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news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

IN THIS ISSUE

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editorial

Doing things differently is not always easy. As Joseph Shaules excellent article on the manifestations of culture shock, or cultural fatigue, shows, even advice from people who have been there before is not necessarily as helpful as you would expect.

Similarly, Constanze Taylor's retrospective look at bringing up a bilingual family also shows that what works for some people, may not work for everyone. By rejecting One-Parent-One-Language [OPOL], in favour of using the minority language in the home, Constanze and her family found a method that worked for them.

The latest installment of the Barron-Hauwert family's bilingual adventures also shows how change can be a disruptive, yet learning, experience. If we were to look for a common thread, it seems that flexibility and open-mindedness is key to success in multilingual/intercultural living. While the advice of experts and peers can be valuable, it's in finding your own path that the experience comes into its own.

Sami Grover

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Culture Shock: Received Wisdom and a Grain of Salt

Joseph Shaules

Joseph Shaules has worked as an intercultural educator in Mexico, Japan and France for more than 20 years. This article is based on his recent book by Multilingual Matters, Deep Culture: The Hidden Challenges of Global Living, *(see page 4 for details) which helps sojourners understand the intercultural experience.*

The best source of information about how to get along in a new country comes from expatriates who've gone before. Or does it?

Before leaving London for a two-year stay in the US, Linda got advice from friends who had lived there before. Everyone had great things to say about her opportunity to have an "adventure in America".

"Oh, you'll love it there! The people are so open," she was told. Her sister declared "You're so lucky! I'd like to get away too!" But life in the US wasn't what Linda expected. Few of her neighbors came over to introduce themselves and Linda had no interest in their "coffee klatches". She knew that it was how they socialized, but somehow it seemed artificial. She had trouble making friends and minor inconveniences rankled. At the supermarket she missed products from back home, and dealing with minor problems (like calling a plumber) always seemed more complicated than she expected. For months she found herself vaguely depressed. Once back in England she did feel, however, that the experience had been worthwhile. Eventually, when asked about life in the US, she talked about how wonderful it was, as though it really had simply been a grand adventure.

Linda misjudged the challenges she would face going abroad, despite having asked for advice. Yet for someone who will live abroad, the best source of information about how to get along comes from expatriates who've gone before. Or does it? Research shows that though the received wisdom of other expatriates can be useful in terms of the concrete details of life abroad – good restaurants, how transportation systems work, foods that one should try – we often have to take advice about the deeper challenges of adapting – i.e. how can I avoid culture shock? How do I make friends and get along with people? How can stress be managed? – with a grain of salt.

As for Linda, several years later she moved to France. This time, she had a very

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different experience. From the start she assumed that things would be a challenge and took it upon herself to put more effort into her experience. Despite the difficulties of learning French and adapting to a new culture, she felt she was on a "voyage of discovery". However, she had had to learn her lessons the hard way.

Change is Stressful

One reason Linda was stressed in the United States was that she didn't expect to have to change. After all, Americans speak English and she was familiar with the country. She thought that "being herself" would be enough. But this kind of thinking can backfire. Linda found that how Americans socialized, their sense of humor, what they talked about, etc. weren't the same as back home. Her unwillingness to adapt, and the negative judgments she made about her neighbors, created stress. In France, on the other hand, she assumed from the start that she would need to learn a new language, learn about French culture, food, etc. Her willingness to experiment with "alternate selves" allowed her to appreciate difference rather than be stressed by it.

Humans are creatures of habit. A vacation is fun because we are relieved of the normal demands of everyday life, but *living* abroad means that everyday life is actually more demanding than usual. In fact, the most satisfying experiences abroad are generally those that involve successfully meeting the most difficult challenges. Simply "being abroad" is not enough to guarantee a positive experience. Having an "adventure" necessarily involves getting outside of our comfort zone. Yet the stresses of life abroad are often vague and hard to describe, meaning that it's hard to know where to turn when things aren't as easy as we'd like.

