the bilingual family newsletter

MULTILINGUAL MATTERS

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

IN THIS ISSUE

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editorial

Welcome to a a new look *BFN*! As we enter out 21st year, we felt the time was right for a revamp. The design of the newsletter has remained largely the same since our launch in 1984 and, whilst we continue to receive praise and support, it is important for the publication to appeal to successive generations of bi/multilingual families.

Our ethos remains unchanged – to provide a voice for bi/multilingual families worldwide, to make the latest research available, to provide expert advice to queries, and to entertain you all on the way. Whilst these aims have always been central to the *BFN*, we are aware that we currently reach only a small percentage of the bi/multilingual community worldwide. Any help in widening our appeal to other geographical areas and language communities would be gratefully received.

If you know anyone that would like a free sample copy, please let us know. Equally, if you know of a school or parenting group that might like to subscribe, please get in touch. Reduced rates are available for multiple copies delivered to one address.

Please be aware that there may be some minor glitches as we work with this new lay-out, so I apologise in advance for any errors. Please send us any thoughts, positive or negative, on the new look, and on where you would like to see the newsletter going in the next 21 years!

Thank you, as always, for your support.

Sami Grover

MY LANGUAGE AND I

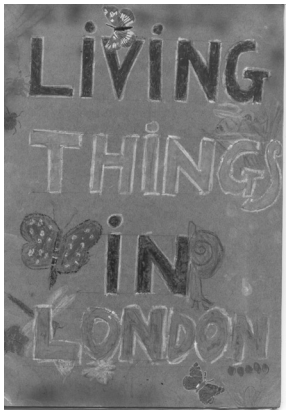
Cristina Banfi

When I try to trace the acquisition of my first Second Language, there are certain landmarks I consider very important.

As is the case with most Argentines, my heritage can be described as "mixed". One of my grandparents was born in Europe, as were all of my great-grandparents. Four were Italian, two Spanish (one Castilian, the other Catalan) and two Irish.

As I was growing up, however, I spoke only Spanish at home, as did my cousins and our parents. When visiting my maternal grandparents I was in contact with another language: English (which my grandmother spoke, but not with my grandfather). My recollections relate this language with short songs and naming everyday objects like "cup" and "spoon". I don't think the language was used beyond that level.

When I was four or five, my parents and I spent six months in Europe. During that period we lived in London for about three months. We also spent several weeks in Italy with relatives. Whilst in London, I attended a local Kindergarten. I cannot remember much about the linguistic side of this experience. I think I supposed the languages involved were just another new element to be discovered and dealt with. My mother does remember a situation that caught her attention, and possibly worried her a little. A few days after arriving in Italy, I came up from the basement, where I was playing with my Italian cousins, and said "Mamma, andiamo in cantina" (Mum, let's go to the basement/playroom). She thought this might be a little problematic in that I wouldn't be able to separate the different languages and might become confused.



A picture drawn by Cristina during her time in London as a child.

When we returned, we resumed normal life in Buenos Aires and I was soon ready to start school. After some debate, my parents decided to send me to a state school with an intensive languages programme, attached to a training college for foreign language teachers. This meant that, as from 2nd Form, I had five 40-minute periods of English a week. In spite of the institutional emphasis on languages, my personal experience, and that of many classmates, was that the foreign language was not only not a prominent, but also a rather disliked subject, at which even good students did not do well. With hindsight, this can be ascribed to different factors (e.g. the emphasis on repetition, the use of memorisation, the recurrent presence of teacher trainees etc.) but it was still not a subject at which I did well or enjoyed.

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NEGOTIATION OF IDENTITIES IN MULTILINGUAL CONTEXTS

Edited by
Aneta Pavlenko *(Temple University)*
and **Adrian Blackledge**
(University of Birmingham)

The volume highlights the role of language ideologies in the process of negotiation of identities and shows that in different historical and social contexts different identities may be negotiable or non-negotiable. The chapters address various ways in which individuals may be positioned or position themselves in a variety of contexts. In asking questions about social justice, about who has access to symbolic and material resources, about who is 'in' and who is 'out', the authors take account not only of localised linguistic behaviours, attitudes and beliefs; they also locate them in wider social contexts which include class, race, ethnicity, generation, gender and sexuality.

