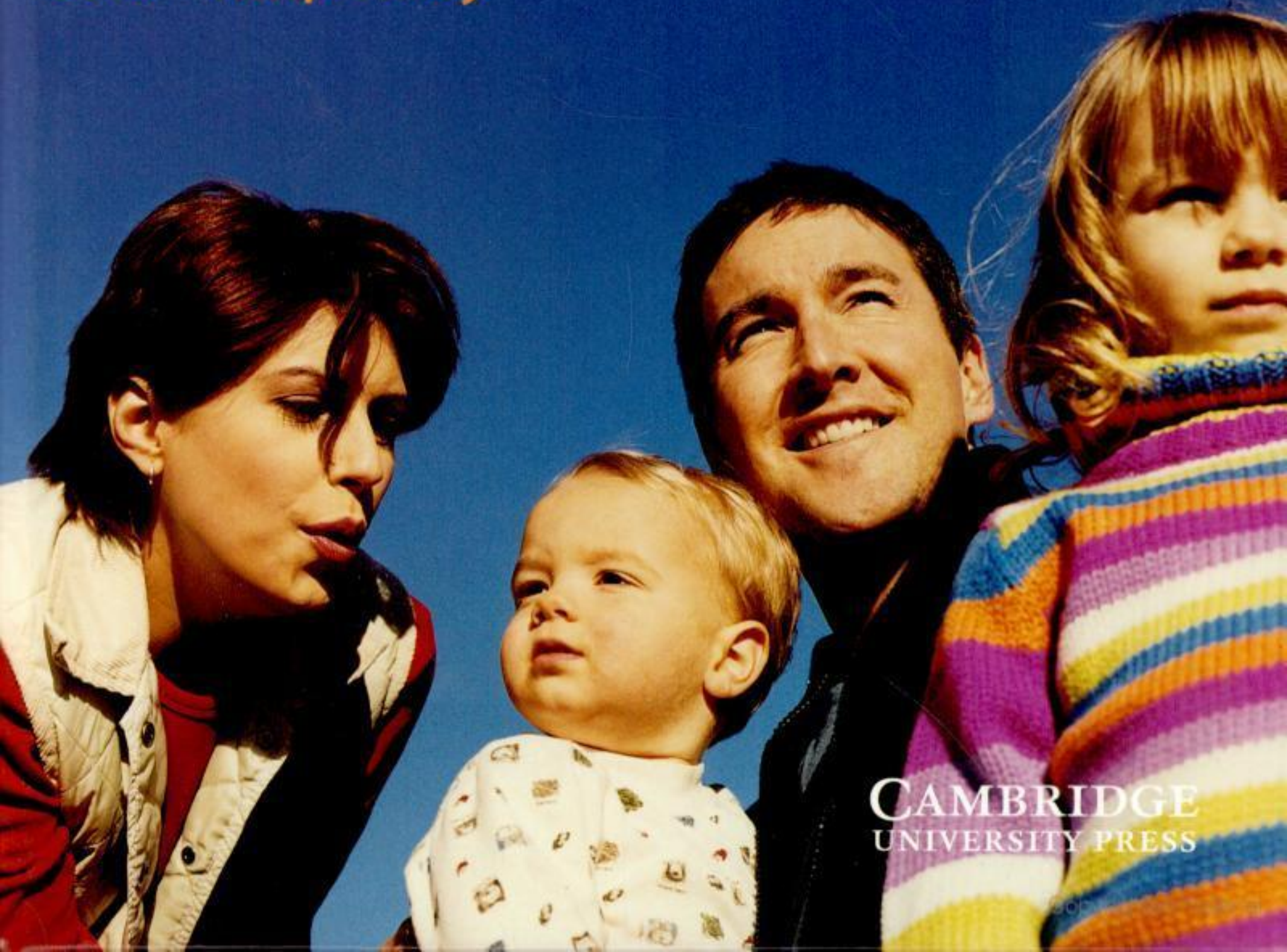
Second Edition

The Bilingual Family

A Handbook for Parents

Edith Harding-Esch
and Philip Riley



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Contents

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ii) A discussion of the factors which parents should take into consideration when deciding whether to bring up their children as bilinguals.
iii) A series of case studies of a wide variety of bilingual families, where readers will be able to see the different choices and decisions made by parents in different contexts.
iv) An alphabetical reference guide to a number of topics or notions likely to be useful to parents.

We would like to emphasise that, although we are both professional linguists, it is the direct, personal and daily experience of bilingualism in our own families which has motivated the book. Readers may not agree with all we have to say, or may find that it does not apply to their particular situation; indeed, it would be surprising if this were not sometimes the case. It would have been impossible to offer a comprehensive treatment of all possible cases; we simply tried to formulate what our first-hand experience over many years has taught us.

