

the bilingual family newsletter

news and views for intercultural people

editors: sami grover and marjukka grover

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editorial

During the 25 years that the *BFN* has been running, we've received tonnes of mail. Most of it is positive, but every now and then we get a complaint too. Among the most common complaints is that we make it look too easy. We do try to paint a balanced view of bi/multilingual living, but it's not hard to imagine how stressed out parents may roll their eyes at what they see as another article about the 'perfect' bilingual family.

For anyone who has had that reaction, Alex Poole's article about his experiences with bilingual child rearing may be a relief. While Alex, a college professor specialising in English as a second language, and his wife, a Spanish teacher, remain strong advocates of bilingualism, they admit to still having worries – most notably about negative societal attitudes to Spanish.

Monika Jonasova's account of the prejudice and isolation she has experienced is another example of how the path to bilingualism is not always a smooth one, and for those dealing with prejudices against bilingualism *and* learning difficulties, the challenges are double.

But the fact remains that most research points to considerable benefits from bi/multilingual child rearing, and if you continue to share your stories with us, both positive and negative, we hope to continue to inspire others to follow the path that is right for them. Please do keep your articles, letters, queries and anecdotes coming – it wouldn't be possible without you.

Sami Grover

Even the Experts Worry...

Alex Poole



Like many of the people reading this article, my wife and I are not shy about speaking to each other in my native language, English, or in hers, Spanish. While in public, whether in the United States or Colombia, such bilingualism can spark a variety of reactions, few of which are disapproving, some of which show confusion, but most of which display praise coupled with envy.

While trying to stop our soon-to-be two year-old daughter from throwing food in a restaurant; changing her diaper in an airport terminal; or convincing her to go down the slide at the park, someone will inevitably overhear us bantering away and ask, "*Does she speak both languages?*" When we answer in the affirmative, they almost always respond by asking how both of us became bilingual.

In order to avoid missing our flight (or our dinner!), I usually give them the abridged version of our linguistic history: I am a college professor specializing in teaching English as a second language (TESL), and my wife is a high school Spanish teacher. "*Oh, so this stuff is easy for you guys. Your*

kids have it made," or some variation, is the usual response.

In many ways such a response is correct – we are very privileged. Both of us are highly functional bilinguals, and we have advanced training in the subject. My wife, whom I met in graduate school, has a masters degree in TESL/Spanish and has taught at the elementary, high school, and college levels. I have a PhD in Applied Linguistics and am the director of the TESL program at Western Kentucky University.

In spite of our achievements, both of us worked hard to become bilingual. When my wife came to the United States, she had already studied English for almost ten years, yet she struggled with idiomatic expressions and academic writing. I, on the other hand, did not know any Spanish when I met her, but soon started learning, and used my professional knowledge to aid me. For example, I read newspapers and magazines that were simple, yet interesting, thus giving myself what Stephen Krashen, an expert in bilingualism and language learning, calls 'comprehensible input,' the idea being that we learn grammar and vocabulary by reading texts that are not too difficult and have content that is familiar to us. I also used effective learning strategies, such as writing down high frequency words on note pads and reviewing them several times a day.

I would also aggressively seek out conversations with native speakers, even if they were strained; nevertheless, I

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Even the Experts Worry...

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incorporated strategies to understand, be understood, and keep conversations going.

We have used our experiences and professional knowledge to help our daughter, Luna, become bilingual. We read to her books in both languages that focus on popular children's characters such as *Elmo* and *Dora the Explorer*; we also have her watch bilingual DVDs with these same characters.

In addition, we expose her to situations in which she has to interact in both languages. For English, she attends an English-speaking day care during the week; for Spanish, we attend church services in Spanish, frequently socialize with our Spanish-speaking friends, speak weekly with her maternal grandparents, and regularly visit Colombia.

Most importantly, we understand that she will switch between one language and the other and mix the grammar of both in a single conversation. These phenomena – which are known as 'code-switching' and 'code-mixing,' respectively – are natural in bilingual children and do not represent linguistic confusion. Unfortunately, many anxious parents do not understand these processes, causing them to abandon one language in favor of a monolingual household.