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My Language and I...

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My family again relocated to the UK for a year when I was 11. This would prove to be a turning point in my relationship with English. We stayed in London for most of that period. I attended Prior Weston Primary School, a school recommended to my mother. This school seemed to be very different from the idea of school that I was used to. Nobody spoke Spanish and no specific point was made of the fact that I did. However, I was given space and time to adjust and, based on the foundation of English that I had, I was able to survive. I distinctly remember the first couple of months as a "silent period" during which I didn't say much, but was very attentive to what was said around me. Once I had built up my confidence and picked up colloquial expressions from my peers, I started gradually increasing the levels of communication.

During this period, a very helpful aid was the local library. Our school had a library, as did our classroom (two elements that were not present in my school in Argentina), but we also visited the local Council Library at the beginning of every term. There I became familiar with a modern children's library. My parents, being both teachers, had introduced me to libraries before, but to me they remained distant, dusty institutions related to work rather than pleasure. This library was different. It was designed for children, with material for children. It was colourful and airy. In the beginning, most books were far too difficult for me, so I started out by borrowing books from the Asterix series. The illustrations made it possible for me to follow the plot, even if most language, particularly the puns, were lost on me.

From Asterix, I moved on to more "sophisticated" literature, e.g. adventure books for teenagers. The Library had a good incentives programme. If you read X number of books, you received a membership card, after reading some more, you received a badge and, after that, every 10 books you read, you were given a book of your choice. The library staff checked through some questions for each book to make sure that you had actually read it. I was hooked! Having started with little English at the beginning of the year, I was nevertheless able to earn two books in this way. This gave me a sense of achievement I had not had reading in Spanish. I believe it imprinted in me positive associations with reading in English in general. So much so, that I am even now far more likely to read for pleasure in English than in Spanish, although I am trying to redress the balance.

> *"When half-awake, I have been known to speak in either English or Spanish (but I wouldn't be surprised if told I have spoken in French or Italian!)."*

Another area I developed in English much earlier (and further) than in Spanish was writing. I am not talking here about initial literacy, but about a more advanced development of the skill. I had, of course, had to write compositions in Argentina before I went to England. I remember thoroughly disliking the experience and resigning myself to the fact that I had a

letters

Readers Letter: Help Needed with Learning Arabic

We are an English/Sudanese family living in Turkey with our 3 year old son, Rafi. We have used the one parent one language system and have a Turkish speaking nanny. Our son took to English with ease, probably helped by the heavy presence of friends. As I am a teacher with access to resources, exposing him to the English language has never posed a problem. Likewise he is comprehensively exposed to Turkish through our environment and his beloved nanny. He started speaking early and is sponging up new words. However, predictably, there is a resistance to Arabic, although he seems to understand most of it.

Unfortunately we have very sporadic contact with the Sudanese community here in Istanbul. Invariably only Dad is speaking Arabic and he can clearly speak English and Turkish. I am keen that Rafi has more exposure and that the language becomes more relevant for him. Despite all my efforts I cannot get hold of any resources. Books and videos are either poor quality or heavily laced with religious teaching. I plan trips to Sudan but given current conditions they are unlikely to be regular enough to generate and maintain a good spoken level.

Are there any readers out there with the same dilemma or with any suggestions as to how I can get my son interested in communicating in Arabic?

Jackie Goudy, Istanbul

Contact details removed

mathematical mind (I was good at Maths), and had no imagination or creativity. On reflection, the problem was obviously more complex. The sort of writing we were requested to do involved narration and description on the basis of very little input. What I found during my Prior Weston days was that I could write long stretches of different kinds of text without much difficulty … provided I had something to say. It was the content and the need to put it across that was the driving force, writing was just the means.

