Top Ten Influences
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STAY INFORMED!
Your questions to Harriet
Answers from a linguist
First language research
Inside an immersion school
Real-world advice

Books & Literacy
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An Interview of Linguistic Proportions!
François Grosjean reveals the world of a bilingual linguist!
**AWARD-WINNING BILINGUAL CHILDREN’S PRODUCTS IN OVER 40 LANGUAGES!**

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We decided to publish the magazine early since I will be in Europe when publication takes place. Thank you everyone for stepping up and putting together a GREAT issue with such a short lead time!

Since this issue will come out with the advent of the school year, we wanted to make sure to include relevant articles about bilingual education, literacy, learning and preparing for the coming school year.

A bilingual child starting at a new school can be extremely nerve-wracking for the entire family. As Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert makes preparations for a new school year, she shares with us her poignant tips and suggestions.

If you are like most parents raising bilingual children, you have probably considered a bilingual immersion school at some point along the way. Oliver Kim knows what he is talking about when he shares “a day in the life” of LISA, an immersion school in Linz, Austria. His insights are extremely helpful and provide us with a unique view into what things are like from a teacher’s perspective.

It is our great delight and honor to have the talented author, Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa on board! If you have ever heard or read about how others are raising bilingual children and thought to yourself, “Hmm, that just doesn’t seem to work for us,” then you need to read Tracy’s essay. She provides essential insight into what we can and can’t influence and how best to come up with our own plan of action that meets each of our childrens’ needs.

One highlight this month has been the opportunity to come into contact with one of the influential individuals in the field of bilingualism: François Grosjean, Professor of Psycholinguistics and Director of the Language and Speech Processing Laboratory, Neuchâtel University, Neuchâtel, Switzerland. We all have François Grosjean, a bilingual himself, to thank for teaching the world that a bilingual should not be seen as the sum of two monolinguals (which many still assume). Instead a bilingual must be viewed holistically and with a view toward his or her unique linguistic mix.

You will not want to miss this fabulous interview which François Grosjean shares with us, together with contemporary photos!

It is our luck to have been given permission to reprint an extremely useful research article titled, First Language Acquisition. Three researchers guide us through the stages of language learning and give us a blueprint for understanding the mind of our bilingual child.

As always, we have put together a tremendous list of tips, suggestions, recommendations and advice! Becky shares her excellent recommendations that are sure to delight even the most discerning bilingual child! Harriet answers two very relevant questions about daycare choices and in-law concerns. Alice and Colleen provide reviews of two books to aid parents along their paths of raising multilingual children. You won’t want to miss our lising of “Websights Worth Visiting”, and our “Ages and Stages” discusses the unique issues that confront bilingual children at school - be it preparing your toddler for the world of education or understanding the identity issues your teen is going through with respect to peers.

To keep us connected with the world around us, we have an inspiring account from the founder of Bilingual Families Perth, Irma Lachmund and a delightful “How We Met” Spotlight of how a woman from Zimbabwe and a man from the Pacific Northwest in the US came together! And don’t miss the insightful tips of Milind Pandit, a adult raised multilingually!

BRAND NEW this month: Global Flavors and a Games and Fun section! Don’t miss out on either!

I would like to take this opportunity to thank each and every one of you from the bottom of my heart for subscribing! We still have a distance to go if we are to keep this magazine alive but you are making it all possible! Please continue spreading the word! And keep your emails coming!

Corey Heller
Publisher/Editor,
corey@biculturalfamily.org

We look forward to Multilingual Living Magazine becoming an integral part of your life as your trusted, intelligent resource for living a multilingual and multicultural life. Our goal is to empower YOU to make decisions that work for you and your family, to inspire you to embrace the unique circumstances of your life and to help you and your family flourish in your multilingual living.
Mailbag

From You To Us!

Reading your website reminded me of the decisions I had to make when my children were little, like what did I wish for them? The most important thing was for them to feel that they belonged and were a part of the good old USA, so I set out to make sure they felt like US citizens but also to know that part of them is Latin. Now that they are older, one speaks Spanish 100 miles an hour, the other one has nothing to do with it, and then one in between. As far as what they consider themselves to be? I was so surprised to find that I usually hear the answers not by asking but by listening to them talk to others... I was in the car going to a movie with a friend and my two daughters. My friend said, “You know guys, I feel so different when we hang out together because you guys are ... so out of the ordinary! ”My 2 girls laughed and said, “Oh Susan you are so white! We are so Latin (funny coming from a blond blue eye 100% American looking girl) we got the best of both worlds from the USA: we have the wonderful way of living, the freedom to be what we want regardless of social status, in Costa Rica it is all about who your family is, how much money you have. That part we do not like, but we do like the way they look at life. easy .. happy.. and the food is way better.” So then my younger daughter says to her sister, “Oh my God, do you have to make such a long story? Susan, we are white Latin People!” So I said nothing but smiled in my heart because my daughters are both and that is wonderful.

Roxana Arias
Latin America Specialist
Travel House, Inc.

OMG, I had no idea how great your magazine has turned out and
I want to congratulate you on it. Very, very nice job and what a
fantastic venture!!!! I will be sure to subscribe. Well done.

Uschi

With great interest, I download the July copy of your magazine.
Great information and support for us multilingual and multicultural
families living abroad.

Silvia Tolisano
M.Ed. Instructional Technology
www.spraakhexen.com
www.langwitches.org

I just found your first PDF edition of your magazine in
my mail box - wow!! It really blew me away, I figured
that you would start small with just a few pages. Content
is great, great writing - very cool!! I’m sending a big
“CONGRATULATIONS!” to you - your project came out
fabulous!!!

Marita
House Of Links
www.houseoflinks.com

Photo of the Month

This photograph comes to us from the photographer Will Austin. A
classic combination of tradition and modernity; the interdependency of
our cultural traditions and advantages of the modern world. To view
more fabulous photos, visit Will’s website at: www.willaustin.com
Becky’s Top Tips

Where I live in the Pacific Northwest, and maybe where you are, the weather is just beautiful this time of year. Autumn is just around the corner, but summer is holding on for all it’s worth. No matter how much I love summer, the fall also has a beauty all its own. It is definitely a time of change and transition. And at this time there are many holidays that celebrate and acknowledge these changes and others that are significant in our lives.

Here are some products that I think are great for sharing the traditions, cultures, and meanings of these celebrations with children.

Round Is a Mooncake: A Book of Shapes
written by Roseanne Thong, illustrated by Grace Lin

Though the Moon Festival is only briefly mentioned on the first few pages, Round Is a Mooncake is such a great book that I have to mention it. Did you know shapes can be found everywhere? In this little girl’s neighborhood there are many items, mostly of Asian origin, that are round, square, and rectangular. Roseanne Thong also addresses numbers and colors in One Is a Drummer and Red Is a Dragon – two other books that I highly recommend.

WHO IS BECKY? Becky Dolan is the mother of two and has degrees in early childhood and elementary education. She has combined her life-long loves of children, language, and learning to create Magellan’s Toy Shop – an online specialty store that features Learning and Fun from Around the World.

Les plus belles comptines anglaises from Didier Juenesse

I was very excited to receive this recommendation from Caroline, a French mum of Hugo, an English/French baby who is now 14 months. Here is what she had to say:

“This email is to recommend a fabulous little book/CD for children, called ‘Les plus belles comptines anglaises’ (in case you don’t speak French, this means = ‘The most beautiful English Children’s songs’). It features beautiful songs/poems sung by children in two languages. Each song/poem is a ‘classic’ children’s song from each country, following a common theme for each couple of songs: for example two songs (one in English, one in French) will be about the rain, then there are another two where the child needs to learn the lyrics by counting on his/her fingers (“this little pig goes to the market…”), again one poem in each language etc, etc. A truly bilingual CD for little bilingual kids!”
Spooky Spelling Game
from Haba

Haba is one of those companies that has a reputation for quality products, and this one is no exception. Spooky Spelling is a great game that teaches kids how to spell words in English, French, German, and Dutch. Players must find the right letter stamps within the ghost tins and be the first to spell two words. It’s more chance than skill, but the fun repetition will help kids to learn something without feeling taught.

Jewish Holiday Stories
by Jim Weiss

This is another example of something that doesn’t quite fit my theme here, but it’s so good that I have to share it. Jim Weiss is a master storyteller, and while he doesn’t present stories about Rosh Hashanah or Yom Kippur, the ones about Chanukah, Purim, and Passover are superb. Weiss’s voice is very soothing, and he delivers the authentic tales in a very engaging manner. Appropriate for ages 5 and up.

Felipa and the Day of the Dead / Felipa y el Día de los Muertos
by Birte Muller

Written by a German author and available in English or Spanish, Felipa addresses the idea of keeping those who have departed with us by remembering and honoring them. There are few details about the holiday, but can be used as an introduction or in conjunction with other books and activities. Best for ages 4 to 8.

Chinese Culture for Children
by Marisa Lin Fang and Helen Ma Jung

When we think about China and its culture, there are a number of things that come to mind. The Great Wall, red envelopes, and pandas are just a few of the country’s culture icons that are explored in this book. Presented in Pinyin, Mandarin, and English, the simple text makes it easy to introduce these topics to young children. The book also includes coloring pages and games to reinforce learning.

If you have a game or toy at home that you’d like to tell us about, drop me a line at becky@bicultralfamily.org, and I can pass it on. I hope that the change you encounter this season leads to lots of opportunities for learning and fun. Bon voyage!

Becky Dolan
www.MagellansToyShop.com
Learning English by Immersion

By Oliver Kim

Considering immersion school for your child? Do you have questions or are you worried about your child becoming overwhelmed? Wondering if your child will be able to follow instruction in another language? Read about one successful English immersion school in Austria and an immersion school teacher’s professional advice.
Profile of one Immersion School in Austria: LISA

The Linz International School Auhof (LISA) is unique as it is the only public school in Austria that offers instruction in English. Students have the possibility of graduating with both the Austrian Matura as well as the International Baccalaureate (IB) Diploma. Our goal is to give the students a broad general education (we are not a vocational school) and to teach them English to the extent that they are capable of using this language with confidence and competence by the time they graduate. It is our intent that the students become “bilingual” by the end of their school career.

Of course, the term “bilingualism” can have a wide range of different meanings and we have decided not to limit ourselves to one particular definition. Rather, we have a somewhat pragmatic approach: By the time the students graduate, English should have become second nature to them to the extent that they are capable of passing the International Baccalaureate Diploma Program (examined in English) without problems. This is an ambitious goal. One should not forget that the students are living in country where the majority language is German.

Due to the strong prevalence of the German language, the school must provide a context which maximizes exposure to the English language but at the same time ensures that curriculum material is taught. In order to give the students sufficient opportunity to practice and apply their English, it is necessary to create a primarily English-speaking context. Our school employs staff members that are capable of teaching their material in English. Native English-speaking assistants are employed, and appropriate textbooks are ordered from Great Britain and the US. There is a problem though. A majority of the students coming to our school after elementary school do not understand sufficient English to follow the lessons.

We therefore do not have a separate ESL (English as a second language) program; rather, the school teaches the contents of the national curriculum in both German and English (parallel) to the students. The teacher switches back and forth between those languages. Over the years the use of German is reduced. It is still taught as a language course, but is not used for other subjects, so that the strong focus on English remains.

Additional foreign languages are required. French is introduced in 7th grade and students have to choose between Italian, Spanish and Latin starting in 9th grade. Additional courses in Russian, Polish and Czech are offered as voluntary courses for gifted students. By the time they graduate, the students will have studied a minimum of four languages, including German.

Immersion schooling: Frequently Asked Questions

It is interesting to note that parents are often a bit worried before their children start the new school. We sometimes reply jokingly: “Do not worry about your own English capabilities! If you don’t know much English, then you will automatically learn this language along with your child, when you help them with the homework!” Many parents simply cannot imagine that by the end of the first year their children are able to understand and even communicate in basic English. But it is possible.

What’s so special about the program? After all, English is also taught as a subject in other schools. Is it not enough to attend regular English courses to learn the language? It depends on what you want. Of course one can learn a language by attending a dedicated language
course. It may, however, take longer to reach a comparable level. An important advantage of immersion learning is that students learn a range of subject-specific vocabulary that are otherwise not obtained. It is unlikely that domain-specific words like millipede, bone marrow and antlers can be found on an average vocabulary list taught in a language subject. These words, however, are covered during the regular biology lesson. A second important advantage is that students simply have more opportunity to practice their verbal abilities. How much speaking time can one student get in a class of 30 students during regular language lessons? In the case of an immersion system, it is simply not possible for a student not to open his or her mouth during the course of a day.

Are the students delayed at the beginning? Many parents are concerned that teaching both in English and German during the first months may result in an academic set-back. It is correct that it may not be possible to teach the same quantity of material and that energy and time is spent to teach (and learn) the subject in two languages. As teachers switch and teach more and more using English, this initial delay is quickly recovered. The fear that this delay results in an overall lower academic achievement is clearly countered by the fact that students repeatedly achieve outstanding results at both their International Baccalaureate Diploma and the national school-leaving examination. I also try to convince parents that the use of high-quality English-language teaching materials, engaged teachers, a willingness to study, and a positive working environment probably play a greater significance in determining academic achievement than the fact that the material is initially taught in two languages.

Will the students understand the English textbooks? It is extremely difficult to obtain textbooks and teaching materials that are specifically designed for the needs of bilingual education. What we need are materials that cover the curriculum but use a simplified language. Authentic teaching materials imported from the US or Great Britain, written for students that are already fluent in the English language, is simply too advanced for beginning language learners. On the other hand, material that is written in a simple language often does not meet our curricular requirements.

The question of whether students understand authentic teaching material must be answered in different ways. Beginning students often encounter problems in understanding both the language and the content, while more experienced students have already acquired the necessary skills to deal with both content and language. Teachers are therefore expected to evaluate the situation and make decisions appropriately.

Are my children capable of following instruction in the English language? If the instruction is only given in English, and the student did not learn English in Elementary school, then he or she will not be able to understand the instruction. How could they? During the beginning months, the teacher therefore uses both German and English as languages of instruction. Tests are administered in both languages (on the same sheet) and the student is allowed to choose the language. As the student’s level of English improves, the teacher will place a stronger emphasis on English, until German is not used at all. It is important to note that English is never forced! This the only way we can ensure that the student develops a positive attitude towards the language. This bilingual model also benefits students who do not speak German and who are given the opportunity to learn the language. It is interesting to observe that many students choose to answer the questions in English rather than their native German. This can be easily explained: After all, the majority of reading material and work sheets are in English. The student starts to think in English and it would be a greater effort for them to think up an answer in German and then to translate it into English.

Are my own English language capabilities sufficient to support my child in school work? This question often arises from a misconception. Many parents have attended a school system in which foreign languages were taught in a rather „formalistic“ way - with a focus on grammar and vocabulary and a strong theoretical/linguistic component. I sometimes get the impression that some parents (while capable of conversing in simple English) are worried that they will harm the language acquisition of their child. “What if I teach them something wrong?” This fear is not openly voiced, but often becomes evident during the admission interviews.

Here it must be stated that our school has a different concept of language learning than the parents assume. The formal, linguistic component is only one aspect of language acquisition. It is important that the children are immersed in an environment where a lot of English is spoken. I’d rather have the parents talk to their
Will bilingual instruction not exert my child too much? Many parents are concerned that the education of the curriculum in a foreign language might exert their child too much and cause high stress. Of course it is difficult, if not impossible, to give a short and universal answer to this question, as many factors besides language issues are involved. We repeatedly tell the parents that the academic success and stress issues depend to a large extent on the willingness of the child to attend a bilingual school and his or her intrinsic motivation. Occasionally, students were enrolled in the school because it was the wish of the parents, and not the wish of the child. In our view this is to be avoided and might indeed be an unnecessary burden on the child.