Even though she is still very young, Luna is steadily progressing towards Spanish-English bilingualism. She comprehends both languages, can make three-word utterances in them, and has a large bilingual vocabulary. In fact, she will sometimes repeat the same word or phrase in one language and then the other.

...the process of fostering bilingualism is a work in progress that constantly presents challenges, regardless of previous successes.

When we are at the mall or a toy store and she sees a balloon, for instance, she'll say the Spanish word, *bomba*, and then balloon. Sometimes, she will even prefer one language over another and switch with whomever she is interacting, even if they are not bilingual. For example, her daycare teacher told us a few months ago that she was preparing the children to go outside and play. Our daughter had removed her shoes, and so she told her: "Okay Luna, you have to put your shoes back on," to which she responded, "Shoes? No, zapatos."

In spite of our educational background and current success with our daughter's bilingualism, many challenges remain, although they are not instructional, but rather social and psychological – for her and us. First, we worry about how to prevent our daughter from internalizing the negative attitudes towards Spanish and Latinos that are prevalent in some sectors of the American society. Such negative attitudes not only can cause identity problems, but also can encourage the children to reject the language and culture.

A South American couple with whom we are friends is actually experiencing this situation with their son, who is in the second grade. He has had the benefit of living in the same city as bilingual/bicultural grandparents, aunts, uncles and cousins who have tried to foster his Spanish-language skills; however, he dislikes Latino music and food, and often resents speaking Spanish. In fact, one time two years ago when I was at his parents' home, I asked him if we could speak in Spanish, to which he responded: "I'm an American; I speak English."

Another challenge pertains to presenting a positive, yet realistic, view of Colombia. While we certainly want to teach her about all of the beautiful aspects of that culture – e.g., the history, art, geography, folklore, the people's generosity, etc. – we also want her to understand that the country suffers from some severe problems, such

Letters



Perseverance Against Prejudice

I am the mother of 1-year-old baby boy named Jacob, who is just like most kids these days, strongly hyperactive and exceptionally curious.

Being lucky enough to have spent one-and-a-half-years as a four-year-old child in the USA with my family, English became part of my life very naturally. Back in my home country, in Slovakia, I continued to study the language many years later in University. I took to it as my second mother tongue from the beginning

and even today all of my notes are written automatically in English. I even dream in it even though my mother language is Slovak.

I am very glad for my "accidental" bilingualism, even when nobody else in my family speaks English. I can not imagine my life without it. Hence naturally, when I became a mother, I started to speak with my son in English as soon as I was pregnant.

At present he is absolutely bilingual in both Slovak and English. Of course only a few real words are coming out of his mouth so far, but he reacts to everything that we ask him for. For instance, he will bring all of his toys if we ask him to either in English or Slovak, and he can point to all the kitchen devices in both (the best-loved is cooker for the moment), he understands all basic commands (are you hungry? thirsty?), and he imitates the sounds of animals (they are different in Slovak and in English).

From the beginning we have been addicted to English books and songs and he lets me know which song I should sing. I learn a lot every day in using English with him as it is normal to forget some words when they are not being used in everyday

conversation by me. So my son is teaching me English again!

We did not, however, follow *OPOL* [One-Parent-One-Language] right from the beginning. As my husband's major language is Hungarian, but he speaks Slovak like a native as well and understands English perfectly too, sometimes we spoke together in English, just to practice it. That's how it happened as he slipped many times into English while speaking with our baby boy and vice versa, and I spoke with him (mainly while cuddling) only in Slovak. We simply didn't know that it might cause some troubles in his bilingual thinking later on and we just switched every time we felt so.

Since then I study every single novelty and try to stay as up-to-date as possible. Unluckily for us, all these are far away from our country. I mean that there are almost no possibilities (apart from language schools) to gather with bilingual families here in Slovakia. I even tried to establish one meeting place for mothers with bilingual babies, but it met with almost no interest. Nevertheless, I

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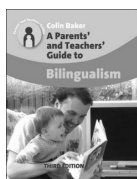
as civil war, poverty, and racism. In other words, we want her to possess a balanced view of Colombia that is neither condescending nor naïve.

