

The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People

Editor: Marjukka Grover Assistant Editor: Sami Grover 2002, Vol 19 No.2

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EDITORIAL

Welcome to the summer issue of the *Bilingual Family Newsletter*. Firstly, I should probably introduce myself. I'm Sami, Marjukka and Mike's youngest and the latest to join the *MM* team. I have been taking care of much of the day to day admin for the *BFN*, particularly as Marjukka is still nursing her mother in Finland. She has asked me to thank you all for the many kind messages of support she has been getting. Many of you understand all too well the additional difficulties that international families face at such times.

Thank you also to all of you who have sent in articles, letters and queries. Your contributions are all much appreciated. Please do keep them coming.

As explained above, I have been dealing with much of the day to day running of the newsletter and am still on a steep learning curve. Things have been a little hectic at times and it is possible that some contributions may have been lost (as Marjukka will attest, I am living proof that an ability to 'file' two or more languages doesn't necessarily translate into a natural ability for other sorts of filing!). We have now got things under control, but if you have sent something in and have not heard back from me, then please email, fax or phone me, giving your name, the title of the contribution and the method of submission (email, post, fax, etc.). I will endeavour to get back to you as soon as possible.

That's it for now. I wish you all a beautiful summer. I hope you enjoy the issue, and that you learn as much from reading it as I have done from helping to produce it.

Sami Grover
Assistant Editor

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THE BICULTURAL CHILD AS 'BOUNDARY'

Michael Anderson



Anthropologists use the term 'boundary' in a way that distinguishes it from 'border' or 'barrier'. Rather than being a tangible, static fact, boundary is more about consciousness. That is consciousness about oneself being different from an other or others. It is therefore more about subjective meanings than walls, lines or fences. Boundaries, whether expressed as flags, anthems, symbolic emblems or in language provide us with catalysts with which we ponder to whom we belong and from whom we are different. In this article, I will provide some evidence as to how children in bicultural and/or bilingual families may be seen by observers and by the family's members as a 'boundary' precisely in the way I have described.

Brenda and Dimitri

Thirteen years ago Dimitri was a student at the University of Manchester in

England where Brenda and Dimitri met. Their relationship developed and after several years of living apart and vacational visits to each others homes they decided to marry and settle in Athens, Greece. Dimitri is employed as a personnel manager for a shipping company and Brenda stays at home to look after their eleven-year-old son, Yannie. The family lives in an apartment block, the apartment below is occupied by Dimitri's mother. Dimitri's mother, like most mothers-in-law in Greek family structures, plays a significant part in their family life. Much of this relates to the raising of Yannie and the focus on him as a child of split cultural identity.

In the first of a series of comments, which gives substance and form to the contest for Yannie's cultural soul, Brenda recalls her reaction to her mother-in-law's insistent attention and efforts to keep away the sinister influences commonly alluded to among elderly (and not so elderly) Greeks.

'As soon as Gianni [son] was born, Yiayia [her mother-in-law] was all over him, going like this - 'frou frou frou' and everything. That's to keep away the evil eye. ... It didn't bother me at first but now it really annoys me...I think it frightens them [the children] and spreads germs. It's a superstition they have ... if you say, like, a compliment then you have to go 'frou, frou, frou' ... to stop the evil eye coming ... it's just the culture, you know...a culture thing.'*

Brenda describes behaviours and attitudes that are foreign to her but which she nevertheless attempts to explain ('it's just

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THE BICULTURAL...from page one

the culture...'). The rationalisation is not just explanatory, but almost magically renders the particular object of her angst - her mother-in-law - not only beyond criticism but justifiably so. Also, the child in question is a clear focus for the expression of adult cultural identity: the mother-in-law in attempting to deter the evil eye, Brenda in her distaste of this practice. What is 'healthy' for the child from the mother-in-law's perspective is emotionally and physically unhealthy from Brenda's.

The child's use of language is also a conflictual theme and is contested for its

"The threat of 'losing' her child to a culture that she obviously feels isn't hers is bolstered by the views of her mother-in-law"

assumed consequences for the child's future.

'I want him to think that he does have a relationship to my culture, but I don't know how that will work out. At the moment he won't even speak English to me - we had an argument about it a few nights ago. Dimitri [husband] sometimes takes my side and sometimes hers [mother-in-law]. I feel sorry for him, but it's all to do with Yannie.'

