



Multilingual Families

## Case Studies Personal Portraits

Families, Kindergartens and Schools  
Sharing Their Experiences With Multilingualism

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WHO ARE THE WINNERS IN OUR EXPATRIATION? OUR SONS.  
THEY ARE LEARNING NEW LANGUAGES, THEY HAVE FRIENDS FROM EVERYWHERE, THEY BECOME OPEN-MINDED.  
OUR CHILDREN ARE MULTILINGUAL AND HAPPY

(Our Children are Multilingual and Happy. Experience from Expats and a Multilingual Family)

## PERSONAL PORTRAITS

### Families, Kindergartens and Schools Sharing Their Experiences with Multilingualism

#### Dear Reader,

The biographical portraits in this brochure represent a varied collection of experiences, examples and best practices on dealing with multilingualism in the home and education. Parents, young people, kindergartens and schools share their experiences, ideas, problems and tips with being multilingual, teaching languages and raising children multilingually.

The biographical portraits are a source of inspiration and reading pleasure for teachers and parents. They differ in form, length and layout. Some portraits are interviews, others are articles and some are statements. Most portraits include photos. The portraits show the diversity of multilingualism and the many possible ways for every person, every family, kindergarten and school to practice and live with multilingualism in the home and in education.

The quotation above expresses a mothers' view of her children growing up in an international, multilingual

and multicultural environment. It reflects how migration and multilingualism contribute to an open mind to people, languages and cultures and that cultural and linguistic diversity is not only natural and normal, but also a treasure for individuals and society.

To find out more about the project *Multilingual Families* or to download this and other of the projects' resources please see our website.

Website:

[HTTP://WWW.MULTILINGUAL-FAMILIES.EU](http://www.multilingual-families.eu)

Facebook:

[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/MULTILINGUAL.FAMILIES](https://www.facebook.com/multilingual.families)

Enjoy!

The *Multilingual Families* project team

My son Marko is five and was born in a bilingual family. I am Czech and his mother comes from Macedonia. Both Czech and Macedonian are Slavic languages, they are similar in basic vocabulary, but they differ in grammar. Therefore it was quite easy to distinguish whether Marko uses Macedonian or Czech at the beginning. His first words such as *mommy*, *granny*, and *daddy* are identical in both languages. We live in the Czech Republic, and from the beginning he was surrounded with Czech. I spoke with him only in Czech, his mother only in Macedonian. Before he started to attend a kindergarten, he used both languages at the same level.

The situation began to change with his first visits to Macedonia. He was eight month old when he was in Macedonia for the first time. From that moment we went to Macedonia as often as it was time and financially, feasible.

From the beginning he did not distinguish either language; they were an equivalent means of communication for him. However, he never made a mistake with which language to use when communicating with Czechs or Macedonians. Before he was three years old, he was able to express himself equally in both languages. Only rarely he could not remember the right words. For example he wanted me to bring him a plate, but because we just got back from Macedonia he could not think of the right Czech word. Pausing and thinking he used the Macedonian word "činija" and waited for my reaction and whether he would really get the plate. As he made more complicated sentences, the more he got into situations when he had to compensate for his shortcomings of grammar with alternate means. He created Czech words with Macedonian endings, or vice versa. Similarly, he formed Czech phrases when translating into Macedonian did not make sense or were grammatically wrong. In such cases, he was systematically led to correct his mistake. This was a part of his education which he never rejected, he enjoyed learning how to say it correctly. To instructions such as: *Say it in Czech/ in Macedonian correctly*, he always responded very positively. It was a sharp contrast to instructions,

like: *Clean up your toys*. ☺ When he was three, he could not translate from one language to another. I constantly tested whether, for example, he would respond to the question *how to say hello* in Macedonian. At first, he did not want or could not answer. However, when he was three years old, he sat on my lap and the Macedonian Grandpa was sitting opposite. I said to Marko in Czech: *Tell Grandpa we were walking and we saw sheep and we gave them grass*. Marko turned and said in Macedonian exactly what I had told him. He has never talked to me in Macedonian and to his mother in Czech. When I or his mother used another language, he started laughing and said: *Talk to me in Czech/in Macedonian!*



The situation began to change when Marko started to attend a kindergarten and when he started to hear fairy tales. The vast majority of the fairy tales he has listened to have been in Czech. He has had exclusively Czech friends. He gradually began to miss words in Macedonian and mispronounced words with Macedonian endings, using them in the nominative (Macedonian does not have cases), or used Macedonian syntax."