Will my children forget their mother tongue? Other parents are concerned that their children will not get enough German input in the non-language subjects and will therefore be disadvantaged when they continue their studies at university. What if they don’t learn enough of the subject-specific vocabulary? I always tell parents that the ability of the child to understand English is probably a better preparation for university life. Many courses in our national university system are already taught in the English language (at least in the sciences). The increased internationalization with exchange professors also plays a role in English being a common language of instruction at university.

I vividly remember a conversation that I had a few years ago with a former student of our school. I asked her if she benefitted from her English abilities. Her answer was, “During the lectures I have to smile to myself when I see the other students trying to follow the lesson, looking up vocabulary words in their thick dictionaries. And to me it’s second nature.”

Certainly parents and students alike are very anxious for our ambitious program at LISA to succeed. The International Baccalaureate program is a central driving force and gives both students and teachers a goal to work towards. Our school is successful due to many reasons. In my view, the most important factors are supportive parents, a motivated staff, as well as a student body willing to take on the challenge of a bilingual education.

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Oliver Kim is an instructor at the Linz International School Auhof, Austria. He teaches the subjects of IB Biology, Computer Science as well as Theory of Knowledge. Visit LISA at: www.auhof.eduhi.at/lisa/
The Ten Key Factors Influencing Successful Multilingualism

By Tracey Tokuhama-Espinosa

Nature or nurture? Identify your child’s recipe!

Identify key language ingredients and move ahead with confidence!
Bilingualism is usually a rewarding experience filled with social and academic gains. However, for some, the process can be a time of anxiety. Many parents often sacrifice the gift of a second or third language in order to spare their children the stress of the learning experience. It would be more advisable for families to gain a clear understanding of the factors they have an influence over and those factors which are in nature’s hands.

In my book Raising Multilingual Children: Foreign Language Acquisition and Children I define the “Ten Key Factors in Raising Multilingual Children” which are combined in a unique “recipe” for each person. Aptitude, Timing, Motivation, Strategy, Consistency, Opportunity, the Linguistic Relationship between the Languages, Siblings, Gender and Hand-Use as it reflects cerebral dominance are all important, even in their absence.

Awareness of these factors can help parents in their vital roles as guides in their children’s language learning process.

**Aptitude:** Each person is born with a certain aptitude for different life skills. People with a high aptitude for foreign languages learn languages easily; people with low aptitude do so with difficulty. You cannot influence how much aptitude a person has, but you can make the most of what exists. It is estimated that aptitude for foreign languages is on par with other talents, with roughly 10% of the population enjoying its benefits.

**Timing:** The windows of opportunity are times when certain skills can best be learned. There are three windows of opportunity for foreign language acquisition. The first and "easiest" is from birth to nine-months. The second is between four and eight years old due to children’s lower inhibition levels. The third is from nine-years and onwards as the brain reaches its full size (though not in terms of neuroconnections).

**Motivation** includes both positive versus negative, and internal versus external factors. Falling in love is a fantastic motivating force, as is hatred. Helping a child find his own reason to learn a language is far more effective than forcing a language on him.

**Strategy** means making a conscious decision to approach language development in a certain way and...

**Consistency** is each person’s (including parents’) ability to stay true to the agreed upon strategy. There are at least seven thoroughly research strategies, including the one-person-one-language approach. No strategy is more efficient than another, though it has been shown that it is easier to be consistent with OPOL, for example, than with using “time” (dinner time, weekends, etc.) as a guiding strategy.

**Opportunity** is the daily use of the language(s) in meaningful situations. The amount of time an individual can spend actually using the target language(s) is the single factor which separates adult and child bilingual success. Harley (1986) actually showed that adults are superior to children when learning a foreign language if and when they dedicate the same amount of time to the task.

**The Linguistic Relationship** between Languages: Does the native language share roots with the second language? If so, the second language is easier to learn due to the similarity of grammar, vocabulary and sound systems.

**Siblings** can have a positive as well as negative effect. In the positive, siblings learn a great deal from one another as they have a greater number of verbal exchanges and conversations in a day. However, in the negative case, one child may dominate the language exchange and stunt the other’s development.

**Gender:** Sexist as it may sound at first, we now have the technology to see how boys and girls approach language from different parts of the brain and this is influential in both first, second and subsequent languages.

Most people have their main language area of the brain in the left hemisphere, but a small percentage (30%) of those who write with their left hand and five percent of those who write with their right hand actually have language spread over a greater area. This group may favor different teaching methods, and thus **Hand-Use,** as it reflects cerebral dominance, makes up the last of our ten factors.

Every individual will combine the Ten Factors differently. Such individuality is what gives researchers and educators awe at the human capacity for language, and what challenges parents and teachers to emphasize an individual approach to the process. It is also the source of anxiety and stress for many families as no one can tell you the “right way” to approach the bilingual or multilingual family experience. What parents can do, however, is determine their children’s own personal recipes and make the most of each of the factors influencing their success.

TRACEY TOKUHAMA-ESPINOSA is a native of California who studied her Master’s of Education in International Development at Harvard University and her undergraduate degrees of International Relations and Mass Communication at Boston University. Since 1997 she has facilitated workshops for families, companies and professional educators on themes of language development, brain-based learning, learning styles, critical thinking and teaching methods and strategies. Her list of clients includes Proctor & Gamble (Switzerland and UK), Early Bird Early Childhood Education (The Netherlands), Shell OUTPOST Schools, Ares Serono, The Diplomatic Women’s Group of Geneva, the University of Melbourne and schools in a doze countries (Argentina, Australia, Norway, Germany, Italy, Ecuador, Thailand, Switzerland, the UK, The Netherlands, Belgium and France). Tracey speaks and writes in English and Spanish fluently, knows conversational French, some Japanese, and basic German. She and her Ecuadorian husband are raising three multilingual children in English, Spanish, German and French. She is the author of Raising Multilingual Children: Foreign Language Acquisition and Children (2000) and The Multilingual Mind: Questions by, for and about people living with many languages (2003). www.multifaceta.com
First day of school making you nervous?

Start off the year with confidence!
Bilingual families may decide to educate their child in a second language school, either to support one of the parental languages or to give the child a ‘immersion’ into another language. Other families may have no choice due to where they live and the lack of schools in the first language. Parents who are unfamiliar with the second-language school system often end up feeling confused or overwhelmed in the beginning.

In our English-speaking mother and French-speaking father family our two oldest children have been in a French language primary school for the last three years to support their French. As an English parent I was surprised to see how many differences there were and how frustrating it was to not understand teachers and other parents. With time most problems were resolved, with the help of a good dictionary and understanding teachers.

For those parents who are considering putting their children into a school which is run in your second language here are a few tips...

**Settling In**

Children will need at least 3 to 6 months to adapt to a new language environment. If your child has come from a monolingual school or environment it might be a shock at first. If the child understands, but does not speak the language, he might appear rude or lazy until he begins to communicate. Children may become very quiet or use aggressive behaviour to get what they want, like grabbing, pushing or screaming for attention. They need gentle coaching on how to ask for things politely, how to ask to go the toilet or for a drink etc. The teacher might be tempted to use the ‘other’ language as a way to communicate, so either write or tell the teacher you want him/her to use only the school language.

**Child’s Peer Group**

Children like to fit in and lacking language skills can hamper the natural bonding process. A child who cannot express herself enough in the second language can be frustrated and even angry, especially if they like to talk at lot in the first language. Parents can help by inviting children round to play or organise an activity together, giving the children one to one time together. Parents need to explain that the child will find friends in time. When your child does find a friend usually the language use increases dramatically as they chat together.

**Curriculum**

Most likely the school curriculum will be unfamiliar. Each country has its own way of teaching reading and writing and education is often very different from country to country. Your child could start reading at age four, like in the UK, or it could be around age 6. There might be national testing at age 7 or 11 or not at all. Subjects like art, sports, after-school clubs and activities differ greatly too within national curriculum. Parents need to revise the curriculum and know what is expected of their child and when (most national school programs can be found online).

**Homework**

When your child is in primary school there will usually be some homework, either reading together or doing some maths, research or writing practice. Parents must decide who does the homework, and if the parent does not understand what the child should do or the homework itself he or she needs to ask for clarification either from another parent or through the teacher. Some parents find homework impossible and employ a student or teacher to coach their child either daily or a few times a week.

**Teacher communication**

Parents regularly meet with teachers and it is important to have an idea how your child is performing. The teacher will usually write a report beforehand, which parents should take the time to understand and translate if necessary. The teacher can explain more if you are not sure what is being measured. For meetings parents who are not confident speaking in the second language should try to find a translator or a friend who can ask questions on their behalf, and make sure both parties understand what is happening. Messages from the teachers regarding school trips/sport days etc need careful attention so your child does not miss or forget an item for school.

**School community**

Parents need to feel part of the school, not excluded. One way to be involved is to volunteer your time and help out. Depending on your language skills you might want to join the PTA or simply help out dressing kids for the school show. You can also offer to go on school trips or with sports such as swimming where an extra helper is greatly appreciated by teachers. It’s important to attend school shows too, even if you don’t always understand the songs or words, and tell your child you appreciate their effort to sing or speak in the other language.

**Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert is the author of Language Strategies for Bilingual Families. She is the mother of three English-French speaking children. Their two oldest children, Marc (9) and Nina (7) have spent 3 years in a French school in Malaysia. For more information check out her website: www.opol4us.com**
Before I came to live in this country, when I first visited it back in 1993, I noticed something interesting in the Brazilian expatriate families that we visited all over the East Coast. The young children spoke very little Portuguese and mostly English, and I noticed that this brought about a significant separation between the children and the parents, since many of the latter spoke very little English. The children seemed fully immersed in the culture because most of them went to day-care or to school; the parents, on the other hand, seemed to be struggling to adapt to many aspects of life. More than ten years later this has become a key element in my decision to focus on one language in our home even though we first started speaking both languages.

Of course in our case, the gap between the children’s mastery of the dominant language and culture and the parents would not be an issue, but I confess that I still fear that once my sons go to school and realize that English is the language with more “prestige,” that they will start speaking it between themselves and with their
friends, even Brazilian ones, and that Portuguese will be left aside. Every time we meet new children of Brazilian parents that tend to speak mostly in English, I shudder, thinking about the future. Because of this, I started to pay close attention to my older son’s interaction with other children.

Once a week, we get together with our Brazilian friends. There are two children, Maria Julia, who is 5 years old, and Matheus, who is 3, who play a lot with my sons. They were both born here and have never been to Brazil, so although they (especially the girl) can communicate in Portuguese, they make several mistakes and sometimes use an English word here and there. They do not have an accent, though, as I have seen in a few children of Brazilian parents who are born here, but maybe they will have it when they are older, as is the case of another friend’s teenage children. Matheus has never talked much, but he recently started going to a day care center daily instead of staying home with his dad or with a sitter, and all of a sudden he’s speaking much more – mostly in English, though. Maria Julia has always spoken to Kelvin in Portuguese because she knows that he cannot speak English yet, but lately she has been speaking more to her brother in English while they play. This has fed on my son’s growing interest in the English language, although sometimes he’s still torn between the two languages. I have started to pay close attention to their interactions so I can see how my son reacts.

A month ago the three of them were pretending that they were in a restaurant. One of them would order and the other(s) would serve the “food.” I noticed that Maria Julia started speaking English and was amused to see Kelvin respond (in English): “Speak Portuguese, please!” (Quite the opposite of Geno Steaks’s request for customers to speak English that I wrote about in my last column!). She complied and they continued playing. Last week, my sons were at the playground with Matheus and I noticed that Kelvin was speaking in English to him and everyone else. “Excuse-me” he’d say if there was someone blocking the passage on his way to the slide. “I am going there,” he said once to explain to a boy that he wanted to take his place, and “I’ll go first,” when he wanted to be the first in the slide. I was very surprised at his quick progress, and I actually felt a bit nervous about this.

It has been over a week since he last interacted with his friends, but now I noticed that he has been practicing his English as he plays on his own. He adores Thomas The Train and his friends, and has two DVDs as well as toy trains that he plays with quite often, and takes everywhere. Yesterday I was working on my dissertation when I heard him talking to himself while playing with his trains in the hallway just outside my home office:

“Faster. My train is going faster,” he said.
I asked him (in Portuguese) “Do you know what faster means?”
“Yes, of course!” He replied, also in Portuguese, “It means ‘fast’ [rápido].”

I corrected him saying it meant faster (mais rápido), or literally “more fast” in Portuguese and then he asked me how he could say “less fast” (menos rápido) in English – I asked whether he meant “slower” (mais devagar) and taught him the word slower. A few minutes later, he started talking to himself again in English: “Gordon is blue and James is red, but the caboose of my train is black not red, it is black.”

“Who’s red?” I asked.
“Mama,” he answered, slightly exasperated, “I said, James is red!”

Sometimes, he wants to know what we are talking about, yet he does not want us to speak English. Later in the day, when we were in the car and my husband and I were talking about a news story we heard in the radio and started speaking English, Kelvin said: “Papi, please speak Portuguese with me!”

Today I was very amused to hear Kelvin, who was playing with trains in the living-room, teaching a new word to his brother (who is 26 months and speaks a lot – all in Portuguese): “speechless” – in English! He was teaching each syllable of the word with a bit of a Brazilian accent, like this: “ees-pee-chee-less,” but when he pronounced the whole word, it sounded perfect. Then he said: “I am speechless.”

At this point I was burning with curiosity to know whether he knew what he was saying and how he had learned to say it. I ran downstairs and asked if he knew what speechless meant and when he did not know, I explained it to him. He also told me he had heard that sentence in the Thomas DVD. After I came back upstairs he kept on repeating “I am speechless” to his brother, and I heard him say (in Portuguese, except for the word in question): “Not talking,” Linton, “speechless means not talking.”

I hope that in the months and years to come I learn to relax and enjoy their English acquisition process, because there is no denying it will happen, even if they have very limited interaction with English-speaking children and only listen to English on television or when we go out to the store and playground. I have to admit that find it hard not to be afraid of English and my older son’s fascination with it only reinforces my qualms. However, I have to keep in mind that we as a family have already ensured that my sons have a firmly established mother language, Portuguese, and now we have to allow them to continue expanding their universe to include English and other languages, so they can become truly multilingual children.

Lilian W. is a monthly contributing editor and columnist for the Multilingual Living Magazine. She is a foreign student from Brazil currently working on her Ph.D. dissertation in the humanities. She and her husband speak Portuguese at home with their sons, but she is hoping they will start learning English soon. Check out her family’s journey in her One Family One Language column each month. You can learn more about Lilian at her blog: http://mamaintranslation.blogspot.com.
Frequently Asked Questions About Raising Multilingual Children

By Milind Pandit

As parents raising multilingual children, we often wonder what impact our choices and decisions will have down the road. One of the best ways to find out is to ask adults who were raised multilingually.
Can my child learn multiple languages without being formally educated, and if so, how? Yes. Children’s ability to learn languages is innate and tremendous, and remains strong until the onset of puberty. There is evidence of prenatal voice recognition, and studies have shown that babies can discriminate between languages as early as the first month after birth. Children learn an average of one word every ninety waking minutes between the ages of 18 months and 17 years. Children can learn multiple languages the same way they learn a single one: by using them and hearing them used on a daily basis.

I am an immigrant. Should I speak to my child in the local language or in my native language? If you want your child to be multilingual, then speak to your child in your native language, and encourage your child to speak to you in your native language.

What if my spouse speaks yet another language? You and your spouse should speak to your child in your respective native languages, and encourage your child to speak to you in your respective native languages. Your child will pick up both languages.

Won’t my child be confused? No. Children quickly learn which language—and within a single language, which accent—to use with which listener. They quickly learn to translate between languages and accents for smooth communication.

