# The Bilingual Family Newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

News and Views for Intercultural People

*Editor:* **Marjukka Grover**

*1999, Vol. 16 No. 3*


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## EDITORIAL

'This towel has a strange new smell', commented Mike, my husband, yesterday, when sorting out the washing. 'Oh yes – it says *uusi tuoksu* (new fragrance) on the packet' he said, coming out of the bathroom holding the box of washing powder, which was bought from our local supermarket. I didn't realise that he had said 'new fragrance' in Finnish until he pointed it out on the side of the packet. It made me feel great! My 'obscure' language was first on the packet, and I had not noticed which language Mike was using – I therefore must be a REAL bilingual.

Although English is 'the' world language everyone wants to learn, global trade has to also take into account languages which are not widely spoken. How good it is for a bilingual child to see that the minority language, which only mum or dad speaks, is also on supermarket shelves. As Laura Sager found in her study of bilingual families (see page four), most parents face difficulties with bilingualism when children start school. This is the time when parents have to be very sensitive, but also extra vigilant, so that the children will not turn against the minority language. Even supermarket packets signal the message that minority languages have value outside the home too.

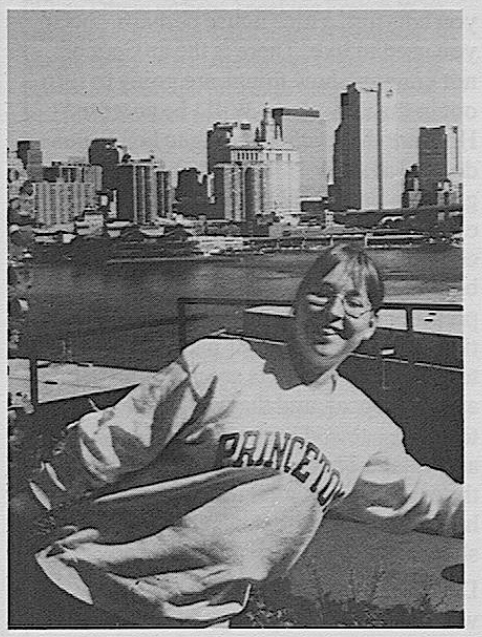
Global trade will surely welcome someone who feels 'at home in many countries', as A.V. Hruby from New York writes in this issue's leading article. Constant moving is not easy, especially for a teenager who is building life-long friendships, but multilingualism and multiculturalism should open up exciting opportunities for future careers. Can any of our readers report on opportunities opened up by their bilingualism/ biculturalism?

**Marjukka Grover**

## MULTICULTURAL PERSONALITY

**A. V. Hruby**

I was born in New York City, a multicultural city *par excellence* and have had the opportunity to live in different parts of this global village. This has had a profound impact on the way I see myself. I spent part of my childhood in the Brooklyn Heights neighborhood where I started *kindergarten* at The Packer Collegiate Institute, a private school that goes all the way through 12th grade. Although my parents spoke German at home (my father is German



and my mother is originally from Brazil, but speaks German also) and I grew up hearing it, my language of choice was English – nothing unusual for a kid with foreign parents in New York City.

When I was eight years old we moved to Germany. We lived in a small provincial town near Frankfurt where my father was starting his new job, and I entered the German public school system where no other children spoke English. I had to learn a new language, adapt to a new system, make friends with kids whose language I barely understood. That was not easy! What helped me get through it, was the fact that there were a few other students who had mother tongues other than German. I had (and still have) a very close friendship with a Russian boy of multicultural parents who had left Moscow in his infancy and then grew up in Germany, which was neither his or his parents' birthplace. We learned a lot from each other and I see this experience as an asset to my multicultural heritage.

*"...many of us were able to work through the adaptation problems by forming close friendships and discovering that focusing on what we had in common helped us more in our growing than concentrating on our differences."*

Four years later, at age twelve, our family moved to London, another vibrant city with a multicultural population which, again, had an impact on my upbringing. Most of the students of the American School that I attended were foreign born, too: Arabs, Indians, Americans, Japanese, Chinese, ... you name it. This melting pot of different cultures and customs, beliefs, and ways of assimilating to a new country made me

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**MULTICULTURAL..** ***from page one***

realize that, again, I was not the only one trying to adapt to a new world. Many of us were able to work through the adaptation problems by forming close friendships and discovering that focusing on what we had in common helped us more in our growing than concentrating on our differences. I really enjoyed going to that school and living in London for a year and a half, especially since I am very fond of the British. They helped make my stay a memorable one.

