Multilingual Living

Because Global Communication Begins At Home

www.biculturalfamily.org

May/June 2008

Volume 3, Number 3

Hearing Impaired and bilingual!

How do you define your mother tongue(s)?

THE BILINGUAL EDGE INTERVIEW

Time to VISIT THE Speech Therapist

Time to GIVE UP multiilingualism?

Non-native French with a newborn

Using both languages to say I love you

Childspeak!

Multilingual FAQs

Spinach Parathas

Language activities to get them talking!

multilingual FAQs

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CONGRATULATIONS to our March-April 2008 WINNER:
Rebecca L. - Rottenburg, Germany

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Multilingual Living Magazine - May-June 2008
Have you noticed that more and more people are taking an interest in raising their children in more than one language and culture? Step by step, year by year, people are seeing the value and need to support native languages and cultures. This is a wonderful sign indeed. However, it doesn’t mean that we can stop what we are doing in keeping our children motivated and inspired. As with anything, if we don’t continue to use our languages, our children will quickly stop using them as well. The key is to revel in the joy of the world taking an interest in global languages while at the same time keeping our eye on the ball and not giving up.

In this issue of Multilingual Living Magazine we focus on some very important issues which many families are dealing with today. One is speech-language problems. Studies have shown again and again that raising children in more than one language does not cause speech problems in children. However, it is hard to get rid of the idea that perhaps everyone is missing something and that more than one language does cause problems (as a kind of overburdening of the brain). Hopefully the articles in this issue will be a reassurance that following your language plans is possible, even if it means getting a little help along the way.

Another interesting question which has come up is how to define “mother tongue.” If we grow up with more than one language, how can we just pick one language as our mother tongue? And why should we have to? Just because society sees the world monolingually doesn’t mean we have to stick to that formula for our own lives. Mother tongues is just as acceptable, if not more so!

The world has come to know the book *The Bilingual Edge - Why, When, and How to Teach Your Child a Second Language*, by Kendall King and Alison Mackey. And well we should! It is a wonderful book for families who have, or want to have, more than one language at home. We are delighted to present an interview with the two authors where they share their valuable insights and tips. We also provide our angle of *The Bilingual Edge* with a book review.

François Grosjean delights us again with a wonderful paper, this time about language impaired children and bilingualism. Growing up without the ability to hear should not hinder a child from growing up bilingually. By knowing and using both sign language and an oral language (in written or possibly spoken form) a hearing impaired child is given the opportunity to reach his or her highest cognitive, linguistic and social capabilities. There are not many who have taken on this topic so we are pleased to be able to share Grosjean’s expert article.

Our regular columnist, Sarah Dodson-Knight is the new mother of a son, Griffin! Congratulations! She continues her journey with non-native French but finds that speaking French isn’t as easy with her own son as it is with her nephew. Her honest article is a true testament to language and emotions.

For everyone out there with questions, we want to hear from you! Send us your concerns and worries as well as anything else on your minds for which you’d appreciate an expert’s advice or answer. It need not be something extreme! This issue’s article about mother tongue was inspired by a single email from someone who wanted to know what our thoughts were on the matter. How very exciting!

Thank you again for all of your support. We hope you have some wonderful outdoor language fun as the weather warms up in the northern hemisphere. And for those of you in the south, we hope you are settling in comfortably to the colder months as they approach.

Corey & Alice
Bilingual Fun on TV

Thinking of starting your own company selling bilingual or multilingual products? Or maybe you’d like to offer language classes? This is the perfect time to try out your ideas! The world is starting to take notice of the value of mastering more than one language.

The founder of the Bilingual Fun Company, Jennifer Manriquez, was interviewed on an ABC program in the USA about her company. It is inspiring to see what a family with a vision can do when it comes to supporting bilingual products! Video: abcnews.go.com/video/playerIndex?id=4447611.

Cody’s Cuentos

Each week, Cody, a mischievous, lovable puppy, and one of his human pals from Spain, Mexico or Argentina presents a well-told tale in Spanish. Spanish-speaking and bilingual families everywhere can now introduce to their children classic fairytales of the Brothers Grimm (Hansel & Gretel), Hans Christian Andersen (The Ugly Duckling), Charles Perrault (Cinderella), among others. Eduardo González Viana, professor of Spanish at Western Oregon University says that Cody’s Cuentos will be both entertaining and instructive to children. “Like all children, I learned the marvelous labyrinths of my native language by listening to my mother tell stories,” Prof. Viana says. “I believe that Cody’s Cuentos is a natural and magical way to learn about the amazing ins and outs of the Spanish language.” Website: www.codyscuentos.com
Your last issue has been very encouraging when it comes to sticking with teaching kids a foreign language. It also helped alleviate concerns I had about “losing” words of my own first language. Thanks again for a great issue!

Marita M.
FundraisingIP.com

Thanks to Alice and Madalena for the fast turn-around [to my question]!

Many thanks for the reassurance, here and in your magazine. Growing up mono in the US, I really appreciate the clear, straight-forward and evidence-based information that MLL provides. Even though I’m surrounded by bi- or multilinguals through my work and home environment who know that learning 2, 3, or 8 languages is the most natural thing in the world, it is great for me to get that MLL boost every other month. And, on a practical note, the kids activity ideas are great too!
Best,
Emily

Arabic Summer Language Camp, 2008 for Children ages 6-12:

American Cultural Exchange, through Arabic Language assistance grant from the Middle East Center at University Washington, is offering a two-week Arabic summer language camp at Northgate Elementary School. Classes start on July 7th and end July 18th and meet from 9 am to 3 pm with the option of extended class sessions from am to 5pm. The instruction will be activity-based, ensuring a unique learning experience for your child. Cost is $250 from 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. and $350 from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Chinese Summer Language Camp, 2008 for Children ages 6-9 and 10-13:

Associates in Cultural Exchange is pleased to announce the 2008 Chinese Summer Language Camp for children ages 6-9 and 10-13. This year A.C.E. is offering intensive language instruction in Chinese at Northgate Elementary School. The daylong program (9am to 3pm) starts on July 7th and ends July 18th. The teacher is a Chinese native speaker, trained in the Natural Approach and Total Physical Response methods. Students are immersed in Chinese language and culture through storytelling, reading, writing, arts and crafts, plays, field trips, and multicultural events. Cost is $350.

To download the registration forms please visit www.cultural.org/wlp/camp.php. For more information please contact Maka Janikashvili, Ph.D. Director of ACE World Language Programs at makaj@cultural.org.

Congratulations on the work you are doing - it is really a fantastic magazine.
Regards
Marie

Is there any way to get a subscription to receive a hardcopy of the magazine (via mail?), or the pdf is the only available you have?
Greetings from the Midwest
Cristian M.

Any hardcopy versions of the magazine on the horizon yet? (I would love to subscribe, but simply don't have the time or inclination to read on the computer or print out the whole thing with my printer.) I'd subscribe in a heartbeat!
Thanks.
Alana

EDITORS: Thank you Cristian and Alana for these questions! We have had many people ask us similar questions over the years and have still not answered it for ourselves completely.
First of all, although we have sought out inexpensive
options, it is still extremely expensive to have our magazine printed. We don't have enough dollars coming in from subscriptions and advertising to afford it. It would probably end up costing each subscriber $10 per issue ($60 a year) if we were to have it printed at this point since we don't have enough advertising money. But to get advertising money, we need more subscribers (so tell your friends to subscribe!).

Secondly, we are concerned with the impact of print magazines on our environment. If we were to have our magazine printed, we would want to make sure it was being done with recycled paper and with environmentally friendly inks. However, this is still a lot of paper and chemicals! The most environmentally friendly approach is for readers to simply print out the pages that they want to read from the digital publication (have you tried it? It is very easy!).

So, the final answer is that we still don't have an answer. At least until we can afford the cost of printing, our magazine will have to stay digital, that much we know.

For Spanish-Speaking Seattle Families:
I am happy to announce that the Fiestas de Alfabetización Temprana en Español (Early Literacy Parties in Spanish) will begin again on Monday, April 14 and will run through June 09. Attached are flyers; one flyer with all locations listed, and one per location. Print, post and distribute as necessary.

What are the Fiestas de Alfabetización Temprana en Español?
The Fiestas de Alfabetización Temprana en Español (Early Literacy Parties in Spanish) are a series of weekly workshops that bring Spanish speaking families together in a social neighborhood setting to learn and practice essential early literacy skills. Parents are their children's first and best teachers, and all Spanish speaking families with children from birth through age 5 are invited to attend the parties in their communities. This project is generously sponsored by the KCLS Foundation http://www.kcls.org/foundation/newsletter/.

The Parties will begin next week on Monday 4/14 and will run for 8 weeks through 6/9 in 8 different locations throughout the county. Please, note that each location will be hosting a weekly party for a total of 64 parties in the 8 week period. Registration is not required and space is limited to room capacity.

We will have refreshments and free children's books in Spanish for each family every week! Children are welcome to join the parents though childcare is not available.

Feel free to contact me with any questions or comments, please. I appreciate your support and enthusiasm in helping children succeed!
Karina Kawaguchi
Project Coordinator
Early Literacy Parties in Spanish
King County Library System
960 Newport Way NW
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425.369.3204 fax

My website (www.polishstorytime.com) is primarily focused on the Polish community in Seattle area but will be of interest to families elsewhere as well. Our website explains the work we are doing with bilingual children. Our meetings take place in the King County Library System.

In our area we have three elementary polish Sunday schools. Those schools are mostly targeted toward school age children, so we want to do something for the little ones. We have a lot of fun together: play, sing, read books, say rhymes and have a puppet who loves to talk with children. We want to show parents how important it is to care about their own languages and traditions. We also want to cooperate with Polish children writers to promote Polish literature on our website and to support the Polish community in general. Finally we want to help build a Polish online community over time.

Thank You,
Joanna W.
Die besten Kinderklassiker
This beautiful collection contains the most famous and loved classical children's tales Max and Moritz, Struwwelpeter, Kleiner Häwelmann, Pinocchio and Peterchens Mondfahrt. Not only children will love the stories, but parents will feel like going back in time when they are reading these German classics. A must for every Kinderzimmer!

Wort für Wort
How do you write "Pirat"? Name the first letter in "Insel"!
This game allows children to learn German words in a fun way and several different play levels help to keep it interesting and challenging for older children. You have to place the right letter next to the picture and spell the word. The parrot on the spinning wheel will tell you how many letters you are allowed to take and you can self-correct your spelling by looking at the picture's backside.
The game contains 45 picture cards, 90 letter cards, 1 spinning wheel featuring a parrot, 4 sticker, German instructions

Mein Quiz-O-Fant
Learning is fun with this game from the popular series Wieso? Weshalb? Warum? aimed at children aged 4-7 years. 10 different topics like animals, vehicles, farm, food, dinosaur etc. can be explored and a magnetic elephant will help you find the answer if you need some help or want to confirm it. The game encourages children to discover and ask questions beyond the obvious and with its three different game levels it is attractive for older kids as well. The game contains 12 playing cards (printed on both sides), 1 magnetic elephant, 24 play chips, German instructions.
Wieso? Weshalb? Warum? Am Meer

This book is the newest of the series Wieso? Weshalb? Warum? Junior which is for children aged 2+ years. Life in, around and along the ocean is shown in different scenes and explained to the children on their level. The book helps to understand, for example, which animal is living in the ocean or in the dunes, how weather is changing the coast line and what you can do at the beach. There are many lift-a-flaps that reveal more details and are fun to find.

Felix bei den Kindern der Welt

Sophie’s rabbit has been to many places and this time he visits the children from different parts of the world. The musical story CD includes 6 songs and takes you to the Sami in the North, the Tourag in the Sahara, the Maori in New Zealand, South Africa, San Francisco and Israel. Felix gets to know different cultures and shares his experiences with Sophie in his letters that he sends home.

Kinder brauchen Träume

A nice collection of 12 songs, including a picture booklet with 160 pages! Rolf Zuckowski and his friends are singing about stories that happen around the year like "Immer wieder kommt ein neuer Frühling", "Stups, der kleine Osterhase" or "In der Weihnachtsbäckerei". A nice CD to listen to in the car or at home!

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Do you need a special book or other German product? Contact us and we will do our best to find it!
Did you know...

…that there are over 583 different languages and dialects spoken in Indonesia alone, including English and Dutch?

…that the language Malayalam, spoken in parts of India, is the only language whose name is a palindrome?