Written by: Radim Ošmera, May 2014  
Photos: Radim Ošmera

## ANDREA SPRINGER EXPERIENCES OF A GERMAN MOTHER IN CASTILE

Our family consists of a German mother and a Spanish father. We live in a small village located in the interior of the country and mainly in a Spanish environment. They learn some English at the nursery, but no German. When I was pregnant with my first child, I barely spoke German and the idea of raising him bilingual was always there but not very defined. When he was born it was hard to speak in German, because I used it only in a few phone calls with my family.



I bought some CDs, books and DVDs in German to use when he grew up. I introduced him my culture from an early age using songs and nursery rhymes in German. We also went to see my family three times during his first year of life. The moment I realized my son understood me it was easier to talk to him in German, I found that the best time to use it was when we were alone with no Spanish people around. When he began to speak, it was in Spanish, it is his main language, although he understands German perfectly. Sometimes the communication with his maternal grandparents is difficult, because he speaks in Spanish, but he manages to communicate and knows some German words and songs. The day I finally got him to sing in German, I almost burst into tears. Today he is three years and five months, and I'm sure he understands me perfectly. When he answers in German, even when it's in fits and starts, I show him how happy it makes me.

Now I'm pregnant again and I'm sure the baby will be born with an advantage over his brother, because we talk in German more and more every day and watch cartoons and read stories.

I show German culture to my son with enthusiasm, because I really miss it. I normally use books and stories. We celebrate Advent and wait for St. Nicholas. We leave our tidy shoes so he will give us some candy. We open every day a window of the advent calendar to welcome Christmas and to make the waiting time more bearable.

We prepare colorful Easter eggs and we look for Easter bunnies and small gifts on Easter Sunday. When it's possible we try to spend some of these holidays in Germany. This way he can live with the traditional festivities of Germany.

Für die Zukunft wünsche ich mir, dass mein Kind sich auf Deutsch verständigen kann und dass das Baby diese Sprache schon sehr früh zu schätzen lernt. Wahrscheinlich wird es viel mehr Spaß machen, weil wir dann zu dritt sind.



Finally, I will include some of the linguistic creations of my son. Sometimes Spanish is not as straightforward as German. For example, he says "rutschar" which is the German verb "rutschen" with the Spanish ending to mean "jump off the slide". He also says "espuckar" which is a phonetic adaptation of the German verb "spucken" (spit).

Written by: Andrea Springer, May 2014  
Photos: Andrea Springer

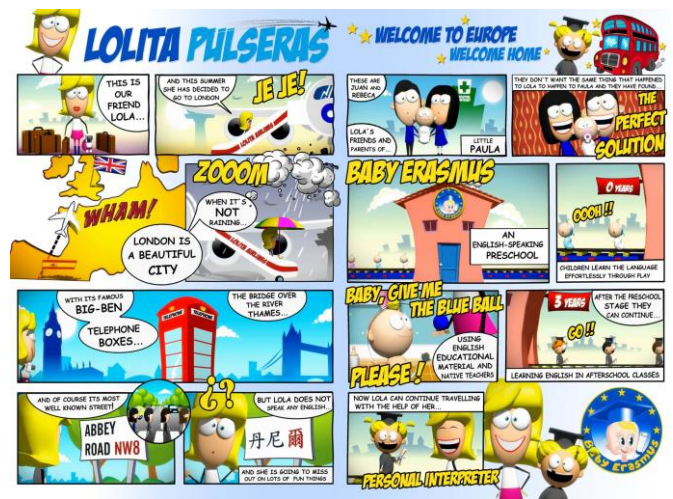
BILINGUALISM IN A MONOLINGUAL FAMILY. HOW TO DO THAT?

My name is Juan Ruiz and I am the father of Paula and Javier (4 years and 1 year respectively). My wife and I lived in several European countries before we were married and had our children. We could see how the children of multicultural couples could speak several languages in cities like Brussels. These children were only 6 and had learned the languages without even realizing.



