

# The Bilingual Family Newsletter



News and Views for Intercultural People  
Editors: Marjukka Grover & Sami Grover

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## EDITORIAL

I have just returned from my weekly lunch with local Finnish friends. Every week the noise level in our corner of the pub rises as we tell each other the latest news, talk about Finland, describe books we have read, films we have seen, argue about politics and laugh (and occasionally cry) – all in Finnish. Or more accurately Finglish. We get funny looks from other tables when, in the middle of a Finnish sentence, we switch into English and back again – or use an English word but pronounced in a Finnish way.

Whilst editing this issue I learned that we conduct these lunchtime meetings in ‘bilingual language mode’ (see François Grosjean’s interview, page 4). We all speak fluent English, which we use occasionally in the middle of conversation, but our base language is Finnish. I find this ‘mode’ most relaxing. There are times when we try to discipline ourselves and speak ‘pure’ Finnish, but this does not last long. It was nice to hear that our ‘bilingual mode’ is quite normal and a rich way of communicating. Certainly nothing to be ashamed of!

Every few years we try to change the editorial board a little to welcome fresh ideas, to gain new expertise and to let long suffering board members take a well-earned break. I would therefore like to thank our resigning members, Stephen Ryan and Nobuyuki Honna, for their invaluable work and would like to welcome as new members Masayo Yamamoto from Japan and Eugenia Papadaki from Italy. Observant readers may have noticed that Sami, my son, has now progressed from being assistant editor to being a full co-editor. This will be a great help to me and will surely help the newsletter go from strength to strength.

Marjukka Grover

## AN INTERVIEW WITH FRANÇOIS GROSJEAN: Part Two

Judit Navracsis

*A full version of this interview can be obtained from François Grosjean:  
francois.grosjean@unine.ch*



**In the second part of our interview with François Grosjean, author of the classic *Life with Two Languages: An Introduction to Bilingualism*, François talks a little more about his research on bilingualism. He explains his concept of the complementary principle, which offers an explanation for the differing levels of language fluency in bi/multilinguals, and also talks a little more about his work on bilingualism and deafness.**

***You have recently proposed the complementary principle to characterise the bilingual. Can you explain what you mean by this?***

The reasons that bring languages into contact and hence foster bilingualism are many: migrations of various kinds (economic, educational, political, religious), nationalism and federalism, trade, intermarriage, etc. These factors create various linguistic needs in people who are in contact with two or more languages and who develop competencies in their languages to the extent required by these needs. In contact situations it is rare that all facets of life require the same

language (people would not be bilingual if that were so) or that they always demand two languages (language A and B at work, at home, with friends, etc.). This leads to what I have called the complementary principle which I define as follows:

‘Bilinguals usually acquire and use their languages for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. Different aspects of life normally require different languages.’

It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually different that bilinguals rarely develop equal fluency in their languages.

***Why is the complementary principle important?***

In general, the failure to understand the complementary principle has had many negative consequences: bilinguals have been described and evaluated in terms of the fluency and balance they have in their two languages (when in fact they are rarely balanced); language skills in bilinguals have almost always been appraised in terms of monolingual standards (but monolinguals use only one language for all domains of life whereas bilinguals use two or more); research on bilingualism was often conducted in terms of the bilingual’s individual and separate languages (the use of language A or of language B when in fact both languages are often used simultaneously); and, finally, many bilinguals still evaluate their language competencies as inadequate.