Then we moved back to Germany, again – due to my father's job. We settled down in Munich, the capital of the conservative state of Bavaria. Bavaria is different from the rest of Germany; the same way Texas is from the rest of the US. I became familiar with Bavarian subculture, and at the same time, I had the best experience in terms of cross-cultural learning, when attending the Munich International School.

*" I feel that in Germany I could be who I was, dress the way I liked to, whereas here I am expected to fit into a mould and be like all the girls ... "*

I quickly learned about stereotypes, and how they come into being. I learned to laugh about how some people associate one nationality with a common cliche: somebody with a beer and *Lederhosen* must be a German, a French person is someone with a Basque beret and a baguette in his/her hand, a Brit is dressed with a bowler hat and always carries an umbrella. None of this is real and it does not show how rich anyone's culture is and how much people from different countries have in common.

When I was 15, my parents decided again to move, this time back to New York City, which is my birthplace but not 'home'. I am now back at my old school, in 10th grade, and must admit that I miss Europe a lot. There are a few other students who come from other countries and whose native language is not English – but by far not as many as in my schools in London or Munich. I miss my friends from Munich and realize that friendships in Germany were different from the ones here. I used to have very intimate friends, and I guess such close friendships are based on spending a lot of time together and sharing experiences. I may be expecting too much of myself, because it's hard to find really good friends in only six months. In America, the 'in-thing' seems to be to have many friends, so quantity counts more than quality.

The other thing that seems to matter more when comparing the two cultures, is the way you look and dress and behave, especially as a girl. I feel that in Germany I could be who I was, dress the way I liked to, whereas here I am expected to fit into a mould and be like all the girls who want to look cool and sexy and attractive to the other sex.

Another issue is that people in Germany accept kids of my age almost as adults and are used to more freedom too. Usually at about age14, people address you by the formal *Sie* and you are allowed to drink wine and beer and smoke legally at age16 – you can even smoke at school – completely unimaginable here in New York City! Here kids my age are (due to the dangers of the big city) often not allowed to walk around alone, go to a movie – something I was used to in Munich.

I feel very fluent in both languages, and people don't realize that I am 'just American' or 'just German', at school. However I sometimes feel in a linguistic 'limboland', since my writing skills aren't 100% in either language, and both my English teacher as well as my German tutor criticize my writing in terms of style, vocabulary and syntax.

The downside when you move around frequently is that you are constantly leaving friends behind, things that gave you comfort, a nice house perhaps, food you used to like. There is the anxiety of not knowing how things are going to turn out in the new place. Will I be accepted? How are the teachers going to be? Will I do well at school? Who are my neighbors going to be? Will I find friends? This is especially hard when you move constantly as in my case. Integration begins to turn into a speedy process. The pressure of 'making the most' in a short time is burdening. Your parents are telling you that things are not as difficult as they appear, and they say that one has to cooperate and try hard to actively assimilate. This is not easy, and often there are tears of utter despair, until a hand reaches out to you yet again and shows you that things aren't so bad.

Despite all the difficulties of dealing with constant change in my life, it is beginning to dawn on me that there are real bonuses of living in many places: it can bring you new friends and the future can be more challenging for a person who is multicultural and bilingual. The job possibilities for an individual who is 'at home in many cultures' are greater. I now perceive myself not as a citizen of one country anymore but as a global villager.

## BILINGUALISM AND COMMUNICATION DISORDERS

**Implications for Speech and Language Therapy**

*Report on the Roundtable at the 2nd International Symposium on Bilingualism (Newcastle University, 14-17 April 1999)*

This biennial symposium brings together sociolinguists, psycholinguists, speech and language therapists and educationists interested in bilingualism. This year the symposium was organised around 'themes' such as, bilingual cognitive processing, codeswitching, sign bilingualism. For the first time for practitioners there was a Roundtable on *bilingualism and language difficulties and disorders.*

There is plenty of evidence in letters to the BFN that some parents continue to receive advice from speech and language therapists which is misleading – namely that maintaining bilingualism in the family is confusing for a child with developmental language difficulties. They often advise the parents to speak only one language, preferably the majority language, to the child. Some therapists and educationists go further and suggest that the child's difficulties developing language are **caused** by being exposed to two languages. A Roundtable discussion provided an opportunity for the professionals and academic researchers to discuss these issues.