…that modern Japanese employs four writing systems: kanji (adapted from the Chinese hanji), hiragana, katakana, and romaji?

…that Lithuanian is the most archaic language of all Indo-European languages?

…that Aboriginal and Native American languages, which include two of the world’s largest number of languages (some 300 to 400 total concentrated, are quickly becoming extinct?

…that what is known as standard Italian today dates back to the last century, when the great Italian novelist Alessandro Manzoni (1785-1873) gave Italy a national language by resolving that it should be Tuscan Italian?

…that there are more English speaking people living in China than in the USA?

…that the most difficult language to speak is Basque. It is not related to any language in the world. It is spoken in northwestern Spain and south-western France?

…that the country Nigeria itself has more than 250 different languages, making the production of newspapers and television shows a challenge. Major languages include, French, Arabic, Hausa, Djerma, and Songhai?

May Day Celebrations

Ahh, the joys of sunshine finally coming our way! Time to send winter packing and let in the longer days of May! How will you celebrate?

How about celebrating with your very own May Day celebration?

May Day marks the end of the uncomfortable winter half of the year in the Northern hemisphere, and it has traditionally been an occasion for popular and often raucous celebrations, regardless of the locally prevalent political or religious establishment.

As Europe became Christianized, the pagan holidays lost their religious character and either morphed into popular secular celebrations, as with May Day, or were replaced by new Christian holidays, as with Christmas, Easter, and All Saint’s Day. Beginning in the 20th century, many neopagans began reconstructing the old traditions and celebrating May Day as a pagan religious festival once more.

May Day has been a traditional day of festivities throughout the centuries. It is most associated with towns and villages celebrating springtime fertility and revelry with village fêtes and community gatherings. Perhaps the most significant of the traditions is the Maypole, around which traditional dancers circle with ribbons. en.wikipedia.org/wiki/May_Day, Photo: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Image:May_day_greenaway.jpg
Celebrating Mothers

Cultures around the world celebrate mothers. Mother’s Day has been observed in one form or another since ancient times. The Greeks of the classical era held festivals to the goddess Cybele (the mother of the Greek pantheon and the wife of Cronus, the god of time) on the day of the vernal equinox. The Romans had the Matronalia, which is a festival dedicated to Juno, the goddess of the hearth and home and wife of Jupiter. The Matronalia was celebrated on the first day of March.

- The United Kingdom has been celebrating Mother’s Day since the 1600s! Traditional gifts for mothers are flowers as well as a special cake with a marzipan center and decorated with marzipan balls on top.
- Wearing a carnation on Mother’s Day in Australia indicates whether a person’s mother is still living or not. A colored carnation indicates a mother who is still alive. A white carnation indicates the opposite.
- Apart from the modern version of Mother’s Day in India, Hindus have long celebrated a 10 day festival in October called Durga Puja. The Hindu holiday praises their divine mother, Durga. This ancient festival has evolved into one of the biggest events in India. Families spend weeks preparing food and gifts for friends and cleaning and decorating their houses for parties.
- In the United States, mothers are often taken out for a special brunch meal and given flowers to brighten her day. The idea is to pamper her as much as possible on her special day.
- It is customary to honor Argentinean Mothers with dinners, poems and special gestures of attention. Children write letters or make cards and crafts while husbands cook and clean and look after the family, allowing the mother to relax and enjoy the day.
- In France, a family dinner is the norm and the mother is honored with a cake that is made to look like a bouquet of flowers along with candies, flowers, cards and perfumes.
- The Japanese call Mother’s Day “haha no hi.” A family may prepare and enjoy traditional dishes that their mothers taught them to cook. The Japanese give their mothers flowers (especially red carnations), scarves, handkerchiefs and handbags.
- In Mexico, in the morning the mother is usually treated to a song sung by her family, or a serenade by a hired band. A family breakfast or brunch is also customary. Any family trouble or enmity is laid aside and all gather to honor the matriarch.
- Mother’s Day in Finland is called aidipayiva. In the morning the family arises and takes a walk, picking the new flowers which bloom this time of year and making a bouquet for the mother. A particular flower called the valkovuokko is favored. This is a small white pungent flower. Back home Mom is presented with a decorated bouquet, while also being served breakfast in bed.
- Mother’s Day in Ethiopia occurs in mid-fall when the rainy season ends. Called “Antrosht,” Ethiopians celebrate by making their way home when the weather clears for a large family meal and a three day long celebration. Source: www.mothersdaycentral.com/about-mothersday/history/

Language tethers us to the world without it we spin like atoms.
Penelope Lively

Linguistics

- Linguistics, or at least the version practiced today, has its origins in Iron Age India with the analysis of Sanskrit. The Pratishakhayas (from ca. the 8th century BC) constitute a kind of proto-linguistic ad hoc collection of observations about mutations in a specific body of work.
- Western linguistics began in Classical Antiquity with grammatical speculation such as Plato’s Cratylus.
- Sir William Jones (1746–1794) noted that Sanskrit shared many common features with classical Latin and Greek, notably verb roots and grammatical structures, such as the case system. This led to the theory that all languages sprung from a common source and to the discovery of the Indo-European language family.
- Noam Chomsky (born December 7, 1928) remains one of the most influential linguists in the world today. Source: en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Linguistics

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Updated Diagnosis!

New research suggests that many children diagnosed in the 1980s and 1990s with severe language disorders would today be diagnosed with autism. Professor Dorothy Bishop, a Wellcome Trust Principal Research Fellow at the University of Oxford, lead the study. She and her colleagues looked at whether a group of 38 adults, aged between 15-31, would now meet the diagnostic criteria for autistic spectrum disorders. Autistic spectrum disorders include both autism and Asperger’s syndrome. These are developmental disorders affecting how a person communicates with and relates to other people as well as how they make sense of the world around them. Developmental language disorders, on the other hand, are diagnosed when a child has unusual difficulty with spoken language but has normal development in other areas. This could be a child who has very limited ability to produce or understand spoken sentences or even one who can speak long and complex sentences but still has trouble communicating effectively when trying to convey a point or understanding what others have said.

The participants in the study were drawn from a pool of children who had participated in a series of studies of developmental language disorder between 1986 to 2003 and about whom detailed information was known. When reassessed by Professor Bishop and her colleagues using current criteria, about a quarter of which were identified as having autistic spectrum disorder. For families raising bilingual and multilingual children, we are reminded to always keep an open mind when our children are diagnosed with a specific disorder. The range is wide and often it is hard to know exactly what the issues could be. Be as informed as you can and be ready to get a second and third opinion if you feel it would be best!

Source: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/04/080408112107.htm

Retrain Your Brain For That Second Language?

Is it possible for adults to retrain their brain to be able to learn a second language more easily? One of the main problems in learning a new language in adulthood is distinguishing the sounds of the second language, which is one reason why it is best for children to learn their languages as young as possible (their brains have not yet been trained to focus on a certain set of sounds). Dr Paul Iverson of the UCL Centre for Human Communication has shown that it is possible for adults to retune their brains to hear certain sounds. In one study, Japanese subjects were retrained to hear the difference between r’s and l’s (something which Japanese students of English tend to find very difficult). Their improvement for recognition was 18% (so if they could distinguish the sounds 60% of the time originally, they now could do so 78% of the time). Dr Iverson says, “Adult learning does not appear to become difficult because of a change in neural plasticity. Rather, we now think that learning becomes hard because experience with our first language ‘warps’ perception. We see things through the lens of our native language and that ‘warps’ the way we see foreign languages. It is very difficult to undo this learning.” Yet another important reason for families raising bilingual and multilingual children to start when our children are young (and to stick with it)!

Source: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/01/070118094015.htm

Pitt and Jolie: All About French

Wonder sometimes why you are paying an arm and a leg to send your children to that expensive immersion school? At least you can revel in the fact that you are in good company! Brad Pitt and Angelina Jolie send their son Maddox to a French immersion school in the Manhattan district of New York city. It supposedly costs around $18,000 a year but who is counting when language is concerned. Of course, this celebrity couple has a little more cash to throw around than most of us. But just think of the joy you will feel when your children meet Maddox in the local playground and they all strike up a fluent conversation in French! C’est fantastique!
Diagnosing Language-Impairment in 3-Month-Old?

What if you were able to know whether your child was going to have a language impairment or not before they even started speaking words? New studies conducted by Professor of Neuroscience April Benasich and her Infancy Studies Laboratory at Rutgers University in Newark, New Jersey, USA are paving the way for one day being able to correct language difficulties before they even begin. If Benasich’s research turns out to be valid, this would mean that children could be spared the difficulties which come from struggling with language. Benasich and her lab are finding that how efficiently a baby processes differences between rapidly occurring sounds is what can best predict future language problems. “We are finding that children who have difficulty processing rapid auditory input are not just showing a simple maturational lag, but are actually processing incoming acoustic information differently,” says Benasich.

The research has found that babies who struggle with rapid auditory processing appear to be using different areas for the task than babies who are not struggling. Those babies with difficulties are perhaps using different brain analysis strategies to accomplish this processing. Benasich’s hope is that it may become possible to guide the brains of babies at risk before they even begin to speak. “We can predict with about 90 percent accuracy what a baby’s language capabilities will be just by their response to tones,” says Benasich. “Our hope now is that we will be able to gently guide the brains of infants who are at the highest risk for language learning impairments to be more efficient processors so they can avoid the difficulties that result from struggling with language.”

Sounds too good to be true? Families raising children in more than one language, who, as a group, are often extremely concerned about their children’s language development, should be cautious. Until the same studies are specifically performed on bilingual and multilingual children, it is possible that an incorrect diagnosis could be made, resulting in unnecessary worry (and more visits to the language therapists). Source: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2008/04/080410153652.htm

Her Brain Works Harder (Linguistically Speaking)

We all know that girls have superior language abilities than boys, right? Well, we now have the biological basis to prove it. For the first time, researchers from Northwestern University and the University of Haifa show that areas of the brain associated with language work harder in girls than boys during language tasks, and that boys and girls rely on different parts of the brain when performing these tasks. Their findings suggest that language processing is more sensory in boys and more abstract in girls. A study was conducted in which tasks were delivered to 31 boys and 31 girls ages 9 to 15 in two sensory modalities: visual (children read certain words without hearing them) and auditory (heard words aloud but not seeing them). The girls still showed significantly greater activation in language areas of the brain than boys. The information in the tasks got through to the language areas of the girls’ brains (the areas associated with abstract thinking through language). But this was not true for the boys. In boys, when reading words, the accurate performance depended on how hard visual areas of the brain were working, and when hearing words, the boys’ performance depended on how hard auditory areas of the brain worked. This could be very important for teachers in classroom settings in particular. It should be considered when creating teaching materials and developing testing methods. What does this mean for bilingual and multilingual families? If you notice differences in the way your boys and girls learn languages in your home, this might very well be based on how their brains are hard-wired. So don’t give them too much grief if they seem able to understand things via one method but not another. It might mean you have to be more creative! Source: www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2007/10/071029133114.htm
Normally Eugenie uses the language of her communication partners and responds to questions in the language in which they are asked.
Childspeak! (or infant multilingual acquisition)

A personal naturalistic case study of the emerging multilingual speech of Eugenie

BY BETTINA RIBES-GIL

A child is normally classified as an infant up to four or five years old, the period in which language is in its primary stage. At the time of this study Eugenie was two-and-a-half. Her mother speaks to her in Spanish (although her mother tongue is French), the carer speaks Latin-American Spanish, which includes lexical variations comparable to those found between American and British English. Her father speaks to her in French. One grandmother speaks English, the other French. One grandfather speaks Spanish, the other French. Her parents (multilingual themselves) usually speak French together, and they live in the francophone region of Switzerland, where identical situations to the above are the norm (see my article “Bringing up children in a multilingual environment” in “Modern English Teacher” Vol.8, No.1, January 1999).

Infant linguistic development

Eugenie perceives language for what it is – a tool for communication – and experiences neither mental block nor embarrassment. Each family environment is distinct, but an overall significant factor is the extent of the child’s parental involvement and other positive emotional bonds encountered in daily interaction, which demonstrate to the child the link languages have with everyday life. Eugenie distinguishes various contexts for simultaneous acquisition of three languages (Spanish, French and English), such as mother/father, home/kindergarten or grandparents/carer, and she tries to assimilate the language of her conversation partners. It is generally accepted that infants learn about one word every three days until about 15 to 18 months, when they accelerate to an average of ten new words daily.