Our subject, bringing up bilingual children, is only one aspect of that vast and controversial problem of bringing up children. In any family, there is a wide range of factors influencing the relationships between the individual members (for example, social roles, health, age, religious and political views) which are not linguistic but which are crucial in defining the members' and the family's identities. We are no more competent to talk about these things than any other parents, and so we have tried not to allow our personal views to colour the discussion that follows. Bilingual children are children first and foremost and problems like pocket money or puberty are just as pressing for them as for anyone else. Dealing with only one aspect of a child's life is a risky enterprise, forced upon us by the complexity of the subject, but we are well aware of the importance of the overall context, of the *whole* child.

In the past fifteen years or so, there have been many developments in the field of bilingual studies, which is one of the main reasons for producing this second edition. In particular, there has been a great increase in research and there are now several established international journals regularly reporting on bilingual and multilingual development. Much work has been carried out on the societal aspects of bilingualism (Fishman, 1989), including major studies dealing with language death (Fishman, 1991; Crystal, 2000; Nettle and Romaine, 2000). There have also been numerous descriptive studies, especially in the fields of language contact, code-switching and language change (Milroy and Muysken, 1995; Jones and Esch, 2002), as well as theoretical studies in cultural variation in lan-

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CHAPTER ONE

Children and language

What do children use language for?

In this section, we will be looking at the various stages that all children go through when they start talking. However, it is important to remember that we cannot see what is actually going on inside a child's head, so that despite the intense scrutiny that has been made in recent years of the ways in which children acquire language, much of the mystery remains. This is one reason why we will concentrate on what children actually *do* with language, since that can be observed and studied by an outsider. A second reason is that it is of far greater relevance to their relationships with their parents than most technical studies, which tend to deal with such topics as the order in which certain fine points of grammar are acquired, or the connection between language and the physiology of the brain. For example, it is possible to analyse in great detail how a child gradually acquires the complex grammar of negation, but when Eliot (2 yrs 1 mth) says 'No Teletubbies!' his mother needs to know whether he wants her to change TV channels or not.

1.1 Building up relationships

– Morning.
– Morning.
– Bit nippy, isn't it?
– Yes. Really nippy.
– Oh well.
– Yes, well. See you.
– See you.

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names. It does seem that this early exercise in abstraction does give the bilingual the mental flexibility and openness which has frequently been reported by experimenters and psychologists. This flexibility in turn is one of the main protections against what monolinguals often imagine must be an unpleasant experience – thinking in two languages. Quite literally, the bilingual does not *mind* this. There are a number of reasons why this is so: first, there are thought processes that are non-verbal or pre-verbal anyway. Secondly, verbal thought – our 'interior monologue' – is usually conscious and the bilingual will *choose* which language to think in. Thirdly, many bilinguals are in the habit of always thinking in one language except when they are actually using another (our guess is that this is the majority). Fourthly, many bilinguals actually like being able to think in two languages, often using it as a creative approach to problem-solving, a sort of lateral thinking.

Unfortunately, this is one of those cases where 'if you have to ask the question, you may not understand the answer' and all the bilingual can do when he is asked what language he thinks in is to say 'Well, it depends . . .'

1.4 Playing with words

Babies and small children love playing with language. Before they can produce actual words, they will spend long stretches repeating the same sounds apparently just for fun. Children who can only say very few words will use them to sing themselves to sleep. Playing with sounds and words in this way seems to be a completely spontaneous activity in children; it is also an important part of the learning process and it is an activity which the child will continue to perform with various degrees of complexity, going from bad jokes to humming songs to writing poetry, throughout his adult life.

'Lullation', as this behaviour is sometimes called, serves much the same purposes, and gives the child much the same sort of pleasure, as do nursery rhymes and all sorts of verbal activities and games later on. Amongst the purposes there is obviously the learning through repetition of basic words, sounds and structures, but the high proportion of 'nonsense' – expressions like 'ring a ring of roses', 'Humpty Dumpty' and 'hey diddle diddle' – is surely there at least as much for the fun of it.

This point is more important to the parents of bilingual children than might at first seem to be the case, because some parents worry that it is a symptom of confusion, since naturally the bilingual child will call on both

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recognised. This is why, when there is disagreement about the status of a dialect, the conflict is inevitably political in nature. For example, when people argue as to whether Breton, Scots or Basque is 'a language', they are usually arguing about the degree of political autonomy of the speakers or the region where the variety in question is spoken.