In consultation with the Special Interest Group (SIG) in Bilingualism it was decided that the Roundtable would have short presentations about current research in areas of interest and concern for practitioners followed by questions and discussion. The four presentations were from Belgium, the USA, UK and Sweden.

Annick De Houwer, Professor in language studies at Antwerp University, Belgium, looked at the insights from research evidence about language acquisition in bilingual children who are not causing concern, which could be used by practitioners to assess those whose

## HUMOUR, HUMOUR, HUMOUR

Hannah (3) insisted for several days that there was a dog in our bathroom! She pointed to the doorknob and repeated a last time in German ,'Hund'. (Rund = round in German, with English R sounds like Hund = dog)

**Kerstin Fricke, Scotland.**

development is causing concern. She directly addressed the issues around distinguishing developmental language difficulties and disorder from bilingual language development. These issues are central to therapists' assessment of young bilingual children, referred for alleged language difficulties and disorders.

Jose Centeno, a speech pathologist from New York, proposed that a detailed sociolinguistic questionnaire could be employed to survey and quantify the dynamics of language use in all linguistic domains and modalities in the speaker's bilingual development. The information describes the individual's personal bilingual history which helps the clinician to understand current language performance, and assists in interpreting diagnostic results and planning therapy in a linguistically effective and culturally sensitive manner.

Alison Crutchely, a researcher at the University of Manchester, reported that findings from a large cohort of children with speech and language difficulties attending language units suggest that 11% of the children are bilingual and have difficulties which seem to be more complex and possibly more severe that those of their monolingual peers. When interviewed, parents of monolingual and bilingual children shared similar but also different experiences about the identification and assessent process of their children's difficulties. For example, although similar proportions of monolingual and bilingual parents reported that they had been the first to notice their child's difficulties, bilingual parents were more likely to feel that professionals subsequently failed to diagnose the child's difficulties or acknowledge the parents' worries.

Eva-Kristina Salameh, a speech and language therapist and researcher from Lund, Sweden, reported on a study into language impairment in a cohort of 400 bilingual children. She reported on aspects of occurrence, based on referrals and take-up of speech and language therapy provision. In comparison with monolingual children, bilingual children and children with a first language other than Swedish, seemed to be referred later and with apparently more severe developmental language difficulties. In addition, they tended not to take-up provision offered as much as monolingual Swedish families.

The final two presentations provoked a great deal of discussion, raising issues about enabling access to services and provision, early referral and detection processes, and supporting inclusion of bilingual families in the service and

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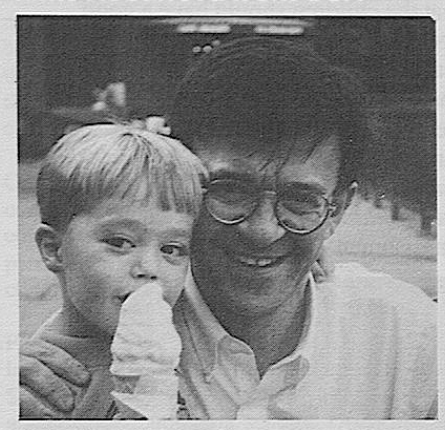
## SPOTLIGHT ON THE EDITORIAL BOARD

### Mike Rosanova from USA



**Wife**: Doris Batliner Rosanova.
**Children**: Grace, 13, and Phillip, 7.
**Country where you live:** USA, Mike (since birth); Doris (since 1976, moved from the Principality of Liechtenstein).
**Languages spoken in the family:** English, Italian, German, some Allemannisch (the German dialect spoken in Liechtenstein), a little Japanese.

**Can you tell us something about Oak Park where you're from?**
Oak Park is situated on the western border of Chicago. From the 1840s to the early 1870s, the old tavern established by the Kettlestrings family served as a way station. After the Great Fire destroyed Chicago in 1871, beautiful, comfortable homes were built out here to the west of the city.

**How is Oak Park a 'new country' for you?**
When I grew up here, speaking French as an acquired language was a mark of gentility. It meant that you had the money to travel. But speaking a foreign language at home was a scandal. It meant that there were lower class immigrants in your family.

**So you learned Italian at home?**
Oh, no, I didn't learn any foreign language as a small child. My grandparents came from Italy very young so the only Italian I knew as a child were words like *spaghetti* and *pizza*.

**So how do you speak so many languages?**
The summer before I entered high school, my family had an invitation from a colleague of my father's in Munich. I was able to spend a week in Tutzing am Starnbergerse. I loved the family that I stayed with, and I loved their little town. Chicago is built on a prehistoric lake-bottom – flat as a pancake. The Alps were a revelation and an enchantment. I made up my mind to study German.