The experience demanded considerable cultural adaptation as well, often of a kind I was not really aware of. A clear example of this happened when I returned to Argentina after a year in London. I returned to the same school and had the same classmates but, apparently, I was different. The first day back at school they all surrounded me and, in excitement, started bombarding me with questions. I stood paralysed by the noise, and asked, in a very low voice, "Please, don't shout". They couldn't believe it, but the fact was that I had got used to a different volume and had to make an effort to re-adjust. A process that continues to this day!

I started out by saying that English was my first Second Language. Chronologically, my third language was French, which I started learning around the age of 10; I then went on to complete the eight-year programme of the Alliance Française. My fourth language was German, which I studied for a couple of years from the age of 16. I have difficulty giving an order in Italian because I never learnt it 'properly', i.e. I didn't take classes. However, I have found myself in situations where I've had to translate, say from Italian into English and vice versa, and actually managed! Recently I have started learning Quichua and Argentine Sign Language.

These experiences have influenced my life in many ways. After secondary school I went on to become a teacher of English and then did a PhD. in Linguistics. Though linguists do not need to speak many languages, it is certainly an advantage. Conversely, knowledge of languages naturally leads to reflecting on language and languages. On a more personal level, both English and Spanish play a key role in my life. Although I live in a Spanish-speaking country, I tend to speak more English than Spanish. I speak English with my husband (he is English) even though, in the past few years of living in Argentina, he has learnt Spanish. Our relationship dates from before and it seems, for the time being at least, to be set in English. We have friends who speak both Spanish and English, and our social life includes both.

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NEWS FROM THE USA

Has Two-Way Been Oversold?

Jim Crawford

Paradoxically, at a time when bilingual education is being dismantled by English-only legislation or abandoned by timid school boards, two-way bilingual programs are thriving. Since the late 80s their number has increased nearly tenfold.

This remarkable growth stems from two factors. First is the appeal of the two-way (or "dual immersion") approach for English-speaking parents who value bilingualism. It offers something for their children that other pedagogies lack: peer models who are native speakers of the target language. These classrooms include limited-English-proficient (LEP) students from Spanish, Chinese, French, or Navajo backgrounds.

The second factor is near-unanimous enthusiasm for two-way programs among bilingual educators. Initially, the attraction was political. Opening bilingual education to language-majority students might help to insulate it from legislative attacks, the reasoning went. Increasingly, members of the field have come to embrace the two-way model for pedagogical reasons as well. Many have come to believe it may be the best way to bridge the persistent "achievement gap" between language-minority and English-speaking students. Welcome news indeed – if true.

In a 1997 research report, Wayne Thomas and Virginia Collier called two-way bilingual education "the program with the highest long-term academic success" for English learners. They reported that, by the end of secondary school, graduates reach the 70th percentile in English reading – far above their counterparts in other models such as all-English immersion (23rd percentile) and early-exit bilingual education (24th percentile). Yet, inexplicably, Thomas and Collier provided no achievement data to support their claims.

Other studies have since been published, with generally encouraging reports. But their findings have been considerably less dramatic. In the most comprehensive of these studies to date, Kathryn Lindholm-Leary* found that English learners reached the 29th percentile in English reading by grade 5 – higher than average for their 5th grade counterparts in California (16th percentile), but well below national norms. Hardly the educational miracle that is often portrayed.

Like most research in this area, Lindholm-Leary's study featured no controlled comparisons between two-way programs and other models for English learners. One exception to this pattern is Thomas and Collier's 2002 study in Houston – this time with data tables included – which reported that two-way was superior to "one-way" forms of bilingual education for English learners.

Again, however, their conclusions are open to question. From the outset, Spanish-speaking students receiving two-way instruction performed extremely well, scoring at the 68th percentile in English reading in 1st grade. Even though these scores declined somewhat by 5th grade, they remained higher than in virtually all studies of English learner programs, two-way or otherwise. Bear in mind that LEP students are typically reclassified as fully English-proficient around the 37th percentile. The obvious question – which the researchers failed to address – is why 1st graders scoring so far above that level were labeled LEP.

It seems likely that these children came from homes where both English and Spanish were spoken. Like their Anglo counterparts, many Latino parents are eager for their children to have the advantages of fluent bilingualism and biliteracy. By all indications, the two-way model is well adapted to meet those goals for academically "advantaged" children – whatever their language background.