*Continued on page 2*

Interview... from page 1

*How does the complementarity principle help us understand the bilingual?*

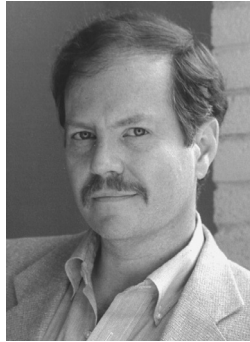
First, it reflects the true configuration of the bilingual's language repertoire: what languages are known and to what extent, what they are used for, with whom and when, why one language is less developed than another, etc. Second, it helps to explain why the bilingual's language repertoire may change over time: as the environment changes and the needs for particular language skills also change, so will the bilingual's competence in his or her various language skills. Third, an increasing understanding of the complementarity principle has changed researchers' views of bilinguals these last years. Bilinguals are now seen not so much as the sum of two (or more) complete or incomplete monolinguals but rather as specific and fully competent speakers-hearers who have developed a communicative competence that is equal, but different in nature, to that of monolinguals. This, in turn, is leading to a redefinition of the procedure used to evaluate the bilingual's competencies. Bilinguals are now starting to be studied in terms of their total language repertoire, and the domains of use and the functions of the bilingual's various languages are now being taken into account. Finally, the complementary principle accounts for why regular bilinguals are not usually very good translators and interpreters. Some may not know the translation equivalents in the other language (words, phrases, set expressions, etc.) which in turn will lead to perception and production problems. Unless bilinguals acquired their second language in a manner which involves learning translation equivalents, many will find themselves lacking vocabulary in various domains (work, religion, politics, sports, etc.) even though they may appear to be fluent.

*You have developed the concept of language mode. Can you tell us what it is?*

Language mode is the state of activation of the bilingual's languages and language processing mechanisms at a given point in time. Bilinguals find themselves at various points on a situational continuum which will result in a particular language mode. At one end of the continuum, bilinguals are in a totally monolingual language mode in that they are interacting with monolinguals of one - or the other - of the languages they know. One language is active and the other is deactivated. At

*Continued on page 4*

## NEWS FROM THE USA: A Dubious Victory James Crawford



Election Day 2002 brought an unexpected defeat for English-only advocate Ron Unz. For five years the millionaire has financed and led, almost single-handedly, a campaign to 'eliminate bilingual education in the United States.' That goal looks more elusive today than it did before the vote. Although his initiative to mandate all-English instruction passed in Massachusetts, it was soundly rejected in Colorado. This was the first loss for an English-only ballot measure in 12 statewide votes since 1984.

It is tempting to report this news in a positive vein – to say that bilingual education has finally prevailed at the polls, signaling a growing tolerance for linguistic diversity. Tempting but, I'm sorry to say, premature. In parsing the meaning of the election, one must begin with the campaigns for and against Unz's initiatives. What kinds of arguments were stressed in Colorado and Massachusetts, and which of these most influenced the voters?

Opponents in the two states adopted strategies similar to those employed, unsuccessfully, in California (1998) and Arizona (2000). Recognizing that bilingual education was broadly unpopular, the program's supporters feared there was too little time to challenge entrenched attitudes. The only way to save bilingual education, they concluded, was to change the subject – to divert attention to other issues. These included, the punitive and coercive features of Unz's initiative, which made educators vulnerable to lawsuits for using languages other than English in the classroom and which effectively eliminated the rights of language-minority parents and local school boards to choose among pedagogical options.

Unz's strategy was straightforward: focus on bilingual education, claim that it holds back Latino students by failing to teach them English, and brand bilingual educators as self-serving or politically motivated. Since most voters already agreed with this line of argument, it proved quite successful – garnering 61% support in California, 63% in Arizona, and 68% in Massachusetts.

What was different in Colorado, where Unz's Amendment 31 received just 44% of

the vote? Simply put, the opponents' strategy worked. For the first time they managed to change the subject. The Colorado vote became a referendum, not on bilingual education, but on Unz's initiative itself. How was this accomplished?

First, the 'No on 31' campaign raised ample resources to get its message out. A local billionaire, who happened to have a child in a two-way bilingual program, contributed \$3 million for a massive campaign.

Second, opponents found a message that appealed to the largely white, Anglo electorate of Colorado. They filled the airwaves with commercials featuring sad-eyed children and ominous background music. One predicted that 'Amendment 31 will knowingly force children who can barely speak English into regular classrooms, creating chaos and disrupting learning.' Rejecting the measure, by implication, would keep the Mexicans segregated in bilingual classrooms. A none-too-subtle appeal to white racial fears, but an effective one. As the political consultant for Unz's opponents asked Hispanic leaders, according to the *Rocky Mountain News*: 'Do you want to win, or do you want to be right?'

The political meaning of their victory, however, remains difficult to gauge. Little effort was made during the campaign – except by a few individuals – to educate voters about the relevant pedagogical issues. As a result, most still see bilingual education as an alternative, not a means, to teaching English. So the program remains vulnerable to attack. Soon after the election the Denver school board began considering a plan to phase out bilingual education at some schools in favor of English immersion. One official described the proposal as 'a kinder version' of Amendment 31.