Baby talk

Eugenie’s initial step into her multilingual word was cooing an indistinct variety of sounds, which together with crying and burping was also helping to control her airflow, thus preparing her for adult speech. All babies sound alike at the cooing stage in whichever language environment they live. This was followed by a second stage, at around six months old, when the coos took on the vowel sounds of the languages she heard spoken in her immediate environment, thus she progressed to babbling consonants and vowels using familiar intonation patterns, producing syllables such as:

Ma-ma, pa-pa (French/ Spanish), agoo, da-da (English)

First steps in simultaneous acquisition

The one-word stage was reached around one year old when Eugenie often produced holophrases: 

Pussy? (interrogative intonation) – interpreted as “Is that a cat?”

Later, having made the connection between sounds and objects, Eugenie produced two-word utterances, usually a noun-verb combination:

dolly sleep, garçon crie [Fr.]

Then she added adjectives and finally adverbs as she progressed to the multi-word stage, sometimes labelled the telegraphic stage because infants initially omit function words such as prepositions, auxiliary verbs and affixes:

Little sister cry loud.
Adults tend to address infants using the third person thinking it is easier for their comprehension. My study confirmed this:

*Papa fait ceci* [Fr.] = Daddy does this = (I do this)

*Abuelito te voy a leer un libro* [Sp.] = Grandpa is going to read you a book = (*I* am going to read you a book)

*Let Granny brush your hair* = (Let *me* brush your hair)

Consequently, Eugenie imitated what she heard and initially only conjugated verbs in the third person, englobing everyone indiscriminately. Pronouns caused her confusion, and it was some time before she generated the meanings of you/me, toi/moi, tu/yo, unless they were included in formulaic speech. She finally introduced *I* and *je* as well, a sequence which demonstrates how she progressively became aware of herself as a separate physical entity. As Eugenie acquired more complicated grammar forms there were problems with possessives and past tenses:

*La maison de moi* [Fr.] instead of *Ma maison* = (My house)

*I* broke glass

And in French some past participles were also used incorrectly:

*prendu* (instead of *pris* – verb *prendre*)

*metté* (instead of *mis* – verb *mettre*)

*corté* (using the Spanish verb *cortar* instead of the French *couper*) [p.part. = *coupé* ie. “code switching”]

**Code switching**

There is a perceived problem with code switching. Although it can prompt negative reactions, it is nevertheless a common feature of multilingual speech, infants usually switching nouns and adjectives according to their psychosocial development level. In this study I noted that Eugenie’s switching usually involved French, ie. French + English, or French + Spanish:

*Granny:* That’s O’Malley the alley cat, isn’t it?

Eugenie: *Pas* alley cat!

*or*

*Mother:* ¿Quieres un poco de agua?

Eugenie: *Pas* agua *veux* *sirop* = Not [Fr.] water [Sp.] want lemonade [Fr.]

and

*con moi* = with [Sp.] me [Fr.]

*vamos à jouer* = Let’s [Sp.] go and play [Fr.]

Spanish verbs seem to predominate in many phrases which were otherwise in French:

*Tu te pintas* Maman? = Are you putting on make up Mummy?

(*pintar* [Sp.] instead of *maquiller* [Fr.])

**Further development**

Normally Eugenie uses the language of her communication partners and responds to questions in the language in which they are asked. She has also begun to correct herself, repeating her utterances changing to the appropriate word. She has even begun to “translate”:
Mummy: *Pide a Papa que te de una manzana* [Sp.] (Ask Daddy to give you an apple)
Eugenie: *Papa, donne-moi une pomme* [Fr.] (Daddy give me an apple)

or

Granny: *Do you want me to read to you in English?*
Eugenie: *Yes please. En français dit “en anglais”* (Yes please. In French [one] says “en anglais”)

Eugenie regularly enjoys having a “conversation” in English with Granny. These gobildygook utterances are however expressed with correct intonation and she imitates Granny’s accent with invented words often beginning with “g” and “wh”, probably because she hears: Granny, Great, Go on, Good Girl, Give me, as well as Where, When, Why and What.

**External influences**

Outside the home environment Eugenie attends a francophone kindergarten where children of several mother tongues are immersed in French and there she has acquired a number of social routines including what could be termed her French “survival vocabulary”:

- *à moi* = that’s mine
- *touche pas!* = don’t touch!
- *stop!* = stop it!

These utterances are put to good use in the playground although toddlers’ speech interaction is often “unsocial” since they are as yet unaware of the constraints of conversation and what is culturally appropriate for greetings, politeness and strategies for protecting feelings, etc.

**Television as a source of speech development**

To allay any imbalance between the languages (French and Spanish predominating at home), Eugenie regularly watches children’s DVDs in the English version and the English television channels. Nowadays audio-visual sources are an acceptable language teaching support and as a result of repetition in viewing favourite videos she has picked up phonologically complicated words and learnt phrases and songs by heart. In addition, watching the DVD of “Cinderella”, for example, followed up by having the story read to her in French or Spanish is aiding her simultaneous acquisition progress. Despite their reduced vocabulary, the Teletubbies are also a firm favourite, possibly, linguistically, a less taxing entertainment?!

**Conclusion**

Language acquisition, especially vocabulary, is a lifelong process and Eugenie will continue to develop her languages corresponding to the amount of exposure to each one and her cognitive development. She uses three languages concurrently, modifying pronunciation and there is little evidence of phonological interference. Some concepts were learnt almost simultaneously where linguistic forms are similar. She continues to show a marked preference for responding in the language used by her conversation partners.

In continuation... Eugenie, now three years old, has suddenly requested her mother to speak to her in English, not Spanish. At the same time, instead of wanting to watch DVDs in English as before, she now asks for the Spanish version. Why, in her ever-increasing francophone environment (kindergarten and friends), this should have occurred is an enigma and proves that language acquisition in infants raises more questions than answers! ☞
What is **YOUR** Mother Tongue?

Answers to a complex question

**BY ALICE LAPUERTA**
One reader wrote to Multilingual Living Magazine recently:

“I was at a job interview yesterday and we had to fill out a form in which one of the questions was to specify what our mother tongue was. I spent a few minutes trying to decide what MY mother tongue was, what exactly is meant by mother tongue? The language my mother speaks to me? The language I speak/read/write best? I grew up as a trilingual so it’s not such an easy question. In my case the language my mother speaks isn’t the language that I’m most fluent in, even though I speak all 3 languages at a ‘native’ level but my literacy level is different in all 3. So what is considered a multilingual person’s “mother tongue”?”

That’s a good question. Books have been written on this, so this question isn’t exactly easy to answer. Alan Davies, author of The Native Speaker: Myth and Reality writes that “The mother tongue is literally just that, the language of the mother… who provides most of the spoken input for the child and with whom the child identifies and wishes to exchange meanings” (page 16). It seems simple, but at a closer look this is anything but straightforward.

“The concept of ‘mother’ can be problematic,” writes Colin Baker in his Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education. “Not all children are raised by their biological mothers. Many are raised by fathers, grandparents or other relatives. Some live with adoptive or foster parents. Others spend most of their time in a nursery from birth through to schooling. What is the mother tongue of such a child?” Furthermore, he asks, “does use of ‘mother tongue’ understate the language role of the father?” (page 47)

We are definitely getting into hot waters, here.

To complicate things more, “mother tongue” is often confused and used interchangeably with a term like “first language,” and “dominant language.” This isn’t without its problems either, as Colin Baker explains: “If the mother tongue is defined as the language a child learns first, what is the implication if a child soon becomes dominant in the second language? If the children and parents become guest workers or in-migrants to a particular region and start switching to the majority language of that region, what is the mother tongue? The language learnt first or the language which becomes dominant in the family and particularly outside the home?”

I suppose in the interview form they actually meant to ask what the reader’s dominant language was, by mistakenly assuming that one’s mother tongue is equivalent to one’s dominant language. It’s one of those myths that society’s prone to believe.

But all this discussion on how difficult it is to define “mother tongue” doesn’t really help us answer people when they ask us what our mother tongue is. Retorting “Mother tongue as a term eludes any sort of concrete definition, hence this question has no merit” is probably not a very diplomatic thing to say during a job interview.

So, what DO we say?

Instead of giving them a one-word answer, I usually rattle off half of my bio (how else are they going to understand?). “My mother tongue is, literally, German, because my mother is Austrian and she speaks German. But my (academically) dominant language is English. I also speak Korean, which is my father tongue. I am, in fact, a trilingual.” This is probably not very practical when it comes to filling out a form, though.

Michal Paradowski suggests the following: “If you’ve been a balanced bilingual since birth, when filling out a form and vacillating which vernacular to enter as your mother tongue, think in which language version you’d have picked the sheet in the first place. In cases of less straightforward linguistic experience, the apposite option is probably the language in which you are fluent and which you had acquired earliest.”

Madalena Cruz-Ferreira counters: “I would answer: What makes you think I have one mother tongue? It’s like asking ‘How do you get along with your sister?’ of someone who has no sisters. It just shows lack of awareness of other people’s realities.”

In her article “Funny-lingualism” in this issue, Madalena brings it to the point: “Who says that people can have only one mother tongue?”

Now, that’s a neat answer! The next time people pop this question at you, how about responding: “I have three! German, English and Spanish.”

“The usual way is to define the mother tongue(s) as the first one(s) to have been learnt (i.e. order of acquisition). Some say the first languages in the first 6 months, other say that any language acquired before age 2 is a mother tongue.” Jean-Marc Dewaele
Every deaf child, whatever the level of his/her hearing loss, should have the right to grow up bilingual. By knowing and using both a sign language and an oral language (in its written and, when possible, in its spoken modality), the child will attain his/her full cognitive, linguistic and social capabilities.

What a child needs to be able to do with language

The deaf child has to accomplish a number of things with language:

1. Communicate with parents and family members as soon as possible. A hearing child normally acquires language in the very first years of life on the condition that he/she is exposed to a language and can perceive it. Language in turn is an important means of establishing and solidifying social and personal ties between the child and his/her parents. What is true of the hearing child must also become true of the deaf child. He/she must be able to communicate with his/her parents by means of a natural language as soon, and as fully, as possible. It is with language that much of the parent-child affective bonding takes place.

2. Develop cognitive abilities in infancy. Through language, the child develops cognitive abilities that are critical to his/her personal development. Among these we find various types of reasoning, abstracting, memorizing, etc. The total absence of language, the adoption of a non-natural language or the use of a language that is poorly perceived or known, can have major negative consequences on the child’s cognitive development.

3. Acquire world knowledge. The child will acquire knowledge about the world mainly through language. As he/she communicates with parents, other family members, children and adults, information about the world will be processed and exchanged. It is this knowledge, in turn, which serves as a basis for the activities that will take place in school. It is also world knowledge which facilitates language comprehension; there is no real language understanding without the support of this knowledge.

4. Communicate fully with the surrounding world. The deaf child, like the hearing child, must be able to communicate fully with those who are part of his/her life (parents, brothers and sisters, peers, teachers, various adults, etc.). Communication must take place at an optimal rate of information in a language that is appropriate to the interlocutor and the situation. In some cases it will be sign language, in other cases it will be the oral language (in one of its modalities), and sometimes it will be the two languages in alternation.

5. Acculturate into two worlds. Through language, the deaf child must progressively become a member of both the hearing and of the Deaf world. He/she must identify, at least in part, with the hearing world which is almost always the world of his/her parents and family members (90% of deaf children have hearing parents). But the child must also come into contact as early

* This short text is the result of much reflection over the years on bilingualism and deafness. Those who surround young deaf children (parents, doctors, language pathologists, educators, etc.) often do not perceive them as future bilingual and bicultural individuals. It is with these people in mind that I have written this paper. I would like to thank the following colleagues and friends for their helpful comments and suggestions: Robbin Battison, Penny Boyes-Braem, Eve Clark, Lysiane Grosjean, Judith Johnston, Harlan Lane, Rachel Mayberry, Lesley Milroy, Ila Parasnis and Trude Schermer.
Your paper on the right of the deaf child to be bilingual has been translated into several languages. Tell us about it.

One day, 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.

Bilingualism is the only way of meeting these needs

Bilingualism is the knowledge and regular use of two or more languages. A sign language - oral language bilingualism is the only way that the deaf child will meet his/her needs, 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.