**So you studied German in High School?**
In my school, students were required to take two years of Latin before entry into a modern foreign language class. The theory was that before the age of sixteen a child's mind is not sufficiently mature for such a task. So I went to the German teacher, Father Aschenbrenner, to ask if I could come to his class because I wanted to learn German. Silly me.

**So you weren't allowed in?**
No, as the Italians say, it was bureaucratically 'impossibilitated' (*impossibilitato*). But about six weeks later, Father Aschenbrenner needed fourteen students for a trip to Austria and asked my parents whether they'd allow me to go. But I would have to study German on my own, and pass the final exam. After all, he had scruples.

**Did you pass?**
Although I wasn't allowed to spend a day in class, I got the highest score on the test. That taught me a lot about the relationship between teaching and learning.

**Did you enjoy Austria?**
Oh, it was gorgeous. The other American kids were all older than me, so I hung out with kids from Germany who were vacationing there with their families and I also attended classes. At the end of the five-week German language course, the teacher gave me an *eins plus* (A+).

**So you never studied German in school?**
No, the next year, I was allowed to attend class with the seniors. But the two years after that, I taught myself. Fr. Aschenbrenner gave me tests every so often. When I took the college entrance exams, I chose German as my elective. Out of a possible eight hundred points, I scored eight hundred.

**You must have known German very well.**
Oh, no. I couldn't speak a word. I was really good at answering multilple choice questions on grammar. That was all I had accomplished. But that was enough for the admissions people at Yale.

**So you majored in German literature?**
I considered myself a language learning machine. But I wasn't interested in spending my life writing literary criticism. So I ended up with a BA, MA, M.Phil. and PhD in social psychology – not in languages. I'm also certified in Early Childhood by the American Montessori Society.

**It's interesting that you've chosen to live in Oak Park, where in 1985 you created a foreign language immersion school for children fom 2-9 years of age. Why?**
Spaghetti isn't so exotic any more, not even in Oak Park. The target languages at our school, *InterCultura Montessori*, are Spanish and Japanese. My son, Phillip, who's seven, is in our Japanese elementary program. I can hear him outside the window now, yelling something back and forth with his pals on the playground, all in Japanese.
Back when Ernest Hemingway was in high school here in Oak Park, he wrote: 'Oak Park is a village of broad lawns and narrow minds.' The local government will never let me get my hands on the size of the lawns in this town; but I think that our work and our lives here have begun to change the dimensions of a few hearts and minds.

**Can interested readers learn more?**
Sure, we've got a website.
It's at *www.intercultura.org*.

## REASONS AND PROBLEMS - Bilingual Upbringing not Easy

### Laura Sager

I did a project on bilingual families at the University of Hamburg, which made me aware of the difficulties some bilingual families are facing – contrary to the common notion of 'ease' of learning in a bilingual family. Most of the 18 families I interviewed were German-English (or American/Australian), but there were also Spanish, French, Korean, Turkish and Thai parents.

The main reason for bringing up the children bilingually was communication with grandparents. Without learning the minority language children would lose not only important family ties but also part of the other culture and its traditions. Additionally, the parents found the thought of not being able to speak their native tongue with their child horrible. They also hoped that the knowledge of two languages and cultures would help the children to become more tolerant, flexible and open towards different people and cultures. Some even thought that bilingualism might make learning other languages later an easier task.

Only two of the families decided against a bilingual upbringing. In one of them, the father is Turkish, the mother German. Thinking that only a mother could successfully transmit a second language as the father wouldn't have enough time, they decided it was not worth even trying. However, I think part of the reason may be that Turkish is one of the less prestigious languages in Germany, often associated with *Gastarbeiter* (guest workers). The parents' decision might mirror their fear of being looked down on.

In the other family, the mother's reason for introducing her language, English, later on was that she considered German the 'warmer' language, associating English with the unemotional, overcorrect boarding school she had attended as a child. The parents also felt that the children should have a good grounding in one language before learning the second. When she tried to speak English later on, the eldest boy fiercely rejected both the English language and the culture: *'Ich bin kein halber Engländer! Ich bin ein ganzer Deutschländer!'* ('I am not a half Englishman – I am a whole German!).