Because languages are not distinguished from dialects on linguistic grounds, it is quite possible to find separate official languages that have more in common than other dialects of the 'same' language. For example, we speak of the 'Scandinavian languages' – Norwegian, Danish and Swedish – even though they are very similar and often mutually comprehensible. On the other hand, we speak of 'dialects' of the Chinese language even though at least eight of these dialects (or rather families of dialects) are mutually incomprehensible. Words like 'Norwegian' and 'Chinese' are political, not linguistic statements: they tell us that the area in question is a separate nation. As it has often been said: 'a language is a dialect with an army and a navy of its own'.

In many places, people speak two dialects. When these are officially recognised as languages, we say that such people are 'bilingual', but in purely linguistic terms anyone who has two different forms of speech available is bilingual. When Philip Riley was a grammar-school boy in the London of the 1950s, he and his classmates received elocution lessons in Standard English and their cockney accents were frowned on at school, so that most of them spoke differently at home and at school. In the same way, the German businessman who 'puts on his regional accent with his slippers in the evening' is just doing what bilinguals do. This, again, is why it is so difficult to count languages, dialects and bilinguals: there are no clear dividing lines.

The four or five thousand languages of the world differ widely in the number of people who speak them. The average number of speakers per language is estimated to be one million. On the other hand, nations also differ widely in the number of languages spoken in them, the average being about thirty. The idea then, that each country has *one* language, spoken uniformly by all the people within its borders, is both naive and inaccurate, even though most countries do have a standard dialect or dialects, recognised as the official language or languages.

1.7 The written language and the spoken language

Speech is the primary form of language. It existed before there was any form of writing and children learn to speak before they learn to write.

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objective historical factors determining the selection and emergence of a standard language do not in any way detract from its value and importance as the major form of access to knowledge and to certain social domains.

Meaning

The 'real' meaning of a word or expression is not restricted to its historical or etymological meaning, words mean what people use them to mean – not necessarily what they *used* to mean. To insist that the 'real' meaning of 'enthusiastic', for example, is 'to be inspired by a god' is either pedantry or a failure to understand what people who use the word nowadays are trying to convey.

Again, the same word usually has a number of different meanings. Only scientifically defined terms such as H_2O have a single unambiguous meaning; 'water', on the other hand, can mean a number of different things: 'He watered the garden', 'His mouth watered', 'The proposition was watered down' and so on. We are able to select the appropriate meaning because there are usually a number of other clues in what is said to help us, and because the context often narrows down the range of possible meanings.

We need to distinguish between the meaning that words and sentences have in use, and the meaning they have when they are not in use. The meaning of words in dictionaries or of sentences in grammars is only a part of the meaning they may have when spoken in real life. The relationship between what we *say* and what we *mean* is neither direct nor simple. A sentence like 'You are not going out' will have one meaning in a grammar book (its literal or semantic meaning) but in a situation it can be used to perform a wide variety of communicative acts. For example:

> *prohibition* (FATHER TO CHILD): 'You've got a cold and it's raining, so I forbid you to go out.'
> *request for confirmation* (WIFE TO HUSBAND): 'I have to go out myself: you will be in if Fred calls, won't you?'
> *threat* (KIDNAPPER TO VICTIM): 'If you try to move, I'll shoot you!'
> *reproach* (FATHER TO DAUGHTER): 'You've been down the pub every night this week!'

Learning *functional* uses of language of this kind is crucial: language is not just a system for conveying 'neutral' information (such as the fact that you are not going out) which is either true or false but nothing more. We also use it to *do* things, like prohibiting, threatening, inviting, agreeing, defining, greeting, persuading and ordering. We use it to express our feelings, to

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ing the learning process about which there is now a general consensus. Since several of these are in complete contradiction with what the person in the street thinks about learning, it is worth listing them briefly here.

First, a few points about what learning is *not*:

- *Learning a language is not simply a matter of repetition.* In fact repetition seems to play only a small and relatively superficial part in the learning process. This seems to be because language is systematic *and* dynamic: we can only repeat a part of the system, not the system itself. Moreover, if learning a language were merely a matter of repetition, how could we ever produce a sentence we had never heard before?
- *Correcting and being corrected does not have any great influence on the language learning process.* This is shown by the fact that we sometimes learn things straight away without ever being corrected and sometimes go on making the same old mistake, no matter how often we are corrected. When a child produces an incorrect but true utterance, such as 'mummy spoon', the mother usually does not correct the child but agrees with him, for instance by saying: 'Yes dear, what a good boy you are!' On the contrary, when a child says something which is grammatically well-formed, but which is not true, his mother will disagree. For instance, the child may say: 'This is Mummy's spoon' to which the mother will reply: 'No, of course not, it belongs to Daddy'. In fact, children are very often corrected for producing grammatical utterances and find themselves encouraged for producing errors. For this reason, it has been said that if learning was a simple matter of correction and encouragement, we should become adults who tell the truth ungrammatically, but of course, we tell lies . . . grammatically!
- *Learning is not a neat, linear process.* It is not like laying a single railway line across an open plain. Instead, it involves wrong turnings, meanders, shunting backwards and forwards, forgetting and remembering. We may take a perfectly correct route, only to find that there is an obstacle across the line: when we go back on our tracks, either to fetch something, to remove the obstacle or to find a different way round it, an outside observer may interpret our behaviour as 'a mistake', although we are, in fact, solving a problem.
- *Errors are not necessarily a sign of failure to learn.* They are an essential part of the learning process. When we come to a junction, we may well take a wrong turning but this helps us work out which was the right one. Errors are very often a healthy symptom that learning is taking place: the child who says: 'I goed' has learnt an extremely powerful rule for the