What kind of bilingualism?

The bilingualism of the deaf child will involve the sign language used by the Deaf community and the oral language used by the hearing majority. The latter language will be acquired in its written, and if possible, in its spoken modality. Depending on the child, the two languages will play different roles: some children will be dominant in sign language, others will be dominant in the oral language, and some will be balanced in their two languages.

In addition, various types of bilingualism are possible since there are several levels of deafness and the language contact situation is itself complex (four language modalities, two production and two perception systems, etc.). This said, most deaf children will become bilingual and bicultural to varying degrees. In this sense, they will be no different than about half the world’s population that lives with two or more languages. (It has been estimated that there are as many, if not more, bilinguals in the world today as monolinguals). Just like other bilingual children, they will use their languages in their everyday lives and they will belong, to varying degrees, to their two worlds - in this case, the hearing world and the Deaf world.

What role for sign language?

Sign language must be the first language (or one of the first two languages) acquired by children who have a severe hearing loss. It is a natural, full-fledged language that ensures full and complete communication. Unlike an oral language, it allows the young deaf child and his/her parents to communicate early, and fully, on the condition that they acquire it quickly. Sign language will play an important role in the deaf child’s cognitive and social development and it will help him/her acquire knowledge about the world. It will also allow the child to acculturate into the Deaf world (one of the two worlds he/she belongs to) as soon as contact is made with that world. In addition, sign language will facilitate the acquisition of the oral language, be it in its
spoken or written modality. It is well known that a first language that has been acquired normally, be it an oral or a
sign language, will greatly enhance the acquisition of a second language. Finally, being able to use sign language is
a guarantee that the child will have mastered at least one language. Despite considerable effort on the part of deaf
children and of the professionals that surround them, and despite the use of various technological aids, it is a fact
that many deaf children have great difficulties producing and perceiving an oral language in its spoken modality.
Having to wait several years to reach a satisfactory level that might never be attained, and in the meantime denying
the deaf child access to a language that meets his/her immediate needs (sign language), is basically taking the risk
that the child will fall behind in his/her development, be it linguistic, cognitive, social or personal.

What role for the oral language?

Being bilingual means knowing and using two or more languages. The deaf child’s other language will be the oral
language used by the hearing world to which he/she also belongs. This language, in its spoken and/or written
modality, is the language of the child’s parents, brothers and sisters, extended family, future friends and employers,
etc. When those who interact with the child in everyday life do not know sign language, it is important that
communication takes place nevertheless and this can only happen in the oral language. It is also this language, in its
written modality mainly, that will be an important medium for the acquisition of knowledge.

Much of what we learn is transmitted via writing be it at home or more generally at school. In addition, the deaf
child’s academic success and his/her future professional achievements will depend in large part on a good mastery
of the oral language, in its
written and if possible spoken modality.

Conclusion

It is our duty to allow the deaf child to acquire two languages, the sign language of the Deaf community (as a first
language when the hearing loss is severe) and the oral language of the hearing majority. To achieve this, the child
must be in contact with the two language communities and must feel the need to learn and use both languages.
Counting solely on one language, the oral language, because of recent technological advances is betting on the deaf
child’s future. It is putting at risk the child’s cognitive and personal development and it is negating the child’s need
to acculturate into the two world’s that he/she belongs to. Early contact with the two languages will give the child
more guarantees than contact with just one language, whatever his/her future will be, and whichever world he/she
chooses to live in (in case it is only one of them). 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.

By the same author

Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press.
Oxford: Pergamon Press.
Oxford: Pergamon Press.
Grosjean, F. (1996). Living with two languages and two cultures. In I. Parasnis (Ed.), Cultural and
University Press.
1. Can you tell us of your personal and academic backgrounds?

We are professors of linguistics at Georgetown University in Washington, DC. Kendall’s area is bilingualism and Alison is an expert in second language learning. We’ve been colleagues and friends for more than a decade. But for most of our careers, we’ve independently written academic articles and books about how people learn and use languages for other researchers.

2. What motivated you to write this book for a general audience?

Four years ago we each had our first children—a boy and a girl, two months apart. As we crossed the threshold from our academic lives into a new world of parenting (full of parent-baby playgroups, parenting websites, books and magazines), we both noticed three things over and over: first, the overwhelming enthusiasm and desire among many, many parents to promote early second language learning; second, widespread misunderstandings about how second languages are learned (and how they aren’t); and third, a remarkable lack of unbiased, scientifically-based – but popularly available – information on this topic. At the playground, at the doctor’s office and in pre-schools, we kept hearing from parents wondering and wanting to talk about how to incorporate more than one language into their child’s life. Often from experience, these parents knew that suffering through two years of high school French or Spanish doesn’t cut it, but they didn’t know where to go from there.

We put our heads together and wrote a book that we hope helps parents put the latest research into practice with their own children. We shared what we’ve learned through our years of academic experience in researching second language learning, as well as everyday observations as mothers (now to 2 children each) to help parents and educators make the best decisions about language learning for children.

3. Do you believe in Golden Rules for Bilingualism? Can there be rules that are valid for all when each family’s situation is so vastly different?

Of course, every family and every child is unique so we’re always reluctant to talk in absolutes. However, one general aim, which probably holds true in just about every situation, is that interaction is critical. We know from decades of research that kids (and adults) learn language best when they are engaged in meaningful and interesting activities that involve real language use. In thinking about language learning and use for children then, this means that parents would probably do well to try to shape things so that human interaction (rather than flash cards, a movie, etc.) is at the core.

4. Is it OK to change methods, say from OPOL to minority language at home or could this be confusing to the child?

Confusion is rarely a problem for children learning more than one language. We know that children all over the world grow up hearing more than one language and different configurations of languages without being confused. Switching from one way of organizing language at home, however, can be challenging in our experience, especially for the parent. Being consis-
tent is key (as with everything), and children may take a
while to get used to using, say, the minority language with
both parents. They may resist or refuse (something we find
far more common than confusion in our research), so par-
ents need to be ready for this, to have thought about what
their strategies will be, what sorts of incentives they’ll have
on hand, and how they’ll manage this. As just about every
parent knows, children are very sensitive to what’s being
done outside of the home and what the ‘cool’ or majority
language is. Going against this grain takes persistence, pa-
tience, and planning!

5. How many languages are too many languages? Where
should we draw the line?

So learning two languages sounds good, but what about
three? For many parents, concerns about language learn-
ing—language confusion, delay, and mixing—are inten-
sified when the decisions revolve around three (or more)
languages instead of just two. So for instance, can or
should a family who speak Italian and English at home
enroll their children in the excellent Spanish-English dual
immersion program that happens to be in their neighbor-
hood or is that just too much? Although there isn’t a great
amount of research yet on how bilingual language learn-
ing differs from trilingual language learning, we have a
lot of successful and healthy human ‘data’ walking around
the world. In other words, millions of children grow up
learning three or more languages and have been doing so
for hundreds of years, with no ill effects.

In many parts of the world, for instance, it is com-
mon for a child to learn one language at home, another
in her community, and a third at school. Given the right
conditions, these children can learn these languages well
enough to be able to communicate competently and ap-
propriately in each context. Having said all this, trilin-
gually oriented parents (like bilingually oriented ones) do
need to take special care to make sure that the child has
adequate opportunity to engage in rich and meaningful
interaction in each of their languages regularly. In other
words, the child needs rich quality and intensive quantity
of input regularly. These parents also need an understand-
ing of how languages are learned and a large bag of tips
and tricks to ensure fun, active, and interactive language
learning for their kids.

Where a parent draws the line is really an individual
and personal decision. For instance, some families thrive
on having a different activity or class for every day of the
week; others opt to have children just choose one or two at
a time in order to have some ‘down time’. There is no cog-
nitive danger in using more than two or three languages
with your child and setting up activities for each of them.
It can, however, be a bit complicated to manage and sort
out a schedule so that high quantity and quality of input
in available in each. Also, realistic expectations are very
important, a point we stress in the book. Children’s com-
petencies will reflect their exposure and opportunities in
each language. One to two hours a week of Italian, for in-
stance, won’t do any harm, but that alone won’t result in
super high level of competence.

6. What if there are insurmountable problems? Are there
circumstances when bilingual development is impossible?

When should we throw in the towel?

In our book, we have a final chapter that deals with chal-
lenge and tries to give parents tools with which to face
them. Almost all the parents reading Multilingual Living
Magazine have probably faced one or more of these prob-
lems at some point. They include issues like how you stem
a bilingual rebellion from your children, if they point blank
refuse to cooperate, if your family circumstances change,
for example through moving home or divorce, and this
affects how much quality input and interaction you can
give your child. We also talk about what happens when
you face resistance from grandparents and other family
members. It’s important to be prepared for the fact that at
some point, no matter what, real life – and real parenting
– intervenes in second language learning, and things don’t
go exactly as planned. Perhaps your child who loved the
language at first starts to lose interest; maybe he is diag-
nosed with having a learning disability or attention deficit
disorder or is hyperactive. Maybe in the face of such real-
life twists and turns you and your partner disagree about
the best course to take. These sorts of tensions are bound
to exist because language choice isn’t just a practical decision
– it is also emotional. Language has a way of intensifying
whatever family issues or tensions already exist. While we
go into helpful strategies for parents in some detail in the
book, here we’ll just mention a few things we have found
helpful:

• Remind yourself and your feuding family members
  that language learning is a long process and that this is just
  one bump in the road.

• Remind yourself (and your fellow caregivers) of your
  original language learning goals and the reasons for opt-
ing for second language learning. It might also be helpful
to discuss these goals with extended family members so
that everyone is on the same page and working toward the same end.

- **Try not to make language the battleground** for playing out other issues or problems between you and your partner. Rather than play a tug-of-war over language (no one will win!), try to get to the root of the problem. Oftentimes, other tensions (for example, disagreements over bedtimes or financial stresses) play out across day-to-day mundane interactions, such as what language to have a bedtime story read in. Focus on the other problems and don’t let them get in the way of promoting bilingualism.

7. You write that “There is abundant research that a strong first language lays the groundwork for a strong second language; the two languages support rather than undermine each other” (page 114). Could one draw the conclusion that successive bilingualism is better than simultaneous bilingualism?

This is a really interesting question! Much of this research has looked at how a strong home language can help acquisition of a second language in formal school contexts. I would not say that one type of bilingualism is necessarily better than another. Both situations can lead to high levels of fluency in two or more languages. Which approach a family opts for really depends more on their own personal, family, and community situation. Certainly starting with both right from the start has many advantages if it is feasible.

8. Bilingualism, immigrants and integration: a hot topic not only in the USA but in Europe as well. Many people believe that immigrants who maintain their heritage language at home will not integrate well into mainstream
society, as they never really get to “properly” learn the community language. A common argument in the media is that immigrants should speak the majority language at home to show a willingness to integrate. What is your response to this?

Wow – big and important question! First, I would say the evidence is quite clear that children thrive when they receive rich and meaningful input and interaction from a speaker with high levels of competence of that language. Encouraging immigrant parents with limited competence in the societal language to use that language with their children is not the way to go. A strong foundation in one’s first language (e.g., Turkish, Arabic) is important for second language development and second language literacy development (e.g., in English, German). I think most immigrants desire to learn the societal language and are very aware that bilingualism is critical for education and job success. I think it is unfortunate that the debate is framed as ‘either / or’ (e.g., either speak German or Turkish), when bilingualism benefits us all, culturally, cognitively, emotionally and economically. Why can’t this linguistic diversity be framed as a resource rather than a problem? Lastly, I think it is useful to look to Canada and other countries which have differentiated between a ‘public’ language of society and a ‘private’ language of the home. While we probably all agree there are many benefits to sharing a societal and public language, a private language of the home is a source of pride, identity, and a resource.

9. In your book you encourage parents who don’t speak a language natively to still consider the benefits of raising their children in that language to promote bilingualism. However, what about the emotional bonds of a language. Won’t these be lacking for the parent who raises a child in a non-native language?

One of the reasons we felt we were a great team in writing this book is our very different language backgrounds. While Kendall is fluently bilingual in English-Spanish, Alison has only limited proficiency in French, and a smattering of Welsh and Japanese. What we try hard to convey is that human interaction is probably the most important thing you can do in second language learning, and that there are many different ways to get this sort of interaction. We talk about bilingual play-dates, story times at local libraries, music and movement classes, babysitters, and making use of what’s available in your community. While we don’t want to negate the importance of emotional bonds, we feel that a monolingual parent can be as equally motivated as a bilingual parent to give their child the massive advantages that go along with knowing more than one language, in some cases even more so because they do not have that advantage themselves.