Our biggest concern about our daughter's bilingualism is actually mine and not my wife's: How I'm going to control all of my anxieties related to this process. Some of these revolve around self-doubt about my approach to fostering her bilingualism (Are we providing her with the right instructional materials? Are we striking the right balance between English and Spanish?); others are concerned about what my reaction will be if she seems disinterested in bilingualism and biculturalism. (Will I respect her decision when she is old enough to make it on her own? Will I feel like a failure as a parent and a second language educator?)

At this point, readers may be asking themselves why I'm telling them all of this. One reason is to show newcomers to this experience that the process of fostering bilingualism is a work in progress that constantly presents challenges, regardless of previous successes. For some of us, it may be dealing with cultural issues and motivation, while for others, it may be accessing quality audiovisual materials.

My second motivation in relating my experiences is to illustrate that even the so-called 'experts' struggle with raising bilingual children. While we may know a great deal about the phenomenon, the actual execution of it is probably just as difficult for us as it is for non-specialists. In other words, nobody should feel deficient or envious because this process is far from being perfected by anyone!

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September 2007
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Notes from the OPOL Family



A Sporting Chance...

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert

We are not a sporting family, but there are some major sporting events where you can't help wanting your country to win. Being a dual-nationality family we are sometimes split. When I hear the British anthem, or see Princes William and Henry in the crowd, I can't help but join in with the chorus of 'God save the Queen!' Jacques has the same effect when he hears *La Marseillaise*. It's tense in our house when it's an England v France game.

Which team should our children support? England and France often come head-to-head in international tournaments. In general, Marc and Nina support France, while me and Gabriel are cheering for England (this could be linked to Gabriel having an England football strip that he wears for all sporting events).

Curiously, we all agree that when one of our teams is knocked out we support the other. At a recent Rugby competition, when England eliminated France in the semi-finals we all cheered for England in the following match. I would do the same for France. I was weepy when France lost to Italy in the 2006 World Cup.

Luckily there are some players who are admired by both countries - David Beckham; Eric Cantona; Arsenal manager, Arsène Wenger; and five of his current team (who are all French). So even though we may play to win there is still some hope for Franco-British relations.

That leaves the intriguing question - if one or more of our children was really talented at a sport, which country would they play for?

How Many is Too Many?

We live in a tiny village and yet there are about ten English families living near us. When we lived here seven years ago the only English I bumped into were retired couples or eccentric hippies looking for a different lifestyle. I used to meet them at the recycling depot or wandering

hopelessly around the supermarket looking for ginger biscuits.

Now we have an influx of young families. Many choose remote rural areas with houses they can renovate. Families who move out here take a huge risk, the country life can be lonely and it's hard for the children being thrown into the strict French educational system. Most parents are optimistic and keen to immerse the family in French cultural life – before signing the papers to their houses they imagine chatting over the fence to their French neighbours and speaking wonderful French in just a few months with their new friends over an aperitif. In reality, their best friends tend to be English.

The numbers of English residents has sky-rocketed in five years. There are estimated to be around 400,000 British families in France. In the English café in the local town I browse the monthly newsletters offering English plumbers, carpenters and gardeners. A whole community has materialized to meet their needs. The supermarket has an International section now (baked beans, HP sauce, Tetley's tea-bags...) and the staff speak English.

In the local school Marc and Nina attend, out of sixty-six pupils there are seven English kids. That's over 10%. The seven kids naturally talk English together, even though they are all bilingual, except in class where English is banned. So far, the linguistic balance is working and the seven English-speaking kids make efforts to play with the French children and to integrate through after-school activities. In the secondary school I hear that 20% of the kids are English. They have become a separate group and rarely socialize with French kids.