Whether it is also the ideal program for English learners who face obstacles associated with poverty and parental illiteracy remains uncertain. Is it superior, for example, to one-way developmental bilingual education, whose promise is well documented?

As researcher Stephen Krashen recently argued, thus far the evidence on two-way bilingual education is "supportive and encouraging". Until more – and better – studies are published, however, there is too little scientific data "to state with 100% confidence that [this] is the best possible program for English learners".

It is also worth remembering that, in education, there is no one-size-fits-all.

*See *Dual Language Education* K. Lindholm-Leary (Multilingual Matters, 2001). For the sake of consistency, in this article NCE scores have been converted to percentiles.

James Crawford's latest book is *Educating English Learners: Language Diversity in the Classroom* (Bilingual Educational Services, 2004).

Q: Bilingualism and Intelligence

Our four children grew up in England with three languages (German, Danish and English). Since our move to Germany last year we kept up the children's trilingualism. In school our eldest daughter (age 7 years) has been put into a grade two years her senior and is doing very well, both academically and socially.

So far, she finds school positively challenging, as there is much she has to catch up with. She seems to be bright, which makes me wonder about the following:

I know that multilingualism is good for children's development and thinking ability. Obviously, children with a high IQ learn faster and more easily. But does multilingual upbringing just use the God given potential better than monolingual upbringing? Or can it even increase the IQ?

I have tried to get an answer from doctors and psychologists here, who say that you can't change or influence your intelligence. It's a potential that each and everyone needs to make best use of. But none of them have experience with multilingualism. So, I'm still wondering...

Judith Sørensen,
Hermannsburg, Germany

One misguided legacy of over 100 years of writing on bilingualism is that children's intelligence will suffer if they are bilingual. Some of the earliest research examined whether bilingual children were ahead or behind monolingual children on IQ tests. From the 1920s through to the 1960s, the tendency was to find monolingual children ahead of bilinguals. The conclusion was that bilingual children are mentally confused. Having two languages in the brain, it was said, disrupted efficient thinking. It was argued that having one well developed language was superior to having two half developed languages.

Early research was misconceived. First, such results often gave bilinguals an IQ test in their weaker language - usually English. Had bilinguals been tested in Welsh, Spanish or Hebrew, a different result might have been found. Second, like was not compared with like. Bilinguals tended to come from, for example, impoverished New York or rural Welsh backgrounds. Monolinguals tended to come from more middle class, urban families. The result was more likely to be due to class than language differences.

The most recent research suggests that bilinguals are, at least, equal to monolinguals on IQ tests. When bilinguals have two well developed languages, they tend to show a slight superiority in IQ test scores compared with monolinguals. Take, for example, a child who can operate in either language in the curriculum in school. That child is likely to be ahead on IQ tests compared with similar (same gender, social class and age) monolinguals. Far from making people confused, bilingualism is now associated with a mild degree of intellectual superiority.

One note of caution needs to be sounded. IQ tests probably do not measure intelligence. IQ tests measure a small sample of the broadest concept of intelligence. IQ tests are simply a paper and pencil test where only 'right and wrong' answers are allowed.

The current state of psychological wisdom about bilingual children is that, where two languages are relatively developed, bilinguals have thinking advantages over monolinguals. Take an example. A child is asked a simple question: How many uses can you think of for a brick? Some children give two or three answers only. Another child scribbles away, pouring out ideas one after the other.

> *The current state of psychological wisdom... is that, where two languages are relatively developed, bilinguals have thinking advantages over monolinguals.*

Research across different continents of the world shows that bilinguals tend to be more fluent, flexible, original and elaborate in their answers to this type of open-ended question. The person who can think of a few answers tends to be termed a convergent thinker. They converge onto a few acceptable conventional answers. People who can think of lots of different uses for unusual objects are called divergers. Divergers like a variety of answers to a question and are imaginative and fluent in their thinking.