Horror Stories

One common symptom of expatriate stress is the telling of "horror stories" about the travails of life in the host country. While these stories are often intended to simply report "the facts" of life abroad, they often contain implicit criticisms. In one case, Philippe, a French researcher living in Germany, told of being reprimanded for not separating his garbage correctly. Glass, plastics, bottles, etc had to be put in appropriate bins. Philippe hadn't bothered (the rules seemed excessively "picky"). His "horror story" involved recounting how his landlord had noticed this, gone through his garbage to find out who was responsible, and had then informed the police. Philippe recounted to his French colleagues in great detail how he was contacted at work by the police to discuss it. The hidden message behind his story, however, was not simply about understanding the system for separating garbage. His broader conclusion was that Germans are obsessed with rules and regulations. Stories like this may be intended as advice, but they don't really serve their purpose. They may even reinforce negative judgments that make adapting even more difficult.

Accepting Difference

Research shows that the people who have the most positive attitudes about their home abroad are those that accept, at a fundamental level, the difference they find. When in a new country, it's natural to compare what we find with things back home. But this can lead to criticism when things seem untidy, inefficient, impractical, etc. In Philippe's case, the detailed system for garbage collection seemed obsessive because he didn't fully accept that what is "normal" often simply depends on what you are used to. The healthiest attitude to take abroad is simply "things are the way they are". This doesn't mean we like everything we find, but we must recognize that difference is something that is best dealt with by suspending judgment. Not only does this help us complain less, but we end up learning more when we don't spend our time judging and critiquing.

> *Having an "adventure" involves getting outside our comfort zone. Yet the stresses of life abroad are hard to describe, meaning that it's hard to know where to turn when things aren't as easy as we'd like.*

Dora the Explorer: One Adventure Too Many?

We're a Finnish-English family living in Finland. Recently we have discovered a bilingual children's program called Dora the Explorer. We wondered what people think with regards to the benefits or drawbacks of this program on our multilingual children.

The program is positive about bilingualism but we wondered if the way languages are interchanged within the same sentence may confuse our children? They are two and eight years old. For our two year old we have followed the one-parent-one-language approach from birth. Our eight year old's mother tongue is Finnish, but we have recently adopted the same tactic for her and her understanding of English has begun to excel.

The program here is in Finnish with key words or phrases in English. English is usually spoken when a character appears who only speaks English, although the main character Dora freely switches between languages. Obviously this is a difficult question to answer, but we would appreciate any readers' thoughts or opinions. Of course, the amount of exposure in the bigger picture is very little.

Dora the Explorer is replicated in many countries. Details of this can be found at:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dora_the_Explorer

Symon Family, Finland

Deep Culture

The word "culture" often conjures up images of architecture and art, music and the finer things that any society produces. When specialists talk about culture, however, they often picture an iceberg, with much hidden below the surface, or an onion, with layers upon layers of "deep culture" hidden from everyday view. "Deep culture" consists of the values and expectations that simply "make sense" when you've been raised a certain way. Valuing (and expecting) order makes queue jumping seem rude, just as valuing (and expecting) sharing makes it normal in much of Africa to offer part of your lunch to a stranger sitting next to you on a bus. The value in Asia of giving "face" makes for elaborate treatment for guests, and so on.

Living abroad provides a wonderful opportunity to explore this deeper side of cultural difference. Unfortunately, deep cultural difference is not always recognized as such. In one study, Australian students who had spent a year studying at a university in France were asked to give advice to the next batch of students. In particular, they were asked to give advice on how best to find information on the French campus. This research question was chosen for a reason. Compared to Australian universities, French universities tend to emphasize more personal, or "particularist" information diffusion strategies. Students are often expected to share information with each other and seek answers to specific questions from particular administrators. In Australia, on the other hand, information diffusion tends to be seen as something impersonal and systematic. Students may be told to "look it up in the course catalogue" or "check the website". The researchers wanted to find out if spending a year dealing with a French university was enough for students to understand that the information gathering strategies that work in Australia may not work in France, and that there are deep cultural differences involved.

Discouragingly, the advice offered by the Australian students was typically "Just remember that the French are inefficient". Even those who gave effective strategies, such as "develop good relationships with administrators", often couched their comments in critical terms, such as: "Basically, nobody knows what's going on, so you have to kiss the arse of whatever office person you can find." What students didn't see was that their expectations about what constitute efficiency were based in deep cultural values. French students in Australia also have frustrating experiences, but for

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Notes from the OPOL Family

Lessons Learned...

Suzanne Barron-Hauwert

How you say that?