What do the locals think about it? French mothers are happy for their kids to play with English kids (free language lessons!), but furious at the prices the English pay for a run-down barn with no running water, or the lack of work for local tradesmen. There is a distinct feeling that the numbers are getting too high. On the English side some of the parents were annoyed to have yet another 'English' family join the class when we arrived. There's the unspoken fear that the kids will not bother learning French or make any French friends. Personally, I am happy that Marc and Nina can talk in English with their new friends and can share books and films. But, when I hear that another house in the village has been sold to an English family I also begin to wonder how many English is too many?

Which team do you support? Is one of your family languages marginalized in the country where you live? Post a comment on Suzanne's blog: <http://opol-family.blogspot.com/>

will try further even more and I will persevere.

The decision to become Slovak-English bilinguals did not seem to me at the beginning as difficult as I encounter it now.

I am meeting with more negative attitudes towards this upbringing and many people are advising me against bilingualism. Some say that it simply isn't right, because no child will understand our boy, others are arguing that it is too hard to follow all the time or they just stare with suspicion or jealousy. Even some of our family members are negative.

Needless to say that I am trying not to notice such prejudices. However I am not going to give up, nor will I be discouraged from bringing Jacob up bilingually, as I am totally sure of its positives. Just as Sami Grover wrote in one of his BFN's "*Doing things differently is not always easy.*" So far it really seems to me that being a bilingual child in Slovakia, means (for the present) to be an outsider.

Moreover when our country (that I love very much), the Slovak Republic is so beautiful, modern, cheerful, and open, I am sometimes surprised by such attitudes. But perhaps I just have not met the right people so far...

To sum up, I wanted to encourage families starting on the road to bilingualism – it can only help your children to live better and fuller lives. And as a last point, let me pay a tribute to all the people who are working for the *Bilingual Family Newsletter* as they are helping many families worldwide to be confident in the fact that we are doing a right thing.

Monika Jonasova & Family, Slovakia

If you know someone who would like to get in touch either for writing, sharing similar obstacles or even live in Slovak

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Book Review: Raising Children as Bilinguals H. Oketani-Lobbezoo (Ed.)



Raising Children as Bilinguals: Bilingual Education from Age Zero — From the Perspective of Japanese Heritage Language Education

H. Oketani-Lobbezoo (Ed.)
Akashi Shoten, 2007
Pp. 222 - ISBN 978-4-7503-2629-0

This book, written bilingually in Japanese and English, is for anyone concerned about children's language education abroad. It consists of two major sections, "Practice" and "Theory." The former section was written by Suzuki Michiko, an experienced educator and pioneer of Japanese heritage language education in Canada; the latter section was written by Oketani-Lobbezoo Hitomi, an Eastern Michigan University scholar in bilingual and multilingual education with expertise in Japanese heritage language education.

...Suzuki's in-depth wisdom, coming from her long, rich experience with children [...] gives us an opportunity to reconsider what roles we parents should take in child upbringing...

The Practice section is mainly based on Suzuki's own experiences in bilingual child raising, both as a mother and a teacher. The topics covered in this section include bilingual education at home; raising a bilingual child at home in the early years and later years; how to deal with TV, videos, and video games; and the practical use of teaching games, which comprises one entire chapter.

Suzuki presents in her discussion many "dos" and "don'ts," some of which are directly related to bilingual child rearing and others that relate to child upbringing in general. To make her claims accessible, in her discussion she incorporates numerous examples that she has encountered. She also presents some games and activities useful for developing children's Japanese language. I think even adults, both learners of and native speakers

of Japanese language, would find some of these games fun and challenging.

While many of her comments and words of advice are wise and useful to parents raising children, some are not necessarily supported by the current research findings. For example, she advises parents that "[e]ach parent should use his or her own native language when speaking to the children" (p. 121). This type of language use by parents is called the *One Parent-One Language* approach, and has often been recommended for effective bilingual child rearing. However, recent research shows that it is not always the best option (cf. Yamamoto, 2001).

Even though some caution is needed in interpreting her comments and advice, Suzuki's in-depth wisdom, coming from her long, rich experience with children, is by all means worth paying attention to, since it gives us an opportunity to reconsider what roles we parents should take in child upbringing in general and bilingual child rearing in particular.