While many monolinguals are divergers, there is a tendency for bilinguals to be ahead of monolinguals on such tests of creativity and divergent thinking. Having two or more words for each object and idea may mean there is more elasticity in thinking. For example, a Welsh/ English bilingual has the word 'school' and its Welsh equivalent 'ysgol'. 'Ysgol' also means ladder. The idea of school is thus extended to an image of schooling being a ladder. There is a sequential climb through school learning with the aim of getting to the top rung.

There are other dimensions in thinking where bilinguals with two well developed languages may have temporary and occasionally permanent advantages over monolinguals: increased sensitivity to communication, a slightly speedier movement through the stages of cognitive development, and being less fixed on the sound of words and more centered on the meaning. For example, imagine young children are asked: which is more like the word 'cap', 'cat' or 'hat'? There is a tendency for bilinguals to center more similarity of meaning (i.e. The word 'hat') than similarity to sound (i.e. 'Cat'). Such ability to move away from the sound of words and fix on the meaning of words tends to be a (temporary) advantage for bilinguals around the ages four to six. This advantage may mean an initial head start in learning to read and learning to think about language.

The above response is an edited excerpt from *A Parents and Teachers Guide to Bilingualism*
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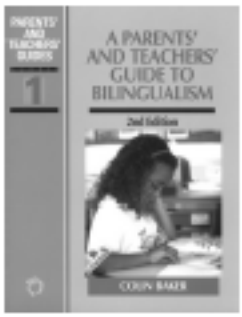

Biculturality: An Ideal or a Necessity?

Diane Frost MA DipTrans AIL, www.juniorlinguist.com

When embarking into the adventure of bilingualism with my first-born, I had no idea how easy or difficult it was going to be. I believed it necessary that my children – raised in England by French and English parents – had equal access to both cultures. Language was going to provide this access.

If I had overlooked the difficulties at first, I very quickly realised it was going to be an intensive and time consuming process. Three children later, that realisation was confirmed: I have devoted a lot of thought, research, time and energy into raising my three balanced bilinguals. But the kneading has paid off and the dough has risen beautifully!

I always felt that their double allegiance, or in linguistic terms, their double acculturation, was a necessary bi-product of their bilingual education. As they grew up I realised that it is in fact the end-product. Fluency in languages is only a means to an end: the Greeks knew that the "tongue can be the best and the worst thing". We can use it to speak the truth or to lie, to praise or to betray! It is essentially the medium through which culture and thought develop. In itself, language is therefore neutral. Language does not give you a sense of belonging: culture does. But language gives you access to that culture.

When I first looked for a job in London, freshly graduated from the Sorbonne in Paris, I was once interviewed by a high-flying TV executive who spent the entire time explaining that no one needed another language but English anymore… I listened in awe… Was TV reporting not about perspective, cultural understanding and communication?

> *In early bursts of anger, I quite literally felt "tongue-tied", but I now swear MUCH better in English! Though pillow-talk is still French…*

Since then, I have sometimes come up against those inflexible monolinguals – both in English and French speaking countries. Living in multicultural society in London, working as a linguist, raising bilingual children, I confess to becoming complacent and sometimes forgetting the extent of the monolingual hold on society, particularly on the business world. Isn't the linguists' catastrophe scenario of one language domination what global business aspires to? Isn't the global advertising campaign still an adman's dream?

I feel lucky that, by merely crossing the Channel, I have added a new perspective to the sensitivity I was born with. In early bursts of anger, I quite literally felt "tongue-tied", but I now swear MUCH better in English! Though pillow-talk is still French… More importantly, I have the use of two languages: two means of expressing myself, two ways of conceptualising the world around me.

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DAD'S CHAIR…

I explained to Timon (2 yrs, speaking German/Danish/English) what a lift is ('Fahrstuhl' in German).

Some time later we used a lift in a big store. Timon stepped in and asked: "Wo ist Fars Stuhl?" (Where is dad's chair?) 'Dad' in Danish is 'Far', 'Stuhl' is German for 'chair'.

'Fahrrstuhl' literally translated means 'moving chair'.