The first few months in our new home in France are a shock for Gabriel. He was born in England and spent the last four years in Malaysia and America, in mostly English-speaking environments. France, for Gabriel, has been summer holidays. But he's old enough to understand that we will live in France now and that he'll go to school there too. The only problem is that he only speaks a few words of French. When he does speak he does so with an English accent. This was tolerated, even considered amusing in the holidays, but it will not be so funny once he starts school.

I organize playdates for Gabriel with his four-year-old cousins, Louise and Simon, to help him learn some real French. After a week Gabriel has learnt to say 'I want play', 'Me too' and 'Let's go hide' in French, which is enough to join in their games. But Louise and Simon are so articulate they simply talk for Gabriel, and he often gets angry. Gabriel urgently needs more vocabulary.

'How you say that?' he shouts constantly, pointing at people, animals and objects. Gabriel wants the French translation of everything, and is angry when it is the same word or if there is no direct translation. His siblings fill in the gaps and he repeats them over and over.

Gabriel is a sociable child at heart and tries to communicate, trying out new words or greetings, but when he says '*Bonjour Madame*!' to everyone we meet, he has to be told off for upsetting several gentlemen and young unmarried girls in the local market. 'He's just learning French…', I explain.

Sorry is the hardest word…

Cultural differences are often most obvious when children are misbehaving. In England, even close friends would not tell off someone else's child, unless they have been really naughty. But the French quickly tell a child they hardly know not to do something. In this way Gabriel is brought to task for throwing mud at a little girl at a party. I am angry with him and agree he needs punishing. I promise to deal with him later, but the girl's father wants a public apology.

Gabriel mutters 'Sorry!' and walks off. 'What?' says the father in French 'I didn't understand?' I whisper to Gabriel to say it in French. 'I'm sorry.' he says again. Meanwhile, the crowd grows around us, fascinated with the linguistic games Gabriel is playing and agreeing that 'Sorry' is just not enough.

Eventually he says '*Desolé*.' and walks off. But the father wants him to kiss the girl too. Kiss the girl? Gabriel is stunned. He doesn't know her and he only kisses girls he likes. Parents whisper that there is a child here who won't *kiss*. I try to negotiate a hug or perhaps a handshake to end it. But no, he must kiss to say sorry. So with some persuasion Gabriel comes back and reluctantly kisses the mud-spattered girl twice on each cheek. Yuck! Gabriel learns an important lesson - an apology is not an apology unless everyone understands it...

Snowy or Blanche?

We go to buy a rabbit for Nina, her first ever pet. She picks a tiny snowy white dwarf rabbit. I suggest Snow White as a name. 'OK' says Nina 'I'll call her *Blanche Neige'*.

I chat to the rabbit while we settle her in and Nina reminds me that the rabbit only speaks French. 'I can't talk to a rabbit in French!' I say, 'It doesn't seem right, and anyway she can learn English!' But Nina is adamant, only French. 'The rabbit's mother was French, so if we speak English to her she will miss her mother even more and feel sad.' Nina says, making me feel terrible. 'But what if her father was an English bunny?' I joke. 'Impossible' says Nina, looking serious. 'How could two rabbits from different countries ever meet?'

In the end we do a deal. As the official 'grandmother' of the rabbit, I am allowed to speak English to Snowy, and it's new mother, Nina, will only speak French to *Blanche*. Who knows we might even have a bilingual bunny one day!

You can read more about how Suzanne and her family cope with bilingualism and bringing up their children on her blog:

http://opol-family.blogspot.com/

Bilingualism and Siblings: Help Needed

I am writing a book on *Siblings and Bilingualism* (due to be published in 2008 by Multilingual Matters) and I need your input! So, what is it all about?

From informal website discussion groups to organized seminars and workshops, parents wonder how they can facilitate the best language environment within their particular family. The majority of the important academic research on bilingualism over the last century was carried on first-borns or only children. Although this research is still valid we need to widen the net and look at the bigger picture of one, two, three or more children. How does birth order, gender, age-gap or personality affect language leaning in the bilingual family?

We should not forget parents who may not be living together, step-parents and step-siblings, or adopted children. There are other important people in the world of the bilingual child too, such as teachers, daycare workers, tutors, nannies, babysitters, or anyone who might affect the child's decision to use or refuse to use a language.