For Brenda language is clearly intrinsic to, and inseparable from, her child's cultural identity and, by extension, her own. Brenda's reaction to Yannie's refusal to speak English to her is a clear indication of this and interpreted as a threat by his mother. She contests the point keenly with her mother-in-law, but with only intermittent help from her husband who is as likely to support his mother as he is his wife. What 'differences' seemed so transparent from her distant home in rural Derbyshire are suddenly present, and seriously divisive.

The threat of 'losing' her child to a culture that she obviously feels isn't hers is bolstered by the views of her mother-in-law, equally pressured and challenged by Brenda's foreign presence, which establishes a barrier between her and her grandson. Relationships between grandmothers and grandsons are of particularly

* This expression is a device uttered to keep away 'evil eye'. Ironically, the threat of evil is made evident by the compliments of others. Complementing children can be seen as a veiled vehicle for a curse. 'Ftou ftou ftou' (or 'spitting') is believed to protect the child against such a threat.

profound importance in Greek families and are well storied and mythologized within the wider context of Greek society and culture. This fact gives impetus and poignancy to the view the mother-in-law offers about the situation. She comments:

'She [Brenda] speaks to the boy [Yannie] in her language [English] so there will be more problems. She doesn't understand our ways and traditions in Greece so it caused a lot of problems. The young ones from other countries think they know everything about children but they don't know anything'

Arguably, for her, differences stem as much from generational suspicion as from xenophobia and the 'cultural' baggage foreigners bring with them. When she highlights language as a key factor it is the latter (xenophobia) which appears to be most prominent in mind. She continues

'There are lots of arguments but she still speaks English to him [Yannie] she should speak Greek otherwise he won't know where he is'

The term 'arguments' makes explicit the conflict and tension particularly over the issue of language use. As Brenda intimated earlier, Dimitri performs as a kind of self-appointed 'arbitrator' between his wife and mother, a role he is not entirely comfortable with:

'They argue a bit, but not as much as before. It was always about Gianni: ... I was in the middle ... if I decide for my mother then my wife would not speak to me for the rest of the day. ...which language to use is a difficult question for us'

Dimitri alternates between the respective 'sides' and territories defined by the cultural 'limits' of each of the women in his life. Dimitri prefers to speak to Yannie in Greek and so, in one sense, votes with his feet. He mentions how there are conflicts between the women as to how Yannie should be treated; most importantly, which language should be used and why. Yannie is the human 'rope' in a cultural tug-of-war, the embodiment of and indeed the catalyst for difference.

Yannie is a kind of focus of reflection for his parents' various identities. Yet he himself appears to remain calmly indifferent to the disputes. Aware of the contentiousness of his presence, or more accurately, his words and actions are, he reflects

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A PASSION FOR LANGUAGES HELPS A BIT!

Michelle Marsical



Being raised in the States I had the unfortunate privilege of growing up with one language. I had a love for foreign languages at quite a young age, though I never thought I would be bilingual. I started learning Spanish in high school and, after having fun pretending I was bilingual, it just sort of progressed into a second way to communicate. I have been expressing myself in Spanish ever since. Many of my friends only speak Spanish, so I must be faring okay, although I could always stand to learn more.

Part of my success has been marrying into a Hispanic family, so I get to practice on a regular basis. I also try to call upon to this support to assist me in raising my children to be somewhat proficient in Spanish.

I could write so much about how being able to speak Spanish has helped my mind to develop more, as I began to tap that unused portion of my mind. After experiencing this with Spanish, I have also decided to learn Latin (for a solid basis in the romance languages) and French (simply because of its beauty). It does not seem so difficult anymore, as I have begun to understand that my brain isn't a limited space that ever fills up completely, but that it is strengthened and increased in capacity becoming more efficient with the addition of not only languages but also mathematics, music and religion.

I am trying to pass on these passions to my children, in any manner that suits the day. I try to give them a greater advantage, not only educationally, but in developing more cultural awareness and becoming more adaptable. Perhaps the best reason to continue is that they retain an excitement for life as they see how other people live and speak.

Here are some glimpses into how the last seven years of trying to teach the children Spanish has gone. I have switched my

methods often because of various obstacles and for diversity with a constant growth. Little do they know it, they are bilingual (understand and sometimes speak) and trilingual (exposure) and hopefully one day will develop these or other languages of their own. Perhaps the language of music, art and the sciences will intrigue them and hopefully they will explore the study of languages itself! The possibilities are endless as I help them to see to make the most of every day.