Imagining Multilingual Schools: An International Symposium on Language in Education

Ever wondered about the issues that confront educators and policy makers around the world as they educate multilingual students? Is there something we can learn from each other as we imagine multilingual schools and multilingual educational practices? You will have an opportunity to join a group of well-known international scholars at Columbia University's Teachers College as they share their visions and designs for multilingual schools in the 21st century. All 25 speakers for the international symposium have been invited to participate. The audience will be limited to 125 to ensure active dialogue among participants.

Among the scholars invited to this symposium are Hugo Baetens-Beardsmore, Jasone Cenoz, Jim Cummins, Viv Edwards, Fred Genesee, Nancy Hornberger, Luis Enrique Lopez-Hurtado, Teresa McCarty, Ajit Mohanty, Tope Omoniyi, Robert Phillipson, Richard Ruiz, Elana Shohamy, Josefina Tinajero, Tove Skutnabb-Kangas, Guadalupe Valdés and Li Wei.

Some of the following questions will be addressed:

- What role does school play in developing students' multilingualism and multilingual literacies?
- How do school systems throughout the world organize themselves to ensure the development of students' multilingualism?
- What are the differences and commonalities in the multilingual schooling of immigrant students, indigenous peoples, traditional minorities, and majority populations?
- What issues arise as schools develop multilingual educational programs?

There will be special panels and cultural events. In addition, New York City offers its multilingual energy and creativity as backdrop to the symposium.

The symposium is being co-chaired by Ofelia Garcia and Maria Torres-Guzmán of Columbia University's Teachers College. It is organized by the Bilingual Education Program and the new Center for Multiple Languages and Literacies (CMLL) of Teachers College, Columbia University. The Center for Applied Linguistics and the National Association for Bilingual Education are co-sponsoring the event with Teachers College. Multilingual Matters is offering support.

The registration fee for the full three-day sympopsium is $225 if registration is received prior to May 1st. The fee after May 1st is $300. We encourage all participants to register as soon as possible since registration will be limited. Don't miss this unique opportunity to be in a room with the world's experts! For further information, visit: **www.tc.columbia.edu/ceoi/languagesymposium.html**

An Artificial Mother Tongue?

Judith Sørensen

After eight years of living in the UK, my husband, from Denmark, and I decided to move to Germany, my home country. Our four children were all born in the UK and, with us speaking Danish and German in the home, grew up trilingually. Our aim has always been to enable our children to build strong relationships with the family by teaching them Danish and German and not using English inside our home. We used the one-person-one-language approach for a couple of years but, when an imbalance became evident, I began speaking German nine months of the year, and Danish for three. I never forced the children to speak a certain language, but made a game of it. They acted as policemen and locked me up if I got it wrong. The transition from using German to Danish and back was made natural by combining it with a visit to that country, or having visitors come over from there.

English is the least important language in our family. All our relatives are either Danish or German speaking. When we moved to Germany we still wanted the children not only to keep it, but also to develop it. We had to integrate English into our lives. As I am the person who spends most time with the children, I have the biggest influence on their language. Could I use English with them? Until then English had been a language of work, a cold language. It didn't seem right emotionally. However, I decided to give it a try.

Initially it felt unnatural, but little by little it has become easier. My aim is to keep the children flexible in their use of languages and to enable them to express themselves. I listen actively by forming their request into a proper sentence and getting them to repeat it. For example, if one child says, 'Mor, ich möchte etwas trinken!' I say, 'Mor, can I have a drink, please?' It is interesting that, if I speak in my usual pitch, my child either doesn't respond or tries to immitate me by speaking with a deep voice! But if I use her pitch, she willingly repeats the sentence in the 'right' language.

We have had concerns about using all three languages in our daily lives. We found it difficult to separate them and stick to one at a time. We were worried about our children not knowing which language to use but they seem to know that they can use all three languages with both of us, and that dad 'prefers' Danish and mum English. With their German grand- and great-grandparents, in whose house we live, they never speak anything but German.

The children have reacted very differently to these changes. Jael (6 years) is well balanced in German/Danish/English. She will answer in the language the question is put in. She is able to read all three languages and express herself freely in writing.