Meanwhile, a state legislator introduced a more flexible, less punitive bill to mandate all-English instruction throughout Colorado. It would allow children two years to learn English instead of one, and authorize 'enforcement' lawsuits against schools but not against individual educators. Although the measure's prospects are uncertain at this writing, Governor Bill Owens – who opposed Unz's initiative – describes himself as 'a backer of the immersion concept.'

Clearly it is too soon to declare Colorado a safe haven for bilingual education. Or any other state, for that matter. Ron Unz recently announced plans to carry his English-only crusade to the U.S. Congress.

**James Crawford's latest book is *At War with Diversity: U.S. Language Policy in an Age of Anxiety***

**For further information on bilingual education in the US visit his web site at: <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/jwcrawford>.**



## Are Bilinguals Better Language Learners?

Jasone Cenoz



Jasone Cenoz (left) with co-editor of the new 'International Journal of Multilingualism', Ulrike Jessner (and an unidentified plant!)

'The more languages you know the easier it is to learn a new language' is a common remark that we have heard many times in our lives. In contrast, it is also common to hear teachers' and parents' comments worrying about children who are exposed to several languages. They think that this situation could have a negative effect on the child's development. Nowadays it is a very common situation for bilingual children to learn an additional language and there are many questions that can be asked as related to this situation.

### **Do all bilinguals learn third languages in similar situations?**

There is great diversity in third language acquisition situations. Some children are exposed to three languages at home. Other children are already bilingual when they are exposed to a third language in the community or day-care centres. There is a lot of variability regarding the languages involved, some are close to each other (i.e. German and Dutch) and others are completely different (i.e. Japanese and Italian); some are minority languages and others are spoken by the majority of the population in a country or in several countries. Some bilingual children receive instruction in three languages at school or have one or two of the languages as languages of instruction and the other(s) as subjects. Some other children have no instruction in the language or languages they speak at home.

### **Is it true that bilinguals learn languages more easily than monolinguals?**

Most research on the effect of bilingualism on third language acquisition shows that bilinguals have advantages over monolinguals when learning an additional language. Some of these studies have been carried out with bilingual children who can speak Basque and Spanish or Catalan and Spanish in

Spain and learn English as a third language. Other studies have been conducted in other areas of Europe (Switzerland, Austria, Germany), Canada or the United States. The studies indicate that bilinguals progress faster than monolinguals when learning a third language. This advantage is reflected in higher scores in oral and written tests. There are different types of bilinguals and those who are highly proficient in their two languages obtain better results than others. This could be due to the possibility of transferring many aspects of proficiency from one language to others.

### **Do bilinguals get confused if they are exposed to a third language?**

Many examples of early trilingualism (some of them reported in the *BFN*) show that children who are exposed to

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*"...bilingual children can develop a higher level of metalinguistic awareness... they tend to understand better the way languages work."*

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three languages do not present problems in their cognitive or linguistic development. Research conducted in this area shows that children exposed to three languages do not usually mix languages more than other children. When speaking one language they sometimes borrow words from the other languages they know but this does not mean that they are confused about the languages they know, they just use their other languages as a strategy to go on speaking.

### **Why do bilinguals have advantages over monolinguals?**

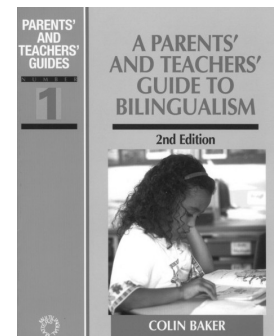
According to research studies, bilingual children can develop a higher level of metalinguistic awareness: that is they tend to understand better the way languages work. This advantage is useful when learning an additional language. Moreover, bilingual children already know two languages and they can relate the new words, sounds or structures they learn in a new language to the languages they already know. This use of other languages is more common when the languages are close than when the languages are completely different. Bilinguals also tend to have better communicative skills and this can also explain their good results in third language learning.

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## The Bilingual Family Support Group, Monza, Milan, Italy.