We are Spanish and finally we ended up living in our country. But we also wanted to give our children the opportunity to be multilingual just as the children of our friends in Brussels. However, we both have the same mother tongue and live in Spain, so it could be difficult for our children to be bilingual. This is the reason why we launched Baby Erasmus, a Pre-school Education Center in English with qualified native teachers and all teaching materials in that language. The objective of this project is that when our children cross the center's door they can travel to another country with a different language and culture. It would be like taking our children to nursery school in London every day. This way our children would have a total immersion in the language and culture of a different country and would acquire a second language naturally, for example by using games.

We started up this project ten months after the birth of Paula (September 2010) and today Paula and all her 4-year-old mates are bilingual Spanish-English. It is completely natural for them to communicate in the two languages they live with every day, since they were born. They understand the two languages and cultures as their own and they identify themselves with both of them but in different ways. Javier is one year old and babbles his first words in Spanish and English without knowing that they belong to two different languages, but he begins to understand both when his teachers or parents show him. He has the advantage that his sister Paula is his home tutor for both languages and she is also the best person for him to learn the language from while playing.



We wanted to share our story because we are convinced that it's also possible to raise bilingual children within monolingual families. In many cities, there are British or bilingual schools that can help us with this task although parents don't speak other languages. However, I do think that the support and involvement at home is also essential and so we follow the instructions the teachers of our children give us to continue the work they perform. These instructions will be a great educational advantage for them in the future.

Written by: Juan Ruiz Subirán,  
 director of Baby Erasmus [HTTP://WWW.BABYERASMUS.ES/](http://www.babyerasmus.es/)  
 Mai 2014  
 Photos: Juan Ruiz Subirán

Emil is half Danish and half Polish. The situation is even more complicated as we live in London where Emil goes to kindergarten and where the English language is used. I also communicate with my husband in English. From the very beginning I have spoken to Emil in Polish and I only used English occasionally when we were accompanied by people who couldn't speak Polish. During the routine check for two-year-olds I was informed that Emil was a little behind with speaking. As a result we started sessions with a speech therapist. I noticed that I started speaking English to Emil more often than Polish. Now Emil is 2 years and 8 months old and he started speaking, but only in English. When I ask him in Polish: "Where are you?" Emil answers: "Kitchen" ;-). He understands Polish perfectly well but gives answers in English. I read books to him in Polish but he prefers the ones in English. I'm still trying to make him interested in Polish books. Interestingly enough, he loves Polish songs and poems. His favourites are: "Sroczka kaszkę warzyła...", "Chodzi lisek koło drogi..." and "Panie Janie" (Brother John). This song is an interesting case as there are many language versions. Also in Danish. We sing it with my husband, me – in Polish, him – in Danish. For some reason Emil prefers singing the song in Danish although he knows it in both versions. Sometimes when he wakes us up in the morning he comes to me and sings the song in Polish, then he comes to my husband and sings it in Danish.

To expand Emil's vocabulary (Danish, Polish and English), my husband and I often use words and phrases in our native languages. For example when we are waiting for the lift, we say: "We are waiting for the lift". Then I repeat this sentence in Polish and my husband – in Danish, stressing the word: „lift". Now Emil uses this word interchangeably and often puts it in an English sentence.

We try to make the learning process as natural as possible, we do not plan which vocabulary we want Emil to know. We agreed a long time ago that in some situations we would say the sentence or a word in English and then we would repeat it in our native languages. Everything is spontaneous, we use everyday situations: travelling by tube, walking in the park, cleaning the flat, going to a playground or a shop. Shops are a great place for such games. There are so many products and people and, as a result – a lot of words that the child can get to know. It is also very helpful in learning verbs that Emil avoids using in a sentence. We teach him that the product is **put into** the basket, we **put back** on the shelf something we don't need, we **add** more products, we **wait** in the queue,

we **ask** the shop assistant for help, we **take out** our products at the checkout, we do not **run around** the shop, we **pass** people **by**, we **look for** the chosen product, we **find** the product, we **pay for** our shopping, we **leave** the shop. Sometimes one of us wanders off and then Emil asks where his mum or dad is. If this is my husband who wanders off, I explain to Emil in Polish that his dad went to look for milk and we should go and look for him. When we find him, my husband says in Danish e.g.: „Oh! You've found me. I went to fetch milk". So we try to teach Emil languages in a natural way.



As Emil still attends sessions with a speech therapist because of his little lag in speaking, we also draw some ideas on teaching languages from his classes. The basic rule is to repeat words a few times. Sometimes we repeat them several dozens of times, if needed. The effects are noticeable, especially in case of one word that irritated me when Emil used it. This word is "lift" which for some reason he called: "ayey". Despite the fact that we live in a building with a lift and we use it at least twice a day, when Emil ran in its direction, he would always shout his "ayey". Two weeks ago he finally started using the words: "winda" and "lift" interchangeably. He doesn't want to say the word in Danish because it's long and difficult to pronounce. A few months of our constant correcting him finally brought about the effect.

We are going to continue teaching our son languages by applying everyday situations, reading books and singing songs in our native languages. We think that these are the simplest and most effective methods we know. We hope that in the near future Emil will speak fluently three languages.

Written by: Agnieszka Wronko, April 2014  
Photos: Agnieszka Wronko

I am 100% Polish, my husband is Sicilian (sic!) born and brought up in Germany; we are the parents of 8-year-old twin sisters – Zosia (Sofia) and Łucja (Lucia). In our home one can hear three languages: Italian, Polish and German (the last one mainly on TV); our girls are bilingual: they speak Polish and Italian (my husband feels Sicilian and he didn't teach our children German).



Until the girls were over three years old, they were mainly taken care of by me (I gave up professional work to raise them), so they heard mainly the Polish language. From the first moments of their lives I talked to them only in Polish – it was completely normal and natural for me! Even now I read to them only in Polish. Of course, my husband and members of his family, that stay in touch with us, always talk to Zosia and Łucja in Italian (grandparents sometimes in the Sicilian dialect, but that is a different story). The girls started speaking very late (around their third birthday), but they had their own way of communicating with each other – neither Italian nor Polish – which they used to “chat”.

And they understood both languages perfectly well when we spoke to them giving some commands. When they started speaking, at first the Polish language dominated; then they gradually started speaking Italian. When they were over 3 years old they started going to an Italian kindergarten. I told their nursery teacher that my girls understand Italian but they speak Polish better. They never had any problems with their peers or carers as they learnt Italian very quickly. Sometimes when I took them from their kindergarten, their nursery teachers would tell me know that the girls argued with each other but "We have no idea what it was about because they were arguing in Polish!". This pattern in Zosia and Łucja's behaviour hasn't changed so far. With peers from kindergarten or school they speak Italian, to each other they speak Polish. I taught them this "tactics". I explained that Polish was "our" language; if they have any "secrets" they don't want their friends to know, they should speak Polish so that nobody can understand them!

The first funny situations related to their bilingual upbringing took place when the children were about 3 years old. At that time their dominant language was Polish; sometimes the girls tried to tell their dad a story but they were lost for words in Italian so they "created" them, adding Italian endings to Polish words. During our Christmas stay in Poland Zosia and Łucja shouted happily to their dad: "prezento, prezento!" – they added Italian ending "o" to the Polish word "prezent" because that is how masculine nouns in Italian most often end. Later while talking to me they started adding Polish endings to Italian words. When they wanted me to swing them, they said: "pogiraj nas" – from Italian: "girare". They still create such language surprises.

We try to visit Poland twice a year (in summer and in winter) but sometimes 7 or 8 months pass before we visit the country. When Zosia and Łucja were almost 4, after such a long absence in Poland (and after their first year in kindergarten when they were constantly exposed to Italian), we went for our first walk around the city my girls shouted: "Mum, everyone here speaks Polish!"



For a very long time Zosia and Łucja thought I didn't speak Italian because I talked to them only in Polish even when we were in a group of Italians. They didn't notice at all that I spoke Italian to my husband or other people. For them mum = only the Polish language, therefore they often played the role of translators! When my husband or parents-in-law talked to them and I was around, they turned to me and said: "Dad told us...", "The Italian grandma said...", "Italian grandpa asked..." etc. I didn't tell them the truth because I thought that it was a good exercise for them. Unfortunately, during our holiday stay in my flat in Poland (it must have been just before their fifth birthday because they had already knew the alphabet), I started clearing up my old school notebooks; of course the girls immediately took interest in what I was doing. In the pile of notebooks they found the ones from my Italian language course and were shocked or even outraged that "I cheated them" they both shouted "You know Italian???!!" Unfortunately, now after this "discovery" they sometimes talk to me in Italian. But I worked out this method: even when helping my children with their homework, I explain some things in Polish or I ask them to translate an Italian text into Polish. I firmly demand that they talk to me in Polish only.

Some funny situations that have taken place were related not that much to bilingualism, but to living in two cultures/traditions. I'm trying to instil some elements of Polish culture into them – for a few years we have been celebrating 11th November as "Poland's birthday" – there is a cake with candles, white and red balloons, etc. Once my girls asked their dad for presents on 11.11. as they explained: "We are half-Polish, half-Italian so we should get a present on the occasion of Poland's birthday! And we should also get a present on the occasion of Italy's birthday!". Some other time when we were in Poland on 6th December the girls got little presents "from St. Nicholas"; from then on we celebrate this customs also here (in Italy children are not given gifts on 6th December but on 6th January – the Epiphany; and they are brought by La Befana, a witch), but I always ask the girls not to boast at school that Saint Nicholas remembers about them also in Sicily. This is one of our little home secrets; and La Befana must also come to Poland when we spend the time at our Polish grandma's house!

Last but not least: Zosia and Łucja took a liking to some Polish foods; they especially love *kabanos* sausages – we often bring big supplies of *kabanos* from Poland. Only... dad can't eat them, because he does not speak Polish! One evening my husband said "Dobranoc" instead of Italian "Buona Notte" – the girls ran to me to the kitchen shouting: "Mum, mum! You can give dad some *kabanos* because he started speaking Polish! "

There are many challenges ahead of me and I have to put a lot of effort in keeping my children speaking Polish, but I am doing my best!"

Written by: Helena Kuczyńska, May 2014

Photos: Helena Kuczyńska

## “CHILDREN CANNOT ALWAYS DECIDE ON THEIR LANGUAGES BUT AT SOME POINT THEY SHOULD HAVE A SAY”

**Dennis (17 years, office clerk with the City of Vienna) and David (21 years, free lance IT-trainer at VHS Penzing) were both born in Vienna. In the logic of the Vienna office of statistics they have a migrational background. Their mother was also born in Vienna; their father was born in Astray Turkey. He came to Vienna as a young boy. The brothers grew up in a multilingual family. They talk about what this means for them and how they live and experience multilingualism, in an interview conducted in a Viennese Bowling Centre in the 17th district of Vienna.**



Photo by Rudi Vancura/VHS Wien

### Which languages did you grow up with?

**Dennis:** Austrian (smiles) or rather...

**David:** ...German...

**Dennis:** Yes, German. I speak better Turkish than him (looks at his brother). Not well enough to be able to work in Turkey, but I could survive, do the shopping or order something at a restaurant.

**David:** I regret that we did not speak Turkish at home. Our grandfather and their relatives who speak German because of their migrational biographies always spoke German to us, even if it was not perfect. A conversation, such as this now, was not possible, but a little bit of small talk was okay.

**Dennis:** But Turkish was also present, somehow we were always surrounded by Turkish. For example: I have a cousin who is about my age and I played football with him and stayed overnight at his place. His mother did not speak German, so she spoke Turkish with me. I asked my daddy „ what does that means, what did she want so say? “, so I could understand something. And my understanding grew slowly.

**David:** I had Turkish at elementary school. When the others had religious instruction I had Turkish first language lessons. My classmates developed their existing language skills and I learned the basics. Today I understand a bit with help from the context. But it is more guessing than knowing. It is really a pity. We had the chance to speak Turkish right from the beginning that would have been cool. Writing is not so important, but speaking would be great...

**Dennis:** At secondary school I learned French, I had English of course and later on at vocational school I learned Turkish. I have asked our father a million times why he did not teach us Turkish. I think he was not convinced, well my parents were not convinced that speaking Turkish was a good idea, I think. They decided that together, as they did with everything. But you have to cherish your languages, speak it to the children from the beginning and onwards, that is a lot of work and takes time. Perhaps my dad did not have enough time as he was working a lot when we were children.

**David:** I do seem to remember that daddy later tried so speak Turkish with me, when I was between the ages of 12 and 16, and then I did not want to, I was embarrassed. I also think it would be much easier to come into contact with a language much earlier. I had a choice whether I wanted to speak Turkish, but perhaps a 13 year old cannot decide on one's own. But you cannot force a child...

**Dennis:** Children cannot decide right from the beginning; neither with languages nor with other things such as food and sports. That is the parents' job; they have to make offers and support the children. You can involve children in the decisions, but in the beginning it is the parents who decide. The children's choice comes later, they cannot also decide against something. For example if they are not interested.

**David:** We always had a choice. Also with other things, we were never pressed into a certain scheme and I found this very nice.



### What does your everyday routine look like? Which languages do you use in private and at work?

**Dennis:** At work there are many languages and German to negotiate and to examine rent contracts. This is a service that many multilingual tenants make use of. Also many Serbian and Turkish speaking people. I was asked right at the beginning, when I started my job, whether I could speak other languages than German, and whether I spoke Turkish. English is useful, but less so. My employer explicitly asked about my other languages.

**David:** I speak German, of course, but I also need a lot of English. Especially when programming. We also speak English in our team of developers and with graphic artists. It has become just normal, I also use English in private contexts, with other students who are passing by or with friends from Italy. My friends mainly speak German, also when they come from different countries and many have what you call a migrational background. I had French at school but I do not need it at all, or Turkish.

**Dennis:** I mainly speak German with my friends, only occasionally bits in other languages. All my peers speak German. But all of sudden a funny word in Serbian pops up, then one in Turkish, then we creatively mix languages. When two speak with each other, for example two of my Turkish friends, then they speak Turkish.

### Have you ever thought about learning Turkish now that you are adults?

**Dennis:** When I ask daddy why he did not teach me Turkish he says „you can always learn it now“. But I cannot make myself do it and I do not have the time: there is football, school, the driver's licence... As a child I would have been totally motivated, it would have helped me and it would have been so much easier, but now...

**David:** You can take the time. But I am lacking motivation. Learning my second foreign language, French, was a total catastrophe. And now I learn Turkish. We would have had a much better chance through our contact to the languages through the native speakers in our surroundings, much better than other people with no Turkish relatives. I could ask friends and family only to speak Turkish with me. But I wouldn't know why. I do not think Turkish is a nice or beautiful language and I will never need it for my job. And I am not talented for languages. Well I am good in English and German but that is enough of a challenge. I find it hard to learn a new language. If I can use it and need it I want to be able to do so perfectly. Then I really have a go.

**Dennis:** I also do not like learning languages. And the fact that Turkish as an agglutinative language kills me. When we are in Turkey and I want to order something I ask „Daddy what is this called“ and I go and say exactly what he told me. But I only know the basic word and then they tell me „Yes, but if you add THIS, the word means something totally different“. That does not make sense to me and makes it so difficult to learn Turkish systematically. On the other hand I love to play with languages, to use sentences and parts of sentences and integrate them into conversations. Just for a laugh. I know a lot of Serbian, and Turkish bits of Arabic. Whenever I meet somebody I try to elaborate this; and if I can answer in Turkish – hey presto. Then they see that I want to do it and that I am interested. For example at the club, there are many Turks and they say, „your dad is Turkish, and so are you!“ And then they start speaking Turkish with me, and if I can I answer they say “You see, you are Turkish“. That produces a different atmosphere. But sometimes I hate it to be categorized (David agrees).

### Do these expectations produce pressure on you?

**Dennis:** It is sometimes really strange because I should be some kind of link between “cultures”. As my dad is Turkish some people expect me to know all of the Turkish culture, or all the pop stars and that I know the Quran by heart, – but do you know everything about Christendom and Austria? Well I do not. I just know my mother and my father grew up in a different way. And I then say, “my dad is Turkish, but that does not mean that I know everything about Turkey. Go and ask somebody else.” When the word Turkey is mentioned at school everybody turn round and asks me “Is it really like this in Turkey?” Well, first, I am only half a Turk and second, I do not speak the language and third, I do not belong to this religion... I just want to say: “I do not know”. You are automatically put in a box. I cannot speak for every other human being, at the same time it is nice and it is my life. I cannot imagine having two Austrian parents. I like the Turkish culture, the food, the cities...



Photo by Rudi Vancura/VHS Wien

### What would you recommend others in terms of multilingualism, which experiences would you like to pass on?

**Dennis:** You first have to think what you want to teach your child, what is useful and feasible. And then you have to try to go for that aim consistently. Not just go half way and then stop; I would not want to do that to my child. Languages are very important these days.

You should concentrate on the language of the place you live in. If somebody speaks Turkish better than German but lives in Austria that is just impractical. Furthermore you should never overburden your children. A child should be a child and play or learn in a playful way. To include a language into the family because some relatives use it is also a good argument for multilingual education.

**David:** I agree with Dennis, you should in any case teach the mother tongue and not just so so, but really well. Right from the beginning whether the children wants it or not. Later on the children can always say “I could, but I do not want to speak it”. At least they learned the language, they understand and can articulate themselves. It means a lot of effort, time and nerves, of course, to educate children multilingually. But that is the way it is. I think we would have profited a lot from that.

### What are the advantages of multilingualism from your perspective?

**David:** Multilingualism has its advantages in your job but also in your social life. It makes you closer to your family and to be able to exchange ideas – and not just superficially. To really learn something from other people, when they ask you. Language is the key to other people, and thus you get to know other people better. An additional advantage is that you can better orient yourself in a country. If you want to work or even live there. Languages only have advantages. That’s how I see it.

**Dennis:** I could follow more conversations, barter at the market, and arrange things with daddy when Mum do not agree. These are perhaps no advantages, but my personal things. I would really love to “have my Turkish” and I think I would use it quite often. Also at the football club I could communicate with the Turks who came here later. People are totally different if you can talk to them in their mother tongue. At the Club that would really be an advantage for me and for them of course, if someone talked to them in a language they know well. I could deepen my relationships, make new contacts and widen my social scope. Languages help, no matter whether it is English or Arabic. It can always happen that you can use these languages. Multilingualism only has advantages.

Interview conducted by Lo Hufnagl, March 2014

The interview was published in the VHS Magazine Forum in a shortened version and transcribed for the project „multilingual families“.

Photos: Rudi Vancura, VHS Wien

Anna is bilingual. She has Bulgarian roots but grew up in Germany with Bulgarian as her family language and German as the majority language. “At home we were speaking Bulgarian. At school and with friends I was speaking German. That was a perfect combination! Today I am absolutely fluent in both languages”, she says. Now Anna has a daughter herself, Maya 5 years, who is raised bilingually. In the following portrait Anna tells us about her private and professional experiences with bi- and multilingualism. Anna is not only from a bilingual family, she also works professionally with multilingual children and multilingualism in kindergartens and schools.

**MF: Anna, what do you find unique about your own bilingual upbringing?**

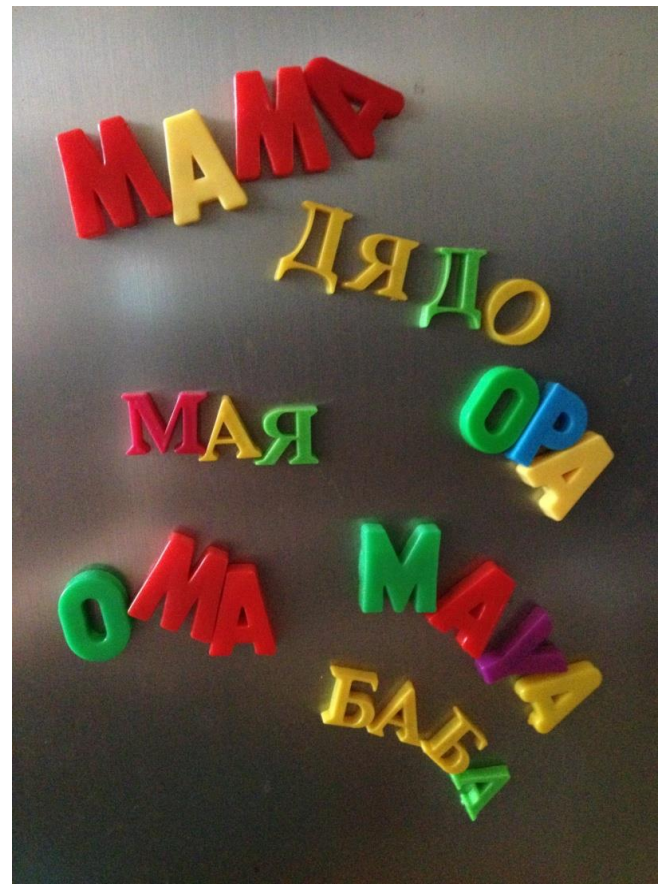
**Anna:** To me it is astonishing how deeply languages are connected with other learning experiences and emotional aspects in life. To me numbers and language are closely connected. When I was a child my Bulgarian grandmother taught me basic mathematics – how to count and the multiplication table. When I calculate today I calculate in Bulgarian (I think the calculation in Bulgarian) and translate it into German afterwards. It is exactly the same with phone numbers, which I learned in Bulgarian. To reproduce them directly in German is difficult. I have to interpolate an intermediate step and note the numbers on a sheet of paper and then translate them into German.