In terms of emotional connections, we’ve found that this is something which is established over time. At first it might feel odd to speak to your child in the language which you weren’t spoken to, but over time, this changes, and pretty quickly in many cases if one sticks with it. A relationship with a child is a dynamic and quickly evolving thing. Those emotional bonds, jokes, funny words, etc. can be created and celebrated in any language.

10. Is there a “language-learning window” within which parents must introduce their children to additional languages? Or is any age as good as any age as any to start the process of introducing another language?

We have a chapter in the book on “when.” The time is now! As we say in the book, there are different advantages for children at older and younger ages, and although there is certainly a benefit in terms of accent for starting younger, older children are often faster with grammar. Now!
Native-like user of language...

Have you noticed that multilinguals are never said to be “native speakers” of their languages? The only instances where you see the word native collocated with the word multilingual are when multilinguals are deemed to have shown, or failed to show, ‘native-like’, ‘near-native’, ‘near native-like’, and so on, uses of language. The word native, short and sweet, is simply not used to account for multilingual uses of language.

The reasoning behind this strange state of affairs must be that multilinguals and native speakers are assumed to be different kinds of human beings. This is confirmed by the large amount of research which sets out to investigate, black on white, the uses that “multilinguals” make of their languages as compared to “native speakers” of the same languages. This sounds very funny to me, because native means ‘born into’, and so a native speaker must be someone born into some kind of surrounding language. Surely multilinguals are also born into communities that do use language? The mystery is solved when we realise that the label native in ‘native speaker’ has nothing to do with your birth rights or those of your languages: it actually means ‘monolingual’, which is the condition of all control populations in this kind of research. This realisation helps clarify why people accept without blinking to label someone born into more than one language as ‘native-like’ and ‘near-native’ (or not) whereas these labels never, ever, apply to someone born into one single language. We can try, for added fun: you are a native speaker (= monolingual) with native-like language abilities. Or, you are a monolingual (= native speaker) with near-monolingual language abilities.

A similar creative use of technical terms applies to the label mother tongue. You will have
heard intriguing questions like, say, “If you are multilingual, what is your mother tongue?” You may have hesitated to respond, or you may even have been told that mother tongue is just not for you, because you have more than one, and there’s only one mother tongue per individual. Being summarily tongue- orphaned in this way is very funny, for two reasons. First, because it treats languages like some commodity that must be coupon-rationed, as if there were a shortage of languages around the world -- there are about 6,000, at the latest (rough) count. And second, because no one ever asks the one question that matters, which is “Who says that people can have only one mother tongue?”, just like no one ever asks “Who says that people can have only one native language?”

If we try to define mother tongue as opposed to native language (the distinction is far from clear even in research about monolingualism), we might say that your mother tongue is what your parent speaks to you. In monolingual settings, it then becomes clear that mother tongue is the same as native language, which makes one wonder why we need two technical terms for the same thing. But that’s another story. The point is that, by this definition of who-speaks-what-to-you-from-birth, multilinguals may have several mother tongues if the mother happens to use more than one language to them, or they may have a mother tongue and a father tongue, like they may have a sibling tongue and a grandparent tongue, which now means that all of these must be your native languages too.

Funny-lingual

And so on. The fun that one can derive from the six labels discussed in this column is never-ending. You can have an L1 (the first language you learned) which is not your native language (if you happen to have two L1s), because a native speaker is a monolingual. You can be dominant in your children’s father tongue from around 7 p.m. on weekdays and the whole day on weekends, and then mix bits and pieces of this language into your own father tongues. You may be asked to provide linguistic evidence that you are a balanced multilingual in the same breath that you are asked to use the same evidence to show that you are dominant, across the board, in a single one of your languages. You can also be balanced in your L2 and L3 (if you took a simultaneous interpreting certificate in these languages) and semilingual in your L1 (if you didn’t, in this one), of which you are a native speaker because you started off monolingual.

Or you can decide that so much fun deserves official recognition. What the labels discussed in this column have in common is that they describe multilingualism in extremely funny ways, whether multilinguals are labelled Language mixers / Code-switchers, Semilinguals, Dominant multilinguals, L1, L2, L3, ..., Ln speakers, Balanced multilinguals or Native-like users of language. So why bother with so many different labels doing the same job? My purpose with this column was to show how the all-encompassing term funny-linguals ideally encapsulates what these labels really mean, and I believe my point is proven beyond reasonable doubt. Warm welcome to the brand-new, unambiguous, insightful world of funny-lingualism!
Two years ago, my daughter’s speech was unintelligible to everyone but us. At 3 years she’d not only mix German, English and Spanish, but created incongruous sentence fragments interspersed with her favorite phrase (“diga-diga” – see April 2006 issue of MLL: www.biculturalfamily.org/apr06/multiculturalmelangeapr06.html). Her speech, was, in short, a disaster. “What did she just say?” people asked me with a puzzled look, and I’d interpret with a pang. Every time I got this half-amused, puzzled look from people I knew deep down that something just wasn’t going right. But what?

Reading Studies, Consulting Experts

I’d read all the studies, talked to all the experts, the linguists and speech therapists, so I knew on an intellectual level that all this had nothing to do with our multilingualism. The reason had to be elsewhere. But we didn’t know what. Was it dyslexia? Dyspraxia? Another kind of dys-altogether? It could be an auditive processing disorder, our speech therapist assumed. Experts appeased me: it’s definitely not the three languages!!! But the nagging worry that multilingualism was the cause was difficult to shake. Nevertheless, we didn’t give up. We stuck to our three languages no matter what, but it was hard, oh, so hard. I was fiercely jealous of our monolingual neighbor whose children spoke fluent, unadulterated German at the age of two. Life just wasn’t fair.

We took her to speech therapists and ergotherapists (apparently there is a relationship between language development and gross motor development, in which our daughter was delayed as well). I must say that our interaction with those professionals was very positive, and none of them tried to talk us out of our multilingualism. My daughter loves going to therapy, which she calls “go play with Karin.” Karin, our speech therapist, supports us in our trilingual endeavor. It helps that we are not her only multilingual clients and that she seems to be up-to-date with the latest research on multilingualism. It is difficult for me to judge my daughter’s improvement, but improve she did! Very slowly, but very definitely, she improved.

A Scary Decision

At about the same time, we made one of the scariest decisions in our multilingual adventure: we changed our method from OPOL to minority language @ home. This was a terrifying move on many levels. We realized, after a while, that the OPOL method wasn’t working for us anymore. I spoke German at home, my husband Spanish, and we would speak English with each other only – reverting to our languages whenever we addressed the kids. We had done this since my oldest daughter’s birth. Three years later, it was clear to us that if we continued this way she was going to be monolingual in German. The majority language was German and she heard German from me at home and at Kindergarten. Spanish and English, however, were reduced to a mere hour a day. This wasn’t enough. When my husband was getting frustrated because our daughter kept speaking German with him and I had to jump in to translate, it became clear that we had to change things. But was it right to change methods given the fact that we had so many other issues going on language-wise? Wouldn’t this be a great set-back for Isabella? And what about our one-year old, who was used to hearing German from
me? Would a change of method confuse both our kids?

We decided to jump into the cold water. English would be the family language from now on. English when the family was together. German we left to the environment, and Spanish whenever my husband was interacting with the kids alone. At first, Isabella spoke back in German. I’d keep repeating back to her in English. It was tedious. Often I yearned to give up the whole thing. Let us just all be monolinguals and forget about all this! But onwards we plodded anyhow, relentlessly.

Are We There Yet?

Two years later. Are we there yet? Is one ever going to arrive? I am somewhat wiser, and my answer is: I think not. We’re still plodding on. The sad thing with multilingualism is that you’re never really “there.” We just make our lives hard by telling ourselves that there should be a goal, a finishing line that we ought to cross one day, after which we can rest with the laurels of having created perfectly balanced multilinguals on our hands. Unfortunately, you can’t put a checkmark next to it, like potty training: “milestone achieved!” Multilingualism is an amorphous, messy process. A forevermore ongoing thing, subjected to the vicissitudes of life.

My daughter, two years later: she speaks basic but clear and correct English to both her parents and her little brother. We all think that she seems to have an easier time expressing herself in English than in German. It seems to me she makes fewer mistakes in English, but maybe that is because she speaks in shorter, simpler sentences. Her German has improved dramatically, but she still has some grammatical issues that I am confident we can shake eventually. She is starting preschool (Vorschule) in a bilingual English-German school this fall which will give her another year until the realities of 1st grade begin. Our speech therapist is more than satisfied with her development. She says her improvement has been astounding. She still doesn’t speak like that monolingual whiz-kid from next door, though. (Two years later I have learned that I should hang all comparisons. But that is hard, sometimes.) And, as we expected, she has more of a passive knowledge of Spanish, but her love for Spanish is clearly there. She adores speaking Spanish with her grandmother over Skype! My husband listens with a smile. “She’s doing well,” he says.

Witnessing the Miracle

Seeing roses bloom is a miracle. There is nothing at all there, at first. Just a stem. Then a green bump. And if you have a lot of faith and patience and tend to the little bud, it’ll grow and grow, until there is a tiny peek of red at the tip. And once you see that, the flower suddenly blossoms overnight. My daughter’s speech development was similar. It took half an eternity as it seemed to me. But her speech is blossoming. Finally! In English, German and Spanish! It looks like we are going to have our multilingual rose garden, after all.

As for my son: he just turned three. What can I say but that his speech is a disaster! As opposed to his sister at his age, he speaks predominantly English interspersed with Spanish (he obsesses about counting and colors), as well as these incoherent phrases that remind me of my daughter’s “diga-diga.” Been there, done that.

“What did he say?” people ask me, baffled.
“He’s speaking Spanish,” I reply with a shrug.
Let roses bloom when the time is right. ❖
First of all, remember that you are not alone! Inquire among other families in your city who might have been in similar situations and find out what they have to offer. Or you can find parents on chat boards such as Bilingual Babies (www.bilingualbabies.org) or at the Multilingual Families chatboard at Babyscenter (USA boards: boards.babyscenter.com, UK boards: boards.babycentsre.co.uk). But remember that their advice and experiences may not reflect your own! Feel free to ignore their advice if it isn’t helping you.

Make sure that the diagnosis is separate from your child’s multilingualism. If the diagnosis is due to your family’s bi-multilingualism, then find another specialist.

Parents are often considered to be co-therapists, which means that you will be expected to conduct “exercises” at home with the child. If you cringe at the thought of this, your child will also most likely dislike the experience.

Make sure that both your child and you find the therapist sympathetic. It is a waste of time and money if you and/or your child cannot build up a relationship of trust with the therapist.

Little increments of 10 minute playful practice spread throughout the day are more effective than longer chunks of time. If the child resists, don’t use force. Try again (and again) later!

It is fine to get more than one opinion. Double and triple check your child’s diagnosis with other specialists if you want to make 100% sure that it is correct.

This is costly but if all things fail, it might be worth going to a private specialist (one not covered by your healthcare plan). Ask around and find out who is recommended in your city. Give them a call. Maybe they will give you an initial consultation on the phone or in the office for free.

Time to call the specialist?
Read through our tips before making that call!

You think your child might have a speech delay?
Before you do anything else get a hearing screening done with a pediatric audiologist.

Come armed with information about bilingual children and be able to cite at least one or two studies on the fact that multilingualism does not cause speech delay, stuttering, autism or behavioral problems. Your specialist should be able to explain any difficulties which may present themselves in applying a course of treatment due to bi-multilingualism without encouraging you to go monolingual.

Therapy can be fun! The child should experience therapy as play, not as drill. If therapy becomes a chore or something your child hates to do, consider checking out an alternate therapist.

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Ryan, do you want your jacket? Oh, yes, it’s a coat, not a
jacket. Christopher, bist du fertig?”

What’s going on here? I am speaking German to
my two-year-old twins Alexander and Christopher, and
mostly English to my four older children, Robert (18),
Gabrielle (11), Mary (9), and Ryan (4). It may seem cha-
otic and crazy (or maybe that’s just the six kids part) but
so far it seems to be working for us. We started down
the bilingual road last spring when I decided to start
working part-time using my languages (I also speak
Spanish). I had been home with my children since I
received an MA in German literature ten years earlier,
so I was a little rusty! While working on my own Ger-
man, I thought, “Why don’t I have a preschool time auf
Deutsch with the younger children?”