This group was formed five years ago as a joint initiative of the Headteacher of Play English and The Bilingual School of Monza, Eugenia Papadaki-D'Onofrio (also mother of two trilingual children) and the Finnish Community School "Suomi Koulu", with the aim to create a forum for exchange of ideas and experiences and to offer support to all those families who live locally and are bringing up their children bilingually. It is a voluntary aided group, which holds monthly discussion meetings/seminars on various aspects of bilingualism and bilingual development where the audience can vary from parents, educators, minority community members and other professionals interested in this area. We also organise annual Conferences with expert speakers in the field. We would love to hear and share experiences with other similar initiatives around the world. Please contact:

Contact details removed



*A Parents and Teachers Guide to Bilingualism* - Colin Baker

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**Interview... continued from page 2**

the other end of the continuum, bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual language mode in that they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two (or more) languages and with whom they can mix languages (i.e. code-switch and borrow). In this case, both languages are active but the one that is used as the main language of communication (the base language) is more active than the other. These are end points but bilinguals also find themselves at intermediary points depending on such factors as interlocutor, situation, content of discourse and function of the interaction.

***You believe that language mode is important in the study of bilinguals. Why is that?***

Language mode has received relatively little attention and yet is a crucial factor: it gives a truer reflection of how bilinguals process their two languages, separately or together; it helps us understand data obtained from various bilingual populations; it can partly account for problematic or ambiguous findings relating to such topics as language representation and processing, interference etc.; and, finally, it is invariably present in bilingualism research as an independent, control or confounding variable and hence needs to be heeded at all times. Let me take just one example. In the bilingual language development literature, it has been proposed that children who acquire two languages simultaneously go through an early fusion stage in which the languages are in fact one system. They then slowly differentiate their languages, first separating their lexicons and then their grammar. Evidence for this has come from the observation of language mixing in very young bilingual children and from the fact that there is a gradual reduction of mixing as the child grows older. However this position has been criticized by a number of researchers such as Juergen Meisel and Fred Genesee, among others, and one of the points made each time (in addition to the fact that translation equivalents may not be known in the other language) is that the context in which the recordings were made probably induced language mixing as it was rarely (if ever) monolingual. The children in these studies were probably in a bilingual mode and hence language mixing took place.

***There are quite a lot of misconceptions and some confusion regarding the definition of***

***code-switching, mixing, borrowing and interference. Tell us about interference first.***

As I have just said, I believe that much of the misunderstanding comes from the fact that researchers do not take into account the bilingual's language mode when studying bilingual language production. Language mixing (which for me is a cover term for code-switching and borrowing) does not usually occur in a monolingual mode (there are some exceptions however). In this mode though, one does find interferences which are speaker-specific deviations from the language being spoken due to the influence of the other language(s). They can occur at all levels of language (phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) and in all modalities (spoken, written or sign). Interferences are of two kinds: there are static interferences which reflect permanent traces of one language on the other and are therefore an aspect of interlanguage. There are also dynamic

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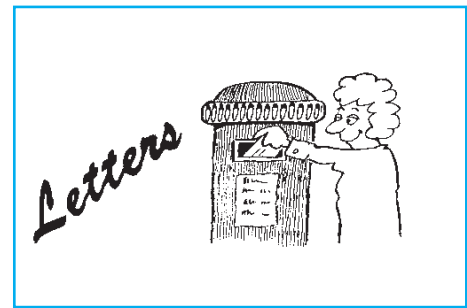
*“Bilinguals are now seen not so much as the sum of two (or more) complete or incomplete monolinguals but rather as specific and fully competent speakers-hearers who have developed a communicative competence that is equal, but different in nature, to that of monolinguals.”*

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interferences which are the ephemeral intrusions of the other (deactivated) language. Examples of this would be the accidental slip on the stress pattern of a word due to the stress rules of the other language, the momentary use of a syntactic structure taken from the language not being spoken, etc. Interferences can only be studied if the bilingual is in a monolingual mode as other forms of mixing (code-switching and borrowing) do not normally take place in that mode.