If I speak to my child in my native language, will my child have difficulty learning the local language? A child who is exposed to the local language from the media and in school will learn it in the course of normal social interactions, with little or no difficulty. Indeed, local children may also begin to learn your native language via exposure to your child.

Will my child suffer psychological harm from being raised multilingual? Children are sometimes ridiculed by adults and children for mispronouncing words, mixing languages in daily speech, for being intelligent enough to speak multiple languages, and for various practices exclusive to foreign cultures. Children may suffer psychological harm from such ridicule. However, there is neither anecdotal nor scientific evidence that children suffer psychological harm merely from learning and being exposed to multiple languages. Indeed, there is anecdotal evidence that multilingual children can learn new languages faster and more easily than their monolingual peers.

My child understands my native language, but only speaks to me in the local language. What can I do? Insist that your child speak in your native language. If your child is asking for something, your insistence will have leverage. Praise and reward your child lavishly for correct usage of your native language. Patiently correct any misuse of your native language without ridicule or punishment.

My child confuses languages while speaking with me. What should I do? You will find that your child is using words from multiple languages within the grammar of a single language. This is not confusion, but simply expediency—to communicate, the child is using any “available” words and phrases. Although your child may sound funny, try not to laugh. Instead, teach your child the words necessary to speak without drawing from multiple languages.

How can you be so sure of all this? I am a child of immigrants. Because of my parents’ patience, persistence and commitment, I learned to read, write, and speak Marathi at home. I learned English primarily from the media, my schoolmates, and my teachers. I do not remember learning English, I have had countless conversations with multilingual children and their parents, and I studied cognitive science and natural language processing in graduate school. I have observed my own daughter learn Marathi fluently at age three, and then effortlessly become fluent in English when she started school.

Book Tip...

A great book summarizing the scientific evidence for language acquisition is Steven Pinker’s The Language Instinct: How the Mind Creates Language, published in 1995 by HarperPerennial. Pinker is a professor of linguistics at MIT and has written easy-to-read books on linguistics and cognitive science.

Meet Milind...

Milind’s knowledge of raising bilingual children comes from personal experience as well as advanced study of linguistics. After immigrating from India as a toddler, he grew up in Wisconsin and Michigan. He learned to speak, understand, read and write Marathi (regional language of the Indian state of Maharashtra) at home which thanks to his parents’ patience, persistence and commitment.

Milind’s interest in languages has also included some formal education in Spanish, Sanskrit, and Japanese. He has a Masters Degree in Computer Science and Engineering from The University of Michigan, is the author of a book on computers, a Microsoft Encarta Encyclopedia article on digital technology, four patents, and several academic papers. He is currently Director of Product Management at Corillian Corporation, an internet banking software company.
sponge offers language classes for young children and their caregivers.

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Harriet Cannon, M.C. is a Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and Consultant with over 20 years experience specializing in working with clients in life transitions; career, international relocation, bicultural and multicultural relationships and family issues.

Ms Cannon has lived and worked in the United States and internationally for both the American Foreign Service and Puente Bretagna, a Chilean group of psychologists and Psychiatrists.

Currently Harriet Cannon has her counseling and consulting office in Seattle, Washington. She consults throughout the Puget Sound to groups, international organizations and businesses. Most recently Ms Cannon was invited to present her research on the life stories of multicultural mothers and daughters at the International Family Therapy Conference in Washington DC in June 2005.

For more information visit Harriet’s web site at www.harrietcannon.com
My 1 year old son and 4 year old daughter are in a Day Care four days a week where only English is spoken. The Day Care is excellent so I am reticent to move the children even though it is affecting the vocabulary of their French which we speak at home. Do you have any suggestions?

It sounds like you are encountering the nemesis of the bicultural, bilingual couple raising bilingual children; what to do about the impact of Day Care on your first language. On an emotional level this is stressful for parents. The fear is children your will have less facility in your language as well as less loyalty to their cultural roots. This fear has some basis in reality which requires a strategy on the part of parents. It is essential to find fun concrete ways to support your French language through games, music, connections with French culture and language wherever you can find it outside the home. Fill your home with French influence and keep it light. Your children will be growing up with a bicultural identity. They will identify themselves as “American” more strongly as they get into grade school. Your attitude about being “French-American” should be positive. You will have to cope with your feelings about your children becoming more “American” than French. Avoid criticizing them for their “American” ways. That strategy will backfire and cause unnecessary conflict. Talking with other international parents and joining organizations such as BBFN will support you so you can support your children in their evolution as bicultural citizens.

My in-laws are coming from India for a month long visit. They love my husband and have grown to accept me but they are not tolerant of US culture and many of the ways we are raising our 3 and 6 year old children. Additionally they are wealthy and accustomed to a life style we do not live. Every year when they come to visit more tension is growing as I feel their judgment on intergenerational expectations.

It is common for tension to grow between relatives who live outside the US to feel more judgmental as they see their grandchildren growing beyond the universal behaviors of toddler-hood into “foreign” children. The development into children who resonate to a different culture is a reality check that is unsettling. Out of fear, the grandparents tend to go towards blaming the in-law and the children for being wrong and different. Some grandparents can discuss this openly and some cannot. Try bringing it up gently and if they resist drop the subject for this visit. Do prepare your children by talking about differences and how their grandparents may feel “out of the loop” in how things happen in the US. School them on the manners they will need for the visit. Not only will this help for future trips to India but it will please the grandparents and increase the bond. You and your spouse can also strategize on affordable ways to do some special things your in-laws would enjoy which honor those things which are important to them. Remember, often a large part of grandparents’ “complaints” about how you are raising your children is a response to their fear they will loose a cultural connection with their grandchildren. The older your children get, the more your can and should talk directly and clearly about how culture is also a connection of the heart with relatives who live overseas. It is worth the effort to keep the cultural connection.
**Brain Development and Literacy**

**Did You Know?**

“Children develop much of their capacity for learning in the first three years of life, when their brains grow to 90 percent of their eventual adult weight,” L.A. Karoly et al. Investing in Our Children. RAND, 1998. “To encourage the healthy development of a newborn, parents need to know that it is the earliest interactions with themselves and other caregivers that most affect the way a baby’s brain becomes wired for later learning.”

**Basic findings about human brain development:**
- Although genes control the initial unfolding of the brain, neural activity begins well before birth as axons make their first connections.
- At birth a baby’s brain contains 100 billion neurons or virtually all the nerve cells it will ever have.
- A trillion glial cells, named after the Greek word for glue, form a kind of honeycomb that protects and nourishes the neurons.
- Shortly after birth a baby’s brain produces trillions more connections between neurons than it can possibly use.
- By the age of two a child’s brain contains twice as many connections and consumes twice as much energy as the brain of a normal adult.
- The brain’s greatest growth spurt draws to a close around the age of 10.
- The brain eliminates the connections that are seldom or never used, preserving those that have been transformed by experience.

**Books/Media:**

**Baby Minds**


**Your Child, Birth to Three.**


**Web Sites:**

**Making Connections: How Children Learn.**


**Brain Development**

http://www.lili.org/read/readtome/braindevelopment.htm

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**Tips for parents to stimulate brain development:**

To enhance problem solving, play contingency games with babies like Peek-a-boo.

2. To enhance recall memory, videotape outings and show them to your toddler and ask questions about what happened.

3. To enhance language development, provide toys for your toddler which lend themselves to pretend play and take an active role yourself.

4. To enhance reading, sing songs and play games with rhymes beginning at birth.

5. To enhance math, make numbers a feature in any activity that involves repetition. For example repeat a word like tickle, tickle several times with the action, then change the action and your descriptive words to sets of three.

6. To enhance drawing, have you toddler tell you about his pictures. Point to various parts and ask questions.

7. To enhance writing, label your children’s pictures. When he scribbles ask what he is writing.

8. To enhance her sense of humor, be on the lookout for opportunities to do inappropriate things with familiar objects like trying to put your toddler’s shoe on your own foot.

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Early Trilingualism: A Focus on Questions
By Julia D. Barnes

There is a lack of research on trilingual/multilingual language acquisition and even fewer publications focus specifically on trilingual children. Since past studies on the topic examined trilingualism within a bilingual framework, and usually focused on the adult individual, this book by Julia D. Barnes fills a gap in the field. In this case study, Barnes focuses on a single trilingual child in the Basque country. She examines the child’s interrogative behavior by analyzing different aspects that influence the development of question forms in English. Issues regarding pragmatic development, communicative competence, and cross-linguistic influence are discussed as well. One particularly interesting research topic is the comparison of trilingual children’s language acquisition to that of monolingual and bilingual children. This book will be of particular interest to researchers and teachers. Parents interested in learning more about multilingual language development from an academic perspective will find this book of great value, as well.

Young Bilingual Learners in Nursery School
By Linda Thompson

Young Bilingual Learners in Nursery School is a report on the implementation and findings of a study of “the social and linguistic behavior” (p.1) of a group of eight British children of Pakistani origin in preschool. The book is a research report and is not designed to provide direction or guidance to parents and teachers. The author begins by placing the children’s experiences in the context of Pakistani immigration patterns to England and Pakistani cultural norms around language learning. Another chapter of background information covers the recent history of bilingual education in Britain. Next, the book outlines the theoretical basis for the project and summarizes the work of child development theorists and linguists. A detailed description of the project follows.

The study’s findings relate to how bilingual and monolingual non-English children interact with their preschool environment (time spent on various tasks, how social networks and settings influence linguistic behavior, etc.). The study found a “small but significant increase” (p.197) in the number of English utterances between the beginning and end of the children’s first preschool term and some rather detailed and technical findings about how the children choose between using English and their native language. Based on the data from the study, the author proposes a “social and linguistic framework for describing an individual’s linguistic repertoire as a linguistic biography” (p. 217). What this means is that the bilingual children studied had a sophisticated ability to choose in what situations to employ which language and that language use in one setting (i.e.: school) will impact language use in other settings (e.g.: home, the community).
Learning a new language as an adult requires something I have in very short supply – the willingness to appear foolish. Until my much younger brother was born, I was the little sister, the youngest of about a dozen cousins, and an easy target for any kid in the family who wanted to improve their self-esteem at my expense. They need only ask me if I knew such and such, some critical piece of information about the world that I, of course, lacked, to prove their superiority. I felt inadequate and became defensive, sensitized to my lack of wisdom and touchy about my personal dignity. I experienced enough humiliation during childhood to last a lifetime. And now I’m trying to speak a foreign language!

My goal with Russian is to become conversational because knowing a few words is just not sufficient to crack the culture code and acquaint oneself with a place and its people. Speaking like a native, reading novels in their original tongue and understanding subtle humor all would be amazing, but that can come later if at all. For my fall visit to Moscow what I hope for is the ability to get to know the people I encounter, order in restaurants, purchase groceries, and find my way around. That feels plenty ambitious for now.

In any language conversation involves a large body of knowledge and skills and requires they be used in a fast-paced environment. It only takes a few characteristic mistakes to become a caricature of a foreigner (“we go store, I wait you”). I still remember with a pang of shame and anger being mocked by a young German vacationer a few years back when I asked directions in my rusty high school French on the French island of Belle Isle. As I think about and prepare for our Moscow trip, I feel like I am painting a target on my back, volunteering to sound ignorant all over again: “Mock me, I’m a foreigner!”

I recently resumed meeting with my Russian tutor. I’m getting back on the bicycle, as the saying goes, after four earlier attempts to learn Russian. I’m not calling them failed attempts (although it’s tempting) because I did take some knowledge and skill away from each effort. Practicing with my tutor, Sofiya, reduces my inhibitions. She keeps a straight face no matter what I say, never lets exasperation seep into her tone, and has heard much worse. Our meet-
ings mainly consist of a role-played conversation about a topic likely to occur on my trip – requesting a beverage from a flight attendant, talking about my daughter, describing my work to an in-law, shopping and paying in stores. This forces me to push through my resistance – if I really want to become conversational, apparently I have to converse.

After three years of household immersion, listening to my husband speak to our daughter in Russian, I think I’ve got a bit more of an ear for the language this time around, not to mention a solid grasp of early childhood and everyday family vocabulary. I don’t need flashcards to remember how to say, “Do you need to pee?” “Eat your oatmeal” or “Don’t climb on that chair!” so I’ve got that going for me.

But the specter of public humiliation is always lurking. I’m working now on my fallback position -- trying to have a sense of humor about it. I was asking my husband for clarification on a vocabulary word the other day. When I mentioned the imperative command “give me” (die-ee-tee) he chuckled and said “you have to be careful pronouncing that, because if you say “dah-ee-tee” you aren’t saying “give me,” you’re saying “milk me.” We got some good laughs out of that. The problem is, I still can’t hear the difference, so I’m just hoping no one grabs my chest while trying to say “give me that glass, would ya?.”

What I can guarantee is that mistakes will be made. I know I’m going to feel like an idiot a fair percentage of the time. I only hope to keep it in perspective and let go of worries. I will look like an idiot, and so what? As they say in Russian “takova jheezn” (such is life -- or does that mean something horribly embarrassing? I just don’t know).
Excellent Bilingual Early Childhood Programs – Parent Guide

All families need the support of excellent early childhood programs. For families who speak a language other than English and who are concerned about maintaining the culture and traditions of the home, it is critical that they have access to excellent bilingual, multicultural preschool programs.

Bilingual education teaches English to children and gives them a chance to practice it while they also learn subjects like math and science. Good bilingual programs build on the resources that families offer. Children learn from their parents and teachers, and they have an innate capacity to process and use several languages. Once children have mastered one language, it is easier for them to learn other languages.

Schools must connect directly to children’s language and experiences in the home. A high-quality early childhood program respects and draws on the language and culture of the child to further the linguistic, social, and academic growth of that child. It also prepares the child for a smooth transition from being at home to life in kindergarten and primary school.

IDRA founder and director emeritus, Dr. José A. Cárdenas, explains: “In successful programs for the education of at-risk school populations, there is a valuing of the students in ways in which they are not valued in regular and traditional school programs. In successful school programs, the student is valued, his language is valued, his heritage is valued, his family is valued, and, most important, the student is valued as a person” (1995).

Here is a checklist of characteristics of a successful bilingual preschool program. Take a look at your child’s center.

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Checklist for Successful Bilingual Preschool Programs

**A child-friendly school**

- The school allows for children to work in small groups and provides individual attention for each child. Individual temperaments, learning styles and language preferences are respected.
- The school provides a variety of physical activities (inside and outside) and varies instruction to maintain the interest of each child.
- The school adapts activities so that gregarious children are engaged and shyer children feel safe and comfortable.

**A family-friendly school**

- The language and culture of the family are central to the curriculum and the teaching.
- Staff members communicate with parents in a language that is comprehensible to them. They respect the parent role as first teacher of the child and prime expert on the child.
- Families are welcomed and invited to participate in school activities in a variety of ways.
High quality instruction

- The school has clear goals in writing in both English and the family’s home language.
- The program addresses the social, emotional, intellectual, and physical development of the child and is much more than fancy baby-sitting.
- Children can work alone, in small groups and large groups, with opportunities both for self-directed and teacher-lead activities.
- Children have restful, quiet time as well as vigorous play.
- Children have opportunities to express themselves, develop motor skills, and experience literature and communication in their own language, music, science, and nature.
- Children’s interests in the world around them are central to the curriculum and instruction.
- Children’s natural interests in reading, writing and counting in their own language are encouraged and responded to.
- The curriculum and materials reflect cultural diversity and represent women and men in many important roles and professions.
- Snacks and meals are nutritious, limiting sweets, fried food and junk food.

Excellent staff

- Teachers are trained and certified in early childhood education and are fully bilingual in English and in the language of the child.
- The director has been a teacher and is fully bilingual in English and the language of the family.
- The ratio of children to adults is small.
- Most of the staff members have been there five or more years.
- The staff welcomes families and visitors, communicates regularly with parents, and views the language and culture of the home as an asset to the school.
- Teachers express care, interest and respect for each child.
- Teachers are engaged with the children most of the time.