I used to believe that my children were exceptionally gifted. I am now realizing that all children (even impaired) are like little sponges that will absorb as much as possible if they are surrounded with good 'water'. I have chosen to merely expose

"... being able to speak Spanish has helped my mind to develop much more, as I began to tap that unused portion of my mind."

them, to allow them to hear my Spanish and give them rewarding smiles when they attempt to answer me in the same language. I have had a hard time with complete immersion for either parent. This does not suit us, although my 3-year-old has definitely been immersed more than the other two, as I have relaxed more in my parenting style and see the benefits of starting when he was a baby.

I tell them stories I have made up about Pancho, a little Mexican boy. They repeat phrases throughout the day from these stories. I play music that will give them a natural feel for the language of the day. Whether it is *el abecedario* in Spanish, *Frere Jacques* in French, or the *Ave Maria* in Latin they always enjoy the variety. When I hear my 3-year-old belting out *Sancta Maria* in the kitchen, I know they are learning. I have a bad habit of repeating CD's for about three to five days, so everyone is ready to hear a different one and the one we finished listening to has its place in their brain.

I also pick up rejected Spanish children's books from the library, as well as words to music and anything of interest; coloring books, maps, pictures. The computer can also be a tool, but not too much, as they have other projects they work on. I don't believe in a lot of TV or excessive computer time. My children actually prefer more games, songs and stories. We also have posters in the kitchen,

Continued on page four

MULTILINGUAL CHATTING MADE EASY

Jayson Campeau

Who would have thought that having random multilingual conversations with strangers could be so much fun? Multilingual chat is one of the many positive side effects of the Internet. It is possible to communicate with people in a wide variety of languages. Many people who hear about this multilingual opportunity are in need of a crash course on the basic protocols. Well, buckle up!

The first thing you need to get started, other than a computer with an IP (access to the Internet) and modem, is a web address that takes you to a polyglot location. I would recommend the following:

Bozs Polyglot Chatroom =
<http://kinya.com/~swissboz/index.html>

Yahoo's Multilingual Chat rooms =
www.chat.yahoo.com

Chat International =
<http://www.chatinternational.com/>

MSN Communities =
<http://communities.msn.com/browseopt.msnw?>

Depending on which of these web pages you select, there will be a complex or a simple log in/sign up stage. Take the time to sign up properly. In particular, give them an e-mail address that is in fact yours. Nearly all are free and many are monitored, and all have a code of conduct, which means that you don't have to put up with swearing in an array of languages. Many people use these forums to learn a second/third language. Be kind and patient with others.

For those who are using this chat opportunity to improve their 'other languages' it helps to plan ahead by anticipating possible dialogues. I recommend that you know how to say the following in the target language:



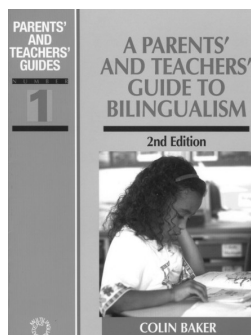
Hello
I am new to this.
How do you say.
Can you help me?
Where can I find?
Thank you
Goodbye

Do BTW, LOL and TTYL mean anything to you? As the world of cyber chat can be cruel at times, I suggest a visit and some familiarity with the chat acronyms at:
<http://users.ez2.net/dronvor/acronyms.html>. Interestingly, these abbreviations are used in many languages even though they stem from English words.

As you venture out into this exciting world of e-communication be warned about pop-ups (advertisements). These pop-up on your screen unannounced and are sometimes adult in nature. Also, some of the chat rooms are geared to adults seeking others for relationships.

One of the technical hurdles which arises when you try and chat with Chat software or even Java, is that it requires some downloading and set up. For this reason I recommend Bozs Polyglot Chatroom for your first go at it. No downloads, just simple HTML (web-based) chatting.

Once you get into chatting with others in your own or your target language, you will see that chat is but the tip of the iceberg for polyglots. The Internet may in fact turn out to be the multilingual community's best friend.



Pbk1-85359-455-5, price £9.95/ US\$15.95

HELP, HELP, HELP...

Trilingual families with pre-school children

I am doing research on how trilingual families deal with life with three languages. If you have children aged 2-6 years and are willing to fill in a questionnaire, please mail, ring or write.