***What about code-switching and borrowing then?***

In a bilingual mode, once a base language has been chosen, bilinguals can bring in the other language (the 'guest' or 'embedded' language) in various ways. One of these ways is to code-switch, that is to shift completely



## Are We Doomed To Failure?

I met my Greek husband in Thessalonica. We married and had two children, Philippos, born in 1991 and Artemis, in 1995. By that time I was fairly confident in Greek and had a circle of friends who were native English speakers. We formed baby groups, which met once a week. We all took it for granted that we spoke English to our children whilst our husbands and their families spoke Greek.

There was plenty of opportunity to enrich and extend their English through getting together with each other for coffee mornings, birthday parties, and through English and American television programmes which were subtitled in Greek, and therefore accessible to our pre-readers. Philippos even attended an English speaking playgroup. We had a month's holiday in England in the summer, two further weeks at Christmas, and my parents would come out to us in May, so there was lots of exposure to English speakers.

Another good aspect of where we lived was that most Greeks we came in contact with were not fluent enough in English to want to practise on our children. Sometimes in tourist areas Greeks are so confident in English (and the language has higher status) that they seek every opportunity to speak it. Bilingual families on holiday there trying to bathe their children in the Greek language are not given the chance!

Philippos and Artemis were fairly balanced bilinguals with language appropriate to their ages (then 6 and 2) by 1997. That year, though, we decided to move to England. I knew that maintaining their Greek would be a challenge, but hadn't realised how hard it would be.

Initially we had to stay with my parents, thus making it hard to establish any habit of speaking Greek at home. My husband Christos was anxious to improve his English and was also working long hours. We had brought no Greek videos with us (an oversight!) and gradually the Greek element in our lives slid away. After the first few weeks in England the children started to reply to his Greek with English. Later we moved into our own home, but by then it was hard to introduce rules about speaking Greek. Christos even started speaking English to the children,

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surely the worst sign! It was even more unnatural for me to speak Greek to them as we had established English as my language. I was getting desperate and sometimes tried to have 'Greek times' where we practised our Greek. It all seemed very forced, and we are only a little further forward now.

A couple of years ago we started to go to a Greek Orthodox church with a school attached, and a Church President who is committed to getting the children to speak Greek. However, the children in the school are of such varying levels it is hard to teach them. Most people have brought up their children as English speaking monolinguals and their children don't even have the passive knowledge that ours do.

Unfortunately, we seem to be in the minority in taking language proficiency seriously. I often get the impression people think I'm obsessed with it. It is a passion for me, but I challenge the common assumption that monolingualism is the norm and anything else is just trying to be clever! So few people are proficient in foreign languages and do not understand the value it adds to life. I would dearly love my children to have as good a grasp of Greek as they do English and be able to appreciate humour and word play in both languages and not struggle as I do. I'd like them to sound like native Greek speakers too! I realise these may be high expectations, but there is no harm in aiming high.

It is a sad truth that Greek appears to be considered a fairly low status language (despite its noble origins) and is considered that way by many Greeks too, who often seem keen to abandon their own language as soon as possible when they move abroad. This doesn't make our task any easier.

Philippos seems to speak fluently (with a limited vocabulary) when we go to Greece for our annual holiday, but Artemis is much weaker, for she lived for only two years in Greece. My only hope is that at some time in the near future I will be able to take them over for a month at a time, possibly leaving them in the care of non-English speakers! Does this sound cruel?

I have always been very optimistic about bilingualism, but it was easy in Greece. Here I don't know which way to progress and am very aware of the clock ticking as the children grow up, acquire other interests and become less likely to learn Greek through natural exposure to it. Has anyone got any ideas?

**Sarah Ward-Evmorfopoulos,  
Berkshire, UK**

## HUMOUR, HUMOUR



### A Smelly Finger

Jael (6 years, speaking German, Danish and English) came home after school, complaining about a sore finger from writing:

*Mor, mein Finger stinkt!* (lit.: Mum, my finger smells!).