As for the Theory section, the topics discussed are: bilingual education; language proficiency and social and psychological aspects; and bilingual development by age. Although this section is referred to as Theory, no hard-core theoretical discussions and arguments are found. Instead, it summarizes some research findings useful for discussing these topics.

Although I feel that the first topic — bilingual education — is dealt with too briefly, the other two topics — language proficiency and social and psychological aspects, and bilingual development by age — are well recapitulated and offer useful resources of knowledge about bilingual development.

In the first of these two topics, Oketani-Lobbezoo introduces Landry and Allard's three levels of factors affecting children's bilingual development, namely the sociological level, the socio-psychological level, and the psychological level (which come from their Macroscopic model of the determinants of additive and subtractive bilingualism, 1992). In the second topic, she presents some research findings on Japanese children's socialization processes and language development, which suggest that "*it takes relatively a [sic] few years to reach the norm for oral proficiency; and five to seven years to reach the norm for literacy. In the longest case, it may take nine years to reach the norm for literacy*" (p. 211).

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Bilingualism and Learning Difficulties: Separating Fact From Fiction

Barbara Dodd, Gayle Hemsley and Carol Stow

Barbara Dodd is an ARC Professor in the Perinatal Research Centre and Gayle Hemsley is a Speech Language Pathologist, both at the University of Queensland. Carol Stow is a Lead Specialist Speech & Language Therapist at Rochdale PCT. In the following article they set out to clear up some of the confusion and misunderstanding that surrounds the subject of bilingualism and learning difficulties.

The term “learning difficulty” is a confusing one. The definition varies from country to country, and depends on whether the author comes from a medical, social or educational background. In recent years, there has been increased research interest in bilingualism and language development in children with two types of learning difficulties: cognitive impairment and specific language impairment. There is now ample research evidence that a bilingual learning environment does *not* disadvantage the language acquisition of children with either of these diagnoses. In both cases, parents should be concerned if they are advised by professionals to expose these children to only one language.

Children with Cognitive Impairment

Children with cognitive impairment have a significant intellectual impairment with deficits in social functioning or activities of daily living. Up until the 1970s it was assumed that cognitive impairment was inevitably associated with language delays and disorders. Children with severe cognitive impairment were assumed to have poor language skills across the board. One implication of this assumption was that if learning one language was a challenge, then learning two would be just too difficult. Now, there is strong evidence suggesting that language and cognitive abilities can show different levels of attainment, regardless of whether a child is monolingual or multilingual. Verification comes from case studies of remarkable people who have learned more than one language.

One example of an individual with cognitive impairment but spared language ability is Christopher. This young man, first assessed by O'Connor and Hermelin in 1991, presented remarkable linguistic skills. Although he had a moderate intellectual impairment (IQ67) and could not live independently, Christopher demonstrated the ability to translate into English from German, French and Spanish. In all four languages his vocabulary was above average and his

understanding of sentence grammar was adequate. In 1995, Smith and Tsimpli's book presented detailed descriptions of Christopher's linguistic and cognitive abilities. The following summary is drawn from their work.

Christopher was born in 1962. His delayed development and intellectual impairment were thought to be due to brain damage at birth. Christopher attended special schools, eventually being transferred to a school for physically handicapped children because of motor difficulties. His main interests at home and at school were foreign languages. Assessment of Christopher's ability in English led to the conclusion that it was 'perfect', even though his performance on assessments of non-verbal intelligence tests were well below average. He did, however, experience difficulty understanding jokes or metaphor (e.g. 'no man is an island'), perhaps indicating that some aspects of language comprehension were limited by his cognitive abilities.

In both cases, parents should be concerned if they are advised by professionals to expose these children to only one language.