> *I never forced the children to speak a certain language, but made a game of it. They acted as policemen and locked me up if I got it wrong.*

When spending more time reading in one particular language, her spelling improves rapidly. In England she called Danish and German her 'secret languages'. Now, she actually prefers to use English, because 'it is something special' in Germany. She influences the younger ones by being so cooperative.

Timon (4 years) didn't like the change and got grumpy when I continued to use

Biculturality...

Continued from page 5

I also learnt that it is easier to evolve when you move from one language to another: ways that are set in one, become more pliant in another. Going from French to English gave me access to other benchmarks and allowed me more freedom to develop my own. I would, for example, have been a very different mother in France. I might have struggled more to find my own way of mothering. I feel lucky that I had to learn another language and adapt to its idiosyncratic ways - ways that were different, challenging, thought-provoking.

I would probably not have breastfed my children in France, or only for the 4 customary weeks, and this would have had an impact on my relationship to them and possibly their subsequent health. In England, I was greatly influenced by the work of the NCT and the Natural Parenting movement. My approach to motherhood was shaped by this "foreign" environment much more than by way of family example or upbringing. I felt a kinship to what I was discovering that went far beyond any sense of "foreignness": This was a culture I felt at ease with, I had always sensed only too acutely the dissonances in my own. I also became paradoxically aware of (French) voices of dissent such as the ones of Michel Odent and Frederic Leboyer – voices that are unheard in France and better understood here where they seem to have found their natural audience.

One progresses faster when confronted with a different linguistic system: it helped shape my values, alter my conceptions and challenge my beliefs. It seems to me that much of the world's arrogance and misunderstandings stem from a lack of cultural knowledge. Without knowledge there can be no tolerance. We are witnessing and, for some, suffering the effects of this right now.

Anybody who is currently able to read the non-English press, notably the Arabic, Hebrew or French papers, adds a radically different perspective to their understanding of our very complex multicultural world.

Grasping realities, understanding others, expressing yourself, making choices, are all areas where bi-culturality can make huge differences. I hope this will be my legacy to my children, above and beyond a double native tongue: a richer, truer, finer understanding of the world.

If, for most of us, multilingualism remains an ideal, I believe that for all of us multiculturalism has become a necessity. In the light of this, I should like to congratulate initiatives like the BFN for encouraging multilingual and multicultural education within the family.

Written in the Lake District, UK.

English. The reason was his insecurity and not being able to express what he wanted to say. I knew he could speak English, his kindergarten teachers had praised his classical English, he just didn't want to use it with me. I left him, only spoke English to him when he was happy and didn't interrupt him when he told me things in Danish or German. Over a period of days I started using English more and he began to tolerate it. He also seemed quite shocked when he learned that his friend (a 3-year-old who had moved from the UK back to Holland) couldn't speak English any more, wondering how he could communicate with her. He became more enthusiastic and, now, five weeks later, is using English freely (though not exclusively) when telling me about his experiences.

Hadassah (2 years 8 months) thought it much fun in the beginning, but then started opposing my using English. I tried to convince her but she would not have it and got grumpy, asking me to use dad's language! Paying her full attention one night (after the others had been put to bed) did the trick: playing her favorite game and reading her a story (aimed at her age and not her big brother's) - all in English, showing her that mummy loves her no matter what language she uses. She now happily joins Timon in his 'playschool lessons', speaking English when showing me what she created with playdough etc. Her vocabulary is limited, but she uses English words wherever she can and understands almost everything. Now, three weeks later, she surprises me by using sentences like: 'Can you wipe my mouth, please?' or 'What is stir?' when she didn't understand my instruction of stirring her soup.

Naomi (1 year) doesn't say a lot, but didn't show signs of distress when I started using English with her. She uses a few words (hi & bye-bye, bitte & danke) and reacts to a lot more in all three languages.

Which language the children use among themselves depends on circumstances, surroundings and what they are occupied with at the time. They used to use German mainly, some Danish, but have now started using English as well.

To outsiders our language situation may look confusing. But as long as our children choose their languages purposefully and address people properly, we are quite happy. I am grateful to all those British mums and toddlers, who equipped me with the vocabulary needed to use English with my children. I certainly didn't learn that at school!