Helen Le Merle

Contact details removed

A PASSION...Continued from page 3

which I rotate, and they get to stare at while eating. I just leave them up; sometimes it takes a while for them to memorize them, but it usually does occur. Having my Spanish-speaking friends and family come over is always beneficial and brings the culture to our doorstep. It makes them think that speaking in two languages is the norm.

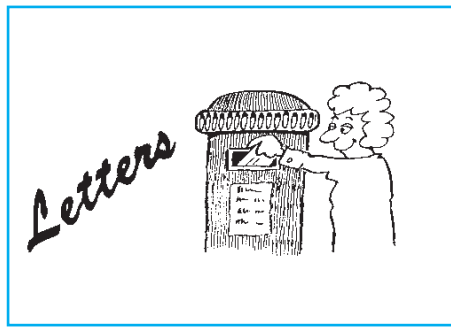
I found the maths article in the past issue to be of particular interest as I had just bought a 3rd grade maths book in Spanish. The children love a challenge they can meet and I present it to them in a non-forceful manner. We have already begun, as all of them have sung the song 'dos y dos son cuatro, cuatro y dos son seis...' . I try to teach them not to translate, but just think in the language at hand. Thinking about maths in another language stimulates the mind, for it is really the same language with an infinite number of methods and approaches.

I have noticed that their brains recognize the various languages we are hearing throughout the day. My children are not suffering with all these languages floating in their heads. Instead it is preparing the ground if one day they should pursue one of them further.

"all children ... are like little sponges that will absorb as much as possible if they are surrounded with good 'water'."

This year I came across the easiest method, I feel, for learning English – the Spalding Method. It has been around since 1957 and is really the best way to learn English. It simplifies all the hard rules and maps out the entire language down to 70 Phonograms and 29 rules to memorize. The method is very particular but the results are basically guaranteed. After learning the basics you begin with simple words in English. They are on-line at www.spalding.org and have studies that show amazing results for English as a second language. The best part is that there are no workbooks, just the book called *Writing Road to Reading* by Ramona Spalding. Check it out!

Please email me at javnmich@best1.net if you share any of my interests. It is very exciting to be a part of a multilingual group! Multilingual (does) matter! Adios!Adieu! Good bye!



LIVING IN A MULTI-FAITH FAMILY

A Christian-Muslim Perspective

As a child I was used to travelling a lot because of my father's profession. In 1968 for example, I was in Prague and my memory has always kept vivid images of that war. Later on, the history of France also made its mark on me, in particular the history of colonisation and of the native population of North America. Later on again, I chose to work as a teacher in a deprived area where the percentage of foreign children reached 80%. I then became the president of a social centre which had to manage a dozen different cultural associations, run literacy courses and various school projects to help children with learning difficulties. What struck me most, were the smiles and warm welcome I got again and again from people who were very poor and living in difficult circumstances.

And then I met a man from North Africa whom I married. Such a relationship can never be without difficulties. The families on both sides were reluctant, particularly about the childrens' education. And what religion would they be brought up in?

One has to make a lot of concessions. One has to adapt to different mentalities. I came from a rather bourgeois and conventional background. For example, I was not used to in-laws coming late at night and unexpectedly. But if you talk about such differences, you can always find solutions.

I was christened, but became somewhat disappointed with the Christian faith and some rather hypocritical churchgoers. I developed an interest in the Muslim faith even before I met my husband. And the problem of religion in our marriage was solved. I not only adopted its traditions but enjoyed them: its food, its music, its feast days. I took lessons in Arabic, but it was difficult to keep them up with my very demanding job. Because I do not speak Arabic, or rather the Berber language which is the language of my husband, the only problem in our mixed family has been the loss of the Berber language. Another reason is that my husband was often absent from home because of his job, consequently our

children do not speak his native language today. They have attended special language courses in immigrant languages at school, but it has not been possible to support it at home. When my son goes to visit our family in his father's country of origin, he learns much faster. But he also forgets very quickly when he returns.

I have friends who are a mixed nationality couple: the mother is German and the father Moroccan. They each speak their mother tongue to their children who speak Berber, German and French. I know another couple where the father is French and the mother Melanesian; their child speaks Mandarin-Chinese with her mother, English with her father and French with her grandparents. The parents speak English together. My biggest regret is not to have done the same thing with my children.

"Tolerance does exist and is a message of hope."