Christopher had varying degrees of knowledge (from elementary to fluent production and comprehension of spoken and/or written forms) of 16 languages: Danish, Dutch, Finnish, French, German, Modern Greek, Hindi, Italian, Norwegian, Polish, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Swedish, Turkish and Welsh. These languages represent a wide range of the world's language families and include languages with different word orders (subject-object-verb; subject-verb-object) and different scripts (Cyrillic, Greek, Devanagari). Smith and Tsimpli (1995) found that Christopher's knowledge of his second languages' vocabularies was better than his knowledge of their syntax. Nevertheless, his ability to communicate in any of the languages studied was exceptional and better than that of most people without learning difficulties.

Children with Down Syndrome

While people with Down Syndrome (DS) do not differ from other cognitively impaired populations (matched for chronological age and IQ) on most intellectual assessments, it is often claimed that their linguistic abilities are more impaired. Children with DS have particular difficulty acquiring expressive language and their speech is often unintelligible.

A recent study by Kay-Raining Bird and her colleagues compared the language abilities of bilingual children with DS with matched monolingual children with DS, monolingual and bilingual non-DS children. Children spoke a range of different language pairs. Each child was assessed in both languages using standardised tests and non-standardised measures of language. No difference was found between the monolingual and bilingual children with DS. They did not differ on any task of English language proficiency. However, children with DS performed less well than the typically developing controls, showing the language profile associated with DS. The authors concluded that bilingual children with DS were developing useful second language skills.

Case studies also verify this pattern. An Italian woman with DS, who had been exposed to English, French and Italian as a child, spoke Italian remarkably well, and could engage in conversations in both her second languages: French and English (Vallar & Papagno, 1993). Another example was reported by Woll and Grove (1996). Ten year old twins with DS, born to deaf parents, acquired both spoken English and British Sign Language (BSL), learning to communicate well in both

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Translation and the Bilingual Child

It was with great pleasure that I read Cristina Banfi's article on why bilingual children translate [BFN 25:1]. I have a few German/English examples:

To Be Inclusive/To Play

Alan, the son of an English friend of mine, who is English, translated the lyrics of an old English song:

"It's raining it's pouring" – "Es regnet, es tröpfelt". Literally it actually means: *"It's raining, it's dripping"* (tröpfeln is a colloquial word which children use a lot). Somehow, this text seemed to fit into the tune better for Alan. The literal translation which would be *"Es regnet, es gießt"*.

Translating Names

Pauline was the first teacher who taught my children English. Although my daughter Andrea was competent in German and English, she was always particular about the pronunciation of her name. People had to pronounce *"Andrea"* with a good German accent, and say the *"r"* like in German (the guttural way). However, some English speakers, including Pauline, found that hard:

Andrea: *"Sie kann ihre deutschen "r"s so schlecht aussprechen. So jetzt üben wir das mal: Sag „Andrea“"* (Meaning *"She has such difficulty pronouncing her German „r"s. Well, let's practice. Say "Andrea"")*.

Pauline: *"Andrea"* (Rolling her *"r"* like in Spanish or Italian, but not guttural like German).

Andrea: *"Das war schon etwas besser, aber noch nicht ganz so wie es muss."* (Meaning: *"That was a little bit better, but still not quite the way it should be"*).

To Play

Steffi was only 1 ½ years old, but she enjoyed talking and did so in both languages. My mum remembers when she was running after a bird, talking to herself **"Birdie, Vogel, birdie, Vogel, birdie, Vogel..."** My mum first thought, Steffi was confused. However, I think she was enjoying herself, and playing with the sound of the words.

To Get Their Way/To Show Off/To Avoid Disapproval

Well, finally, the oldest example comes from me, myself, in my late teens.

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Bilingualism and Learning Difficulties... Continued from Page 5

languages, although their ability in either language was not equal to that of monolingual non-DS children in either language.

Children with Specific Language Impairment

Some children have specific language impairment (SLI). This means they fail to develop normal language functions in the absence of any obvious cognitive or sensory impairment. These students' significant learning needs are generally supported through ongoing speech-language therapy as well as educational placement in school language units.