*Laura with her bilingual subjects*

The other families didn't share these fears and doubts and were extremely enthusiastic and positive about bilingualism. They did point out, though, that maintaining bilingualism in a family is more difficult that it might seem to outsiders. One mother described her trilingual children as 'little business people' because of their many 'appointments' such as attending schools and music clubs in two languages.

Visiting the minority language country or having visitors from that country were seen as the best way of encouraging bilingualism. A stay abroad has the advantage that it brings the children into contact with other children who 'teach' them a language more appropriate to their age through playing. This adds to a positive memory and can be a stimulus to keep up the language skills. A visitor who doesn't speak the language of the country can have the same effect. Having to translate for the visitor, children can show off their 'superior' knowledge, which will make them proud and self-confident. All of this will highly motivate further language acquisition.

In all families, the onset of kindergarten and/or school were problem times. Even if the children's minority language was equally or better developed than German, kindergarten and school had an enormous impact on their language development. The new environment and friends are important influences, and all the new experiences take place in German. Children often feel that they can't talk about these experiences in the other language because it wouldn't have the same meaning. When starting school most children began answering in German when addressed in the minority language. This put parents in a difficult situation. Interrupting the child and insisting on the other language might provoke a negative reaction from the child, feeling that how s/he says something is more important than what s/he has to say. Also children at that age do not want to be different from the other children. Several mothers said their children felt embarrassed and asked them not to speak the second language to them in front of other people.

Problems also arise when the other parent doesn't speak the minority language. One of the Spanish mothers said that she often feels more comfortable speaking German to their daughter when her husband is with them to prevent misunderstandings and to avoid excluding him. The girl, however, loves teaching her daddy Spanish and regards this a wonderful game. Knowing more than her father makes her proud and self-confident.

Parents found it difficult to try not to be bothered by other peoples' stares when they spoke minority language in public. However, if the children notice the parent's discomfort the children will feel awkward, too, and might regard that language as something to be ashamed of and reject it. It is important for parents to think about how to react to other people's comments in advance, to talk to

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### THE EARLY YEARS OF LANGUAGE DEVELOPMENT

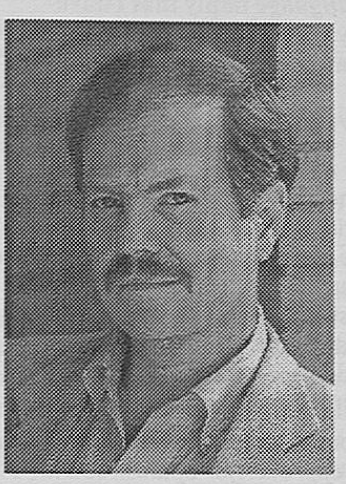
| Age | Language |
|---|---|
| First Year | Babbling, cooing, laughing (dada, mama, gaga). |
| Around 1 year old | First understandable words. |
| During 2nd year | Two-word combinations, moving slowly to three- and four-word combinations. Three element sentences (e.g. 'Daddy, come now'; 'That my book'; 'Teddy gone bye-byes'). |
| 3 to 4 years | Dramatic changes. Simple but increasingly longer sentences. Grammar and sentence structuring starts to develop. Conversations show turn taking. |
| 4 years onwards | Increasingly complex sentences, structure and ordered conversations. Use of pronouns and auxiliary verbs. |

From the book *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* by Colin Baker

## NEWS FROM THE USA

### A Victory for Bilingual Education

by James Crawford



Despite appearances, English-only advocates are hardly winning every battle in the USA these days. Their momentum, following California's recent vote to limit instruction in other languages, has faltered at the courthouse door.

In a closely watched case this spring, a federal judge rejected their legal challenge to bilingual education in New Mexico. The so-called Center for Equal Opportunity (CEO), a conservative 'think tank,' had argued that Hispanic children were being 'segregated' in bilingual programs against the will of their parents. According to CEO's lawsuit, such practices in the Albuquerque Public Schools were violating these students' civil rights under federal law and the US Constitution. An English-only approach would better serve their needs, it contended.

Judge Martha Vazquez found no merit in any of these claims. To the contrary, she ruled, New Mexico's bilingual education program 'does not divide the students but unites them.' Moreover, its goal is not to deny but to foster 'equal educational opportunity' for children who are not yet proficient in English.

If the parents disapproved of bilingual education, Judge Vazquez suggested, they had every right to pull their children out and request English-only instruction. But they had no right to impose this choice on everyone else.

Meanwhile, the judge allowed a group of parents who support bilingual education to 'intervene' in the case and negotiate with the Albuquerque school district over how to strengthen programs for English learners.