Despite the years which have gone by, my side of the family has been most reluctant to accept the Muslim faith. But our religious practice has remained very open. In Alsace, where religion holds a central place, my ten-year-old daughter has asked to be christened. It has been rather problematic for her father's side of the family, but even though her choice was not supported by them she is still most welcome in their home and their love for her has not changed. Tolerance does exist and is a message of hope.

The image people often have of men from North Africa can be simplistic. There are male chauvinists of all nationalities. In our home my husband takes part in all domestic tasks: bathing the children, shopping, washing dishes, etc. And domestic fights are the same as with other couples.

To conclude, living as a mixed couple is no different from other couples, but it does bring extra cultural wealth to the children.

Monique Vallat, Alsace, France

Monique Vallat is headmistress of the primary school of Didenheim, Mulhouse in Alsace, France, where she has been living for the past ten years. She has three children: Eddy who is 12-years-old, Eva who is 10 and Alice who is 3. Her husband is called Mourad and is originally from Morocco.

Please send us material which you think might be of interest to our readers. Remember the Newsletter is for you, but above all, by you!

NEWS FROM THE USA

Three Unexpected Victories

James Crawford

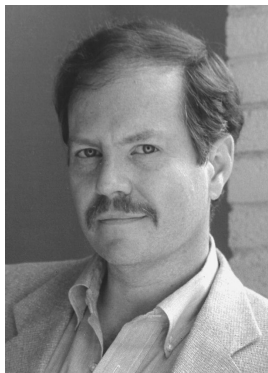
Spring 2002 brought a rare winning streak for those who champion minority language rights in the United States. Courts in Alaska, Oklahoma, and Colorado struck down English-only initiatives as inconsistent with the constitutions of those states. None of the rulings represents the last word in these cases; litigation is certain to continue. Nevertheless, the victories are welcome for advocates who have had little to cheer about in recent years.

In the first case, decided March 26, a state superior court overruled Alaska's 1998 ballot initiative declaring English the state's official language and prohibiting most uses of other languages by government. The legal challenge was led by Yup'ik speakers in the town of Togiak, who argued that if the measure were allowed to take effect, it would prevent the municipality from serving the needs of many Native Alaskans whose English was limited. They charged that the English-only mandate would violate the constitutional rights of free speech guaranteed to state workers, elected representatives, and Alaska residents.

Judge Fred Torrisi agreed. He ruled that the law would adversely affect not only speakers but also listeners: tens of thousands of Natives, Hispanics, and Asians who need to communicate with government. Meanwhile, the state of Alaska had failed to support its claim that the English-only law would promote government efficiency. Torrisi asked: *'If you happen to have a Filipino seeking to register a snow machine at a DMV office where the worker actually speaks the right dialect, how is it efficient to have her restricted to the use of English?'*

The judge also rejected arguments by English-only advocates that the initiative had nothing to do with the freedom of speech because it sought to regulate only the means of expression – the language used – rather than its content. *'Language is the beginning, it is part of who we are,'* he wrote. *'Beyond defining our ethnicity, it organizes our minds. ... Speech in any language is still speech and the decision to speak in another language is a decision involving speech alone.'*

A week later, the Oklahoma Supreme Court reached similar conclusions in a case brought by Cherokee Indians, among others. In an 8-1 decision, the justices threw out a proposed English-only initiative before it even reached the ballot. The measure infringed both freedom of speech and the right of citizens to petition their government for redress of grievances, the court ruled.



These cases reduce to 23 the number of states with active 'official English' laws on their books. They also illustrate a serious problem facing the traditional English-only movement. Proponents are running out of states where it is possible to pass such legislation.

The third ruling, issued the following week, halted the momentum of a more dangerous form of English-only activism, at least temporarily. The Colorado Supreme Court blocked an initiative to ban bilingual education in Colorado because of wording that was likely to mislead the voters. The proposition, similar to those adopted by voters in California and Arizona, purports to offer parents the right to seek 'waivers' of the English-only mandate if they choose. But the court noted that the waiver process was so cumbersome and tortuous that, if the initiative passed, parents would be effectively denied the option of bilingual education. The official ballot summary must be rewritten to reflect this reality, the justices ruled.

Ron Unz, the Silicon Valley millionaire who has spearheaded this campaign in several states, pledged to make the necessary changes. Whether they will pass muster with the court remains to be determined. But Unz still appears to have the time – and certainly he has the money – to gather the signatures needed to qualify the initiative for Colorado's November ballot.