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> Bilingualism [is] native-like control of two languages . . . Of course, one cannot define a degree of perfection at which a good foreign speaker becomes a bilingual: the distinction is relative. (L. Bloomfield, 1933)

> Bilingualism is understood . . . to begin at the point where the speaker of one language can produce complete, meaningful utterances in the other language. (E. Haugen, 1953)

> The phenomenon of bilingualism [is] something entirely relative . . . We shall therefore consider bilingualism as the alternate use of two or more languages by the same individual. (W. F. Mackey, 1962)

> The bilingual or wholistic view of bilingualism proposes that the bilingual is an integrated whole which cannot easily be decomposed into two separate parts. The bilingual is NOT the sum of two complete or incomplete monolinguals; rather, he or she has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. (F. Grosjean, 1992)

> Bilingualism refers to the phenomenon of competence and communication in two languages . . . A bilingual society is one in which two languages are used for communication. In a bilingual society, it is possible to have a large number of monolinguals . . . provided that there are enough bilinguals to perform the functions requiring bilingual competence in that society. There is, therefore, a distinction between individual bilingualism and societal bilingualism. (A. Lam, 2001)

Even the briefest of examinations of these quotations shows the importance of distinguishing between bilingual *societies* and bilingual *individuals*. Theoretically, it is quite possible to have a bilingual society in which all individual members speak only one language, just as it is possible to have a bilingual individual in an otherwise monolingual society. Secondly, these quotations underline the importance of the *relative* nature of bilingualism. At what point do we decide that someone is a bilingual? The fact that we can ask this question shows that the decision is to a large extent arbitrary.

In this chapter, we shall look at bilingualism from the point of view of society at large. The following chapter will focus on individual bilingualism and the meaning of growing up bilingually.

2.2 'Elitist' bilingualism and 'folk' bilingualism

Figures for 'intermarriages' in the EU countries are not easy to come by, but there is no doubt that in the last two decades there has been a considerable increase. Such parents are faced with a long-term choice, but

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day conversation, referred to as 'low' forms. Since this is true of any language to some degree (we would not usually open a letter in English with the words: 'Hello, Charlie, how's things?'), this is obviously another very relative statement. The two forms may only be slightly different, in which case we would probably refer to them as a 'standard' and a 'dialect', or they might be completely separate languages. Where we come across references to 'high' and 'low' forms or to 'classical' or 'standard' languages, we can usually be sure that we are dealing with some form of diglossia. This form of societal bilingualism is far more common than is generally realised: both Arabic- and Greek-speaking countries exhibit it, for example, as does the German part of Switzerland. The relationship between individual bilingualism and diglossia is an immensely complex one, since it is quite possible to use only the high or low forms, or both, or one better than the other, and since the factors that determine the individual's linguistic identity may well be a compound of historical, geographical, ethnic, religious, economic and psychological influences.

In huge and diverse countries like the USA and the Community of Independent States, the present linguistic and ethnic compositions of the populations result from different types of colonising processes. In America:

> Many different people were attracted from many parts of the world. An intensive process of ethnic and linguistic convergence resulted and the colonial movement is centripetal. In Europe, the process has been one of divergence: the colonial process is centrifugal. (G. Lewis, 1981)

Both countries have large groups of bilinguals, but as the result of very different social and political developments.

Bilingualism may be essentially an urban phenomenon, as in Madina (in Ghana) where most inhabitants speak three languages, or New York's El Barrio (Zentella, 1997), while elsewhere it may be characteristic of a mainly rural society, as in New Guinea.

There is a tendency for certain trades to be associated with bilingualism. Many builders in northern France, who are of Italian origin, are speakers of Italian, for example. Then there are those occupations that directly involve the daily use of several languages: translating and interpreting, of course, but also the diplomatic service, certain branches of the IT software industry and the travel and tourist industries, communications, journalism and teaching.