As an independent researcher I focus on the bilingual family as a whole, because these are people that I meet regularly and hear their concerns. They are often geographically divided from their extended families, and struggling to keep their children academically on track in one language, while supporting another at home or through the community. This book will bring together the thoughts of real bilingual families on siblings taken from an online questionnaire, case-studies from around the globe, and current research on multilingualism.

For three ways to participate and more information, please go to my blog at: bilingualsiblings@blogspot.com

1.Click on the blog link to complete the anonymous online questionnaire**.**

2.Be part of a mini case-study for the book. Send me details of your family, with a brief history of your family, and any particular issues you may have had with siblings and bilingualism.

3.Reply to the open questions on my blog, or email me your thoughts and experiences of siblings and bilingualism.

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert
Author of '*Language Strategies for Bilingual Families'*
(Multilingual Matters, 2004)

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opposite reasons. They may find that despite having gone to the trouble of coming to the office for official information from someone "in the know", that they are simply told to look things up online. From the French point of view, this can seem quite "inefficient".

Cultural Fatigue

Many imagine that it's bizarre food or exotic customs that cause culture shock. The stories we hear about unusual food or strange habits can reinforce this perception. The reality is that due to globalization life abroad is more convenient than ever. It's easy to stay in touch with loved ones back home and most expatriates won't need to eat cooked insects or sleep in a grass hut. But while extreme culture shock may be less common than in the past, most sojourners still experience a form of "culture fatigue".

When we are in a familiar environment we multitask and still have plenty of mental energy to think, socialize, or even just daydream. While driving to work we may already be organizing our day; when driving home we may already be planning dinner. When abroad, the things we normally do without thinking – grocery shopping, a trip to the bank, ordering in a restaurant – involve much more uncertainty. This incompetence is tiring and stressful. Yet many sojourners don't identify the source of this stress as cultural difference.

Concentric Circles

Culture fatigue is one of the most predictable challenges of learning to live abroad. To counteract it, it may help to actively make decisions which give you control of your new environment. Using a concentric circles approach, take control of your immediate physical environment first – the innermost circle. For example, upon arrival unpack everything. Even in a hotel, the act of taking your possessions out of a suitcase and putting them in drawers helps you claim territory for yourself. Being in control doesn't mean you get everything you want, but you are making decisions which affect your living environment and this can increase your sense of control.

In a similar vein, it's not always better to have everything arranged prior to your arrival. One expatriate arrived ahead of his wife in order to set up their household. When she arrived their apartment was already full of their possessions, which had been shipped ahead. While the husband's intentions were good, in some ways it made things worse for his wife. When she arrived she had little to do and few decisions to make about her home and possessions. She felt alienated sitting on her own furniture which had been arranged by someone else in a house that she hadn't chosen.

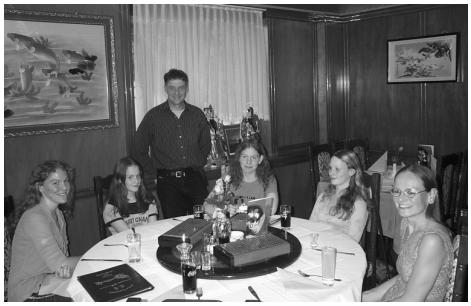
Once you develop a feeling of control over the inner circle of your home, work on the next circle: the neighborhood and needs for daily life. Walk around your neighborhood with a map of the area, marking sites that may be of use – a laundromat, vegetable store, pharmacy. Don't wait until you need those things to seek them out. Fortunately, this is the one area that those who have gone before us can help us the most with.

When she arrived she had few decisions to make about her home and possessions. She felt alienated sitting on her own furniture which had been arranged by someone else in a house that she hadn't chosen.

Any advice or information that helps us have a better idea of what to expect in a new environment can be useful. Remember, however, that not all expatriates adapt successfully to their new environments and their hidden frustrations can colour the stories they tell and the advice they give. There's often nothing wrong with received wisdom, but sometimes it's best taken with a grain of salt.

The Effects of a Bilingual Upbringing on Adult Life

Constanze Taylor



The whole Taylor family at the Chinese restaurant: (From left to right) Melanie, Bettina, Julian, Stefanie, Andrea, Constanze Taylor

20 years after writing my first article in the BFN "One Parent – One Language. Is it always the best approach?" Vol:4 No:4), I I thought I'd take a look back on the ups and downs, the fun and the problems we had together in our attempts at being German-English bilinguals. I make no claim to summarizing recent research results on the subject of bilingualism. Nor have I performed my own research. I just want to express my personal opinions based on both my own long experience with my daughters' bilingual upbringing, and also influenced by the opinions and experiences expressed by authors of previous articles in the BFN.

First, I would like to describe my daughters' development of English language skills, English being their weaker language. Unsurprisingly, German has been their stronger language, since they were brought up in Germany. It was clear to us from the start that in our family, the father's native tongue would not stand much change of survival if we observed OPOL. For this reason we chose to make English the family language, which meant that I spoke a language with the children which was not my native tongue. I read about various other readers of the BFN who also used this approach, one of them was the Trott family who at that time lived near Hamburg, Germany (Language Development of a German-English Bilingual Child, pts. 1&2 Vol: 5 Nos: 2&3).

Another important aspect so often addressed in the BFN is biliteracy. What if the children start school, and learn how to read and write in their first language? Since reading and writing is rarely taught to young children in German schools in a second language, we had to make alternative arrangements. There was a club for families in Darmstadt, not far from where we lived, for families whose native tongue was English. They offered reading and writing classes for these children. My family was able to join the group for a while and to send them to the English lessons that they organized. Being able to read books in English gave their second language more meaning, and it also gave them more of an incentive to carry on using it at home.

Now let's look back at each of my children's bilingual learning experience in turn.

My Daughters' Bilingual past

Stefanie, now 24-years-old:

As I said in my BFN, article from December 1987, by the time Steffi was 3 1/3 we decided not to stick to a system of "One Parent One Language" any longer and we both spoke English to the children while Daddy was at home. Since Steffi was the oldest at the time, my husband spent a lot of time talking to her while I was busy looking after the two younger ones. This gave Steffi an excellent head-start in English. After leaving school, Steffi lived in Brighton, England, for two years (2003/2004). At that time, she became so fluent that noone would have taken her for a non-native speaker of English.

> *It was clear to us from the start that in our family, the father's native tongue would not stand much change of survival if we observed OPOL.*

Melanie, now 22-years-old:

For unknown reasons, Melli developed a strong liking for English when she was about 4. She liked her English reading and writing lessons in Darmstadt and always wanted to do her homework whenever Steffi did hers. When Daddy was at home, I spoke in English to both Melli and Andrea. Later on, in 2001 and 2002, when Melli was 16/17 years old she spent 10 months in Florida where she also attended high school and stayed with a host family.

Andrea, now 20-years-old:

Andrea was the most talkative of all my daughters. She started forming complete sentences in English during a holiday with her grandparents in London when she was only 21 months old. After that, we spent 3 weeks at my parents' flat in Munich, where she then learned to form sentences in German too. She was never shy and always very confident talking, even to people outside the family. However, when she was 3, she began to lose her English. Therefore Julian, my husband, suggested that I talk English to the children all the time, even in his absence, a suggestion that I gladly accepted. I kept up until we moved house again in 1995, which I regret very much. Andrea preferred German most of the time, although she did go through phases when she showed off her English skills, for example when she was asked to be one of the main characters in a school musical. Now that she is a management assistant in a travel agency, she knows that her English is an asset at work. She is currently studying for her Certificate of Advanced English in an evening class, and one language course last winter even took her to South Africa.

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The Effects of Bilingual Upbringing
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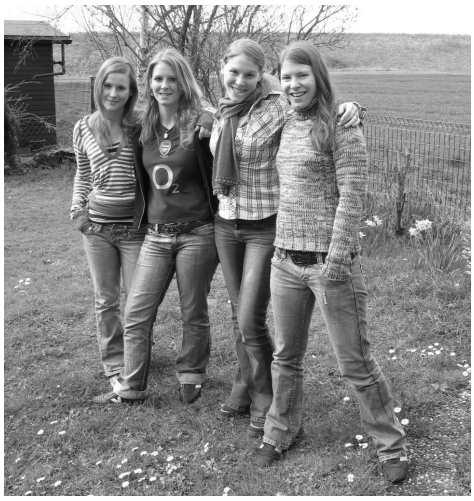

My four daughters in our garden: (From left to right) Bettina, Andrea, Melanie, and Stefanie Taylor

Bettina, now 18-years-old:

I spoke English with Bettina right from the start. As far as Bettina is concerned, I was therefore an artificial bilingual like George Saunders ["Artificial" Bilingualism, BFN Vol: 3 No:3]. Apart from speaking English with Bettina in everyday life, I also made sure I read stories to her at bedtime, and provided her with movies in English from Granny in London. That way, she had a large vocabulary in English, and spoke it with me by the time she was 2, although she still spoke German with her sisters and their friends. While she uses German with everybody now, I was amused recently to hear that when translating a text from French into German, the English words occurred to her first. A teacher also mentioned that she uses anglicisms in her German.

The Present

I designed a questionnaire asking each of my daughters how they felt about being brought up bilingually, now that they are adults. I asked them how they felt about knowing two languages, what we as parents could have done better to encourage their bilingual learning experience, and how they would feel themselves about bringing a child up bilingually. They all experienced it as positive, enjoyable, and also believe they benefited from learning two languages. They all addressed the usefulness for a future career. Steffi conceded that she sometimes felt "torn between two worlds". I was not at first sure why she felt this way, especially since she took such great care and developed her language skills so well. Maybe this was the very reason: the pursuit of perfection. In other words, the more one knows, the more one is also aware of what the problems are. An interesting aspect Steffi reported was that her English friends often laughed at her dry humour while among her German friends, that sort of humour did not seem to go down so well. I took this as evidence that she has some English as well as German cultural influences.

When asked what we could have done better, two of them, Melli and Bettina, stated that she would attempt to make both languages more "present" in the family. Steffi did not have suggestions for improvement – she thought everything was fine. I agree that I could have been more persistent speaking to them in English. I kept speaking to them exclusively in English from the day Andrea was 3 until the early 1990s. When I finally started working full time again, I found the whole affair too tiring, especially since the children persistently spoke to me in German – they sometimes seemed to find the whole affair with artificial bilingualism literally a bit artificial. Perhaps I should have been more persistent.

The Long Way to Learning Arabic in Jordan

When we moved to Jordan three years ago, my husband (Danish) and I (German) decided that our two children, then aged three-and-a-half years and twenty months, should learn Arabic. We wanted them to fully integrate into their new environment and be able to have contacts beyond the expat community. We put them into a nursery in our neighbourhood and thought the rest would come by itself. However, we ignored how difficult it is to practice Arabic with Jordanians other than taxi-drivers and car-washers in the westernised parts of Amman. Wherever my children appeared, people would ask them: *"What's your name?"*

"In Arabic, please", I used to say. *"Really?"* would come the reply, with a suspicious look at my kids' fair hair and blue eyes. When we were lucky, they gave it a try: *"Shu ismak?"* No answer, as my children are shy at first contact with strangers. *"What's your name?"*, it went again. Still no answer, but this did not keep the Jordanian party from chatting on in English…

The most attractive bookshops in town offer more childrens' books in English than in Arabic, and activities offered in the well-off neighbourhoods are often all-English. Some middle-/upper-class Jordanians speak only English with their children, others are mixing languages in the way of *"biddak strawberries?"* (do you want strawberries?) or *"shuf al-lizard"* (look at the lizard). When I pointed at the picture of a chimpanzee in a book and asked my daughter if she knew what it was called in Arabic (after half a year in the local kindergarten), she proudly answered: *"Monkey!"*

There are some people and even associations in my home-country that criticize the increasing use of English terms in the German language. If they witnessed what is going on in Jordan, they would deem themselves lucky.

Maybe Jordanians believe that it is genetically impossible for Non-Arabs to learn their language. I was not much more successful in practicing Arabic than my children. I did an intensive course during my first year in Jordan and reached quite a good level. Still, when I tried to use my knowledge people would give me a blank look and ask in English (which sometimes was no better than my Arabic) what I needed. At the beginning I sometimes pretended to be Estonian or Hungarian and understand nothing but my native language and Arabic. But finally I gave up and resigned myself to speaking English from the start. Then I met these people who asked me – after having learnt that I had spent quite some time in Jordan: *"So why don't you try to speak Arabic?"* !!!