While celebrating this victory, advocates for language-minority students must recognize that it may be a brief one, limited to a single state. Defeating Unz's nationwide movement will require a stronger and more sustained commitment to educating the public about bilingual education than we have seen from the field thus far.

For more information on these decisions and related issues, visit James Crawford's Language Policy Web Site: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford/>.

LANGUAGE AS A GATEWAY

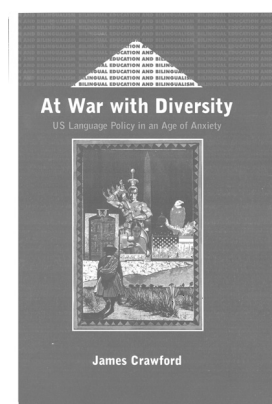
Thank you very much for the latest BFN, which was very interesting and good! Especially Ciara O'Higgins' article *And Where Are You From, Then?* which put words to many experiences and encounters I have had over the last 15 years. Like her, I don't see a language as an end in itself but as a door that opens up hearts of people in their native countries.

Several years ago I had the opportunity to travel in Eastern European countries. As I spoke some Romanian and Russian, I was amazed at how open the people were to share their experiences with me. Most of all I enjoyed talks with the old people, many of whom had memories from the Second World War and the Germans. Being German myself it opened my eyes for part of the German history that we didn't learn about at school. Because I was able to communicate in their own language, they were able and willing to tell me about their memories, which they wouldn't have done in either English or German, possibly not even through an interpreter.

Recently I met several bilingual families whose children are grown up now. In many cases they had to abandon bilingualism, because of problems the children were facing at school or the lack of support (or criticism!) from monolingual relatives. I felt really sorry for them, as their children are monolingual or only have a rudimentary understanding of their parents' language.

And that makes me even more thankful for the BFN and all the support and help we have received over the last seven years. The feeling that being multilingual is NORMAL (just not everywhere in the world...) and that it is possible to raise children with more than one language.

Judith Sørensen, Hull, England



The book analyses the sources of the anti-bilingual movement in USA, its changing directions, and its impact on education policy.

Pbk 1-85359-505-5, Price £9.95 / US\$15.95.



Is tri-literacy possible?

We are a German/Danish family living in England. Our children are now 4, 3 & 1 years old. Is it possible to teach our children to become fluent in both speaking and reading as well as writing in all three languages???

How do you go about trilingual literacy, Mr Campeau? Your children are all at school, now, aren't they? If you've got time to answer, I would like to hear a little about your methods, experiences and how the children cope with it.

Judith Sørensen, Hull, England

Trilingual literacy... hummmm!!! I wish I had a better answer. Our children Sarah (8), Jacob (7), and Benjamin (5) are all at very different level of literacy in each of the three languages (French/ English/ Flemish). This is due partly to gender, age and effort of behalf of the parents. Are we still striving for balanced trilingual literacy... yes... but that balance may never come... but we still strive for it. Sarah reads and writes in French proficiently. She reads and writes in English less well. She reads some in Flemish and writes very little. Jacob reads and writes in French with some competence. He reads and writes a little in English. He reads some words in Flemish and does not write. Benjamin is writing in French and English. No reading.

We live in a predominantly English part of the world. The French the children are learning will serve them well in many situations. The Flemish is a tougher sell. Less people using it and even fewer opportunities for employment with Flemish (alone). We clearly do not do enough to foster and nurture the Flemish, but we would not listen to a monolingual who told us that we should not be teaching our kids to read in other languages. This is assuming that they are at or beyond their classes reading level.

I believe that the skills learned in decoding and deciphering meaning are applicable in all languages. There will certainly be some initial confusion on spelling and pronunciation but that is normal. I urge you to keep at the Danish

especially. It is probably like Flemish for us. The internet is great for finding language specific stuff. Lingoware puts out some free software that will translate software into other languages. It is great for learning practical uses of languages. Running ICQ in French has its advantages... namely; others don't use it because they can't read it. These are the perks of multilingual community.

Hope these ramblings help. Sorry that I could not be more technical. Bonne chance!

Jayson Campeau

Jayson is a member of the editorial board and speaks English, French and Flemish. His wife is a Flemish speaker from Belgium. They have three children who attend a French school. The family lives in Canada.

How to revive Italian?

I am Dutch and at the age of five moved to Italy. With my mother I spoke both Dutch and Italian. At the age of nine we moved to the UK and learnt English. Later I learnt French, which I can speak with my mother too.