Finally, it is worth noting that bilingualism has often been the hallmark of the upper classes. Probably the best-known example of this is that of the

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official language has been chosen as a lingua franca for a multilingual society.

Officially bilingual nations

These are nations like Canada, Belgium or Finland, where two or more languages have full official recognition, one of the languages being invariably that of a minority group. But this certainly does not mean that all of the individual inhabitants of the countries are bilingual:

> In fact, there are fewer bilingual people in the bilingual countries than there are in the so-called unilingual countries. For it is not always realized that bilingual countries were created not to promote bilingualism, but to guarantee the maintenance and use of two or more languages in the same nation. (Mackey, 1967)

Grosjean gives the example of officially bilingual Canada where only 13 per cent of the population uses both French and English on a regular basis, whereas in officially monolingual Tanzania, some 90 per cent of the population regularly uses at least two languages. Again, in officially bilingual Finland, only about six per cent of the population is (officially) bilingual.

Officially multilingual nations

Either they are countries like Switzerland, where the main national languages are all recognised as official languages, or they are countries like India, which have a large number of national languages only some of which are recognised as official languages for practical purposes: of the fourteen national languages mentioned in the constitution, only Hindi and English are official languages (Srivastava, 1988). The inhabitants of bilingual and multilingual countries are not themselves automatically bi- or multilingual. In India 'only about ten per cent of the population uses two languages regularly' (Grosjean, 1982).

It is important to realise, then, that official labels like 'monolingual', 'bilingual', or 'multilingual' have little to do with the actual distribution of bilingualism. Such labels are better understood as political statements of attitude towards minority groups rather than as statistical indications of the degree of bilingualism amongst the country's inhabitants. This is why, in Western Europe, the questions raised by the education of the children

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In such circumstances, the words that do come to their lips are those belonging to the other language. This is the phenomenon known as *interference*, which has been defined as:

> Those deviations from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than one language. (Weinreich, 1953)

A typical example is that of Monique, a Frenchwoman living in England, whose entire experience of 'motherhood' has been acquired exclusively in English. Speaking to a French friend on the phone, Monique chatted happily about her baby's *bouteilles* ('bottles', instead of *biberons*) until her friend began to ask just how much wine the infant was getting through. It is worth noting that this kind of error would probably not have appeared in a *written* vocabulary test designed to 'measure' the balance between her two languages, but that none the less this sort of error crops up in conversation.

Interference can occur at any level of language structure or function. For example, when it occurs at the phonetic level, it gives rise to a 'foreign accent'. An English dominant English / French bilingual may pronounce 'd' and 't' in the English way, with his tongue a little bit above and behind the teeth rather than with typical French dental articulation.

At the level of vocabulary, interference usually manifests itself by a failure to choose correctly between related words. For example, a French dominant French / English bilingual may say: 'I went to the library this morning', instead of 'I went to the bookshop'. Similarly, a Swedish dominant Swedish / English bilingual might say: 'He's in my bad papers' for 'He's in my bad books'.

It is also possible for the grammatical structures of one language to interfere with those of another. A common enough example of this is the ordering of words according to the rules of the dominant language, as when an English dominant English / French bilingual says: '*C'est celui que je parlais avec*' for '*C'est celui avec lequel je parlais*', under the influence of the English structure: 'He's the one I was talking to'. Similarly, French dominant French / English bilinguals say things like: 'He plays very well the guitar' which shows the same word order as the French: '*Il joue très bien la guitare*'.

Interference is one indication of language *dominance*. In those cases where the bilingual is not absolutely *balanced*, one language is said to be dominant. However, it follows from our discussion above about domains of interest and experience that it is not necessarily the same language that

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however, seems to be the general rule: *where one of the parents does not understand one of the languages, attempts to maintain bilingualism in the family are most likely to fail.* There may be exceptions of course, but we have come across so many examples of this happening that we feel justified in regarding it as almost inevitable.

A variation of receptive bilingualism is *asymmetrical bilingualism*, the ability to speak a language better than you understand it. In this respect, Beardsmore quotes the example of a French student of English going to the north of England for a holiday and finding that though people can understand him, he can't understand them – at least, not to start with. Parents should be aware that this can happen to children quite easily, and that it is not serious, since it is usually short-lived. It is not difficult to understand how asymmetrical bilingualism can occur. Take, for example, the cases of Ingrid and Matthias, sister and brother French / German bilinguals, who have learnt their German from their father, in France. Despite occasional trips to Germany, they simply are not exposed to the quantity or range of accents, voices or speaking styles to be found in Germany. They understand their father's German perfectly, but can be thrown by another German speaker who does not have exactly the same characteristics, because of age perhaps, or because he comes from a different part of the country. Once again, though, it is important to underline the point that monolinguals can have exactly the same sort of problem. Philip Riley's father, who was English, never learnt to understand Americans speaking, even after the advent of television, and anyone who has made a sudden move from, say, southern England to Scotland will need a period of adaptation. One feels for the sixteen-year-old French / English bilingual on holiday in Halifax, Yorkshire, who, when congratulated on her English because she 'didn't have an accent' replied: 'No – but *you* do!'