What she meant to say was: *Mum, my finger stings!*

Judith Sørensen, Hull, UK

### Thank You!

In the somewhat challenging and anxious early beginnings of bilingual family living I have found this most recent issue of The Bilingual Family Newsletter (V.19:4, 02) the most encouraging so far and particularly on two counts:

Firstly, your response to Nathalie Holmes' letter about her daughter's reluctance to speak French has been further helpful confirmation that being relaxed and consistent in my approach to speaking Spanish to my four year old daughter since her birth will bear fruit! Lizzie has always found it exciting to think she knows about another language but the trojan solitary work of ensuring her Spanish input has been exhausting to say the least. I am Anglo Chilean (my father is Chilean of British descent), and am the only person she hears speaking Spanish, which I do on the one-parent-one-language basis. I support this through listening to tapes, reading books together, and more recently through the fabulously successful BBC Muzzy early language course. In her four years Lizzie has been to visit our family in Chile four times, each for a period of at least four weeks, and during which she has attended a rural nursery five mornings a week together with purely Spanish speaking children and staff. On each occasion, for the entire week after her return to England she has not spoken English at all, much to the challenge of the English nursery staff and their holiday Spanish! These infrequent periods of 'success' in the language development are vast reward to the interim periods where Lizzie says nothing at all in Spanish except

for odd words although appears to be increasing her understanding and vocabulary.

And then François Grosjean!

Having learnt Spanish only 'informally' in Chile during periods of time amounting to some 5 years over the last 27, plus annual or biannual visits of a month at a time over that same period I am so utterly conscious of my inadequate level of Spanish ability and yet so determined to introduce this whole cultural aspect which is so special to me, to my daughter.

Francois' two points particularly, that a) bilingualism is the use of two languages in one's everyday life and not knowing two or more languages equally well, and b) that because the needs and uses of the two languages are usually quite different, the bilingual is rarely equally or completely fluent in his/her languages – These are music to my ears! I shall write these two points out clearly to remind myself every day that my passion to encourage language development no matter the challenge is worthwhile!

Thank you for your fabulous publication which I share with speakers of various languages at the nursery in England where Lizzie attends.

**Nicola Wilkinson,  
Northamptonshire, UK**

**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!**

### ...and Thank You again!

During our stay in England I bumped into your magazine and quickly was taken aback by the contributions and loving care of the editors in order to make the 'letters' a very welcome, refreshingly joyful travel through cultures and languages. I always enjoy it so much - not least because of its sparkling wisdom.

**Barbara Siebner,  
Kiel, UK**

*Multilingual Matters would like to thank all of you who continue to write in and offer your support and encouragement. It really is great to know that our efforts are so well appreciated. We love to receive your articles, anecdotes, queries and letters, even if they do not all get published. They really do make the BFN what it is.*

**Sami Grover, Marjukka Grover, and all at Multilingual Matters,  
North Somerset, UK**



## BILINGUALISM AND ADOPTION

**My wife and I adopted a 19 month old girl from China in April this year. I speak no Mandarin whilst my wife speaks it only poorly. Our daughter was not speaking any Chinese at the time we adopted her. Since then her comprehension of English, which, of course, she had not heard before, has progressed rapidly. She is clearly having difficulty learning to speak in this very different language, however. She has a very small set of words which we understand but outsiders probably would not.**

**I am writing to you in case you are aware of any publications or other material on this issue. We are very keen to make sure we are doing the best things for our daughter to enable her to acquire English speech as naturally as possible. Equally, of course, we are anxious not to subject her to any stress over this, even if done unconsciously.**

**Roger Horney, UK**

First the bad news. As far as I'm aware there is nothing else written on adopting children and bilingualism. I composed an Encyclopedia a couple of years ago - and trawled hard for material on such issues.

Better news - the Bilingual Family Newsletter is a way into other families with similar issues. I guess the BFN must reach a few other families like yours. So this query might activate some parallel experiences.

However, I suspect I shouldn't duck some practical individual advice even if it is not 100% in line with general advice. So here goes on your particular case ...

It will be important for your adopted daughter to have proficient English by the time she goes to Primary school.

While I naturally strongly support bilingualism, there is a reality that a child needs to be sufficiently advanced in the school language to cope with an increasingly complex curriculum. So (wearing a Professor of Education hat), my practical advice would be to concentrate on getting her confident and competent in English as preparation for schooling. Using English at home (with much encouragement and love), at pre-school or nursery, with similar age

friends, should result in English competence by the age of four or five.

Also, if she hears Mandarin 'poorly spoken' this will not help (linguistically or cognitively) her development.

Your letter radiates sensitivity and care. To investigate and raise a query shows much concern and affection. While Mandarin may seem a route to accepting her origins and heritage, this can be done culturally, socially and not only by language. By the sounds of your letter, you are keen that she gains high self esteem and self confidence. These are achieved by all elements of a relationship - not just by language.

While I normally would go down a bilingualism line, in your circumstances the most sensible seems to cultivate her English for school readiness while opening up chances to learn Mandarin later in life (e.g. at secondary school, out-of-school classes).

With very best wishes for the future, deserved from the kindness of your adoption.

**Colin Baker**

### **Roger responds:**

*We agree wholeheartedly with all you say about the need for our daughter, Sasha, to be proficient in English and the possibilities acquiring Mandarin at a later stage.*

*I was not really asking about the pros and cons of raising Sasha bilingually. My wife's mother tongue is Cantonese although these days the main languages in Singapore are English and Mandarin. All Sasha's cousins have English as their first language but have also learnt, or are learning, Mandarin. It is very difficult to know what Chinese 'dialects' Sasha has been exposed to, let alone which language is, literally, her mother tongue. Almost certainly she has heard Mandarin but may also have heard the Hunan dialect local to the orphanage. Given all this, my wife decided not to speak Cantonese to Sasha or, at this stage, Mandarin. We are concentrating completely on English.*

*We are in frequent contact with many other families in the UK who have adopted from China. Many were adopted a little bit younger than Sasha but some were of a similar age or older. Obviously there have been language delays but they do seem to have had fewer problems than Sasha does.*

**Roger Horney, UK**

## **Are Bilinguals...**

*continued from page 3*

### **Do all bilinguals have advantages?**

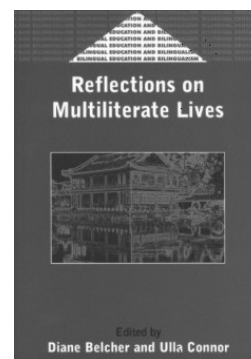
Not all bilinguals have advantages over monolinguals when learning an additional language. Some studies have found that some bilingual immigrant children do not present advantages over monolingual children. These results may be related to social factors and educational factors. The social conditions for these children are not optimal and in many cases their first language is not used at school and they cannot fully develop it.

### **Is bilingualism the most important factor in language acquisition?**

Bilingualism is one of the factors that influences language acquisition but it is not the only factor or not even the most important one. Some individual characteristics such as aptitude for languages, motivation or socio-educational background can be more important than bilingualism. The specific family and educational contexts in which third language acquisition takes place are also important.

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*Reflections on Multiliterate Lives* is a collection of personal accounts, in narrative and interview format, of the formative literacy experiences of highly successful second language users, all of whom are professional academics.

Pbk ISBN 1-85359-521-7, price £19.95/  
US\$29.95, February 2001 vii+211 pp



## New Books on Sign Language and the Deaf Community

For years sign languages have been wrongly seen as a subsidiary of spoken language, merely a series of gestures which directly correspond to spoken words. Only last month I was looking at an impressive list of languages in the brochure for an adult education centre and yet spotted 'Introduction to British Sign Language' listed separately in the miscellaneous section along with needlework and felt-making!

Recently, however, there has been an increased recognition of sign languages being just what their name suggests, *languages* in their own right, with grammars, dialects and cultural aspects just like any spoken language. This is reflected in two new books being published by Multilingual Matters:

### Understanding Deaf Culture: In Search of Deafhood

Paddy Ladd (*University of Bristol*)

*'Paddy Ladd has done a splendid job with this book: it is enlightening, insightful and deeply reflective'*  
Harlan Lane (*Northeastern University*)

This Book Presents a 'Travellers Guide' to Deaf Culture, starting from the premise that Deaf cultures have an important contribution to make to other academic disciplines, and to human lives in general. There is a need for an account of Deaf culture, which enables readers to assess its place alongside work within other minority cultures and multilingual discourses.

Pbk 1-85359-545-4 £24.95/US\$39.95/CAN\$49.95

### Making Sense in Sign: A Lifeline for a Deaf Child

Jenny Froude

*'Professionals who work with deaf children should read this book and refer to it often. The arguments for the communication approach are clearly presented. But that aside, the insights into family life with a deaf child are invaluable'*

Jackie Parsons  
(*Lighthouse Sign Support Resource*)

The story of family life with a boy, Tom, deafened by meningitis. Told by Tom's mother, this book offers a first hand account of how the family learns to communicate and how Tom grows up to be an independent young adult.

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## Interview... continued from page 4

to the other language for a word, a phrase, a sentence. The other way is to borrow a word or short expression from that language and to adapt it morphologically (and often phonologically) into the base language. Thus, unlike code-switching, which is the juxtaposition of two languages, borrowing is the integration of one language into another. Most often both the form and the content of a word are borrowed (to produce what has been called a loanword or more simply a borrowing). A second type of borrowing, called a loanshift, consists in either taking a word in the base language and extending its meaning to correspond to that of a word in the other language, or rearranging words in the base language along a pattern provided by the other language and thus creating a new meaning. I believe, like Shana Poplack, that it is important to distinguish idiosyncratic loans (also

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*"...one never regrets knowing several languages but one can certainly regret not knowing enough, especially if one's own development is at stake."*

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called 'speech borrowings' or 'nonce borrowings') from words which have become part of a language community's vocabulary and which monolinguals also use (called 'language borrowings' or 'established loans').

***Your paper on the right of the deaf child to be bilingual has been translated into several languages. Tell us about it.***

Back in 1999, I was asked to give a short presentation on the bilingualism of deaf children. As you may know, I had already written several papers on the bilingualism of the Deaf. When planning this particular talk (and then paper), I came up with the idea of starting with what a deaf child needs to do with language, that is, communicate early with his/her parents, develop his/her cognitive abilities, acquire knowledge of the world, communicate fully with the surrounding world, and acculturate into the world of the hearing and of the Deaf. I then continued with the fact that if these behaviors are truly important for the child, then the only way of meeting these needs is to allow the child to become bilingual in sign language and speech. Sign language can help trigger the language acquisition device,

give a natural language to the child in the first years, and also help the acquisition of the oral language. I ended the paper by stating that one never regrets knowing several languages but one can certainly regret not knowing enough, especially if one's own development is at stake. The deaf child should have the right to grow up bilingual and it is our responsibility to help him/her do so. Since then, this short paper has had more success than any of my other writings! It has been translated into some twenty languages (among them Chinese, Japanese, Russian, Spanish, Hungarian, etc.) and has appeared in numerous publications.

***Is the situation of deaf children changing? In some countries the oral vs. sign debate is still raging.***

I do believe that things are changing since the bilingual approach that many of us defend does not put into question the importance of either the oral language or sign language. Both are needed and so the defenders of the one, or of the other, feel less threatened by this middle of the road approach. In addition, since recent research has shown that sign language can help the acquisition of the oral language, in particular that of writing skills, parents, educators and language pathologists are showing real interest in this other way of doing things. Many schools in North and South America (e.g. Canada, the United States, Nicaragua, Colombia, etc.) follow a bilingual approach. This is also the case of Scandinavia, The Netherlands and other European countries. Still other countries are slowly opening themselves up to this approach. I firmly believe that in the years to come, deaf children will be allowed to be bilingual in their very early childhood.

***Tell us something about your current research on bilingualism.***

Since I am an experimental psycholinguist by training, I am continuing experimental (and computational work with N. Lévy) on bilingual speech processing (see, for example, our recent study with D. Guillelmon on the processing of gender marking by early and late bilinguals). The aim is to better understand how bilinguals process language when in a monolingual mode (and hence when their other language is deactivated) and when in a bilingual mode (that is, when they produce and perceive a base-language as well as code-switches and borrowings from the other language). I also write general papers on the bilingual and bicultural person (hearing and deaf) and I keep 'fighting' against well-established (but false) ideas about bilingualism. In

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## GLOSSARY:

**Acculturation:** The process by which an individual adapts to a new culture.

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addition, as you know, I have been very busy these last five years editing, with fellow editors, the journal *Bilingualism: Language and Cognition* (Cambridge University Press). As soon as I step down from the co-editorship, I would like to write another book on bilingualism which will summarize all the work that I have done on the subject since *Life with Two Languages*.

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