Excellent place

- The classroom space is ample, attractive and scaled to the children, with places for quiet individual and large group activities.
- The outside is safe, spacious, attractive and appropriate for vigorous activities, and is well supervised.

What a Parent Can Do

Using this checklist parents can have a conversation with a center director or other key person who can answer questions. They can begin by asking about the strengths of the center and by making supportive comments about those strengths. Parents can speak from a position of wanting the best for their children and assuming that both the family and the school have similar goals.

It is important to be polite but assertive about those issues of language and culture that parents feel are important. If the answers given do not convince them that this is the best place for their child, they should thank the person for the information and continue their search elsewhere.

In addition, parents can talk to other parents whose children attend the center.

If the child is already in a preschool program that does not match well with the above checklist or other standards that the family considers important, parents can talk with the director, teachers and other parents to improve the program.

Conclusion

Any center that meets licensing requirements should meet the minimum requirements for a good preschool program. Yet parents who desire a high-quality preschool program need to concern themselves not only with the critical elements for any early childhood program, but also the linguistic and cultural characteristics of the center.

A good bilingual preschool program is an excellent way to support the development of children in their native language and also jump-start them toward a future of fully bilingual professional adults.

This article is adapted from “How Can Parents Identify a High Quality Preschool Program?” by Lilian Katz, director of the ERIC Clearinghouse on Elementary and Early Childhood Education, 1995. Aurelio M. Montemayor, M.Ed., is leader trainer in the IDRA Division of Professional Development. Comments and questions may be directed to him via e-mail at comment@idra.org.

Resources


Does language learning come naturally to children? Are we as humans hardwired to learn languages? Answers to these questions and the natural development, stages and abilities of children and how it applies to learning a second language.

Still today, it is the commonly held belief that children acquire their mother tongue through imitation of the parents, caregivers or the people in their environment. Linguists too had the same conviction until 1957, when a then relatively unknown man, A. Noam Chomsky, propounded his theory that the capacity to acquire language is in fact innate. This revolutionized the study of language acquisition, and after a brief period of controversy upon the publication of his book, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, in 1964, his theories are now generally accepted as largely true. As a consequence, he was responsible for the emergence of a new field during the 1960s, Developmental Psycholinguistics, which deals with children’s L1 acquisition. He was not the first to question our hitherto mute acceptance of a debatable concept – long before, Plato wondered how children could possibly acquire so complex a skill as language with so little experience of life. Experiments have clearly identified an ability to discern syntactical nuances in very young infants, although they are still at the pre-linguistic stage. Children of three, however, are able to manipulate very complicated syntactical sentences, although they are unable to tie their own shoelaces, for example. Indeed, language is not a skill such as many others, like learning to drive or perform mathematical operations – it cannot be taught as such in these early stages. Rather, it is the acquisition of language which fascinates linguists today, and how it is possible. Noam Chomsky turned the world’s eyes to this enigmatic question at a time when it was assumed to have a deceptively simple explanation.

There are many distinctions between the processes of learning and acquisition. For instance, the
terms are generally used to separate L1 acquisition from L2 learning, and implied within this distinction is the gap between children of 0-5 years learning their mother tongue, and those beyond puberty who may begin at this stage to learn a second language, or more. The process is a conscious one in learning whereas it is subconscious in acquisition, and in language acquisition the focus is on communication or reception of a message as opposed to syntax and grammar as is the case in language learning. Moreover, the context is usually crucial and meaningful in language acquisition, but need not be important to the same extent in language learning. Motivation, too, is a factor which may broaden the gulf between learning and acquisition, as for the latter the language is a matter of urgent necessity. Most importantly, however, the usual outcome of language acquisition is fluency, which is by no means guaranteed in language learning.

There are six Universal Stages of language development generally recognized to govern children’s language acquisition. These are as follows:

- Pre-linguistic stage
- Crying
- Cooing
- Babbling
- Holophrastic stage
- Two-word stage
- Telegraphic stage
- Intermediate development stages
- Adult stage

At first, there is what is known as the ‘silent period’ which is a relatively long period where the infant does not produce any formulated sounds; he only cries. In the next two stages, distinct language-specific sounds begin to emerge, and he then begins to utter his first words. This single-word communication is known as ‘holophrastic speech’. The child’s vocabulary then begins to increase until around the age of 28 months he reaches the stage at which he begins to produce what Brown and Frasier in 1963 were the first to term ‘telegraphic speech’. Here, as in telegrams, articles, auxiliary verbs and any sort of inflections are omitted. At this level, the child generally uses one pivot word plus one or two additional words, such as ‘Mummy go shops’, ‘Give dolly’. Telegraphic speech is marked by its own grammar, especially in terms of structure: pivot words tend to occupy a consistent position in the sentence and the word order reflects the order of adult utterances, the only difference being that in telegraphic speech the less semantically important words disappear. By five years, they have mastered adult language skills and need only to develop them with experience.

However, the telegraphic stage is still in the early stages of phonetic progress. Children go through various processes including syllable simplification, substitution, and assimilation. Syllable simplification involves reducing consonant clusters by deleting one or more segments. For example, stop becomes [tap]. It may also take the form of deletion, as in dog becoming [da]. Substitution consists of a variety of processes: stopping, fronting, gliding, and denasalization. Basically, a child substitutes one sound with another one that is easier to articulate: sea becomes [sij]. Assimilation occurs when one or more features modifies to become more like neighboring sounds, such as soup becoming [zuwp]. Research continues to appear to prove that children are able to perceive the correct phonemic constraints, while they are still unable to produce them. For example, a small boy refers to his plastic fish as a fis. When an adult called it a fis, the boy said that was wrong. “It’s a fis.” After the adult called it a fish, the boy was relieved and said, “Yes, it’s my fis.”

As the children’s lexical and syntactic productivity increases, so their sentences become fuller, and they venture into the grammatical dimensions. This tends to be around the age of 30 months. At this point in their progress, they tend to utilize rising intonation to signal yes-no questions. After they have auxiliary verbs, they incorporate them into the sentence without undergoing inversion, such as “Can he can look?” it usually takes a few months to completely acquire inversion with the proper use of auxiliaries. Wh questions emerge between the ages of two and four; this type of structure goes through three stages and ultimately combines the wh question with inversion.

Why is the theory of imitation now thought unacceptable? If children really acquired all of their linguistic knowledge from what they hear adults say, how could we explain the frequent errors which occur due to overgeneralization (i.e. systematic application of general rules, even where exceptions should occur)? Examples include the systematic addition of ~ed to put verbs into the past tense, resulting in sentences like ‘she holded the baby rabbits’, a phrase which could obviously never have been copied from an adult’s speech. Indeed, this type of error is also found in young deaf children. They, too, can extract grammar from the language to which they have been exposed, even (as in the case of hearing children) if this information has come to them in patchy and incomplete form.

Others have explained this type of error by the theory that children use analogy to draw conclusions, which they apply overall, as well as to create new sentences. (Indeed, the human language is so rich that with a finite number of words and structures, we are able to create an infinite number of different sentences with a frequencey of occurrence of zero.) However, this theory too is deficient in relation to children’s use of language because, although doubtless valuable in many cases, we can see that there is a number of logical errors which we may perhaps expect to occur by analogy, but never hear from small children. An example is the conversion of ‘I painted the barn red’, with a change of verb, to ‘I saw the barn red’. This last is clearly illogical, and no child would ever make that mistake. Is it not, then, a natural conclusion to draw that children have an innate and unconscious awareness of certain universal linguistic properties and characteristics? Those errors made are logical errors, which may shed more light on the unnecessary complications we as adults inflict upon the world of grammar, rather than on any amount of deficiency on the part of the children who make them.
Chomsky’s Innate Hypothesis is based on the observation of a number of indisputable facts in relation to language acquisition:

- All children, regardless of I.Q. level, can acquire language;
- Children acquire language effortlessly, and in a relatively short period of time;
- Children do not have to be taught formally to acquire language;
- Language is a complex system;
- Children discover the system of language from a small, unsystematic amount of data;
- Language acquisition involves very little imitation;
- Language acquisition is an active process, involving ‘mental computation’: Children say things that they have never heard from adults, e.g. came.

From these observations, Chomsky drew the following conclusions:

- Infants are born with what he termed a Language Acquisition Device (LAD). This area cannot be pinpointed in the brain, but is generally presumed to exist through the neurological networks we have developed; Exposure is all that is necessary for a child to learn language.

Chomsky’s first conclusion is drawn from the assumption that, as the brain is divided into specialized areas, so the LAD is among them. Like learning to walk or developing limbs, the human facility for language is inherent in our genes, and just as we are designed to walk upright rather than climb trees, so we are designed to talk. Language acquisition, as opposed to language learning (which implies a degree of consciousness in relation to the process), is as natural as human physical growth.

Not all aspects of language are innate, however. Chomsky has claimed that in fact we are all born with what he terms a Universal Grammar, an inherent sensitivity to linguistic structure and patterns applicable to every human language. From this point (at the cooing stage), a child begins to reproduce the particular language-specific sounds he encounters in his linguistic environment, and these are the sounds he eventually produces when he acquires the lexis and specific grammar of his own language. To summarize in Saussurian terms, then, the child is born with an innate capacity for language and parole, but needs to learn the langue. For the theory of a Universal Grammar to hold water, we must compare all the languages of the world to establish whether the human species has common properties of language. Papua New Guinea alone
h harbors 750 native languages, each different in varying degrees from the next. Although thought of as primitive by the developed world, these languages are startling in their complexity. A single one of them may have up to two or three thousand forms for each verb, as compared to the five English verbal forms. There are around five thousand languages in the world, but these are all founded in similar ground, to the extent that some talk of them as dialects of one language, human language, governed by a Universal Grammar: some underlying set of characteristics which is true of all languages everywhere. Languages have several possible variables, such as the position of the verb, word order or affixes, but all have words which act as verbs or nouns, and all express negation, interrogation, number, gender and definitiveness in some way. Accordingly with the theory of an inherent Universal Grammar, children seem to love rules and have an innate predisposition toward them. There appears, as well, to be a specific developmental sequence for acquiring language, particularly for English. However, this seems to deviate from the sequence most commonly heard by children. This leads to the conclusion, once again, that humans are born with some sort of LAD, as supported by Chomsky.

To continue the discussion of children’s logical errors as a result of overgeneralization, we never come across certain types of error, which would, given the nature of our language, be perfectly comprehensible. Thus, a child would never ask ‘What did you eat your eggs and?’, but rather ‘What did you eat your eggs with?’, although he may be answered ‘I ate eggs and ham’. Such an error, we may conclude, would violate the principles of the Universal Grammar. In other words, every grammatical or syntactical error a child makes is an affirmation of what may well apply in another language somewhere in the world, but children will never make the kind of error which opposes this Universal Grammar.

It is noteworthy that deviant utterances are immediately corrected when learning a language, whereas a native child will not be so avidly corrected. That is to say that even when parents tirelessly repeat the correction of their child’s persistent error, the child seems quite content to ignore them until he is in a sense biologically ready for the next grammatical step. All of a sudden, the persistent errors iron themselves out, apparently regardless of parental intervention.

A number of points can be raised from Chomsky’s second conclusion. It would seem to be borne out by case studies of so-called ‘wild children’, discovered around the period of their puberty, who had been isolated from human contact all their lives until that point. Studies carried out showed that although they were able to learn individual words and concepts after they were found, their progress ultimately slowed and stopped altogether because they had passed the Critical Period (Lenneberg) for the internalization or acquisition of the grammatical and syntactical rules of language. Most prominent are the cases of Genie (1970s) and Victor (19th century), which illustrate this point exactly.

On the other hand, a group of linguists known as Interactionists agree with Chomsky on all points except this last conclusion. They argue that exposure itself is insufficient for a child to acquire language, but that together with social interaction it is possible. Thus, if a child were isolated with a television set until puberty, Interactionists claim that he could not possibly internalize all that children normally infer from the language in their environment, without contact and social interaction with other human beings. In fact, then, this group of linguists suggests that for language to emerge there must be interaction between the biological component and the environment; between nature and nurture. However, we should note at this point that Chomsky has never made explicit his definition of ‘exposure’, and he may therefore have intended the inference ‘exposure to those circumstances which usually surround our discovery of language’.

Lexical development is a realm fascinating to visit for linguists in terms of a child’s acquisition of vocabulary. Children seem to associate a word with an object, but may then in future use that word to describe a number of other objects in their environment. Thus for a child a word stands for a concept, but that concept is open to interpretation in that he selects a category of relatively similar objects and applies the lexical item throughout. This phenomenon is known as over-exten-
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**Little Red Hen and the Grains of Wheat**

This book is a recent winner of the WOW! Award from the UK National Literacy Association, which recognizes the best new children’s titles annually. The book caught the panel’s attention because of its sumptuous illustrations with their determined and joyful appeal? Witty, with a juggling cat and a duck on stilts, this will be a favourite in primary classrooms.” Little Red Hen finds some grains of wheat, but when she asks the cat, the dog and the goose to help her plant them, they are all too busy. When Little Red Hen has finally grown the wheat, harvested it, turned it into flour and baked the bread, the others are only too willing to help her eat it - but will she let them? This story is part of Language Lizard’s collection of folk tales and fables from about the world. The gentle repetition and humorous second story unfolding in the illustrations make this a joyful retelling of the classic fable. Readers get a lesson in the importance of helping out. They will also see the process of making something from scratch (in this case, bread) and then enjoying the fruit of one’s labor.

This story is available from www.LanguageLizard.com in English with the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese-Traditional, Chinese-Simplified, Croatian, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Panjabi, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Shona, Somali, Spanish, Swahili, Tagalog, Tamil, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese and Yoruba.

**My Talking Dictionary: Book and CD Rom**

This is a unique bilingual picture dictionary that introduces 750 widely used words, arranged thematically. Themes include Clothes, Feelings, Family, Fruits, Playground, Classroom, Music, Weather, Town, Sports, Numbers, etc. It has brilliant illustrations that are appealing to children, and the book includes language scripts and transliterations for languages that do not use the romanized alphabet. The hardback book comes with an interactive CD Rom, which allows you and your child to hear and practice spoken words and do speedy word searches and other exercises. The dictionary is available from www.LanguageLizard.com in English with your choice of the following languages: Albanian, Arabic, Bengali, Bulgarian, Chinese, Chinese-Simplified, Croatian, Czech, Farsi, French, German, Greek, Gujarati, Hindi, Hungarian, Irish, Italian, Japanese, Korean, Kurdish, Lithuanian, Panjabi, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Scottish Gaelic, Slovakian, Somali, Spanish, Tagalog, Tamil, Thai, Turkish, Urdu, Vietnamese, Welsh and Yoruba. Best for Pre-K through Grade 6.
Yes. It is entirely possible to teach an infant two or even three languages, and four is not unheard of. In Europe, a great many toddlers learn four languages with little or no difficulty. The main requirements for this learning are: the parents speak only their mother-tongue to the child; the child has some reason to learn the languages (motivation); and there is reinforcement of some kind for these languages, preferably outside the home. If the language of the environment is a third language, then the child will easily learn the third language once they start playing with neighbourhood children. There appears to be a ‘window’ of learning language that ‘opens’ at about the age of ten months. Infants can hear much earlier, of course, and there is some evidence that they can even hear in the womb. It is clear that they will begin to imitate the ‘noises’ they hear, and when there is a reaction from their caregivers, they begin to associate meanings with the sounds. Over the next
two years, infants acquire language at an astonishing rate. By the age of three, they have acquired basic syntax (sentence structure), basic grammar (the ‘rules’ of the language), and a large vocabulary of basic words necessary to their physical and emotional survival. Their motivation to talk with their caregivers is high: asking for something usually results in being given the thing they need. Similarly, when the infant begins to play outside, with other children, then the motivation to talk to these children is high, and the infant will try to learn the language of play. Later on, at school, the language of the school will be important, too.