3.2 Compound and co-ordinate bilinguals

Perhaps we should state at the outset that this distinction is no longer a fashionable one. Specialists in bilingualism regard it as, at best, a drastic over-simplification. We have two main reasons for referring to it here, though. The first is that, in its time, it was very influential indeed and many books, articles and encyclopaedias still use these terms. The second, and more important, reason is that these concepts were developed to account for some of the most important characteristics of bilingualism. They ask the right questions, as it were, even if the answers are wrong.

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In some cases of infant bilingualism, where the parents speak one language at home and the child stays at home all day with his mother, the outside language will be learned by the child only in a receptive way (see section 3.1 above). He goes to the shops with his mother, he listens to the radio, watches television, hears his parents talking with visitors and friends, and so on, but does not usually feel the need to use the outside language *actively* until he makes friends with the neighbours' children or goes to a playgroup or nursery school. This is all perfectly natural – just another instance of the child not using a language until and unless he *needs* to. The important thing is for parents not to panic and start imagining that because Jean-Marc has not started speaking English at, say, three years of age, he will never do so. He will do so when he needs to, that is, when he starts meeting English-speaking adults and children. We should look at the child's social life before we start worrying about his language acquisition.

In very general statistical terms, bilingual infants and children start speaking slightly later than monolinguals, but they still remain well within the degrees of variation for monolingual children. In other words, they start speaking at an age that is perfectly acceptable in a monolingual child. In fact the age difference between girls and boys (girls start speaking, on average, several weeks before boys) is bigger than the difference between monolinguals and bilinguals. Other causes of variation that need to be kept in mind include the child's position in the family: first-born children usually start speaking earlier than subsequent children because they do not have to share their parents' attention. Lastly, there is individual variation, which can be considerable. The average range is from eight to fifteen months. It is also perfectly ordinary to have such differences occurring between children in the same family: Margaret, a first-born girl, was producing expressions like: 'There it is!' before her seventh month, whilst her little brother was well over three years old before he managed anything more than his sister's name and the word 'No!'. He then caught up with her.

Child bilingualism

Child bilingualism seems to assume the *successive acquisition* of two languages, but the distinction between simultaneous and sequential acquisition is not always clear. In particular, McLaughlin (1978) proposed that acquisition of more than one language up to age three should be considered simultaneous but, as pointed out by Romaine (1999), it seems to be

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> results from losing all our familiar signs and symbols of social intercourse . . . a series of props have been knocked from under you, followed by a feeling of frustration and anxiety. People react to the frustration in much the same way. First they reject the environment which causes the discomfort. (Kalervo Oberg, 1972, quoted in Casse, 1984)

One's chances of learning a language in a state of culture shock are very slight, as the language (and the people who speak it) forms a major part of the environment which is rejected. But culture shock is by no means limited to those who do not yet speak the language or to the socially disadvantaged. A recent European survey of the attitudes of university students who spend a period of residence abroad as part of their degree shows that highly proficient individuals can resent the host country as a result of cultural differences (Coleman,1996). Paradoxically, it is often the fact that such students do speak the language of the host country that makes their lives difficult. If you make grammatical mistakes or use the wrong words, people think you *speak* badly, but if you make cultural mistakes, they think you *behave* badly.

Although children can suffer from culture shock as badly as any adult, in our experience (and with reference only to the kind of middle-class family we have been discussing) it is usually less traumatic and shorter lived. They are protected by their parents, they do not have their parents' responsibilities and they are remarkably resilient and adaptable. The rapidity with which they learn the language and integrate into the host society, simply by going to the local school, for example, means that usually they feel quite at home well before their parents. It is certainly not unknown for the children to play a major role in getting their own parents to understand and accept the ways of the host society. Of course, where one of the parents is actually a citizen of the 'new' country – when a Czech / French couple moves 'back' to France, for instance – such problems are considerably reduced. This is in itself a major argument for bringing children up bilingually, though of course it might not be sufficient to do away with all the difficulties caused by being uprooted.

It is also worth noting that where the parents 'overadjust' in their desire to be accepted by the new community, where they abandon their original culture and language, it is sometimes seen as a kind of 'treason' by the children. It is not uncommon for a child to insist on learning his parents' language; indeed, in our experience most children after the age of puberty will want to do so. They will not all do so to the same degree, of course. Dominique, son of a French father and an English mother, was brought up

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when he realised that Grandmother could not understand his French he launched into fluent, acceptable German.

