for his opinions, too. And that someone might want to hear.

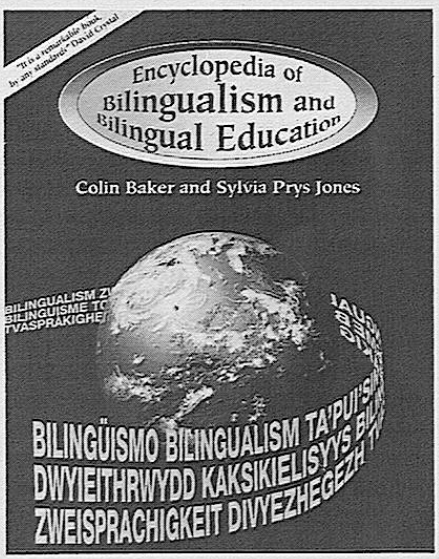
Because the real question is communication, not Spanish. If the child has access to a developmentally appropriate second-language environment early enough in his life, and if the child is neurologically sound and socially competent, the child will become bilingual. In America it is extremely rare for monolingual adults to become bilingual. But among small children in the right environment at the right time of life, it is unusual not to become bilingual.

So the first and most important question for the concerned parent is not 'What's the word for *snake* in Japanese?' It's: 'I wonder how I can relate to my child in a way that will encourage him to discover his own life?'

* *Strategic Training for Effective Parenting* by Dinkmeyer, McKay and Dinkmeyer (Circle Pines, MN: American Guidance service, 1989).

Dr M.J . Rosanova is the director of The Montessori Bilingual Institute at Inter

Contact details removed



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CONTACTS

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

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

ANSWER ... *continued from page six*

they will realise that language has important social symbolisms, in addition to the informative functions it has. Sometimes, they want to identify themselves more with one language group than the other and they would use their linguistic resources to mark their identity. Often for young children it is very important to 'sound like' their peers. I suspect that Maria is emphasising the 'English' aspects of her identity when she is speaking German with a heavy English accent. Do pay attention to her pronunciation when you take her on holidays to an exclusively German-speaking environment.

It is extremely interesting to hear the real-life experiences of bilingual families. BFN depends on the important contributions from its readers like yourself. Please keep your letters coming in, and if there is anything we can help with, let us know.

Dr Li Wei,

Contact details removed