Speaking all these languages is, for me, a great asset. I now live in Holland and have two children; a boy of 7 and a girl of 5. From the day they were born I always spoke Italian and Dutch with them until I got divorced and remarried nearly two years ago. I stopped speaking to them in Italian and have regretted this decision. My eldest has been asking me to speak Italian with him again but when I do he does not seem to understand me, yet I know he does because I sometimes sneak some Italian words in the sentence and he understands. I recently had an Italian friend visiting me who spoke Italian to the children and they understood.

How can I go about starting speaking Italian with them again and how should I act when they tell me that they do not understand?

This brings me to another question. My children go to a private school and they have been receiving German lessons for 1/2 hour a week. My husband speaks fluent German and we were thinking that he could speak to them in German. My husband and I would be speaking in Dutch to each other. Is this a good idea and how should we go about it? We have cable television and thus receive Italian and German channels.

Marianna Bentlage, Enschede, The Netherlands

First of all discuss with your children your linguistic situation and explain to them clearly why you spoke Italian to them from birth and why you stopped when you got divorced. Since your son is asking you to speak Italian to him why not decide on the strategy to adopt by discussing it with him. I feel if a child says he does not understand he should be listened to because communication between parents and children should always be a priority at any age.

Reassure them first that you will take time to explain to them what they do not understand in Italian. You can rephrase what you said more simply, or paraphrase, mime or illustrate concretely what you mean. And if this does not work or is too artificial, just translate in Dutch. But then try to go back to Italian as quickly as possible. Explain to your children that they need to get used to Italian again, that it is going to take a little time but soon they'll understand everything again.

A holiday in Italy and meeting Italian children their age could build their confidence in the language. The same applies of course to Italian television. Reading children's stories in Italian with nice picture books can be a good way of eliciting language through discussions about the text or the pictures. Singing Italian songs with them might be fun. In short, give the Italian language some place in your home so they hear it as a background language and not just from you.

As far as your second question concerning German, half an hour a week in school of any language is in no way sufficient to learn a language, but is a good idea to get children to hear sounds they are not used to. As to your husband speaking to them in German, it might be too much at present if you want to go back to using Italian with them. What your husband could do is to teach them some songs or simple nursery rhymes from his childhood; in other words, share some of his German culture with them and also take them to Germany sometimes to develop in your children a curiosity and taste for the language.

You would not want your children to feel they did not understand you when you spoke Italian and they did not understand your husband when he spoke German. I would first concentrate on Italian, mostly because your child asked you. Maybe later in school they can take German and your husband can support their learning of their third language.

Finally, I can understand you would like your children to benefit from the rich

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'I'm Greek but sometimes I feel English. I speak both languages. But it depends on the situation: if it is better for me to speak English then I do. If it's better to speak Greek then I speak Greek. Mostly I speak Greek which upsets my mum. If I speak English then Yiayia [grandmother] tells me not to. Usually it's what ever is best in the situation[...] I don't speak English much at the moment but I did a lot before. I think I am both English and Greek because I have a parent from each country. But sometimes I don't know what I feel like[...] I have friends in England and cousins so when I go there I can be English and when I am here I am Greek.'

Yannie contextualises the variant 'identities' he feels are available to him. These 'components' of identity are pragmatically employed or conveniently disregarded pieces of a personal and changing montage of belonging; not, as in the case of his elders, matters of absolute significance.

Contrasting Social Protocols

The family politics of polite social protocol and the pressure to instil a certain cultural form of these into one's children incites parents from contrasting cultural backgrounds to open domestic hostility over the most banal of daily exchanges. Pat, for example, speaks of when her daughter was seven:

'We went back to England for a holiday and I was trying to get her [Andrea] to say please all the time, or when she was supposed to, because the kids here [Greece] tend not to say it that much. My father was appalled when she wouldn't say 'please' or 'thank you'. But when we came back to Greece, Taki (husband) thought that she was being too formal. I tried to tell him that in England you have to say 'please' and 'thank you' a lot, otherwise it sounds rude. He said it was too formal and in Greece people are not so formal. He even thought it sounded sarcastic when Andrea kept saying 'please' and 'thank you' to him. It caused a lot of friction between us, and Andrea was just confused.

Children's usage of the terms 'please' and 'thank you' takes on a significance way beyond their functions as mere expressions of request and gratitude and become complex emblems of cultural contest and identity. Taki adds to Pat's comments by describing the practical outcome

'So now when she (Andrea) talks to her mother, she will say all these things: 'Please', 'Thank you', and when she talks to me she doesn't. So when she goes to England she won't sound rude. ... But here it is not necessary to say these things all the time ... it's crazy.'