The decision is considered significant for several reasons. First, CEO is closely allied with Ron Unz, the sponsor of Proposition 227, which dismantled most of California's bilingual programs. Second, it debunked one of the central myths of the English-only forces: that Hispanic children are routinely misassigned to bilingual classrooms on the basis of ethnicity rather than language. And third, the plaintiffs that CEO 'represented' in the case were recruited under questionable circumstances.

Once again this raises questions that always come up in US debates over bilingual education: who really speaks for Hispanic parents and what do they want for their children?

Parents were recruited to join the CEO lawsuit with flyers that promised up to $10,000 in legal damages if the ruling went against the Albuquerque schools. (After this unethical tactic became public, it was dropped.) Many of those who did sign on as plaintiffs were surprised to learn – when finally asked to give evidence – that the suit aimed to ban bilingual programs. Most simply wanted these programs improved.

CEO, on the other hand, wanted to advance a political agenda. By that standard, its 'civil rights' case proved an embarrassing failure.

Historically, civil-rights litigation has been the last resort of parents who seek bilingual education for their children, but face resistance from local school officials. While US law does not 'mandate' such programs (except in a few states), it guarantees 'affirmative steps' to overcome language barriers that obstruct students' access to the curriculum. Schools may use bilingual instruction to further this goal, or they may try nonbilingual alternatives such as English-as-a-second-language instruction. But they cannot simply neglect children's needs.

This principle originated with a Supreme Court decision, *Lau v. Nichols*, and a federal statute passed shortly thereafter, the Equal Educational Opportunities Act of 1974. Neither guarantees opportunities for children to become fluent in two languages - only their right to effective English instruction designed to help them catch up with English-speaking peers.

Parents who want bilingualism and biliteracy for their children usually have to fight to get it, and to maintain it, in their states and localities. The outcome of these political battles is far from certain. Meanwhile, occasional victories like the Albuquerque decision are cause for encouragement.

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To read more about bilingual education in the USA, including excerpts from the judge's decision in the Albuquerque case, see James Crawford's Language Policy Web Site at http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford/.


## Bilingual teenager's letter like a breath of fresh air

What a pleasure to read the letter from Franziska Heimburger in the BFN Vol.16:1. We often read experts' views on bilingual issues, but to read a letter from an experienced child was like a breath of fresh air. I do not think that any of us quite understand what it is like to grow up, and go to school with two or more languages, and to hear about those problems which mean so much to a child was comforting reading to say the least.

My eldest son read the article with great interest, and laughed, 'yes mummy she is right' refering to the sentence, '*it was a constant struggle to remember which words the class knew, which tenses they had learnt and what the teacher wanted to hear*'. He then mentioned that he always used to put his hand up to answer a question, but as he was never asked, stopped bothering, but was recently acused of not participating in the lesson.

However, as Franziska righty mentions, things do improve as the class develops, and learning English grammar thoroughly can only be an advantage. It is a struggle, however, especially with motivation. We actually spoke with the English teacher, and came up with the idea that Nicholas could help the children who have difficulties with English in his class. It has certainly increased his popularity. It does seem a shame though, that out of the five school hours of English he attends per week, that not one of those lessons could cater for his level, even if it meant he was allowed to read an English book!

Many times in your newsletter we read about children speaking two or more languages, but I often wonder which school system they attend, and how do these languages fit in with the curriculum? What level of reading and writing do they reach? Are they, as in the German system, regularly tested and graded and compared to the rest of the class? Are these grades then used to assess which school the child then attends?

Since writing my first letter from Singapore (Vol.15:4, 98), we have now transferred to Vienna, Austria where our

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children attend German speaking schools. They have very quickly realized that they are the lucky ones, as their two languages actually count in the school marks. Many children in Vienna are Hungarian, Croatian, Turkish or Greek, and struggle with German. Then English is introduced as a second language, and their chances of success in higher education become slimmer. At the age of 10/11 years the children are assessed on their German, Maths and Science/Nature subjects. A Grade 2 in German is essential for High School. Although our nine year old can reach this standard in all his subjects he can only manage a Grade 3 in German. As he reads English and German books alternatively, he is hardly likely to be at the same level as children who only speak German at home. So, as we were changing schools anyway, we made a decison to put him into Class 3 once more. The unfortunate aspect of that decision, is that he is a bright nine-year-old in all other aspects of his life, and finds that spending his day with eight-years-olds somewhat tiring at times. The long term 'big picture' is not taken into consideration.