A large, wide-ranging, study of children attending language units in the UK found that 11% of the sample had been exposed to languages other than English at home (Crutchley, Botting & Conti-Ramsden, 1997). Children learning a range of language pairs were included.

...families can feel comfortable with their wish to raise their children bilingually and be reassured that they are not disadvantaging their child.

These children had a different profile of language abilities from monolingual children with SLI. This is because it can be difficult to separate bilingual students whose language development is different due to their bilingualism (when compared to monolingual children in either language), from SLI students whose language development is disordered.

In 1999, Alison Crutchley cautioned that differentiating bilingual language difference from language disorder continued to be a clinical problem. This has resulted in both over and under referral of bilingual children to speech-language therapy. Under-referral of bilingual students to speech language therapy and special education services is a particular problem in the early years of schooling. Crutchley suggested that young bilingual children require more severe language difficulties than monolingual children to be identified as having SLI and referred to a language unit.

Another study found that teachers working with Southeast Asian children rarely refer children for special education services until fifth or sixth grade because of perceived difficulty determining whether learning problems are due to learning English at school or SLI (Hwa-Froelich & Matsuo, 2005).

Although bilingualism complicates a diagnosis of SLI, there is no evidence that it affects the ability of these children to reach their potential. A recent review by Johannes Paradis of French-English bilingual children with SLI concluded that 'children affected with a language learning disability can be raised bilingual without serious detriment to their grammatical development. Professional practices such as advising parents to give up speaking one of the two languages to a child with SLI do not find empirical support'. Confirmation has also come from SLI research with children who speak other language pairs. For example, Swedish-Arabic bilingual children with SLI had equal grammatical abilities in their two languages while typically developing bilinguals were usually more advanced in one language than the other. This suggests that development in one language was supportive of development in the other.

Conclusion

Every bilingual child with learning difficulties is unique and there can be no one 'rule' that applies to all children. Nevertheless, parents will provide the best language models for children to learn from when they speak in their own mother tongue. For parents to stop speaking that mother tongue is not likely to result in a positive outcome. Further, there is no evidence that learning difficulties are a reason for limiting children to one language. Rather, families and professionals might wish to facilitate bilingualism to avoid children being isolated from important family interactions. Like all parents, those of children with learning difficulties want to help their children be effective communicators. Given the evidence that children with learning difficulties can learn more than one language, families can feel comfortable with their wish to raise their children bilingually and be reassured that they are not disadvantaging their child.

We would recommend the following resources for parents, SLTs and teachers.

Baker, C., 2007, *A Parents' and Teachers' Guide to Bilingualism* (Clevedon: Multilingual Matters)

Foundation for People with Learning Disabilities: www.learningdisabilities.org.uk

Homeschooling in French: Too Much, Too Young?

Queries



My daughter is 7 ½ years-old and is a fairly 'balanced' bilingual (English/French). French is the minority language as we live in Britain and she can speak and read it with ease and is keen to learn more. So far, we have been doing about an hour of 'formal' French (verbs, spellings, handwriting..) per week.

However I am finding that it is getting harder, partly because I am not a teacher and am finding it hard to organise effective lessons. I am thinking of registering my daughter with for French lessons with a distance learning organisation (the very official Centre National d'Enseignement par Correspondance) which provides education for children who cannot attend school or who need extra help. That way, she would have some work set and marked by French teachers and would follow the syllabus they have in French schools.

I am worried, however, that it might 'too much' or 'too formal', and I am also concerned that there might be a conflict later with the English education system if/when she begins studying French there. Basically I am torn between being too ambitious for my daughter and giving her a real choice for her future.

Carole Paquis, Wallsall, UK

Doing French only with a French distance learning organisation is a good idea if you want your daughter to follow the syllabus prescribed in French schools. Your daughter might enjoy the challenge and be proud of doing something different and special.

It is beneficial as long as it remains something she is keen to do and does not become a chore which takes too much of her time that she would otherwise dedicate to other extra curricula activities.

It's also important that she is not put off by the way in which French is taught. To put it crudely, the French system expects more memorisation and cramming than the English one, which encourages the child to experiment and find out by himself. Obviously the best way of knowing whether it is suitable for your daughter is to try it for a year and then reassess the situation.