So that she 'won't sound rude' is the reason given for Andrea's parents teaching their daughter to say the right thing in the right place and in the right circumstances. Her father believes that she should not grow to appear over-formal or sarcastic and refuses to enforce what he sees as superfluous courtesies. Her mother's requirement is that she won't appear discourteous to her

HUMOUR, HUMOUR

When my daughter Ophélie was three years old, her favourite sport was to repeat everything I said to her and then to burst out into laughter.



Once I said to her 'I can't believe it Ophélie, you are such a Papagei' (Papagei = parrot). She answered: And you are such a Mamagei'.

Cornelia Aubert, Le Pecq, France

(Andrea's mother's) extended family. The difference is addressed by encouraging the appropriate use of the terms in the appropriate situations. Thus, a different attitude to the linguistic rules of request and gratitude is expected to be adopted by Andrea somewhere in the space between the respective airports which separates the two countries and cultures.

Not only is Andrea assumed to be a kind of human receptacle for a range of competing social competencies – each to be pulled out at the appropriate times and in the appropriate places – she is also an agent for emerging and agitating adult sensitivities about their own identities, histories and complexes of belonging. In their efforts to secure a socially competent child, Andrea's parents attempt to counteract each other's 'image' not only of who Andrea is, but also of who they are.

Parental pasts and family boundaries

As in any home, the bicultural or bilingual home child futures are linked to parental pasts. But these parental pasts are in fact 'presents', sensitized and brought to consciousness by the process of movement itself and the presence of their children. Pasts are reconstructed in the context of the present to make *sense* of the present.

The child in the bicultural family is a boundary, an embodiment, a symbol of family identity and poses a meeting point of a range of cultural incongruities, a junction for adult complexes of belonging. As a zone of reflection and for contention about culture, the child is the field on which adult relationships and identities are played, made and broken, constructed, de- and re-constructed continually.

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GLOSSARY

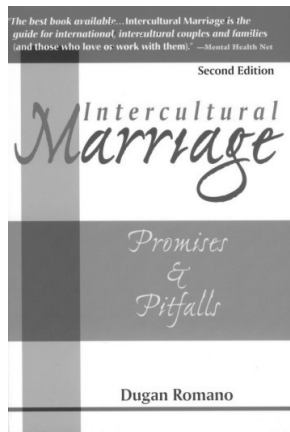
Polyglot = competent in two or more languages

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linguistic context you have known yourself but most importantly, children should feel confident in their language abilities. They should be given ample opportunities to express themselves, play with language or languages and understand why their parents speak different languages to them. This last point might seem obvious, but children need to understand the world they live in to grow up; their understanding of reality does not match adults' understanding, therefore children's views and feelings should never be underestimated.

Dr Christine Hélot

Christine is a member of the editorial board. She has three French/English bilingual children and works at Matre de conférences Anglais Strasbourg, France.



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BICULTURAL CHILD ...Continued from page seven

The pasts in the bicultural/bilingual home are not only culturally different but, as the comments of the adults and children illustrate here, potentially are highly conflictual. They are pasts and 'cultures' brought into domestic conflict by the process of movement itself. Angelica Bammer's reflections on family transitions capture succinctly this sense of 'what we hold on to and ... what we let go [of]; what we translate ('carry over') ... at our peril and for our survival. It is a reflection on the ways in which these issues of peril and survival are different for those who, by force or by choice are divided between different cultures' (1994:92)

Even if the parent's feelings of displacement diminish over time, the sharp edges of cultural difference are not necessarily blunted.

Movement, migrancy and the decreasing significance of national borders in the modern world can easily provide us with the illusion that cultural difference ceases to exist. A close look at families within which cultural and linguistic differences are very real aspects of everyday life, suggest a different picture. The further away from the reality you are the smoother differences appear to merge into sameness. The closer you are the more apparent the differences are.

Bicultural and bilingual families provide an intriguing context for the consideration of the child and for language use as 'boundary', as a zone for adult reflection upon their own culture and identity.

 An extended version of this article appears as a chapter in the new book "Beyond Boundaries: Language and Identity in Contemporary Europe" P.Gubbins and M. Holt (eds), 2002. ISBN 1-85359-555-1. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters