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Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-parent-one-language Approach

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 2004. Pp. xv + 220. ISBN 1-85359-714-7.

The cover blurb for this volume reads 'The 21st century guide for parents of multilingual children'. The book is indeed a sign of our times. However, I would argue, not in regard to what it has to say about bi- and multilingual education. Rather, this book is an exponent of a contemporary parenting style that has been termed 'hyper-parenting' (see, e.g. <http://www.hyper-parenting.com/start.htm>) – the unrelenting management of children's lives in pursuit of child success as a measure of parental achievement. Alongside classical music in the womb, swimming for newborns and toddler maths, bilingualism has definitely joined the markers of parental success. Childhood bilingualism is hip, a potential that must be tapped – no questions asked. Indeed, when Harding and Riley (1986) published the first edition of their '20th century' (my term) handbook for the bilingual family almost 20 years ago, they included a chapter on how to reach a decision as to whether parents would want to raise their children bilingually or not. And they did remember to remind their readers that 'the child's happiness comes first' (Harding & Riley, 1986: 80). Tellingly, there is no such chapter or reminder in Barron-Hauwaert's text. Not raising children bilingually is unimaginable from the first page to the last: 'the *only* way to raise a child [is] with two languages' (p. ix; emphasis in the original); 'you realise that this [= bilingually; IP] was in fact the only way to raise the children' (p. 197).

Thus, the volume is yet another parents' guide on how to raise bi- or multilingual children. As such it targets the same readership as, for instance, Cunningham-Andersson and Andersson (1999), Harding-Esch and Riley (2003) or Tokuhama-Espinosa (2001), namely parents, or parents-to-be, who wish to raise their children bilingually in a monolingual society. Like many other titles in the 'advice genre', all these titles offer a mix of literature review, more or less systematically conducted research, and case study reports. The present volume is no exception, but is slightly different from most of the other titles in that it focuses on one single parental strategy only, namely 'one-

parent-one-language' or OPOL. The book draws heavily on two research projects conducted by the author: a questionnaire study of 93 couples who are raising their children bilingually using the OPOL strategy, and another one of 10 couples who are raising their children trilingually. There are eight chapters, which focus on different age groups and different family contexts. Chapter 1 traces the emergence of the OPOL approach in the late 19th century, reviews the main diary studies in the field (Ronjat, Leopold, Taeschner etc.) and discusses the place of 'language mixing' in an OPOL family. Chapter 2 is devoted to the first three years of a bilingual child's language development, while Chapter 3 continues into the school years, and discusses culture learning, in addition to language learning. Chapter 4 deals with language choice in family situations (as opposed to parent-child interaction), with language choice in the extended family, between siblings and with 'the outside world and visitors'. The difference between parental expectations of bilingual family life and 'the reality' (e.g. feelings of isolation, one-parent families or speech problems) are explored in Chapter 5. Chapter 6 moves to multilingual families and the education of trilingual children. Chapter 7 looks at parental strategies other than OPOL, and Chapter 8 summarises the discussion by providing advice for 'the 21st century'.

This book will be of interest to parents or parents-to-be who (a) do not have a background in linguistics and/or bilingualism; (b) who have made up their minds that they want to raise their children bilingually; (c) who have been raised with and reside in a predominantly monolingual society; 54 out of the 93 couples who participated in the questionnaire study reside in the UK or USA or another English-speaking country; (d) who speak English and another major world language; most of the case studies refer to French, German and Japanese; (e) who regard the provision of language education as part of contemporary parenting, and particularly mothering; (f) who are not fussy about the accuracy of a text; e.g. the language combination of Charlotte Hoffmann's children is variously given as 'German/Italian/English' (p. 32), 'German/Danish/English' (p. 92) and, correctly (Hoffmann, 1985), 'German/Spanish/English' (p. 142); (g) who do not mind a bumpy read due to a complete lack of proofreading; and, most importantly, (h) who are happy to view 'a positive attitude' as the most crucial aspect of their family and personal lives, and who do not object to receiving advice on such matters in what Cronin (2003: 2) has called 'a kind of neo-corporate Teflon-speak with [...] its unrelenting narrative of success'.

When I submitted the above review, Aneta Pavlenko asked me which books for and about bilingual families I would like to see instead of the 'advice genre'. To begin with, it is important to acknowledge that 'bilingual families' as such do not exist and their situations differ due to many different factors such as their language combinations, their country of residence, their lifestyle choices, etc. Therefore, I would like to see family ethnographies that pay careful attention to the context and the ways in which ideologies about the family and about parenting structure bilingualism. Okita's (2002) critical ethnography of the parenting practices of Japanese mothers in the UK is an excellent example of such work (see my review in this journal, 6 (2), 149-153, for further details). Okita argues convincingly that there is a price to pay for

childhood bilingualism. In her study it is paid by the mothers for whom language education becomes another form of 'invisible work', similarly to housework, kin-keeping and the like. Another study (Chang, 2004) shows that, in a different context, namely the English childcare industry in Taiwan, the price is paid by the children, who find themselves in a no-win situation. As long as their English is not 'perfect', the pressure to perform is the bane of their existence, but if they become too much like their American caregivers, for instance in their emotional expression, they are rejected for not being Chinese enough.

A second avenue for future work is with adults who were brought up bilingually and/or with their parents – currently the literature is skewed very much towards young children. Fries (1998), for instance, provides a fascinating first-person account by an American mother who raised her children bilingually in France. Her account is permeated with a deep sense of disappointment despite the fact she did all the 'right' things and her children are highly proficient bilinguals. Some of the case studies in my own work with English- and German-speaking couples (Piller, 2002a) also suggest that the quest for 'perfectly balanced' bilingual children can lead to disappointment on the part of the parents and a sense of failure on the part of the children.

Thirdly, we need more longitudinal work that follows the language-learning histories of both early and late bilinguals. An important rationale for raising children bilingually in the family is the belief that young children are better language learners. This belief is increasingly being questioned in research (e.g. Marinova-Todd *et al.*, 2000). While there is good evidence that late bilinguals can reach high proficiency levels (e.g. Birdsong, 1992; Bongaerts, 1999; Piller, 2002b), there is significantly less literature on the proficiency outcomes of early bilinguals. Anecdotal evidence however clearly shows that their proficiency is as varied as that of late bilinguals.

Finally, the advice genre aims to intervene in the way bilingual parents raise their children. I believe that advocacy is important and we actually need more writing on bilingualism that aims to make a difference. As a bilingualism researcher, a late bilingual, a partner in a bilingual couple and the mother of an early bilingual, I am wary of parenting responses that are essentially private. Even if neoliberalists around the world would have us think so, there is nothing private about family organisation. The way we organise our private lives continues to be political. I hate to see 'bilingualism' as yet another argument why a stay-at-home mom is best. Of course Barron-Hauwaert, like other writers in the genre, offers suggestions on how to combine motherhood and work in the bilingual family: hire an au-pair or nanny with a non-community language background, take your child on frequent trips to your country of origin, etc. However, it is precisely these private responses by those who can afford it that let politicians and policy makers off the hook to provide high-quality (bilingual) education for all. One of the good things about growing up in West Germany in the 1970s and 1980s was that it was possible for a working-class girl like myself to become bi- (no, make that multi-)lingual in and through the public school system. Sadly, if I want the same for my daughter in the first decade of the 21st century in Australia, I will have to provide her with a private education. Rather than – possibly – ensuring the

bilingualism of one child by stressing OPOL, it seems much more important to me to join the fight for public education and democratic access (e.g. <http://www.ecoledemocratique.org>).

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Becoming Biliterate: A Study of Two-way Bilingual Immersion Education

Bertha Pérez. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2004. Pp. xxviii + 230. ISBN 0-8058-4678-6 (hbk): \$69.95.

Bilingual education has become a highly political issue in the USA. Proponents and opponents each defend their position and attack the other fiercely, often referring to the same statistics but giving them diametrically opposite interpretations. What has always puzzled me about this debate is the assumed primacy of English acquisition by both camps. It is no surprise that opponents of bilingual education take it as their shared belief that the most important goal for English language learners (ELLs) is to learn English. But some