The first morning I read them Max und der Ball and
then we started playing with a ball. I quickly realized
that in reading Kafka and Mann, we had never cov-
ered how to say things like, “Catch the ball!” or “Good
throw!” So I would sit there and play with them with
my Oxford-Duden German dictionary looking up the
words I needed.

I began researching bilingual families on the
Internet and started thinking that maybe I could actually speak German to them the
majority of the time. I began researching bilingual families on the
Internet and started thinking that maybe I could actually speak German to them the
majority of the time. However, German is not the cause of the delay, as
it existed before I began speaking German to them. Since my oldest child did not speak until age 3, I am
not worried. The twins communicate with each other and
convey their needs to us, so talking is not neces-
sary yet. They get plenty of English throughout the day,
since their older siblings are homeschooled, and they
hear me speaking English to them. The words they say
are evenly divided between the languages, and they are
so cute saying “Danke” and “Bitte” all the time! In their
case, I feel that the benefits of growing up with German
outweigh the possibility of bilingualism contributing to
a speech delay.

The advantages of speaking German with the little
ones became clear right away. Obviously, it improves
my German and gives me needed practice. I have fi-
nally mastered command forms! I also tend to be a
nicer mom in German – I am much quicker to express
irritation in English. The whole family enjoys watch-
ing them learn. It thrills me when they have obviously

Speaking German With Just Some of the Kinder
Different rules with different kids
BY JEANNE GILBERT

I began researching bilingual families on the
Internet and started thinking that maybe I could actually speak German to them the
majority of the time.
understood something I said to them. One day Alexander had taken my blanket from me. A while later I was cold and said to him: “Wo ist meine Decke? Mir ist kalt!” He thought for a moment, went into the other room and brought me back my blanket.

Another amazing result of speaking German to the twins has been the effect on my older children, who love trying to figure out what I said. My oldest son is studying German for high school, and he quickly began saying whatever he could in German, especially the often-heard refrain “Das ist nicht für dich!” My daughters did not like learning German, because they would rather learn Spanish and Swedish. Ironically, when they started hearing me speak German to the twins, they became more interested. Mary has tried to construct sentences and then asked if they were right. They are learning German just by hearing it – it’s like sneaking veggies into food they enjoy. One day Mary was going to ask me what “Kaninchen” meant, when she realized that she already knew!

And I finally put my fears to rest about having an authentic relationship with the twins. I realized that we have a special connection and that German only enhances it. Even with my imperfect non-native German, I am giving them a gift I wish I had given my older children!
Philippines

The Philippines, officially the Republic of the Philippines, is an archipelagic nation located in Southeast Asia, with Manila as its capital city. According to the 1987 Constitution, Filipino and English are both the official languages of the country but more than 180 languages and dialects are spoken in the archipelago. Filipino is the de facto standardized version of Tagalog spoken in Metro Manila and urban centers while English, the other official language, is widely used as a lingua franca throughout the country.

The word Tagalog is derived from tagá-ílog, from tagá meaning “native of” and ílog meaning “river.” Thus, it means “river dweller.” There are no surviving written samples of Tagalog before the arrival of the Spanish in the 16th century and very little is known about the history of the language. Spanish was the language of the Philippine Revolution, and the 1899 Malolos Constitution proclaimed it as the official language. In the early 1900s, Spanish was spoken by a total of 60% of the population as a first, second or third language. However, its use declined after 1940, following the American occupation of the Philippines. Currently, only a few Mestizos of Spanish or Hispanic origin speak it as their first language, although a few others use it together with Filipino and English.

How Bizarre!

When was the last time you used the word “bizarre” when complimenting a man for his good looks and bravery?

The term bizarre is currently defined as “odd” or “fantastic” and comes to us from the French from around 1648. However, the term seems to have originally meant “handsome, brave” via the Basque word bizar meaning “a beard.” The notion being that it came from the strange impression made in France by bearded Spanish soldiers.

However, there is an alternative etymology which traces it to the Italian word bizarro which means “angry, fierce, irascible,” (from bizza “fit of anger”).

Either way, it is probably best to stick with the current meaning unless you want to offend your bearded companions by telling them how “oh so bizarre” they are today.

Source: dictionary.reference.com/browse/bizarre
The Life of an Immigrant

“I think immigration is a great con game; you tell yourself lies, you reinvent yourself in many different ways, and to undo all of that took a long time.” Kiran Desai (stated during a CNN interview).

What does it mean to be an immigrant? No matter how much we assimilate, the depth of our being is always tangled with the web of our original home, our original customs and languages and emotions. Wherever we go, we bring our home within us. The immigrant of today’s world is filled with unknown questions. As we crisscross the oceans and continents it is hard to know who we are and who we have become. Where is home and do we ever feel completely comfortable anywhere anymore?

The frustrating question immigrants ask themselves is whether where they are is where they want to be. Why did they leave that other place to come here, or leave here to go there? And they wonder if maybe they should go back again to the one of the places. Do we all end up “undoing it” as Kiran Desai implies in her quote? Do we search for something and in the end ultimately want to undo it all to have things back the way they were before? Is that even possible? Going back again is never completely possible.

The life of an immigrant is often initiated via the desire to pursue something better, something more. Yet “better” and “more” are relative terms set against our current states of mind. Good and bad start to blur into something less tangible and ripe with subtleties. We lose track of our well-worn assumptions and preconceived notions and find ourselves raw and exposed to the world as it is. Perhaps the life of the immigrant today is about letting go of boundaries and limitations to embrace something more?
“I Love You” Too...
Expressing emotion in more than one language
BY COREY HELLER

“I love you Mama. I love you, love you, love you.” Three little words to warm a mother’s heart!

It probably sounds strange but I’m not exactly sure where my daughter learned these words. The chance that she learned them from me or her father is unlikely since we speak German with her even though it isn’t my native language.

Hearing my daughter say the words “I love you” recently immediately reminded me of a day four years ago. My mother, shocked that I had decided to speak German with my toddler son, asked me, “Will he ever hear the words ‘I love you’ from YOU?” My immediate response was a strong dose of defensiveness - how could she even ask me such a question! However, the truth is, I was embarrassed that I had no answer and was hit with the realization that I had never really thought about such implications of raising my son in my non-native language.

What would it ultimately mean if my son never heard the words “I love you” from me? I couldn’t imagine NOT saying the words to him at some point along the way but my mother did have a point: when would I ever speak such words if I was primarily speaking German with my son? I knew that at the very least, he’d hear the words from my mother and brother. He’d hear them from other family members and very close family friends.

Yet, I started to understand what my mother was getting at. She was wondering how anything could compare to that emotional closeness which included words learned from my own childhood. Snuggling on the sofa, warmly nestled in a mother’s lap while hearing those heart-warming words has an indescribable force of its own between child and parent. And the truth is, she was right to ask that question. The words “Ich liebe Dich” just don’t have quite the same emotional impact within me that the words “I love you” have. They have a very powerful response within me but it is different. The words envelop a different place in my heart and don’t go quite as deep down into the very core.

After months of letting thoughts about this mill about in my head, tentative resolutions started to bubble into focus. I realized that the answer to this situation for me would definitely mean finding a compromise. I didn’t want to stop speaking German with my children but I also wanted to use expressions which came most natural to me in English.

I decided to take what I call the “attentive yet laid-back” approach. I decided to try not to pressure myself or my children to use these expressions in any given language (the laid-back part), yet I also made sure not to ignore these important elements in our relationship (the attentive part). I started looking for moments when using the words “I love you” would work well in our conversations (bedtime is a great time, especially after reading a book in a given language) and when using the words “Ich liebe Dich” would work best. Sometimes I’ll just use both: “Ich liebe Dich, I love you, Ich liebe Dich, I love you!”

I also have made an exception to the rule of always repeating my children’s English sentences in German before replying back to them, at least when it comes to these expressions. I take the opportunity to repeat back phrases of love in the same language. Thus, “I love you” from my children will be answered with a corresponding “I love you” from me. And the words “Ich liebe Dich” are answered in kind. After all, we ARE a bilingual family. Using both expressions of love with my bilingual children is a delightful luxury!

So, four years after my mother’s initial question, how are things working out? It is always hard to say but I do believe that my children are developing a personal relationship with both “I love you” and “Ich liebe Dich,” which was the most important outcome for me.

Of course, being that I am an American, I use these terms of endearment (in both languages) more liberally than my German husband. I consider the possibility that my children might find themselves as cultural oddities in comparison with their German counterparts due to their more liberal use of such endearments. But that is a price I’m hoping they will be willing to pay for the benefit of their bilingualism. Besides, maybe if we count all the different ways to say “I love you” in German we’d find that Germans actually DO use terms of endearment more often than it seems. Who knows.
“Ohnon! Griffin, tu as, uh, spit up-é sur ton, ton, ton onsesie! Je vais te mettre dans la, um, bouncy chaise...”

I am rapidly discovering that speaking French when taking care of my two-year-old nephew, Carl, once a week is quite different from speaking French all day, every day, with my newborn son, Griffin!

The first thing that strikes me is my frustrating lack of appropriate vocabulary. As a non-native speaker who studied textbook French in high school and college and then learned conversational French as an exchange student, I spoke almost exclusively with teens and adults. I never learned baby-related vocabulary! While I have picked up the more common terms while spending time with Carl–high chair, nap, bottle, stuffed animal, and so on--I was clueless to name items like “binkies,” conditions like “colic,” or actions such as “swaddling” or “cleaning up after a diaper blow-out.” While I can use paraphrases to describe something when I don’t know the precise word--for example, “a large piece of cloth cinched at the shoulder and strapped diagonally across the chest to form a pocket in which the baby rides”--it would make my life a lot simpler just to say the French word for “sling!”

I miss being able to label without opening the dictionary first. But that problem is easily solvable: I’m reading French websites about baby care and child-rearing, posting questions to listservs, and making an effort to meet local Francophone parents. I’ll learn those expressions to narrate my actions and describe Griffin’s world to him. What’s harder for me is keeping up a constant barrage of French.

When I take care of Carl, it’s a treat. Our Fridays became a time I really treasured. I’d plan ahead--books to read, songs to sing, words he needed to know, simple activities we could do together. We’d play, I’d teach, we’d laugh... and then I’d hand him over to his maman and go home, thrilled that he was picking up French so naturally.

With Griffin, though, it’s more difficult. He needs to hear lots of language to develop his verbal skills, but as a not-too-talkative person, I have trouble carrying on a one-sided conversation--in French--all day long. Plus, I rely on the same songs, rhymes, and board books--dare I admit that I’m starting to get bored in my beloved second language? Sometimes speaking French begins to feel like a chore, an obligation, instead of a chance to share a second language with my son. He’s two months old as I write this, and I’m still so sleep-deprived that sheer exhaustion makes it hard to even speak English to my husband at times! French with an infant? Now that’s tough.

The hardest adjustment, though, is recognizing that if I speak exclusively French with my son, then I am losing the intimacy and nuances that come with one’s native language. The silly songs I make up aren’t as funny, I’m not as articulate, and the books I adored as a child and dreamed of reading to my own children just don’t sound the same in translation. This doesn’t bother me when I’m with Carl--he’ll get everything he needs from his parents, regardless. French with his Tatie is a bonus. What will it be like for Griffin and me?
Call for Submissions
Do you have a knack for writing?

If you have a multilingual family, enjoy writing, and are interested in contributing to our magazine, we would like to hear from you!

We seek short articles up to 800 words in which you report about the daily joys and challenges of raising children in more than one language.

Please contact Alice for more information:
editor@multilingualliving.com

We also seek research articles or articles by experts. These may be longer (max. 1500 words). Articles should be geared towards our audience in style and should not be too academic/technical in language (academic articles may be published on our website instead).

Please note that we do not publish articles if its main aim is to advertise a business or product. For this purpose you may purchase advertising space.

Please contact Corey for info:
info@multilingualliving.com

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We are currently unable to pay any of our writers, but regular contributors receive a free subscription to our magazine.
A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism

By Colin Baker

Written in a very reader-friendly style, the book is a practical introduction for parents and teachers to bilingualism. Straightforward and realistic answers are given to a comprehensive set of frequently asked questions about bilingualism and bilingual education. Areas covered include family, language, culture, identity, reading, writing, schooling and issues.