We make this point here to underline the fact that children, in linguistic as in other matters, are by no means completely predictable. In the end, as discussed by De Houwer (1999), much of the immediate language environment in which the child acquires his languages and which determines – amongst other things – the frequency with which parents use a particular language to the child, is influenced by the parents' attitudes and beliefs. So the 'categories' of childhood bilinguals mentioned below and in our own case studies should be taken with a pinch of salt. The main use of such categories is that it provides a basis of comparison that helps individual families describe and identify their own situation. But do not be surprised if you do not find a family, here or in the case studies, which corresponds exactly to your circumstances, as an almost infinite number of variations are possible. A number of typologies have been proposed in the past ten years and each of them has advantages related to the specific interest of their authors. For example, Döpke's (1992) typology is based on interactional principles and the patterns of exposure that can be predicted from the way the 'one parent one language principle' is applied in different environments. The recent categorisation proposed by Yamamoto (2001) stresses the fact that 'interlingual families' are a context in which children are only potentially bilingual. It is particularly relevant to the Japanese context where the constructs 'native language' and 'community language' appear to be less problematic than in Europe. Our typology was used as a basis by Romaine (1995 [2nd ed.]), and recently Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001) developed it to include multilingual children. The latter is also nearest to us in spirit because of the educational orientation and of the author's overt acceptance of the complex dynamics of families: parents cannot always control the application of the strategy they have decided upon as if the family members were experimental subjects but often 'bumble their way into being a truly multilingual (or bilingual) household' (p. 57).

4.1 Types of bilingual families

The following five main types of bilingual families have been described in the technical literature on bilingualism. Each type has its own characteristics, described below. The studies mentioned are entered under the author's name in the reference section at the end of the book.

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thongs. Both groups of children also extend the meanings of words to things which appear to them to be the same. Again, both mono- and bilinguals will slowly increase the length of their utterances, and start by using simple constructions before embarking on complex ones like relative clauses.

To put it succinctly, the similarities between bilingual and monolingual children are far more striking than the differences.

4.3 Separating the two languages

There are two schools of thought regarding the separation of their two languages by bilingual children. There are those who think they go through an initial mixed stage and combine the two languages into one unified system and there are those who believe that they keep both languages separate from the moment they start talking.

It is worth noting that this question does not seem to worry bilingual children unduly. However, the issue is a very important one for linguists and psychologists, if only because it prevents them from labelling what the children produce with any degree of certainty. In particular, one simply cannot talk about the *interference* of one language with another if there is no evidence that there are two separate systems. For example, if a three-year-old English / Swedish child says: '*Det är en* snowman' it can be taken as clear evidence that *either* the child produces mixed utterances which reflect her inability to separate the two languages *or* that the child has two distinct systems, since the correct word order is preserved (there are no unnecessary words, for example, '*Det är en* a snowman') and, most important of all, the accentuation and pronunciation is correct: '*det är en*' is pronounced with a Swedish accent, 'snowman' with an English accent. The Swedish part of the utterance follows the rules of Swedish, the English part follows the rules of English. The fact that the utterance itself is mixed can be explained in a number of other ways, the most likely being that the child hears such mixed utterances in its environment. Certainly, such utterances are said to be typical of children who are themselves exposed to mixed utterances.

This, it must be admitted, is a pretty unsatisfactory state of affairs for the psycholinguist, but gradually, researchers get to understand more and more. For example, research in experimental phonetics on French / English primary bilinguals has shown that there are subtle interactions between the sound systems of their languages (Watson 2002). In other

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This is the stage where some children rigidly associate the languages with particular people. Hildegard, Leopold's daughter, asked her English-speaking mother: 'Mother, do all fathers speak German?' We would suggest that two related things are happening here: the first is that the child is beginning to map out her world socially – who speaks what language to whom. Here is an example: Katja (Swedish / English / French, 5 yrs) has just been collected from her French nursery school: 'Daddy, do my friends all speak English when they get home?'. Secondly, the child is probably attempting to reduce the effort involved in selecting the right words and structures. However, this tendency to label people according to their language decreases as the child becomes more confident in her use of the two languages.

Some children have a tendency to overgeneralise certain rules in order to help themselves keep the two languages separate. Philip (English / French, 6 yrs) has noticed that most adjectives in French go after the noun. He apparently wants *all* adjectives to go *before* the noun in English and *all* adjectives to be *after* the noun in French:

> GRANDFATHER: *Oui, c'est une belle maison.* ('Yes, it's a nice house.')
> PHILIP: *Non, c'est une maison belle en français.* ('No, it's a "house which is beautiful" in French.')

A few remarks are in order here:

i) First, very little is actually known about the *process of separation* which bilingual children undergo. What we do know, though, is that they eventually get there and that mixed utterances decrease in number quickly.
ii) Secondly, the various phases described above can vary tremendously in length from child to child. *It is not possible to say at what age a child will reach a particular phase.* The phases are only convenient points on a continuum. Amongst the factors that we have mentioned as playing an important part in the child's development as regards separation of the two languages are:
   - Separation of context (and persons).
   - The quantity and quality of the interactions in each language.
   - The parents' attitude to mixing.
iii) Thirdly, interference and mixing is usually kept to a minimum in bilingual children if the two languages are kept in balance and if their domains of use are clearly separated (McLaughlin, 1978).
iv) Finally, 'dominance' is not static – it cannot be. When a bilingual family moves from one country to another, the pattern of linguistic input to

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4.5 Code-switching and translation

As we have seen, the bilingual child's development is very similar to that of the monolingual child's, the only difference being that the bilingual has the extra task of distinguishing between the two languages. Directly related to this task are two skills or activities that monolinguals, by definition, can never perform: these are code-switching and translation. For example, Philip (6 yrs) speaking to his father on the phone: '*J'ai été à la piscine aujourd'hui* and I dived for the first time'.

To the outsider, especially to someone who does not speak both the languages in question, code-switching seems confused and confusing and it is very difficult to believe that not only does it follow a set of clear and detailed rules, but that it provides the bilingual with a further communicative means of great expressiveness. Code-switching is a phenomenon that is limited to bilingual situations, where bilinguals talk to other bilinguals and where they can call upon the full communicative resources of both languages. It is always meaningful.

Children soon use it in very subtle ways to express their feelings, emotions or degree of involvement in a conversation, or simply to show that in their family setting they can, if they are tired, use both languages interchangeably and still be understood.

Before we go on to look at different kinds of code-switching, let us just recall two other terms that we have already met and which must not be mistaken for code-switching. The first is *borrowing*, where a word or expression from one language is used in the other but in a 'naturalised' form, that is, it is made to conform with the rules of grammar or pronunciation of the second language. For example:

i) *Je vais faire* checker *ma voiture*. (English 'to check', for *verifier*, is given the French infinitive marker *-er* to convey: 'I'm going to have my car checked'.)
ii) *On est parti en* hovercraft (where the English word for *aéroglisseur* is pronounced *à la française*: 'ovaircraft'). ('We went by hovercraft.')

The second is *language choice*, where the speaker changes from one language to another according to the person she is speaking to. For example:

i) Philip (6 yrs), who is staying in France, wants to phone his English nanny:

> PHILIP: *Maman, quel numéro il faut faire?* ('Mum, what number should I dial?')

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switching as a sign of confusion, this seems surprising, but if it is seen instead as a complex grammatical skill it becomes much more understandable.

4.6 A 'born translator'?

In this section we will *not* be talking about translating and interpreting as professions. You will find a brief discussion of that topic under *Interpreting and translating* in Part III. Here, we will be discussing 'natural' translation and interpretation in childhood; something bilingual children do from the moment they are able to use both languages independently. Indeed, Harris and Sherwood (1978) go so far as talking of 'translation as an innate skill'. They point out that many children of immigrant parents have to help their parents communicate with speakers of the majority language and that they are not long in realising how much power this gives them. They report the example of the little Italian girl in Canada softening her father's angry outbursts when interpreting for him in his dealings with non-Italians:

> FATHER (to little girl, in Italian): Tell him he's a nitwit.
> LITTLE GIRL (to third party, in English): My father won't accept your offer.
> FATHER (to little girl, in Italian): Why didn't you tell him what I told you?

Similarly, a school teacher from Nanterre told one of the authors that she had eventually been forced to learn some Arabic in order to talk to her pupils' parents, because when she used the children as interpreters to tell the parents they were always late, had disastrous marks or watched too much television, she somehow never got the reactions from the parents that she would have expected!

It must not be thought, however, that translating and interpreting is limited to the children of immigrants. There are also cases like that of the solemn four-year-old American girl, Linda, seen standing on the threshold of a flat in Finland, interpreting the conversation between the local postman and her Fullbright Professor father. Children from 'mixed' families also frequently find themselves in situations where they need to translate for monolinguals from different sides of the family or for visitors to their country. (An example is given in Case Study 3.)

Although all bilingual children seem to manage to interpret reasonably well, some are better than others, as is only to be expected. Perhaps it is worth recalling that these tasks do not just require a good control of two

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