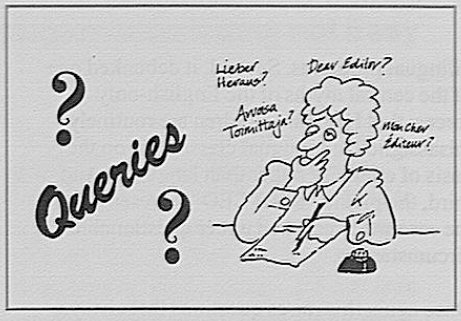
*"I do not think that any of us quite understand what it is like to grow up and go to school with two or more languages, and to hear about those problems which mean so much to a child, was comforting reading, to say the least."*

I think that it is a very interesting topic, and would love to read more from other children like Franziska in your Newsletter, and about the various school systems that bilingual children attend within Europe. The letters can be of great assistance to families like my own, and to language teachers generally who, I often feel, have very little understanding towards bilingual children. We are becoming more integrated with more mixed marriages. This is our future.

Keep up your very good work

**Janice Weiss, Wien, Austria.**

**The more material we have, the better the Newsletter will be. Please continue to send us letters and articles. Every letter is much appreciated!**




## How to bring up a child with several languages?

**My wife Isabelle is bilingual (French and Spanish) and I am Italian. Isabelle is a teacher of French, but she is fluent in Spanish (language of her parents) and speaks also Italian. I was brought up monolingual but learned French at about 30. At home we speak both French and Italian with a dominance of French, as this is the language in which we started our relationship. I now speak also Spanish and my professional language is English.**

**We plan to stay in Germany for a few years and will have our first child this year. We have started to think in which languages we should educate our baby. We think the safest approach is the *one parent - one language* method. Isabelle will speak French to the baby, I will speak Italian and we will continue to speak either French or Italian between Isabelle and myself according to the situation.**

**This will give already a three languages context for our child: French, Italian and German. The main question concerns how and when we can introduce Spanish since half of our family is Spanish?**

**In BFN Vol. 15, No. 3, 98 there is a useful indication relevant to our situation. In the article 'Sound advice to parents on bilingualism' it said: *'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.'* Also in his book 'A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism' Colin Baker warns parents to be particularly vigilant when many languages are present at the same time as there is the risk that none develops to the right level for a given age.**

**Based on this advice we have decided to ask the Spanish grandparents to speak Spanish with the baby and we shall speak Spanish whenever appropriate ( i.e. with Isabelle's parents, Spanish friends etc.).**

**Is the above approach for Spanish sound? Does the method *one parent-one language* imply that I have always to speak Italian not only with the baby but also with my wife?**

***Paolo Pili and Isabelle Carrasco.***

As a member of the International Editorial Board for the BFN I am happy to give my opinion. However, be aware that I am a French teacher and not a linguist and that my theories' are as much a blend of other peoples 92 theories as a reflection upon the practical applications of multilingualism.

In response to your first question: *Is the above approach for Spanish sound?* I would say:

'Yes'. It sounds like Isabelle will be speaking her 'most motherly tongue' (French) and you yours (Italian) to your child. This is already off to the right start. The ideal way to introduce another language from birth would be that you could hire a 'specific language' speaking nanny to compliment the interactions with the grandparents and friends. The second opportunity to introduce another language comes when you select a school for your child.

In some ways I think the number of languages which can be acquired in childhood is limited to the number of significant people or places the child is exposed to. Furthermore, I am starting to believe that the child has to have a reason to communicate in 'that language' for the language to be acquired and not lost later.

In response to your second question: *'Does the method 'one parent-one language' imply that I have to speak Italian not only with the baby but also with my wife?'* I would say:

No. My opinion has changed on this issue. I now believe that your children can hear you speak other languages to others and not be negatively affected. And I am starting to wonder if bilingual people might be better off speaking 'their languages' rather than pretending to be a monolingual. Our current practice reflects both of these suggestions.

We have found it helps to plan to provide a balanced exposure to 'all' the languages and to constantly reassess the situation and fine tune (see Vol.16:1, 99), accepting what good has come and making plans to further improve the linguistic opportunity that we provide our children by being polyglots.