“Families around the world raising bilingual and multilingual children will sigh a breath of relief to find Colin Baker’s third edition of A Parents’ and Teachers’ Guide to Bilingualism. With its expert answers and easy-to-read format, this book will be a touchstone for families just getting started as well as those needing guidance along the way. As the world changes quickly, Colin Baker has taken the initiative to seek out and answer the most pressing questions and concerns of today’s bilingual families including questions on dyslexia, multiliteracies and autism with the same ease and expertise that we have come to expect from him.”

Corey Heller, Bilingual/Bicultural Family Network founder and publisher/editor of Multilingual Living Magazine

For more information: www.Multilingual-Matters.com
When It Becomes Too Difficult… Should We Give Up Bilingualism?

Let take a moment to talk about problems. The really big ones. For instance, divorce, family conflicts, relocation, serious illnesses and death. We all have to deal with some (or all) of these issues at one point or another during our lifetimes. What should we do when we are confronted with these issues, and our child’s bilingualism ends up the very last item on our agenda? What can we do when it becomes simply too much of a burden to handle?

Experts Kendall King and Alison Mackey share the following wisdom and advice (adapted from their book *The Bilingual Edge*, Collins 2007 p. 249-251):

1. **Take a breather.** “Dial back the anxiety and remember that language learning is a life-long process. A short break is not a disaster.”

2. **Native speaking spouse is not longer around?** Study the language together with your child. If it is suddenly just you and your child, it doesn’t mean that your partner’s language has to be lost forever. Use resources from the internet, check out books at the local library, or make things at home (your own books, board games, cut-out figures). Do whatever little bit you can to maintain the language, but “don’t fret over not doing enough.”

3. **Whatever may be happening, try to see change as something positive.** Keep your eyes open for new opportunities that might arise from this situation.

4. **Keep looking for new resources, classes and playgroups!** “Even if you are in a place that seems to be completely monolingual English, keep looking. Put up signs in grocery stores, at the local library, and at schools. Chances are, there are speakers out there, or other people interested in the same language.”

5. **Stay in touch with your ex’s family.** Take the initiative to forge new relationships with in-laws and your child’s grandparents and enlist their help.

6. **Consider switching methods or languages in the case of relocation.** It is OK to change things if you realize that old methods don’t work anymore.

7. **Be open to new ways of learning languages.** The WWW has so much to offer: check out free language learning classes online, join forums, interest groups and chat groups, subscribe to ezines and magazines (like *Multilingual Living Magazine*), or go to your local public library for books and materials.

8. **Above all, “Try not to let language become a battleground for other issues in your family!”**

And don’t forget that multicultural therapists are ready to help! Harriet Cannon specializes in issues between multicultural couples (with or without children). You can find her at: [www.harrietcannon.com](http://www.harrietcannon.com).
Ask An Expert...

YOUR QUESTIONS ANSWERED BY MADALENA CRUZ-FERREIRA

The questions in this section are reprinted with permission from the Linguist List website: linguistlist.org/ask-ling/. Have a question for our expert? Send it to: editor@multilingualliving.com.

Question: I have 3 children and they all grew up with 4 languages (English, French, German and Greek). Both our 11 and 9 years old have problems with orthography in French and in the other languages, to the point that it has become a problem at school. Is it possible that the 4 languages have created or impacted the problem? Should we give up (with great reluctance) any of the four languages to help the situation? Any ideas how to deal with this, please?

Answer: I've got some dreaded, old-fashioned advice: Copies. It's a low-tech thing that involves the user only (plus some written/writing material) and is therefore low-valued too. But it's extremely effective. I've used it myself, as an adult trying to cope with foreign spelling, and I've assigned it in palatable chunks to my (trilingual) children for the same purpose, at home, with favourite music on the headphones and/or a nice cup of tea. Then ask the child to assess the accuracy of the copied work against the original. It works like magic. Reading as much as possible helps enormously too, there are endless good-quality French publications for children of all ages.
And please don't stop using your languages at home, nor consider any changes to the family’s linguistic make-up. Spelling is a skill that has nothing to do with natural everyday use of language in a family.

Question: Suppose that a natively bilingual person who is equally proficient in both languages moves to a place where a third language is spoken and is completely immersed, but does not receive any instruction in the new language. What would their accent be like? A mixture of both native languages’ accents? Or would they have to default to one language or the other to draw their accent from?

Answer: That person would acquire the accent with which s/he would feel most comfortable for interaction in that language, in order to understand and be understood. There is no reason why one or the other, or both, of the native languages should be the source of an accent, and not the new language itself. Total immersion means full focus on a new language, including on its accent. If by “instruction” you mean some form of schooling, then chances are that the person will have no problems with strange accents, because a lot of language instruction is given through written material that inevitably spawns ‘spelling pronunciations’.
Hope this answers your questions!

Madalena Cruz-Ferreira is a multilingual parent, educator and linguist. She is Portuguese and she received postgraduate degrees in linguistics from the University of Manchester, UK. She is the author of Three is a crowd? Acquiring Portuguese in a trilingual environment (2006) Clevedon, Multilingual Matters (www.multilinguallmatters.com). Her main research interests are child multilingualism, multilingual phonology and intonation, and the language of science. She has lived in Singapore for over 10 years with her Swedish husband and their three trilingual children.
Website: linguistlist.org/people/personal/index.html
Email: mcf636@hotmail.com
To have an “edge” over something means to have an advantage, a special something that sets you apart from the rest. Be it creativity, greater literacy skills, cognitive advantages, greater cultural understanding, job opportunities—raising our children in two or more languages will give them this special something. Kendall King and Alison Mackey, both professors at Georgetown University and mothers of bilingual children, wrote *The Bilingual Edge: Why, When and How to teach your child a second language* as a manual for parents who not only want to give their children this bilingual edge, but seek guidance and information along the way. The goal, the authors write, is to “help our children—and yours—become fluent bilingual speakers.”

As a parent of two trilingual children who has experienced the vicissitudes of the multilingual adventure for 6 years already, why would I need yet another manual on Bilingualism? Haven't I read it all yet? What is still out there for me to learn? The answer is: tons. The reality is that no matter how experienced we think we are in this, we still go through moments of doubt. Is it all worth it? Is it really going to work? Is this “right”?! It is in moments like these when it helps tremendously to be able to pick up a book like *The Bilingual Edge*. After receiving the book in the mail, I gobbled it up in one sitting. Then I went through it a second time, this time more slowly, taking stock of the various information boxes, factual research, and reference sections. This book was a breath of fresh air, a source of inspiration full with valuable tips and ideas. Most importantly, it gave me a pat on the back: quit worrying, the authors say, and keep pushing on. You are definitely on the right track.

I found the sections that were geared towards parents who do not speak any of the languages fluently particularly fascinating. So you want to raise your child in Spanish but you were never particularly good at it yourself in high school. Should you do it? Most people will advise you against it. Yet, why not? Mackey and King will arm you with advice, practical tips, how-tos and exercises to help you accomplish the task. What is most heartening is that you certainly aren’t the only one who’s done this: the various stories of other families who have done so successfully are supportive and inspiring.

I am particularly appreciative of the practical approach that the authors provide in raising children in more than one language. The list of issues, tips, ideas and suggestions can be used in every-day life and are backed by solid research which is presented in an understandable, easy-to-read way. This book has clearly been written by two mothers who have experienced the needs, problems, questions and of every-day multilingual life themselves. There are worksheets, exercises and sample answers. (Ever tried to do your own family language audit? Alison and Kendall show you how to do it. I tried it and had an enlightened a-ha experience about our family situation.)

Are you more of a hard-facts kind of person, preferring to learn via science and research? Then you'll find what you are looking for in *The Bilingual Edge*. The book is scattered with boxes full of research, facts, and possibly the most comprehensive reference section of books and websites that I have seen on the topic. This is not a book to read and set aside, but to keep on your shelf as a reference, for advice, support and inspiration. “*The Bilingual Edge* is for everyone,” the authors write, and I wholeheartedly agree! Not only does this go for bilingualism itself, but most definitely, also for this book!
Pressing Plants

With the springtime finally here (in the northern hemisphere at least) the plants are finally starting to show off their lovely foliage. This is a perfect time to start doing some plant and flower pressing. It is very simple. All you have to do is get your kids out and about for walks where there are different plants, trees and flowers. Talk with them about nature and the different plants. Discuss the details of plant parts and why they are the colors which they are (plants are green because they reflect the color green, red flowers because they reflect the color red). Bring buckets and bags and fill them with the plant clippings. When you get home, dump out everything on the porch or front yard or kitchen floor. Have your children pick out the plants they’d like to press. If you can, find out why, exactly, they chose to press the plants and flowers that they did - was it the color or the shape or the texture? You can either purchase a flower and plant press or you can make your own by gathering old books and newspapers. Just put the leaves, plants and flowers between the newspaper and put the newspaper between two heavy books (they might warp from the moisture of the plants to use old ones!). Or you can use newspaper between two boards and something heavy on top. Once the plants are pressed, save them in special books, hang them on the wall or make collages. Either way you’ll be talking “plant talk” in no time!

That’s My Name

Children are fascinated with their own names. Often for a period of time they are confused as to why other children or adults have the same name as them. How can a classmate have the same name - so strange! Once they are beyond that, it is fun to create games which associate with the first letter of your child’s name with other words. If his name starts with the letter L, for example, you can start a list of words that start with L. Try to focus on kind and empowering words. For the letter L, good words would be “lovely” or “love” or “laughter” or “likeable.” Once you have a list of many words, create a story out of the words. You need to have enough nouns, verbs, adjectives and adverbs to create a fun story, so keep an eye on this while coming up with the list of words.

All Mixed Up

You know your child’s language skills best so you can decide how easy or difficult to make this activity. Pick a list of words with your child that she can read and spell well. For example, “bed,” “house,” “mouse,” “red,” etc. Write them on the left side of a piece of paper. Then on the right side write out the words but with the letters all scrambled together. Don’t write the same word on the same line as the correctly spelled word. For example, for “bed” you’d write something like “ebd” and for “mouse” you could write “sumoe.” Give the paper to your child and see if she can figure out which word matches with the scrambled word. When she figures out each one, she can draw a line from one word to the other or draw a line through the two words. To make it more difficult, don’t write out the correctly spelled words along the left hand side. Just write the scrambled words. Another fun way to play this game is to write out a sentence with scrambled words.

Once your child has a good grasp of the game, have her write out words for you to figure out! Just show her how to mix up the letters and to write them that way. It is very empowering for a child to be able to create a game like this for her own parents and older siblings!
**Nouns, Verbs and More**

Children love coming up with their own stories but sometimes don’t know where to start and where to go with it. A fun way to write a story is to have some fill in the blanks based on grammatical parts of speech. For example, write out a story about a girl who goes for a walk in town with her mother and sees all kinds of things. But leave a blank line for some of the nouns and verbs and adjectives and adverbs, and instead have information about what kind of word should go there. “Once upon a time a girl named __(name)__ went for a walk with her mother. They __(verb)__ down the sidewalk until they got to the bus stop. When the bus arrived they __(verb)__ onto the bus and paid __ (number)__ dollars to the bus driver.” Before you read the story, ask your child for words that you will put into the blanks ahead of time. This will make for a hilarious story. For example, if your child had said “Fred” for the name, “rolled” and “skipped” for the verbs, and “100” for the number, then the story would be: “Once upon a time a girl named Fred went for a walk with her mother. They rolled down the sidewalk until they got to the bus stop. When the bus arrived they skipped onto the bus and paid 100 dollars to the bus driver.” Oh what fun! Make as many stories as you can come up with and think of new ways to change things around to make it even more challenging, fun and hilarious!

**Scrabble**

Do you have a Scrabble game at home? If so, get it out and use it as a fun learning to read tool with your children! You don’t need to use the board and you don’t have to play the game for real. Just lay out all of the letters, turn them all over so that you and your child can read them, and start building words. If your child puts together a bunch of random letters and asks you to read the “word” out loud, that is great! Go ahead and read it the best you can and have fun with it. Try to avoid saying things like “That isn’t a real word so I can’t read it.” Otherwise, your child might start resisting trying out new words out of embarrassment. At this point there shouldn’t be any worries about right and wrong words or spelling. This is about having fun. You can help direct things by creating your own real words and reading them out loud to your child. For an older child, focusing on real words will most likely be fun for him so go with the flow and answer him if he wants to know how to spell something correctly.