In our case (two English/French bilingual children), we discussed our situation with the headmaster of the Primary school and he subsequently allowed our children to stay at home once a week to work on their French. Thus being bilingual was officially acknowledged as something positive, to be proud of and which should be fostered. This was very important and encouraging to our children. This also meant that "doing French" was not added to their school time but part of it and considered as such by their classmates. This is an important consideration, given that most children of that age want to be like everybody else.

At Primary school level, things you do with your daughter don't have to be formal. Decide what areas you think she should know about and encourage her to find out about them independently (French books, DVD, internet search etc). In that way, her proficiency and ability to manipulate the language will increase a great deal.

For our children we chose topics linked with nature, art, history, environment or science which we felt were missing from their English education. We also explored aspects of French life that we considered essential to sustain their French identity. The children gathered material, took photos, interviewed people in France, wrote notes and summaries, built up dossiers. In that way, they had something to show for their effort.

We only corrected linguistic mistakes that occurred in their notes or summaries and we used these as a starting point for practice of grammatical points. My earlier attempt at following a systematic approach to grammar found in French primary school books was not very successful at all. The children did these exercises very swiftly without great enthusiasm and quickly forgot what they had been doing. The approach of "practice only when necessary" was much more fruitful.

There need not be a conflict with the English education system when your daughter does French at school, simply because she does not need to do French at school. In our case, when the children

reached Secondary level, we contacted the Local Authorities in good time to let them know that the school nearest to our home was not suitable, as it only offered French and could not cater for our children's language needs. The children were sent to another school where they could learn German.

During secondary school education there was not much time left to practice French formally at home, however the children were easily persuaded by the fact they could sit their formal exams in French several years ahead of their contemporaries if they did the preparation at home. Their previous experience of building up dossiers and independent work made the syllabus easy to follow, and they were quite prepared to work on the grammar required. The obvious attraction was to acquire an officially recognised qualification.

As a bilingual your daughter is used to switching codes and adapting to situations in different cultures. This is a crucial asset. After growing up in an English environment, if she decides to study or settle in France, she'll still have to adapt. Nobody can claim to be perfectly bilingual, knowing the vocabulary for every aspect of their new life or all the intricacies of two cultures, but in a way she'll already feel at home.

Marie Therese Byram, Durham, UK

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Translation... - Continued from Page 6

Though I'm not a native speaker, I took a great interest in English at quite a young age. My dad was always very kind, but sometimes a little bit authoritarian. I remember him giving some kind of instructions, which I was not so sure about, and I made this remark in English: "That's not very democratic". I must emphasise at this point that both my parents and my sister have a good command of the English language.

The remark fits all three of the above categories.

- **To avoid disapproval:** In another language, I was hoping it would sound like more of a joke and friendlier than if I had said it in our German native language.
- **To show off:** I was obviously pleased and proud of my good results in English at school and did not hesitate to share this.
- **For emphasis:** Apart from working on my English at school, I also took an interest in English and American history, sociology and in the politics. Did I not remember that the major Anglo-Saxon countries ranked among the oldest democracies?

This is my story, and I would enjoy reading many more!
Constanze Taylor

Book Review – Continued from Page 4

Although Oketani-Lobbezoo has done her job well in summarizing the theoretical issues, the range of topics and the depth of the discussion are unfortunately too limited: in comparison to approximately 90 pages for the Practice section, the Theory section is only about 20 pages long. I understand that the main purpose of this book is to provide accessible and practical resources to those who are interested in, but not familiar with, bilingual child-rearing. However, I feel that the book would have been more robust if more thorough discussions, both qualitative and quantitative, had been integrated into the Theory section in a way that the experience-based advice in the Practical section would have been scientifically supported and more persuasive.

Notwithstanding these caveats, I think the book is a very useful and easily comprehensible resource to parents and teachers who are trying to help children grow up bilingually.

Reviewer: Masayo Yamamoto

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