THE IMPORTANT THING TO REMEMBER IS THAT EACH CHILD IS AN INDIVIDUAL, and that each child will learn when they are ready to learn. If you think your child is ‘late’ learning to talk, be sure you have ruled out all possible physical causes, including possible deafness, and then just wait. Especially if there is more than one language in the baby’s home environment, then the baby will be learning first to process and separate the different languages, before talking begins. This ‘separating the languages process’ is why it is important that each parent speaks only their mother-tongue to the baby. They can speak a third language among themselves if they want the baby to hear and become familiar with that language as well, but it is important that the baby hears native-speaker sounds if you want the baby to make native-speaker sounds.

There is considerable debate among linguists as to when the ‘language learning window’ closes, if it closes at all. However, there does seem to be an ‘optimal’ age for language learning, when the child’s mind is still open and flexible, and not cluttered with all sorts of other learning, not to mention the society’s views on which languages are ‘prestige’ languages, and which ones are regarded by the society as of little or no importance. The latter affects motivation: children will be admired for speaking a ‘prestige’ language, and teased and bullied for speaking a ‘non-prestige’ language. When the mind is being taught many many other things than language, there is less ‘processing space’ left for language learning. At the moment, the ‘optimal’ time for learning a second language appears to be ‘at the same time as the first language’, i.e. in the home beginning at birth to three years (providing the parents speak these two languages as their mother tongue). The next best time for learning a second, third, and even a fourth language, appears to be between the ages of two to seven years. A third period for learning a second language is from about ten to thirteen years of age, this is in cases when the second language is not the language of either the parents or the environment. This is the reason behind the push to introduce ‘foreign’ language learning into the curriculum of elementary schools, in the grade when the child is about ten-eleven years old.

Parents who want their children to learn their mother-tongue must realise that it will take work, beyond simply speaking their mother-tongue all the time to the child. Especially if the spouse speaks another language, which is the language of the environment, the parent speaking the ‘minority’ language will have to be sure that there is sufficient input for the child to learn and reinforce what has been learned. This means things like reading out loud (this should go on until the child learns to read on their own, and for a few years afterwards until the child says stop), singing to them and teaching them songs and nursery rhymes, showing video films in the parent’s language (radio is not as good as there are no visual clues), and having other adults or children talk to the child in this language (grandparents are invaluable here). Taking the child to visit in a country where the parent’s language is the language of the environment is also a good idea, if it is practical: sending the child to spend time with grandparents at about the age of eleven or twelve is also a good idea, for many reasons. This is probably a good place to remind parents that a multilingual environment is also a multicultural environment, and that it is very difficult if not impossible to separate language from culture. Without a context (culture) for the language, the child will have difficulty making sense of the meanings underlying the words. Parents should make sure the child has a firm grounding in the parents’ own languages before trying to teach a third language. This should if possible include learning to read and write in at least one of those two languages. Some countries in Europe offer children in the early grades of elementary school the possibility to learn to read and write in their ‘home’ language: parents should check if this is possible in their local schools. Parents who want to teach their child to read at home should remember that linguists think it is impossible to teach a child to read before they have learned to talk: first the child learns a system of sounds that have meaning, and how to put these ‘meaning’ sounds together in a larger system; then the child learns a system of symbols (letters or ideograms) that have the same meanings as the sounds and/or combinations of sounds. A phonetic system of learning to read is preferred by many linguists, for languages that have alphabets. Teach the child the sounds of the letters first, then teach ‘sounding out’ the words from the letters. Simply reading aloud to a child while holding the child in your lap and putting your fingers under the big letters in a picture book, or under the words in a storybook, is one method of teaching a young child to read. It is rare that a child learns to read under the age of four. Writing can be taught at the same time as reading, or after the child has learned to read: begin with making separate letters, and the first written word taught is usually the child’s own name. Problems will arise when the child starts playing with neighbourhood children who do not speak the language the parent is trying to teach them. This is the stage when a lot of parents give up. The child does not want to be ‘different’ from their playmates, and speaking a ‘foreign’ language certainly makes you different. If the parent refuses to answer the child, or to give them what they want until they ask for it in the parent’s ‘own’ language, the process of learning the language will continue. Some parents make an agreement to talk to the child in the language of the playmates when the
playmates are around, and the ‘home’ language when only family is ‘home’: personally I think this does not work well. The problems will increase when the child starts kindergarten. The parent must keep speaking only their ‘own’ language with the child, or the child will lose the language.

At this point, the question of putting the child in a ‘foreign’ language school comes up. This is a hard decision to make, especially if the child is already ‘different’ because their mother or father is a ‘foreigner’, because taking a child away from neighbourhood playmates and putting then in a different school will make them even more different, and more likely to be teased and bullied by the neighbourhood children. Having said that, putting a child in a ‘foreign’ language school will certainly ensure that they learn that language. For example, a child living in Sweden, whose father speaks only Portuguese to them, and whose mother speaks only Finnish to them, and who is put in an English school, will learn Swedish, Portuguese, Finnish, and English. However, if this child grows up and goes to university in England, and has little or no contact with Finnish relatives, then the Finnish will almost certainly be lost. Languages need to be spoken, or they will be lost.

Teaching a child a language that is not the mother-tongue of either parent is usually not a good idea. Unless the parents are completely bilingual themselves, that is, they speak two languages as native languages, then the sounds that are produced for the child to imitate will be tinged with a strong ‘foreign accent’. Similarly, unless the parent speaks the non-native language exceptionally well, then the child will learn the mistakes that parent makes in that language. Finally, and perhaps more important, teaching a third language that the parent does not know well will confuse the child unnecessarily. Wait until the baby has mastered the native languages of both parents well enough to be able to have long, meaningful conversations (about five years old) and has begun to play with other children, before deciding about introducing a language that the parents do not speak well. Remember that the child will learn the language of the environment and the school even without input from the parents. Trying to teach the child an artificial language, such as Klingon or Elvish, for example, can be done only if both parents speak it well enough to converse in it daily where the child can hear them. Again, this must be considered a ‘third’ language, and teaching it is best done only after the child has learned the parents’ languages well. Children who do not use this ‘artificial’ language in their teen years will almost certainly lose it, since as said above, languages need to be spoken or they will be lost.

FOR THOSE OF YOU WHO WANT MORE INFORMATION ON THIS SUBJECT, A LIST OF BOOKS WITH A COMMENT OR TWO ON THEIR CONTENT IS PRESENTED BELOW, THIS IS BY NO MEANS AN EXHAUSTIVE LIST, JUST THOSE BOOKS I HAVE READ.

Probably the most useful of all the books on this list. The style is that of a FAQ sheet, i.e. questions people have actually asked, followed by Colin Baker’s answers. Written in clear, straightforward, plain English. Includes identity problems multilingual children might have, language ‘mixing’ (you speak one language, the child speaks another, and you converse this way), the influence of the Internet on bilingualism, benefits for children who have a second language that is not as strong as their first language, language strategies to use with adopted children, employment and bilingualism, etc. You might want to actually buy this one if you can find it.

This is primarily a book for parents who are trying to decide whether or not to bring up their children as bilingual, and there is not much concrete advice on how to do this. In that sense, the book is definitely not a ‘handbook’. The book presents the stories (case histories) of sixteen bilingual families (Indo-European languages), with the different ways they handled the problem of bilingualism. There is also a chapter on linguistic theory regarding bilingualism. As a university lecturer, I have to say this book reads like a university lecture, but if you are still debating on whether or not to raise your (unborn?) children as bilinguals, you’d probably benefit from reading it.

Lots and lots and lots and lots of fascinating data. A very expensive reference book you should try to get your local library to buy. A good book to raise awareness about the diversity of language in the world. Points out, for example, that nearly two-thirds of all the inhabitants of the world are bilingual. Four sections: individual bilingualism; languages in society; languages in contact; and bilingual education.

Case history of Swedish-English family living in Sweden, where English is a prestige language understood by large numbers of Swedes. Not much use for parents who speak a minority language in a country where they are not going to get outside reinforcement for that language, although it does emphasise being consistent in sticking to the family’s system of who speaks what language to whom in which situation. Includes a list of internet resources which may be out of date already.

Written by a bilingual (English-Spanish) who has taught in international schools in Japan, Ecuador and France, and who gives workshops on raising multilingual children to schools and families in Switzerland and France. She evaluates some of the research in linguistics and education, and reinterprets the findings in her own way. The best part of the book is the case studies, and a list of ten ‘key-factors’ (most of them given above in the ‘Answer’ part of this entry) for raising children to be multilingual. Strong emphasis on parents and teachers finding their own answers for their own situations. Includes a description of various stages in a child’s linguistic development, with indicators to help you identify the stage your child is in.


Primarily for teachers with bilingual children in their classrooms, or teachers of foreign language to young children. Parents interested in the schooling their children receive might want to read it.

**IF YOU ARE REALLY INTERESTED IN THE DEBATE ABOUT BILINGUAL EDUCATION (PARTICULARLY IN THE USA), YOU MIGHT ALSO BE INTERESTED IN THE FOLLOWING TITLES:**


Krashen replies to the critics and discusses: Does the research show that bilingual education doesn’t work? (No.) Is English in trouble in the USA? (No.) Are most parents and teachers against bilingual education? (No.) Will bilingual education work for languages other than Spanish? (A most emphatic Yes.) Is bilingual education actually good for English? (Yes!) Can bilingual education be improved? (Yes!) Lots of good stuff if you have to argue for bilingual education in your school system.


Goes beyond teaching methodology to look at - as the title says the school, the family, and the community, in a discussion of academic and social success of children who speak a minority language.

**THOSE OF YOU INTERESTED IN THE PROCESS OF ACQUIRING A SECOND LANGUAGE, AND RESEARCH INTO BILINGUALISM, MIGHT FIND THE FOLLOWING OF INTEREST:**


Essays in linguistics, psychology, and education, on how bilingual children cope with two language systems. Includes thoughts on how to develop educational curriculums when the school has a lot of bilingual children.


In addition to research into second language acquisition, also presents thoughts of sociological issues of cultural diversity and multilingualism. Lots of interesting information on how concepts of mind and self and culture affect language learning. Also points out that the globalisation of the world means that no country (including the USA) can afford a policy of monolingualism (English Only). Some discussions of what policy could be adopted to make societies stronger through taken advantage of their linguistic diversity. Interesting, but not much advice on raising multilingual children.


Modern research in language processing, in persons (mostly adults) who speak more than one language. Includes research on ASL signers. Linguistic and psycholinguistic research. Probably only of interest to persons actually doing research in linguistics, psycholinguistics, applied linguistics, language teaching, cognitive science, and/or psychology.


There is also an International Journal of Bilingualism, and several online discussion groups for parents of bilingual children, as well as closed email lists you can get on by going through the chat groups.

Reprinted with permission from The Linguist List: http://www.sfs.uni-tuebingen.de/linguist/ask-ling/biling.html
When my newly-wed daughter finally returned home to the U.S., with her newly-wed husband, and set up household in Seattle, (she beginning a masters program in Ancient History at U.W. and he a PhD program in physics, also at U.W.) she seemed, to me, to be a new person; still recognizable as my daughter, but with new aspects added to her personality; new and foreign sounds and accents added to her native tongue; new table etiquette styles and manners added to her old; new cadences and tones added to her rhythm of speech; even new gestures and ways of moving. At times, to my amazed eyes and ears, it seemed as though she were an actress studying for a role in a foreign film. At first, and to some lesser degree, even now, over ten years and three grandchildren later, I occasionally felt and feel unsettled, a bit shaken and a little out of kilter in my interactions with her. She was and is still my quick-speaking, bright-eyed, freckle-faced, people, animal and nature-loving, horse-back-riding, golden-haired daughter, but she was and is now also someone new.

I’ve always enjoyed and welcomed opportunities to meet, hear and speak with people from far-away places. Unfamiliar accents, the presence, at social gatherings, of people, with living histories, places and backgrounds different from my own, have always given me a feeling of having serendipitously discovered, or come into direct contact with, another part of this wide world we were all born into. Yet, in spite of this enjoyment and appreciation of differences, the feeling of interacting with someone who, at various times, is simultaneously both my daughter and a stranger-foreigner, was, especially at first, quite an unexpected and unsettling event.

This “seemingly” new persona, “seemingly” superimposed on another person, speaks to her husband and children in a language other than her native tongue, and, when she does so in my presence, I not only don’t know what she’s saying, but, from time to time, I almost feel as though I don’t know who she is. To “cut to the chase,” and “make a long story short,” as the old sayings go, more than feeling personally rejected or left out (though a tinge of that is also usually present) I often perceived this phenomenon, especially in the beginning, as my daughter’s active rejection of her own unique and beautiful heritage, in preference for another, which, though it also be ever so unique and beautiful, is not the same as her own.

Six years after my daughter’s August 1995 return to the U.S. and arrival in Seattle, in the Autumn of 2001 ———- Surprise! Here came Patrick! First-born, only grandchild, from my first-born only daughter! And what to my wondering mind should appear next, (after years of almost unrelenting worry and concern about my daughter’s well-being) but a gorgeous new love for a beautiful new child, (who now, at age 4 1/2, already speaks and is learning to read and write in both languages.) Poof! went almost all my sense of what I believed to be my daughter’s lost and/or rejected heritage. Poof! went almost all my wishes and efforts to (like an archaeologist-historian, digging for artifacts from past eras) re-awaken and rekindle my daughter’s interest and preference for her own heritage. For here was a brand new human being in our midst, a brand new love in our lives, and suddenly most of the unresolved questions, debates and arguments, about language, culture, religion, traditions and heritage, paled in comparison to those of health, love, family unity, stability, security, education and domestic tranquility.

Now, in addition to Patrick, our joy and love have expanded to include Patrick’s brother, Christoph, and his sister, Marie. Now my daughter’s household contains five; each one good, beautiful, valuable, unique and worthy of attention and care.

So, at least during the here and now, of this hot summer of 2006, tales, (from my daughter’s father’s mother’s family) of sailing ships arriving through California’s Golden Gate, and tales, (from my mother’s mother’s family) of miners, farmers, pioneers and immigrants crossing the north and mid-west of this continent, will have to linger, like phantoms or angels, in the background of our lives, as the exigencies, joys, trials and tribulations of everyday, ordinary life, take precedence over, and remain the substance of, our everyday, ordinary communications and interactions.

Sharon K. Cook-Spellman has been a year-round resident of the western slopes of the Sierra foothills, near Nevada City, California, since 1972. Her monthly column for Multilingual Living Magazine is about the joys, trials and tribulations involved with being a grandmother of three bilingual children.
Websites on the World Wide Web for families interested in language, culture and more!

**Sprachhexen**
Sprachhexen started in 1999 as a resource for German families living abroad trying to raise bilingual children. Since then Sprachhexen has grown to address also the needs of foreign language educators who are looking to find support and ideas from other teachers in teaching bilingual children as well as as second language. Through examples, concrete lesson plans, recommendations, and relevant links Sprachhexen wants to fill the need for quality resources which many foreign language teachers lack, due to professional isolation from colleagues.

*Website:* www.sprachhexen.com

**Travels of the Bay family and the Yoda Van**
This is a travelogue of our favorite bilingual family (German and American) as they travel to different countries in a 1982 Vanagon Camper for a year. Keep up with Allison and Matthias and their two children, William and Julian, as they travel through the Americas. Make sure ot get out your atlas as follow their journey as they make their way south.

*Website:* blogs.bootsnall.com/TheBays/

**Speaking in Tongues**
“Speaking in Tongues” is a series of short English-language radio programmes, produced and recorded by IH Barcelona. The 25-programme series was broadcast on Saturday mornings by Radio Free Barcelona. The series discusses a range of different topics relating to language, language learning and language teaching. The programme is intended for a general public, but will of course be of special interest to language teachers and students.

*Website:* www.ihes.com/radio/index.html

**Family Culture**
A Multicultural Thanksgiving! Thanksgiving traditions and harvest celebrations around the world from Family Culture. FamilyCulture.com provides educational and cultural resources for diverse families and their service providers, with a special focus on Asian and multicultural families. Make sure to check out their calendar of multicultural celebrations.

*Website:* www.familyculture.com

**Online Books for Children - Rosetta Project**
“The largest collection of illustrated antique books online.” Most books are in English but many have translations into other languages! This online library of illustrated books is a volunteer-driven project. It has grown slowly since 1996 from the work of a single man and a handful of books, to a vibrant volunteer-driven organization publishing new books and translations every week.

*Website:* www.childrensbooksonline.org

**Bookbox**
BookBox is a essentially a web-based jukebox of digital books in languages from around the world. It synchronizes the text, audio, and visual media to create an educational and entertaining reading experience for children and even adults who still have a child in them! Based on proven methods of Same Language Subtitiling (SLS), BookBox aims to not only enhance children’s basic literacy, but also facilitate their proficiency in foreign languages.

*Website:* www.bookbox.com
Your own life with two languages

Do you remember how you became bilingual?
I was born in 1946 in Paris. My mother was British and my father French but I did not become bilingual immediately as my parents spoke French to me at first. It was only when I was sent to an English boarding school in Switzerland at the age of 7 that I acquired English in a “sink or swim” manner. I don’t recall it being difficult as the staff and my peers were all very friendly. I stayed in that school for 7 years and then, at the age of 14, was sent to a boarding school in England where I remained until my A-levels. This change was culturally very difficult and I never quite managed to become totally monocultural (i.e. British only) in the way others wanted me to be. But after 11 years of English schooling, I wasn’t really French any longer and my return to France to enter the University of Paris at the age of 18 was quite a change. It took me a number of years to adapt linguistically, but especially culturally, to France and that explains many of my reflections in the book I was to write some years later.

Is your own family bilingual?
Yes, despite what I wrote in the dedication at the beginning of my book, “To my wife, Lysiane, for her encouragement and her informative bilingualism, and to my sons, Marc and Eric, for their monolingualism, so categorical and yet so natural”, the whole family is now bilingual in English and French. In 1982, after some eight years in the United States, we came back to Europe for a year and our two monolingual English-speaking boys acquired French. We kept it alive when we went back for three years and since 1987, when we returned to Europe for good, both French and English have been family languages that we use interchangeably. We change base language a lot and we code-switch from one language to the other constantly.

What approach did you use with your family when your children were small?
Although we wanted our children to be bilingual, living in an English environment in a country like the United States made this very difficult. It is a well known fact that children do not acquire (or only partly acquire) the minority language if there...
isn’t community or educational support, or other motivating factors that make using the language a natural thing. So it was only when our boys were in a French-speaking environment for a year in 1982 that they finally became natural users of French. We then worked hard to keep their French alive when we returned to the States (but in as a natural way as possible).

To what extent did your being bilingual determine your research area?
My personal, and early, interest in bilingualism found a first outlet in my Master’s thesis at the University of Paris in which I surveyed English-French bilinguals in Paris. This was a way for me to start understanding who I was and to begin thinking of the bilingual as a different type of speaker-hearer. It was while I was preparing that piece of work that I discovered researchers like Weinreich and Haugen, among others. I never dreamed that I would actually become good friends with Einar Haugen himself.

Your book, “Life with two languages”

What led you to write your book?
The idea of writing my book arose when I was asked to teach a course on bilingualism in the United States and I realized that there just weren’t any books that covered all aspects of bilingualism. I therefore very naively asked Harvard University Press whether they would give me a contract to write such a book. They asked for a chapter, reviewed it and gave me the go-ahead. I had met Einar Haugen in the meantime and had become friends with him and his wife, Eva. Einar Haugen was just the kind of person a young author needed: he took me under his wing, was very supportive and read every chapter of my book. Of all the authors on bilingualism, he was, I felt, the most “human” (in the sense that he wrote about the bilingual PERSON) and I tried to follow his example in my book (hence the many first-hand accounts in those boxes). I wanted my book to be comprehensive but especially to give the bilingual’s point of view. Much of what had been written about bilinguals had been written from a monolingual view point and I wanted the bilingual to come through in the book. Even now, my biggest source of satisfaction is when bilinguals tell me they enjoy my book.

What positions did you want to defend in your book (and in later writings)?
When writing my book, and ever since, I have tried to defend a number of positions which I find important. These are:

◆ Bilingualism is the use of two (or more) languages in one’s everyday life and not knowing two or more languages equally well and optimally (as most laypersons think).
◆ Bilingualism is extremely widespread and is the norm in today’s world (and not the exception).
◆ The older, monolingual, view of bilingualism has had many negative consequences, one of the worst being that many bilinguals are very critical of their own language competence and do not consider themselves to be bilingual.
◆ The bilingual is a unique speaker-hearer who should be studied as such and not always in comparison with the monolingual. The bilingual uses two languages - separately or together - for different purposes, in different domains of life, with different people. (See the Complementarity Principle below). Because the needs and uses of the two languages are usually quite different, the bilingual is rarely equally or completely fluent in his/her languages.
◆ In their everyday lives, bilinguals find themselves at various points along a situational continuum which induce particular language modes. The concept of language mode is critical (see below also) and it helps to differentiate such things as interference, code-switching, borrowing, etc. which researchers like Weinreich never actually differentiated.
◆ People testing (or examining) bilinguals need to take into account whether the person is in a stage of language restructuring (i.e. acquiring a new language and/or losing the first one) or whether the person has attained a stable level of bilingualism. In addition, such factors as the domains of use of the languages, the language mode the person is in when being studied, etc. has to be taken into account.

Aspects of bilingualism

Your holistic approach to bilingualism is well-known all over the world. However, many people still hold a monolingual view of bilingualism, and bilinguals themselves claim that they are not bilinguals since their language competence is not equal in both languages. Do you think this is a widespread phenomenon?
Yes, I am afraid it is. Although most researchers throughout the world have the same defining view of the bilingual, based on the regular use of two (or more) languages (or dialects) in everyday life, the layperson still holds a monolingual view of the bilingual who should be balanced and equally fluent in his/her languages. The problem is that if one were to follow this “two monolinguals in one person” view, we would be left without a label for half the world’s population. More seriously, we would be putting forward and describing a person who is extremely rare. That person would be similar to international conference interpreters but even they have specialties. I believe that it is our role as researchers to change the public misconceptions of bilinguals. I realize that this might take a lot of time but I hope that one day we will reach that goal. When defending my holistic approach, I am constantly thinking of bilinguals who belittle their bilingualism because they do not master their languages to the same level. This leaves them insecure and worried about their status as human communicators. This saddens me as all bilinguals should have positive feelings about their bilingualism. I often tell them that monolinguals have to cover all domains of life with just one language and that they, as bilinguals, have to do so with two or more languages (one language for some domains of life, the other language(s) for other domains, and two or more languages for yet other domains). They are human communicators, like monolinguals, but they simply communicate differently.

You state that you investigate stable bilinguals but can a person ever be a stable bilingual considering the fact that the mental lexicon keeps changing all the time?
It is true that lexical knowledge, and other linguistic knowledge, do change over time but probably much more slowly for the stable bilingual. In my studies, I look at bilinguals who are not restructuring their languages at that moment (they have not just moved from one country to another, they are not acquiring a language or forgetting another language, etc.). All bilinguals are interesting (those who are becoming bilingual, those who are in the process of restructuring their various languages, etc.) and they should all be studied. However, I concentrate on those who have achieved some level of stability simply because it is easier to study them experimentally. (Recall that I am an experimental psychologist and that I run experiments on bilinguals).

**In your definition of bilingualism, you mention two (or more) languages (or dialects). Does that mean that you consider bilingualism and multilingualism to be the same? Aren’t there both quantitative and qualitative differences?**

This is a very difficult question for which I don’t have a clear answer. However, I wouldn’t be surprised that when we know as much about multilingualism as we do about bilingualism, we will probably realize that there are many similarities but also quite a few differences. I’m happy to see the work on multilingualism increase in importance in the literature. I’m also happy to see that many concepts and approaches developed to study the acquisition, the knowledge and the use of two languages carry over quite easily to three or more languages, sometimes after having been adapted. It makes a lot of sense after all.

**The complementary principle**

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

The reasons that bring languages into contact and hence foster bilingualism are many: migrations of various kinds (economic, educational, political, religious), nationalism and federalism, education and culture, trade and commerce, intermarriage, etc. These factors create various linguistic needs in people who are in contact with two or more languages and who develop competencies in their languages to the extent required by these needs. In contact situations it is rare that all facets of life require the same language (people would not be bilingual if that were so) or that they always demand two languages (language A and B at work, at home, with friends, etc.). This leads to what I have called the complementary principle which I define as follows:

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

It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually quite different that bilinguals rarely develop equal and total fluency in their languages. The level of fluency attained in a language (more precisely, in a language skill) will depend on the need for that language and will be domain specific.

**Why is the complementary principle important?**

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

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

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

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

Language mode is the state of activation of the bilingual’s languages and language processing mechanisms at a given point in time. Bilinguals find themselves at various points on a situational continuum which will result in a particular language mode. At one end of the continuum, bilinguals are in a totally monolingual language mode in that they are interacting with monolinguals of one - or the other - of the languages they know. One language is active and the other is deactivated. At the other end of the continuum, bilinguals find themselves in a bilingual language mode in that they are communicating with bilinguals who share their two (or more) languages and with whom they can mix languages (i.e. code-switch and borrow).

In this case, both languages are active but the one that is used as the main language of communication (the base language) is more active than the other. These are end points but bilinguals also find themselves at intermediary points depending on such factors as interlocutor, situation, content of discourse and function of the interaction.

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

Why is that?

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

There are quite a lot of misconceptions and some confusion regarding the definition of code-switching, mixing, borrowing and interference. Tell us about interference first.

As I have just said, I believe that much of the misunderstanding regarding these categories comes from the fact that researchers do not take into account the bilingual’s language mode when studying bilingual language production. Language mixing (which for me is a cover term for code-switching and borrowing) does not usually occur in a monolingual mode (there are some exceptions however). In this mode though, one does find interferences which are speaker-specific deviations from the language being spoken due to the influence of the other language(s). They can occur at all levels of language (phonological, lexical, syntactic, semantic, pragmatic) and in all modalities (spoken, written or sign). Interferences are of two kinds: there are static interferences which reflect permanent traces of one language on the other (an aspect of interlanguage therefore) and there are dynamic interferences which are the ephemeral intrusions of the other (de-activated) language as in the case of the accidental slip on the stress pattern of a word due to the stress rules of the other language, the momentary use of a syntactic structure taken from the language not being spoken, etc. Interferences can only be studied if the bilingual is in a monolingual mode as other forms of mixing (code-switching and borrowing) do not normally take place in that mode.

What about code-switching and borrowing then?

In a bilingual mode, once a base language has been chosen, bilinguals can bring in the other language (the “guest” or “embedded” language) in various ways. One of these ways is to code-switch, that is to shift completely to the other language for a word, a phrase, a sentence. The other way is to borrow a word or short expression from that language and to adapt it morphologically (and often phonologically) into the base language. Thus, unlike code-switching, which is the juxtaposition of two languages, borrowing is the integration of one language into another. Most often both the form and the content of a word are borrowed (to produce what has been called a loanword or more simply a borrowing). A second type of borrowing, called a loanshift, consists in either taking a word in the base language and extending its meaning to correspond to that of a word in the other language, or rearranging words in the base language along a pattern provided by the other language and thus creating a new meaning. I believe, like Shana Poplack, that it is important to distinguish idiosyncratic loans (also called “speech borrowings” or “nonce borrowings”) from words which have become part of a language community’s vocabulary and which monolinguals also use (called “language borrowings” or “established loans”).

Psycholinguistics of bilingualism

How do you see of the bilingual’s mental representations?

I am still very much a believer in the difference between competence and performance. The bilingual has knowledge of two or more languages (to differing levels) and uses this knowledge when perceiving
and producing his/her languages, spoken individually or together in the form of mixed language. The concept of “representation” can be used to characterize knowledge (e.g. grammatical competence, lexical competence, etc.) or a stage in the actual use of language: the representation which is verbalized during language production, or the representation which is the outcome of processing during language perception (one talks of the interpretative representation then).

Some researchers seem to say that the bilingual memory does not exist. What is your feeling about this?

In my mind, it is important to separate memory processes from what is stored. Memory processes allow you to put information into various memories (iconic, short term, long term, etc.) and they are probably very similar, if not identical, among all speakers, be they monolingual or bilingual. However, the permanent linguistic stores (containing our lexical and grammatical knowledge) must be different, in large part, for the languages known. Bilinguals have two language networks which are both independent and interconnected. They are independent in the sense that they allow a bilingual to speak just one language. And they are interconnected in the sense that the monolingual speech of bilinguals often shows the active interference of the other language, and that when bilinguals speak to other bilinguals, they can code-switch and borrow quite readily. This view has long been defended by Michel Paradis who proposes that both languages are stored in identical ways in a single extended system, though elements of each language, because they often appear in different contexts, form separate networks of connections, and thus a subsystem within a larger system. It is what he calls the subset hypothesis.

What do you think about the structure of the mental lexicon? Weinreich’s categories are a bit out of date but what are your views of the compound, coordinate and subordinate distinction?

I have a lot of respect for Uriel Weinreich’s work which, I think, has not always been understood clearly. His categories did not only apply to lexical meaning but to other levels of language too and I do not believe he stated that bilinguals could only reflect one type. I cover the whole controversy in several pages in my book (pp. 240-244) and after rereading what I wrote, I still agree with the main points I make. The bilingual’s linguistic knowledge is far too complex to be categorized into one of three categories when most bilinguals are a bit of all three. For example, at the level of the lexicon, researchers now hypothesize that within the very same bilingual, some words in the two lexicons will have a coordinate relationship, others a compound relationship and still others a subordinate relationship, especially if the languages were acquired in different cultural settings and at different times.

Would you briefly summarize the essence of your Bilingual Model of Lexical Access?

Back in 1988, I proposed an interactive activation model of word recognition in bilinguals, which has since been named BIMOLA (Bilingual Model of Lexical Access). It is strongly inspired by McClelland and Elman’s TRACE model and it is governed by two basic assumptions. First, it is assumed that bilinguals have two language networks (features, phonemes, words, etc.) which are independent yet interconnected. They are independent in the sense that they allow a bilingual to speak just one language but they are also interconnected in that the monolingual speech of bilinguals often shows the active interference of the other language, and in that bilinguals can code-switch and borrow quite readily when they speak to other bilinguals. The second assumption is that in the monolingual language mode, one language network is strongly activated while the other is only very weakly activated (the resting activation level of the units of this other network is therefore very low) whereas in the bilingual language mode, both language networks are activated but one more than the other. In BIMOLA, the feature level is common to both languages but the next two levels - phonemes and words - are organized according to the subset hypothesis, that is, both independently (each language is represented by a subset of units) but also interdependently (both subsets are enclosed in a larger set). At both the word and phoneme levels, units can have close or distant form neighbors, both within a language and between languages. Connections are unidirectional between features and phonemes and bidirectional between phonemes and words. Features activate phonemes which in turn activate words. Descending connections bearing information about the listener’s base language and language mode serve to activate words which in turn activate phonemes. Language activation (reflected by the overall activation of one language system over the other) takes place through these descending connections but also through within language connections at the phoneme and word levels. The model has been refined these last years and implemented on computer by Nicolas Léwy.
Deafness and bilingualism

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.

Current research

Tell us something about your current research on bilingualism.

Since I am an experimental psycholinguist by training, I am continuing experimental (and computational work with N. Lévy) on bilingual speech processing (see, for example, our recent study with D. Guillelmon on the processing of gender marking by early and late bilinguals). The aim is to better understand how bilinguals process language when in a monolingual mode (and hence when their other language is deactivated) and when in a bilingual mode (that is, when they produce and perceive a base-language as well as code-switches and borrowings from the other language). I also write general papers on the bilingual and bicultural person (hearing and deaf) and I keep “fighting” against well-established (but false) ideas about bilingualism. In addition, as you know, I have been very busy these last five years editing, with fellow editors, the journal Bilingualism: Language and Cognition (Cambridge University Press). As soon as I step down from the co-editorship, I would like to write another book on bilingualism which will summarize all the work that I have done on the subject since Life with Two Languages.

References of some recent writings on bilingualism


This interview is printed with permission from François Grosjean.
ColorinColorado.org, the first major, comprehensive bilingual site for parents and educators of Latino ELL children, is working with Multilingual Living Magazine to provide families around the world with tips on encouraging language learning in your home! Although primarily aimed toward Spanish-speaking children learning English, these tips are useful no matter what language you are encouraging in your home.

Colorín Colorado refers to a popular ending to many Spanish language fairy tales. It is equivalent to “...and they lived happily ever after!” ColoringColorado.org is a free website which brings parents and educators together to help students learn, and it literally puts parents and classroom practitioners on the same page. The easy to use content of the Web site includes tools and tips for parents on helping their children build literacy skills. It also has instructional tools and tips for educators of ELL students. It’s a one-stop shop for parents and educators looking to help these students in achieving academic success.

As an added bonus, ¡Colorín Colorado! establishes a crucial link between home and school. With language barriers out of the way, parents can feel more empowered to be a part of their child’s education. We know that the more involved a parent is with schooling, the more successful their child is likely to be. Parents and educators can use these resources to help children gain the academic skills needed to thrive in school...and beyond. We believe that’s what education is all about – success!

After all, doesn’t every child deserve to live happily ever after?

Look for ColorinColorado’s tips in each Multilingual Living Magazine!
Read early and read often. The early years are critical to developing a lifelong love of reading. It’s never too early to begin reading to your child! The tips below offer some fun ways you can help your child become a happy and confident reader. Try a new tip each week. See what works best for your child.

■ Read together every day.
Read to your child every day. Make this a warm and loving time when the two of you can cuddle close.

■ Give everything a name.
Build your child’s vocabulary by talking about interesting words and objects. For example, “Look at that airplane! Those are the wings of the plane. Why do you think they are called wings?”

■ Say how much you enjoy reading.
Tell your child how much you enjoy reading with him or her. Talk about “story time” as the favorite part of your day.

■ Read with fun in your voice.
Read to your child with humor and expression. Use different voices. Ham it up!

■ Know when to stop.
Put the book away for awhile if your child loses interest or is having trouble paying attention.

■ Be interactive.
Discuss what’s happening in the book, point out things on the page, and ask questions.

■ Read it again and again.
Go ahead and read your child’s favorite book for the 100th time! Talk about writing, too. Mention to your child how we read from left to right and how words are separated by spaces.

■ Point out print everywhere.
Talk about the written words you see in the world around you. Ask your child to find a new word on each outing.

■ Get your child evaluated.
Please be sure to see your child’s pediatrician or teacher as soon as possible if you have concerns about your child’s language development, hearing, or sight.
AUSSE PLUS!

‘Down Under’ with more than one language

By Irma Lachmund
Bilingual Families Perth is a not-for-profit parent network in the Western Australian capital Perth. The network brings together around 300 parents from 40 language backgrounds whose aim is to maintain the family language at home. Irma Lachmund, the founder and chairperson, writes about her experiences in the network as well as what it is like being the mother of two bilingual children aged 8 and 9.

Australia is, after Israel, the most diverse country in the world. 16% of the population or 2.8 million people speak another language than English at home with more than 200 different languages spoken. Most Australians live in cities around the fringes of the continent and the reality in many suburbs is more like one in three or one in four people speak another language than English at home. I never thought I would live in a country outside Europe, but it was love that brought me to Australia in 1995 and my
life changed from a professional to becoming a mother. I did not know all these English words you use for baby clothes such as “skivy” and had never changed a nappy in my life. I always spoke German to my little girl, Theresa, because I had these words close to my heart and could not find corresponding feelings in my English vocabulary and body language.

My partner Pete did neither understand nor speak German at the time. But he was very supportive of our daughter becoming bilingual and he was also keen in learning German himself. Her vocabulary grew fast and when she stopped around the time she began to talk, he can still say “Hund” (dog) and “Kuh” (cow), but he certainly did not really make an independent sentence. Nevertheless he remained keen on German being part of our daily family life. His German language knowledge grew strongly over the years and it allows him to understand most of our usual conversation in German.

I speak German to my children all the time. I always have continued speaking German with my children but during the years I was a bit slack at times and was not always modelling German well. I mixed my languages and then was very surprised that the children did the same. My mother only speaks German but started learning English at evening school when I met Pete.

She visited us when my son Miles started talking. He was around 18 months old and his first words were in German, beautifully spoken without any accent. His vocabulary grew rapidly and the children spoke German with each other.

This changed quickly when Theresa entered kindergarten and Miles went to childcare. English took over more and within a few months the children were only speaking English, with each other and with me. I also noticed that all my bilingual friends, especially the families where one partner was monolingual, were in the same situation. Unable to find the support I hoped for from traditional service providers, I founded Bilingual Families Perth with the mission to assist families with the maintenance of the family language and to promote bilingualism as an asset.

The organisation is getting stronger and stronger. It started with a handful of parents, speaking German, French and Croatian. Now it connects people who are speaking around 40 languages. All services are delivered through volunteers. Bilingual Families Perth has volunteer language coordinators for around 20 languages, all who are parents with small children, which means they can assist with a parent to parent perspective. Other services include workshops and monthly social events where people come together to learn and have fun. The
children see and hear other children speaking more than one language. Parents connect across languages and the result is a vibrant community of multilingual people – Aussie Plus living ‘down under’.

My children now speak German with me and although their German skills are not at the same level with children in Germany, I am happy with the result. This has given them a good start for improving their German and they can speak freely with our extended family who still reside in Germany. Both children read German quite well and their writing is getting better every day. We know that we are on the right track and teaming up with other parents has made it a lot easier for all of us.

The most important is to make it fun for the children and to realise it is a long process that needs commitment, perseverance and persistence. You always need to look at what you can do instead of what you can’t. Celebrate along the way and enjoy the learning journey.

If you are interested in the BFP brochures “Language Choice for New Parents” and “How to Start a Kids Language Club” or if you are interested in forming a similar network in your area, log on to the Bilingual Families Perth website at: www.geocities.com/bilingualfamilies and feel free to contact Ima directly at bfp@webace.com.au.
I am originally from Zimbabwe, and my husband Scott is from Portland, Oregon, USA. When I left Zimbabwe in 1992 my cousins teased me about marrying an American. I remember laughing at them. “How preposterous!” I thought to myself. The idea of me marrying a non-African seemed so far-fetched it was almost inconceivable. I could not imagine giving up Zimbabwe, and as such I could not imagine someone else giving up their home for me, either. To say nothing of giving up my culture, and asking someone to embrace mine. The idea of me marrying a foreigner was not a realistic one in my mind.

Every so often Scott and I stop to reflect on the winding journey we took to get to each other. I suppose the idea of 2 people from different countries coming together isn’t as amazing as it used to be anymore, but we still marvel about it every once in a while.

It all started in a small town called McMinnville, Oregon. Back when we were in college, attending different schools, Scott’s friend invited him to a dance on our campus. While he was there he bumped into an Ethiopian friend of mine. As a linguist and an Afrophile, Scott was studying Amharic. He quickly became friends with my friend, and she later introduced us. For most people, the rest would be history. Not so for us! Scott is an engineer, and his preference for structure and orderliness reflects that. I am more laid-back, and often tend to think of time in a very fluid, not-rigid sense. While we didn’t hate each other on sight, it would be fair to say our relationship back then was more of 2 acquaintances than that of close friends.

Over the next 5 years we were aware of each other’s existence, and we occasionally bumped into each other along the way. Then, when I was graduating from graduate school, our mutual Ethiopian friend resurfaced. She had come in from New York (NY) to attend my graduation, and needed someone to pick her up from the airport. I was still in the process of completing my finals when she arrived, so we asked Scott to pick her up. It was at that point that he and I reconnected.

After graduation, my friend went back to NY. I was also moving to the East Coast for a job, and was considering options about how to get there. My initial plan was to drive across the country, but doing that alone didn’t sound like fun. I happened to mention to Scott that I was pondering how best to get there when he mentioned that he hadn’t
taken a vacation in several years, so perhaps we could travel together? That seemed harmless enough, so, since we both had time to spare, we started planning how best to do this. The idea was to use a combination of planes, trains, and automobiles as we meandered across the country. Scott found a few companies that were willing to loan him some techie toys to test and take with him as we traveled. That helped finance part of our trip, with the goal being for him to call in to radio shows every so often and let them know how their toys were performing. So, tickets in hand, sponsors found, we were ready for our trip.

We traveled together for a fortnight, and because dating each other, let alone marriage, wasn’t something either of us could see happening, we were able to get to know each other really well. We felt no compulsion to impress each other because this relationship, if one could call it to elope and get married. We wanted our initial union to be something special just between the 2 of us, as the celebration with family and friends would follow later. I even managed to show up on time for the wedding! But we forgot one crucial thing: witnesses. There we were, barely 3 months after our road trip (which we now affectionately think of as a long date) ready to tie the knot in Wilmington, Delaware and we had no one to witness our union. Rather than reschedule, charmer that he is, Scott accosted some joggers in the park and asked them to be our witnesses. They very graciously accepted, and we got married on October 24, 2000.

We had already decided to live in Portland, so a few months after that I resigned from my job and moved back. The white dress marriage celebration with our families and friends happened on August 26, 2001. Their reaction to us waiting 5 years to have a baby is another that, was going nowhere. We would discuss world affairs and politics, and we argued long into the night. Our true selves really came out. And at the end of our 2 weeks, through Phoenix, AZ, Oklahoma City, OK and Detroit, MI, we arrived in Philadelphia (Philly) as friends.

While it would be generous to say that by the end we were changed people, I would say that getting to Philly, the place where we went our different ways, did leave us both feeling let-down. How could our time together be over? Along the way we had had many discussions about the importance of family, about our respective cultures, and about what it means to be world citizens. We had even discussed the importance of time to our respective cultures, as well as how we deal with silence. We hadn’t seen eye-to-eye on everything, but we had both come to the realization that while doing things our respective ways worked, it certainly wasn’t the only way to get things done. So the idea of severing ties with each other, though once appealing, became increasingly sad. So we didn’t. We agreed to stay in touch. Long-distance relationships hadn’t worked for either of us in the past, but we were keeping open minds. Then Scott got a chance to go on a road show through his work, which kept him in the East Coast for several weeks. It was during that time that we decided we loved each other and were serious about each other.

A few months later, and also after spending hundreds of minutes on the phone with each other, we decided story itself? But suffice it to say we now have an 8-month old baby boy, Zenzo.

As I look back I see that it was evident during our courtship that while we were as different as any alike people can be, when it came down to it we agreed on the fundamentals. My fears of having to chose between my home and his were non-issues: Scott has always loved the African continent, so instead of having one home we potentially have 2. And his concerns about spending the rest of his life with someone who did not see eye-to-eye with him on the fundamentals were also addressed. We both learned about the importance of compromise, and of having a sense of humor. When our cultures clashed we learned to look at both perspectives and, by combining the best from each one, we came up with a third, new option.

Scott and I have a great life, and we often chuckle about our “2 week date”. Would we do it over again? In a heartbeat. Loving and marrying someone from a different culture certainly has its challenges. But for us the rewards far, far outweigh the obstacles encountered along the way.

Mo Nkiwane lives in Portland, OR with her husband, Scott, and their 8-month old baby, Zenzo. Mo works as a freelance writer and a full time mom. Her blog is at www.nkiwane.com/mo
People like to think that we’re experts in the field, after all we’re straight at the front battling with our three languages. But the truth is, most of the time I feel just as lost as everyone else. Eager in my quest to find enlightenment, I turn to books and studies. Only to encounter a similar answer everywhere: the presentation of various models and the recommendation that model A is probably the best. Then I read that “there is no single, correct way of bilingualism,” that the “forms of multilingualism are infinite” and that, ultimately, that I “should trust my instincts and do what I think is best for my family.” Oh, and of course to be consistent, to always be consistent. I leaf through the pages in frustration and wonder why this is of not much help. This is because I crave simple answers to complex problems, and then realize that they don’t really work in our situation.

Responsible for triggering this current angst was an article which I’ve read recently, in which the author delineates a situation that is very similar to ours. The father speaks the minority language with the children, the mother the majority language, while the parents speak a third language with one another. The result: their daughter is firmly trudging down the path towards monolingualism in the majority language. This is partly due to the father’s lackadaisical interest in strengthening the trilingual situation at home. It seems as if he just isn’t encouraging the minority language enough. And it is partly due to the de facto situation: if the minority language is spoken by a parent who is out working the whole day, so that the children don’t get to hear the language for more than 2 hours a day, what can one expect? The linguistic scale is pushing down heavily on the majority language side. If nothing is done to re-create the balance, one language will ultimately dominate.
I saw our situation mirrored in this article. Our kids are surrounded by German, which is not only the majority language, it is also the language spoken at kindergarten, at playgroups, at the playground, by Omi (grandma)- and here is the thing - by myself. Spanish and English they hear only when Papi is around - which isn’t a lot, especially when he’s on business trips! So are we to suffer the same fate as the family of the man who wrote the article? Are our attempts to raise our children trilingually doomed to failure? Already our daughter is showing a marked preference for German. Even though she seems to understand Spanish and English, she hardly ever speaks those languages.

Initially I chose German as the language of mothering because I thought it made sense: we thought we were going to live in Ecuador for a while, where they speak Spanish. But after only a year there we re-located to Austria. This is when I realized that if we don’t change something about our situation, we will end up having monolingual kids. Common sense told me: speak to them in English now! After all, I am speaking English to my husband all the time anyway. It’s not new to them, they hear English on a daily basis anyhow. New will be that now I will be addressing them directly in English as well.

So from my perspective I thought the solution was straightforward: if I speak English I not only reinforce one of our minority languages, thus evening out the balance somewhat, but we’d also have an easier time communicating with each other when the whole family is together. We’d no longer have conversations over our kids’ heads, but we could include them because they’d be able to speak back in English. German we leave to our environment and to Omi, at whose house my kids hang out every day anyway, for several hours. They get more than enough German input. I became convinced that the right path for us at this time was to reinforce English and Spanish.

Yet the range of arguments raised against me switching to English astounded me. The most popular argument was “it will confuse the kids, for one shouldn’t switch languages when they are that young” followed by “it’s better for them to have one language established first,” to some insistent voices claiming “you should always speak your own mother tongue to one’s children, never a foreign language, and English isn’t your mother tongue even you are fairly fluent in it” to the implication of “think of the poor child at school when she is unable to speak proper German, and all because you decided to switch to English”. All of this made me highly uneasy. To top this, Isabella developed a speech delay in German, and experts told me to keep exposing her to as much German as possible, even at home. I should read to her, play finger games, and speak to her as much as possible – in German!

I really didn’t know what to do anymore. It was like choosing the better between two evils: ignore the voices of admonition, speak English anyway and Isabella might develop a lasting speech defect, in addition to becoming a poor performer at school; as well as confusing the poor baby, who, at his young age, might not be able to handle his mother’s switch of languages. Or stick to German and so much for our trilingual endeavor. What to do now? What’s the enlightened choice here?