My Language and I...
Continued from page 3

At work I use Spanish and English; I have taught university courses in both; at the office I speak English and Spanish with different people. I read for work in English, Spanish, even French, Italian and Portuguese; for pleasure I read in English, Spanish and French (in order of frequency). I prefer to read the original to a translated version. The same applies to TV and film, which has been greatly facilitated by technologies such as DVD.

> *[my confidence stemmed] from a decreasing concern with attempting to achieve perfection, i.e. become the perfect spy who can fit in anywhere.*

One interesting aspect of my experience with English is something that developed over time. As a consequence of my exposure to English, my formal studies in the language, and a more indefinable factor related to 'picking up' languages, I have been taken for a native speaker, even by true native speakers of English. This is a very disconcerting experience, but mostly for my interlocutors who seem to be very concerned with 'placing' me, or my accent. In the States, they immediately identify me as British, as do most people from countries other than Britain. In the UK, or more specifically in England, the concern is with placing me geographically (or socially?). I appear to have picked up a rather 'neutral' accent that can pass off for native. I emphasise the 'picking up' nature of this process because I have never made a conscious effort to try to sound like anybody, not beyond the phonetics classes I took in college at which I wasn't particularly good. However, this is not simply a function of contact and exposure. I have not, for example, picked up my husband's English. Interestingly enough, I am very bad at impersonating people or accents when trying to do it intentionally; however, if I find myself in the right context, I tend to pick up the local 'lingo'. I once spent a little over a week in the Dominican Republic. Even after this short period of time, I left the country speaking with what I can only describe as a Dominican 'sign-song' accent.

Often people ask me "what language do you dream in?" as if this were an indication of what language is prevalent. I always find myself explaining that there is no absolute rule. When dreaming I think I tend to dream in images rather than words, and when words crop up, the language used is conditioned by the language I normally use with that person, or in that context of the communication. Interestingly, when half-awake, I have been known to speak in either English or Spanish (but I wouldn't be surprised if told I have spoken in French or Italian!).

As far as making mistakes goes, I certainly make mistakes … in all languages! This is something I have stopped worrying about. I used to think that the mistakes I made in English were simply a sign of the fact that I was not a native speaker. Then, at times when I was mostly in contact with English and spoke little Spanish, I noticed I started making mistakes in Spanish. I realised that it was a question of regular exposure rather than order of acquisition. Also, I noticed that native speakers made mistakes, hesitated and generally stumbled over their use of language, less often than non-native speakers, but mistakes definitely existed. This realisation contributed to building up my confidence, which did not stem from greater knowledge of the language, but from a decreasing concern with attempting to achieve perfection, i.e. become the perfect spy who can fit in anywhere.

The editor, with the help of the International Editorial Board, is happy to answer any queries you may have on bilingualism /biculturalism. We reserve the right to edit any letters published.

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French/Dutch families in South France with young children sought by student looking for for a research project about bilingual children. The research is about upbringing and linguistic aspects of bilingualism. I'm a 22 year old Dutch developmental psychology student and I'm studying in France (Montpellier) for 1 semester. Next school year I'm also doing the same study in the Netherlands. If you are interested in this research you can email me.

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Norwegian Playgroup. We meet once a month in North London to encourage Norwegian language and culture in a friendly and informal environment. For more information contact Astrid Griffiths.

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Spanish day nursery. Due to a favourable OFSTED report, permission has been granted for Peques to operate continuously for 50 weeks per year. Peques is now able to receive applications for enrolment from babies 3 months+. Additionally Peques Club can accept applicants 2-8 years 8am-6pm. Choice of Morn/Afternoon/All Day. Peques Club is open to all and will operate during normal school holidays and half terms. Peques can also provide Spanish lessons to all 4 year olds, evenings, after school hours.

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Glossary

Immersion Bilingual Education: Schooling where some or most subject content is taught through a second language. Pupils in immersion are usually native speakers of a majority language, and the teaching is carefully structured to their needs.

Incipient Bilingualism: the early stages of bilingualism where one language is not strongly developed. Beginning to aquire a second language.

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