My appeal to the people in our host-country: Be proud of your language! Give newcomers a chance! We are willing to try with your help.

Monika Koeller, Amman

P.S.: We continued struggling and my children have now reached a fair level in Arabic. We found a good bilingual school, supportive teachers and employed a Jordanian student to practice with them in the afternoon. So learning Arabic in Jordan is possible, but demands perseverance.

Another interesting aspect that I wondered about is the next generation. I asked them whether they would bring a child up bilingually should they ever have one. At present, this is still a question of the distant future, but they all felt they would at least try to speak English to their children, though they admitted it would be difficult, since all of their boyfriends are German.

The Limits to Bilingualism

Looking back on it, we made great efforts to give English a chance in our family, but even then we were up against certain limits. I believe some factors play a role here: the non-native speaker's level of support of, or proficiency in, the minority language; the attitude of the native speaker themselves; support from the environment and contact to other native speakers; status of the minority language in the majority environment, and even money – all of these can play a major role in the success of bilingual child rearing.

Let me explain what I mean when I talk about "limits" to bilingualism, and how I think they can be overcome, by using our personal experience as an example.

Support from the non-native speaker:

In our case, the non-native speaker is me. If the non-native speaker of the minority language is also the non-working parent, and if at the same time they have the speak language as the majority environment – in our case, German – the child has very little exposure to the minority language - in our case this would only have been when Daddy was home. As I explained, to balance things out, we did not observe the OPOL rule, but I spoke English with the children, too.

Degree of proficiency and attitude of the non-native speaker:

It certainly helps if the partners can speak each others languages. This was also pointed out by my daughter Melli who said she would try to bring a child up bilingually, but would find it hard if the father spoke only German.

Support from the environment:

Whether or not a child maintains a second language may also depend on the environment. The presence of other speakers of the second language – grandparents, other families etc. – can be a great help. Whether or not the language is taught at school, or is heard regularly in the media, will also be a factor. Even if neither of the above is the case, it at least helps if the surrounding community (i.e. grandparents, neighbours, teachers etc.) has a favourable attitude to bilingualism. Bilinguals may, for example, have it easier in cities with an international community rather than in an isolated community where they may face prejudice against foreigners, for example.

"Looking back on it, we made great efforts to give English a chance in our family, but even then we were up against certain limits."

Status of the minority language:

It certainly helps if the minority language enjoys a high status in society. Since English is a world language, it is unlikely to be lost, even if children refuse to speak it for a while. Even 'passive' English skills are often revived when children learn it as a second language at school. As Bettina, my youngest daughter, put it: "Everybody learns English anyway".

Material available in the minority language:

To give meaning to the minority language and make it enjoyable for children, it helps a lot to have books, songs and movies in the minority language.

Money:

It is sometimes difficult to keep up a second language with limited financial means. If one has to pay off a mortgage on a house, for example, one may not have the money to travel to the country where the grandparents live. Similarly, sending the children to a bilingual school or buying material in the minority language also costs money. Therefore, I was always very pleased when the English grandmother provided us with lots of books and video tapes or DVDs in English. One thing that really enhanced their English was not only stories, but also non-fiction books, particularly about a subject which happened to be their hobby. I remember when the children had pets, I asked "Granny" to send us books on how to look after them. The children learned a lot of new vocabulary that way.

In conclusion, I hope this article will encourage readers with small children to persevere in their efforts to speak two or more languages with their children, and will also draw their attention to what they must watch out for, if they want these efforts to be successful. I certainly wish everyone good luck.

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Glossary

Communicative Competence: Proficiency in the use of a language in everyday conversations. This term accents being understood rather than being 'correct' in using a language. Not only knowing grammar and vocabulary of a language, but also knowing the social and culturally appropriate uses of a language.

Community Language: A language used by a particular community or in a particular area, often referring to language minority groups.

Community Language Learning: A second language teaching methodology based on Rogerian counselling techniques and responding to the needs of the learner 'community'.

Competence in Language: A person's ability to create and understand language. This goes further than an understanding of vocabulary and grammar, requiring the listener to understand sentences not heard before. Competence is often used to describe an idealized speaker/hearer with a complete knowledge of the whole language, and is distinguished from performance which is the actual use of the language by individuals.

Compound Bilingualism: One language is learned at the same time as another, often in the same contexts.

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