Sure, nobody said they promised us a rose garden. But nobody said that it was going to be this messy, either. It took me some time to realize that this multilingualism-phenomenon is not static, cut in stone, that once set up it will always stay that way. Multilingualism is also about change. Our environment changes and things happen constantly. We move and relocate, families change, divorce happens, death happens, unforeseen events and the hands of fate intervene. This all affects our choice regarding language. After years of sticking to one model, we may suddenly find ourselves in a situation where we have to forego the previous model and embrace another, because the old model simply doesn’t work anymore. We may have to switch from OPOL to minority/majority language. We may have to switch between two languages or use two at the same time. We may have to go against the face of all advice to be “consistent” simply because this is what works best for us. As much as our language choice changes, so does language itself. One moment one language is dominant, then another is. Receptive languages become active, active ones come receptive. As we no longer need one language, we file it away in our attic of languages and pull it out again when we need it. So that is really what multilingualism is about: It is a reflection of all that happening, it’s a reflection of life itself. It is, bluntly put: a mess.

So I just did it. I speak English to my kids now. Isabella’s reaction was interesting: she grinned. She actually seemed to like it! And she definitely understood what I was saying. “Let’s go get ready for bed,” I suggested. And she went to her room and put on her pajamas.

My switching to English raised a whole series of other problems. Will I speak English only at home and switch to German outside of our home, thus changing from one parent to one language to home language versus environment language? Or will I stick to English all the time? Or speak English only when Papi is present, and switch to German when I am alone with my kids? It’s not so easy. While switching from one language to another itself is not a problem for me, the problem is remembering to switch. So often I find myself speaking German when I should have spoken in English, simply because I forgot that I was supposed to speak English now.

My daughter’s initial reaction encouraged me that what I was doing was right. “I love you, Mami,” she said one morning, out of the blue. In English! “This is my house,” she said, and pointed to her little tent in her room. Amazing! She never said this before! So my speaking English with her caused her to tap into her passive English reservoir and activate it. In the meantime, of course, her enthusiasm for English has slackened off and yet again she resorts to German to tell me stories of what happened at kindergarten. I listen to her and nod, and keep replying in English.

Still, I feel worried about this experiment. Some negative voices are still not put to rest. What if I end up confusing my children hopelessly? What if she falls behind with her speech again? What if, because of this, she starts to stutter, develop a speech defect, ADHD, autism, a mental defect, a knotted tongue and purple mushrooms in her ears?

And I still haven’t made up my mind what to do with little Niki, who is one year old. This is tough. Speak English to my little guy? Never again to call him “Mein kleiner Raunzerbub”? For I have no idea how to translate that into English.

Alice Lapuerta is the managing editor at biculturalfamily.org. She would welcome it if you were to share your story on how you have handled a similar situation: editor@biculturalfamily.org
Ages 0-2: Customs

Long before your child enters her first classroom setting, she will have learned some of her most important lessons – from you! Before she can speak, your child is learning from the people and activities in her surroundings and is putting together the pieces that will form the foundations for formal learning later.

It is important that you feel comfortable about your child’s bilingualism and biculturalism at this stage since she is picking up cues from you right now. Go ahead and imagine what it might be like when she starts school and how you might feel. Are you afraid that other kids will make fun of your child for her second language and culture? Are you worried that she may decide she doesn’t want to have anything to do with her second language and culture after spending time with children in school? Your child isn’t too young for you to start thinking about such issues. How you feel about them now can have a tremendous impact on how you help your child embrace bilingualism and biculturalism throughout her life.

Before you know it, your child will be starting preschool or will be spending time with other children, learning how to share, take turns, be patient, say “thank you” and “please.” She will begin to learn what it means to be part of her local society. You may not realize it but she will be learning how to assimilate with the local community. She is slowly learning the local customs. This may be difficult for you since you might start to feel that you are “losing” your child to the local culture. You may feel that your child is pulling away from you. Often the local customs may be ones with which you are not very familiar and you may find it difficult to teach them to your child.

No matter how you feel about your local community, it is important that your child learn what is and is not allowed. If your child is in preschool, or later when your child is in school, she will need to be able to rely on these unspoken “rules” to feel grounded and comfortable when apart from you.

Don’t forget, however, that you also need to find ways to teach your child about your native customs and the “rules” of your culture. You owe it to your child to teach her how to behave in your native culture so that she will feel comfortable with family and friends when you are on visits. Feeling that she is part of her extended family, and not some kind of outsider, is essential to her feeling that she is truly bicultural.

Ultimately, customs make us feel part of our surroundings. Even if our child later decides to “do her own thing”, it is important that she understands how each of her cultures may interpret her actions and attitudes differently.

Ages 3-5: Getting Ready

The anticipation of that first day of school is something some children and parents dread and others just can’t wait for. Regardless of whether we are feeling nervous or excited, preparing a child for what to expect at school is very important, especially for bilingual children.

Often as our child moves closer toward school age, we start to wonder and worry whether his language abilities will be up to par with other children in class. Will the teacher and the school approve of us raising our children bilingual or will we end up feeling defensive and needing to explain our decisions? Will the other children and parents treat our bilingual family as any other family or will they treat us and our child differently?

The only way to answer these questions is to be prepared. Make sure to visit the school where your child will attend. Speak with the principal and the teachers. At the very least make sure to set up a meeting with your child’s intended teacher. The more people you can talk with at the school, the better. For example, what if your child ends up in the nurse’s office due to an illness or due to an accident on the playground? It is possible that your child will not have the right words in the community language to explain exactly how he is feeling. A nurse who knows that your child is bilingual will be better equipped to deal with such a situation. Or maybe in the classroom your child’s teacher can bring up the topic of bilingualism in a comfortable way, together with other unique attributes of other students in class, so that classmates will learn that your child is bilingual without him feeling he has been singled out.

However, preparing the school for your child is only half of the process. Preparing your child for the school is the other step. In a calm, cheerful manner, help your child understand what to expect while at school. If you feel it is appropriate, you can let your child know that other kids will probably not be bilingual like he is. However, try not to make him assume the worst or to become worried. Speaking about what to expect at school matter-of-factly is the best approach.

Take time out to discuss with your child how he is feeling about school, both before it begins and after he has begun. Remember that he may not say a lot if he is still working through his thoughts and feelings. Give him time but also make sure he knows that you are available and are open to hear whatever he has to share.
Ages 6-10: Friendships
At this age, your child is getting the hang of being a student and what school is all about. School activities are becoming more second-nature and your child’s community language abilities are most certainly up to par with that of the other students. In fact, your child’s bilingualism probably does not even come to mind during an average school day.

At this point, your child is most likely focusing on her social surroundings and is starting to make real friendships with other students. Learning to cooperate and communicate with fellow students was the first step and now she is moving toward establishing more meaningful bonds through sharing thoughts and opinions, likes and dislikes. Your child is also likely beginning to determine with whom she enjoys spending time and has most in common.

Some children will establish friendships easily, others will need more time. Your child’s bilingualism or biculturalism most likely does not have any influence over this process, at least at this stage, so try not to let it factor into any concerns you might have about whether your child is fitting in or not. It is doubtful whether your child’s bilingualism alters the way other children view her at school. Other, more common elements most certainly play a greater role.

This stage often hits parents the hardest. It can be very difficult for parents to accept that their child only wants to spend time with other monolingual classmates. They begin to notice that their child spends most of the day speaking the community language, which leaves very little time to speak the second language. It is very difficult at this stage for parents to encourage a child to establish new friendships with bilingual children outside of the classroom (unless the bilingual children are neighbors or live close by). Children spend all day with their peers and feel a special connection with them. To expect this kind of bond to form with children of families outside of school, just because they also speak the second language, can often backfire. Children are especially sensitive to their parents trying to “set them up” with friendships only for the sake of the language. If parents aren’t careful, they might cause resentment and a rejection of the second language.

Parents usually find that this is a good stage to take time out to reassess language goals and to redefine plans of action since often previous language assumptions and approaches are not working anymore. If your child is open to it, bring her into the conversation and find out how she feels about it all. Parents should let their child know what is on their mind: worries, concerns, and feelings of loss as well as the joy and delight they feel that their child is forming friendships and feeling comfortable at school.

Ages 11-18: Meaning
As your child moves through this stage, he will most likely transition from taking for granted that he is bilingual into actually thinking about what it means to be bilingual and how this influences her decisions. He will possibly start to find explanations for some of his idiosyncrasies and come to recognize his uniqueness.

As your child starts to come into his own at this stage, he is likely looking for answers as to why he is the person that he is and he is possibly starting to scrutinize himself. He is starting to really be able to give meaning to what it means to be a bilingual and is likely forming opinions about it. Maybe he is seeing the wonderful opportunities that await him since he is able to speak two languages fluently and can understand two cultures intimately? Or perhaps he is frustrated that he doesn’t feel completely at home in either culture? Give him space to think through these thoughts, yet make sure to let him know that you are available for anything he may want to discuss. If he never brings up the topic, you might try bringing it up in non-confrontational ways. For example, you could talk about what it is like being married to someone from another country or the choice to raise a bilingual child. Or maybe you can start by asking if there are other bilingual kids in his class, what languages they speak and what their future plans are. Remember that peers still have a strong influence over our children at this age so a child’s view of other bilinguals may have more to do with our child’s identity than anything.

As your child gets closer to finishing school and is starting to think about college, talk with him about his future and whether he has factored in his bilingualism. Does he know how to read and write in the second language? If so, then perhaps attending college in your native country is a possibility? Or maybe he would like to hear about jobs that can only be filled by bilinguals? Take him to speak with a college counselor who can provide this kind of specialized information and guidance. If he can’t read or write in the second language, this would be an excellent time for him to attend a class to learn it or to set up tutoring sessions with you or your spouse.

This can be a wonderful stage in your bilingual family. Your child’s ability to put things into perspective will provide you the opportunity to take discussions to a new level. Try not to let your child completely avoid the subject of bilingualism and biculturalism since this is the point in his life where understanding his thoughts about them can possibly help him determine and define who he is. He may not even realize to what degree growing up in a bilingual family has or has not influenced who he is. At the very least, it may help him understand why he does things differently from his peer group in one country and similarly in another.
Looking for language-learning fun?  
Try these easy, entertaining games!

By Alice Lapuerta

**MEMORY**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Memory is a simple game for two players and more that can be played in different languages. Mixed cards are placed face-down on the table. The goal is to find as many identical pairs as possible. Each player turns over two cards. If you haven’t found a pair, return the cards to their original location. If you have found a pair, you get to search for another pair. The winner is the player who has found the most pairs.

**MAKE IT BILINGUAL:** For our bilingual purposes, every time you turn over a pair, identify the picture first in one language, then in another. Or you can play the first round entirely in one language, and the second round in another language. Kids love this game! In addition to training vocabulary, it also trains their cognitive abilities as well as their concentration.

**TIP:** If you don’t have a set of memory-cards at home, try making them by yourself! It doesn’t have to be anything complicated or fancy: with a pair of scissors, cut 24 squares out of a sheet of cardboard or paper. Make 12 identical pairs of random, simple objects: the sun/moon/stars, house, tree, flower, cat, dog, or simple symbols. Let your child do it!

**PACK A SUITCASE**

**INSTRUCTIONS:** Get a small backpack and tell your child you are going on an imaginary vacation. What are you going to pack?

**PARENT:** “I am packing a suitcase and take along ... a pair of socks!” (put socks into the bag).  
**CHILD:** “I am packing a suitcase and take along... a pair of socks and a blue t-shirt!  
Parent: Repeat socks, t-shirt, and add a third item.

**MAKE IT BILINGUAL:** This game, too, can be played in different languages (play once in one language then again in the second language). Start out with the number of objects your child is able to remember (5 might be a good number to start with). If your child is older you might want use more, or less if s/he is younger) and then build up a larger vocabulary.
Test your bilingual knowledge!

By Alice Lapuerta

ACROSS

2) this type of bilingual uses two different words in two different languages for the same concept
4) this is one of the 22 national languages spoken in India
6) reading difficulty
8) growing up with two different cultures
9) each parent speaks only one language to his/her child
10) measure of linguistic productivity in children
11) most widely spoken constructed international language
12) process of exchanging information

DOWN

1) this type of bilingual is able to understand, but not speak, a given language
3) this person can speak six or more languages fluently
5) study of origin of words
7) medical treatment of organs involved with speech production

Answers to crossword puzzle can be found online at: www.biculturalfamily.org/sept06/secure/solutions.html
Chai
From Gayatri Muthiah in Seattle, USA

**Ingredients:**
- 1.5 cups water
- 1.5 cups of 2% (or your choice) milk
- 4 plain black tea bags (do not use green or other specialized variety)
- 3 pods of cardamom
- ¼ teaspoon crushed ginger
- Sugar to taste

**Directions:**
Boil water, ginger and cardamom together. Cut the tea bags and empty the tea bags in the boiling water (so, the leaves can really soak, if you don’t have a strainer/filter you could leave the tea in the bags) Add milk after about 2-3 minutes. Leave it on the heat until it boils again. Strain and serve hot.

Note: If you don’t like your tea as creamy, you can reduce milk and add more water instead.

**Serves:** 3
Let yourself be intrigued and inspired by the these words from the
*Encyclopedia of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education* by Colin Baker
and Sylvia Prys Jones!

**A Child’s Language Development**

A child’s language development depends on many factors: the amount and quality of exposure to the language at home, in school, in the community, on the mass media, for example. If the child’s contact with the language is minimal, or confined to the home, the child will not achieve the same level of competence as monolingual peers. The child may not progress much beyond understanding the language, what is termed passive or receptive bilingualism. However, it is important not to view bilingualism in terms of ‘success’ or ‘failure’, ‘all’ or ‘nothing’. Any degree of bilingualism can be a valuable asset, and competence in a language may increase with greater exposure to a language. (Page 43).

**Language Learning**

Studies have shown that, because of their superior ability to analyze and process information, older children and adults often learn language more efficiently than young children. However, for adults, lack of motivation and lack of time can be a problem. Psychological factors such as shyness, self-consciousness or negative attitudes towards the target language can hinder or obstruct learning. Older children and adults are used to expressing complex thoughts and abstract concepts in their first language. They are often frustrated at their inability to achieve this in the target language. If second language learning takes place in a classroom environment, it is not always easy for a second language teacher to present the target language in a way that is relevant and authentic.

For these reasons, there is increasing awareness of the value of introducing second and third languages to children at an early age. The world of a small child is simple and concrete. The child’s language needs are simple and are linked to everyday activities, familiar people and objects, and happenings that affect the child directly. A second language can also be acquired quite naturally and incidentally during day-to-day activities and in interaction with other people. An effective way of teaching a second language to a child is to use the language with the child in daily living, while eating, drinking, playing with toys, singing, telling stories, painting, gardening, cooking, shopping and so on. (Page 491).

**Multiculturalism vs. Assimilation**

In England and the United States, movements towards multiculturalism have not tended to receive an official blessing nor encouragement. Rather, the assimilationist viewpoint has continued. In contrast, in parts of Canada, Scandinavia and New Zealand for example, a more multicultural approach has been taken, but with much dispute and debate.

The difference between assimilationists and multiculturalists is rooted in basic human needs and motives. The movement towards assimilation or heritage cultural maintenance is likely to be affected by the economic reward system. Both assimilation and heritage cultural maintenance can be promoted by the need to earn a living and the desire to acquire or increase affluence. Assimilation may be chosen to secure a job, to be vocationally successful and to achieve affluence. The minority language and culture may be left behind in order to prosper in the majority language community. At the same time, language planning can be used to ensure that there are jobs and promotion within the minority language community. (Page 300).
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