**Jayson Campeau, Chatham, Canada.**

## Husband against the minority language

**I need to speak to people who have had the same problem as I have and which is very distressing. I am French and my husband is English. I have been speaking French to my little boy since he was born, but it is a struggle every day because my husband cannot tolerate it when I speak French to our son in front of him. So I am having to juggle between languages when he is there. We went away to France and when we came back Jason's French had improved a lot. He was speaking to me more in French – before he used to reply in English when I asked him a question in French. The problem is that my husband finds this even more annoying. I keep asking my husband why doesn't he like it when I speak French to Jason, and he says he does not know. He even tells Jason not to speak French when he is there. I keep telling him we have to think about Jason's future but he keeps telling me not to worry because Jason will be able to speak French. I say that I have to speak French for him to be bilingual.**
**I do need to know people in the same situation and why do they behave like that. I thought that maybe he is afraid Jason's French might be better than Jason's English, which is wrong because we live in England, he goes to an English school and he has English friends.**
**Please help me! What should I do? It feels uncomfortable to be unable to speak your own language, to be watched carefully and to be told not to speak your own language. It feels like being in a prison. Please help me!**

***Isa***

I find it sad to think that bilingualism, which should be a positive experience, can cause so much tension in a family.

It is very difficult to comment without knowing your family and the situation better, but it dose seem that your husband feels insecure if he does not understand what you and your son are saying – very common with monolingual people. He may also feel that Jason will not be fully British if he speaks fluent French from early on. Perhaps he has deep fears of 'losing' his son, not being able to identify with him, if Jason grows up with the French language and culture. Whatever is causing your husband's behaviour, he obviously has not fully accepted that he is in an intercultural marriage. He may even secretly hope that you become more British if you don't use French every day.

I fully sympathise with you – my own mother tongue, Finnish, is a very strong part of my identity. If I couldn't speak Finnish with my children I would feel that part of me had been lost.

Try to explain the emotional importance of your mother tongue kindly to your husband. Show him that you can be happy in England as long as you can remain French and speak your language to your son. At the same time make sure that you are very positive about the English language and way of life and and don't have a conflict between the two countries. Try to make him see that children growing up with dual identities, dual nationalities and bilingualism are in a far better position to become real Europeans than those with a single identity and nationality – very important in the modern world where borders are disappearing fast. You should also try to make sure that your husband and Jason have plenty of time together without you so that he can see that he is not 'losing' his son, that Jason's English is as good as any monolingual British child's English, and French for him is a positive extra.

Continuing dialogue, openness about each others' feelings and willingness to understand each other are important aspects of any marriage, but even more so when the partners come from different cultural and language backgrounds.

Have other readers experienced similar problems? Please write to us.

**Marjukka Grover**

**REASONS** ... *from page four*

the children about it and to explain to them that these stares or comments are just a sign of envy.

Nevertheless, the attitude of the children's environment definitely plays an important role in the children's attitude towards their other language and culture. In my study, however, even the children that did not speak the minority language fluently showed a positive attitude towards the language and pride and pleasure in its culture. But this also shows that even if the children love the language and culture, they do not automatically become fluent bilinguals. The key to succesful language acquisition, in my view, lies in parents creating a relaxed atmosphere where learning is fun, as well as creating a 'need' to speak the minority language by by pretending not to understand, and asking 'do you mean...?' questions when the child speaks in the majority language.

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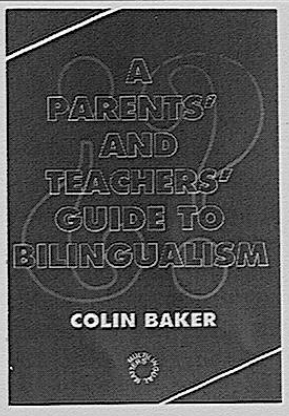
**BILINGUALISM** ... *from page three*

provision. Valuable comparisons of provision and practice in different countries were made.

The Roundtable offered a unique opportunity to clinicians and researchers in the field of bilingual language difficulties and impairment to discuss the application and generalisability of their findings. It met with a very enthusiastic response and there was no doubt that this should become a feature of the ISB in the future.

**Deirdre Martin**
Dr Deirde Martin is a Senior Lecturer at the School of Education, The University of Birmingham, UK.


*This 45 minute video presents a number of ways of raising children bilingually, especially if one of the parents is a monolingual English speaker.* Available from Language Australia Ltd , GPO Box 372F, Melbourne, Vic. 3001, Australia. Fax: + 61-(0)3-9926-4780

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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

## GLOSSARY

**Immersion Bilingual Education**: Schooling where some or most subject content is taught through a second, majority language.