**Get Dirty**

Time to get outside and play in the dirt! This is the perfect time of year do some planting. Even if it is too cold where you live to start planting outside, that doesn’t prevent you from doing some indoor planting using indoor pots. You can either choose some seeds with your child (a great excuse to look through the different seed packets at the garden store and talk about all of the different plants) or plants which are already sprouted. Either way your children will be able to get their hands dirty. Find out which plants grow easiest in your climate so that your children will be least disappointed by plants dying too quickly. Consider some vegetable plants for some real learning fun. Tomatoes are often a great plant to try out with kids. There is such joy when those first yellow flowers blossom and then when they turn into little green balls and finally the juicy red tomatoes. Even if your kids don’t want to eat them they will take a vested interest in the plants growing healthily. You can talk about the necessity of water and nutrients so that the plants can grow (just like us!). Talk about the roll of the sunshine in plants being able to grow. If you don’t already have a spot for growing plants, work with your child to pick out a good spot, one with a good amount of sunlight for plants which like sun and shade for plants which prefer it. Let your child get into the dirt and really dig around in it before the plants are added. Then explain to your child how careful she has to be so that the plant won’t get stepped on and how important it is to keep an eye on the plants so that they have just the right amount of water.
Raising children in more than one language and culture?

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Seattle, WA 98115
USA
Spinach Parathas

**Dough Ingredients:**
1 cup flour
1/2 cup water
1/4 teaspoon salt

**Filling Ingredients:**
2 cups chopped spinach
1 teaspoon oil
1/2 teaspoon cumin seeds
1/8-1/4 teaspoon chili flakes
1/2 teaspoon salt
oil for frying

**Directions:**

**Paratha Dough:** Mix the flour and salt together. Then add the 1/2 cup of water and mix. Knead the mixture well and let sit for 10 minutes.

**Paratha Filling:** Heat a frying pan on medium-high heat. Add oil. Add cumin seeds and chili flakes (amount depends on how spicy you want it). Cook for a few minutes and then add the chopped spinach and salt. Cook for 3-4 minutes stirring until the water has evaporated.

**Putting it together:** Split the paratha dough and filling into 6 parts. With a little oil on the hands, roll each of the paratha dough parts between the hands to form balls. Then flatten each with a rolling pin into 2 inch diameter circles. Put one part of the spinach filling into the center of each rolled-out paratha circle. Fold in the edges of the dough to the center to seal the spinach filling inside. Let each paratha sit for 2-3 minutes. Then dip each paratha into flour and roll out flat on a hard surface until about the thickness of a standard tortilla. Heat a frying pan on medium-high heat with a little oil. Add the paratha and fry until it starts to brown on the bottom. Add a bit of oil on top, flip and continue to fry on the other side.

Serve with a pickle and plain yogurt mixed with a little salt, chili power and ground cumin. Or eat them plain - they taste great!
Emotions and Multilingualism,
by Aneta Pavlenko

When parents are asked why they raise their children in more than one language and culture, more often than not their answer is an emotional one. We want our children to learn more than just vocabulary, grammar and traditions. We want our children to feel what it is like to live among languages, to make them a part of their souls. Professor Pavlenko is no stranger to the concept that languages and emotions are intrinsically intertwined. Her book is a testament to this deep understanding and appreciation.

*Emotions and Multilingualism* is not an easy read. The academically inclined will appreciate the depth to which the author goes to explain her subjects. Carefully researched and replete with personal insights, *Emotions and Multilingualism* has something for everyone interested in the details of this subject and explores many questions from different angles: How do bilinguals experience emotions? Do they perceive and express emotions similarly or differently in their respective languages? What role do emotions play in second language learning and in language attrition? The author does not attempt to give final answers to such questions but by discussing them in such detail she encourages us to dig deeper into our own multilingual psyches.


Culture Shock! Successful Living Abroad - A Parent’s Guide,
by Robin Pascoe

So, you are thinking of moving abroad? Sure, go for it! Oh wait, you are married and have children? Ah-ha, that might be a different story - or at least one that you’ll want to give some thought to ahead of time. *Successful Living Abroad - A Parent’s Guide* is a handy place to start in your plans for moving abroad. There are many things to consider when it comes to children which you may not have given much thought. Have you considered the possibility that your move might take its toll on your children’s self-esteem? What about a contingency plan if things don’t go as expected? No matter how well prepared you are, you and your children are bound to experience social adjustments. Robin Pascoe’s book consists of her cumulative experiences of having been on the move with children since they were born as well as consultations with psychologists to better understand and explain the impacts of such movements. The book is an easy read and is packed with nuggets of valuable information, tips, advice and important warnings. Even if the wealth of information seems a little overwhelming right now, the details of the chapters will come to mind again and again as your adventures abroad unfold and develop.

eeBoo
Bring Multilingualism Home!

eeBoo products are not just toys and games. They are beautiful pieces of art! It almost makes a parent (me!) want to hide the games away for herself. Yet eeBoo products are clearly made for children’s busy hands: solid and colorful with smooth, rounded edges. These products are made to last.

Who would have guessed that eeBoo made their fabulous products with a multilingual and multicultural twist? The I Never Forget a Face memory game has been a hit in our home. The cards display faces and head garments of children from around the world (the back of the box identifies each child and country). This can spawn a whole new learning process: pulling out the atlas to identify where each country is located and then discuss languages and customs!

The French Flash Cards and Spanish Flash Cards go above and beyond what we expect from flash cards. Not only do they focus on a word, they give an entire sentence to illustrate the word (with the English translation on the back). And for us non-native speakers, there is a even a pronunciation guide included. Who could ask for more!

What would a home be like without a bingo game? Children love bingo! So, the question really is why we don’t all have language bingo games in our homes? Learning Spanish and French has been a hoot with the eeBoo bingo games. We all love the pictures and I am thankful for the pronunciation guide on the inside of the cover. My kids just can’t get enough bingo.

The Children of the World Sewing Cards have been another big hit in our home. Each time one of my children picks out a card, they want to know the culture of the child on the front. What a delight! I can’t tell you the opportunities we have had to discuss many different cultures as my children sew to their heart’s content (which means they actually have the patience to listen to me for a while as I explain - another parental delight).

My 3 year old daughter especially loves the Friends Say Hello Puzzle. It is an easy puzzle since there are only 12 pieces, each with a unique shape. Children from different cultures teach us how to say “hello” in their languages. We’re all learning a lot here.

And when the evening comes to a close and our thoughts drift to writing about our day, eeBoo has multicultural journals for the child at heart. The Thoughtful Girl journals have a girl from a specific culture on the front writing in her journal with a different theme in the background. Included are stickers, an address book section and letters!

A delightful surprise was the Peaceful Letter Papers product. It is fabulous! Beautifully designed note papers and envelopes come complete with “peace stamps” which show faces of children from around the world, their language and the word “peace” translated into their language. Simply lovely in design and innovation.

We highly recommend these products and encourage everyone to visit the website! For more information go to: www.eeboo.com.
CALENDAR OF EVENTS

Presentations, workshops, conferences and more for your learning pleasure!

CONFERENCES & SEMINARS

May 7-8, 2008
Interdisciplinary Conference on Peoples and Cultures in Nigeria
Adeyemi College of Education, Ondo, Nigeria
www.freewebs.com/ace2008conference/

May 14-16, 2008
The 8th International Language, Literature and Stylistics Symposium
İzmir University of Economics
İzmir, Turkey
dti.ieu.edu.tr/ieu-dilsempozyum/index.php

May 15, 2008
“Culture for Kids: Raising Global Citizens”
In this dynamic panel discussion, local experts will talk about the benefits of early language learning and share their experiences and ideas for integrating language and culture into young children’s lives.
Seattle, Washington, USA
RSVP & Info: events@spongeschool.com, www.spongeschool.com, 425-274-5188

May 15, 2008
“Raising Bilingual Children” (seminar)
Three-hour seminar to prepare parents, grandparents and other caregivers in the rewarding choice to raise their children bilingually and/or multilingually.
Bellevue, Washington, USA
www.biculturalfamily.org/seminars.html

May 17, 2008
“The Contextuality of Language and Culture “Philosophy of Language, Hermeneutics, Interpretation”
Kraków, Poland

June 18-20, 2008
“International Conference on Language Issues in English-medium Universities: A Global Concern”
A forum to discuss and debate language issues in English-medium universities internationally.
University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong, China
www.hku.hk/clear/conference08/

June 26-29, 2008
The 9th International Conference of the Association for Language Awareness
“Engaging with Language”
The University of Hong Kong
Hong Kong, China
www.hku.hk/clear/ala/

June 30-July 11, 2008
Lingfest ’08
Lingfest 2008 is a series of six linguistics events held at the University of Sydney
Sydney, Australia
www.lingfest.arts.usyd.edu.au/lingfestportal.html

Send us information!

Are you giving a presentation, workshop or seminar on bi/multilingualism or bi/multiculturalism? Know about an upcoming conference or event which would be of interest? Send information to:
editor@multilingualliving.com
**Did You Know?**

“As children are surrounded with meaningful writing, they begin to learn that what is spoken can also be written and that there is a prescribed way for writing things down.”


**Basic findings:** The sequential stages in learning to write that children move through regardless of the child’s native language.

- **Scribbling** - making controlled marks to experiment with the visual appearance of writing.
- **Linear/Repetitive Drawing** - making marks that more closely resemble their own language system, cursive in English.
- **Letter-like forms** - making marks that look almost like letters.
- **Letters and Early Word-Symbol Relationships** - making symbols or letters that represent entire words.
- **Invented Spelling** - writing that demonstrates the knowledge of sound-letter relationships, of the structure of words, and of some grammatical rules.
- **Standard Spelling** - writing that demonstrates the knowledge that words have a standard spelling.

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**Tips for parents to encourage children to learn to write:**

1. Take dictation and label the child’s drawings.

2. Accept all writing as valid from scribbles to standard spelling, by acknowledging and praising it.

3. Help your child break down words and letters into more manageable parts to develop phonemic awareness.

4. Provide models in daily life such as grocery lists, letters, notes; and many opportunities using materials like paper, crayons, pencils, and markers; for your child to write.

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**Writing**

Whether you are raising a bilingual, multilingual or monolingual child, it is important that your child receive the kind of stimulation that will encourage language development.

**Start Today!**

Find ways to incorporate these tips, suggestions and ideas into your child’s life!

**Books:**


**Web Sites:**

- Ten Pointers on Evaluating a Young Child’s Writing By Susan Fleming. Currents in Literacy. Hood Children’s Literacy Project. [www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/hood/currents/v1n2/10pointers.html](http://www.lesley.edu/academic_centers/hood/currents/v1n2/10pointers.html)

When bilinguals are faced with assessment, who knows what might happen! It is important for bilingual families to be prepared for a variety of diagnoses from a variety of testing. Parents are encouraged to seek out information and approach their children’s assessment with a level head.

THE ASSESSMENT OF BILINGUALS

“One incorrect assumption is that bilingualism leads to language communication disorders (e.g. language delay). Research does not attribute such disorders to bilingualism. Rather, such beliefs derive from prejudice and ignorance of linguistic and cognitive research.

The communicative differences of bilingual children must be distinguished from communicative disorders. The failure to make this important distinction partly occurs because basic mistakes in assessment and categorization are sometimes made. A bilingual child is often assessed in their weaker, second language. Hence, both language development and general cognitive development are measured inaccurately. For example, in the US and the UK, immigrant children are sometimes assessed through the medium of English and on their English proficiency. Their level of language competence in Spanish, Vietnamese, Hmong, Korean, Cantonese, Turkish, Talagog, Bengali or Panjabi, for example, is ignored.

The result is that such children can be classed as having a ‘language disability’ and perhaps a ‘learning disability’. Instead of being seen as developing bilinguals (i.e. children with a good command of their first language who are in the process of acquiring a second, majority language), they may be classed as of ‘limited English proficiency’ (LEP in the US), or even as having general difficulties with learning. Their below-average test scores in the second language (e.g. English) are wrongly defined as a ‘deficit’ or ‘disability’ that can be remedied by some form of special education. [...] Bilingual children are often over-represented in special needs education, and this is much due to biased assessment practices. Assessment can result in both cultural and linguistic bias, in the testing and the tester, in interpretation, discounting and omission.