I have a memory for both languages, which are connected to different aspects of life. My private life – everything with family and emotions – is Bulgarian, while work and education are German.

**MF: You raise your daughter bilingually in Bulgarian and German, like you grew up yourself.**

**Are there any differences between your and her language learning process?**

**Anna:** My own bilingual language acquisition process was easier and more consistent compared to my daughter’s process. As a child I had a constant and stable language input in both Bulgarian and German: at home Bulgarian and at school and with friends German. My daughter has not the same steady and continuous language input in Bulgarian, due to the fact that we mix the languages and also speak German at home and sometimes in public – e.g. when shopping or playing in the court. In public it is sometimes difficult to stick to the family language, as you notice that people around pay attention to you speaking another language. Although I work with languages and multilingualism professionally it is sometimes difficult to implement the “best practice” into everyday life. My daughter understands everything in Bulgarian, but she does not speak much Bulgarian yet. In that way German is her first language.



**MF: How does your daughter handle her own bilingualism?**

**Anna:** At the moment she is in a very creative and productive stage and motivated to learn more Bulgarian. Primarily this is due to the fact that her Bulgarian speaking friends recently spent their holiday in Bulgaria and currently are one step ahead of her in their knowledge of Bulgarian. She notices that she cannot express herself as clearly as her friends. This causes her to develop her own language – with Bulgarian intonation and Bulgarian-sound-a-like vocabulary! It is brilliant and a very constructive strategy! Sometimes she asks me for Bulgarian words, but at the moment she concentrates on the language melody and intonation. It motivates her that she can practice Bulgarian with her friends, but sometimes when we speak Bulgarian at home she says “Mama, that is a bit too difficult right now, please tell me in German”. Multilingual upbringing of a child is indeed a very interesting and also individual process.

**MF: Do you have tips or experiences, which you would like to share with other parents raising their children bi- or multilingually?**

**Anna:** We have almost all our children's films in Bulgarian and we listen a lot to Bulgarian radio via the Internet. What I like very much: We have magnets with the Bulgarian and German alphabets on our fridge at home. Maya spells basic words like her own name, mum, dad, granny and grandpa with the magnets. In that way she learns the alphabets and her awareness of the differences between the languages is sharpened. She finds it interesting that her own name has four letters in German but only three in Bulgarian (the syllable "-ja" is written with one letter in Bulgarian). That is a funny and playful way for children to discover their languages, which I can recommend to other parents.

**MF: Thank you very much, Anna!**

Interview conducted by Julia Christensen, March 2014

Photos: Anna Uslowa



**Anna Arguchinskaya:** I am the mother of two children aged 4 and 9 who speak fluent Spanish, Catalan and Russian. I am also co-founder of the Russian Cultural Association "Kolobok". This association aims to teach children of Russian origin their native language and deepen their knowledge of their country of origin (or country of origin of their parents).

It is evident for me that the success depends mainly on the efforts of the parents. It's very important to keep speaking the family language and be aware that parents are, at first, the only source of knowledge. It's essential to find a community that shares the culture and language. To teach children the importance and value of the language itself. Children then know that they can use the language to communicate with other children, play and have fun.

Luckily there are many parents who want their children to be with other children from their country of origin from the age of 2 or 3. We prepare the classes for children of this age with the involvement of the parents and have a space where mothers can share their experiences.

Most 3-year-old children are able to start learning in groups – we use games to work on vocabulary building, communication skills, and basic math skills. We also have a room to practice music and develop motor skills. Specialists such as psychologists and speech therapists work side by side with these children. The main goal is to work on the pronunciation of the vowels and some consonants, the ability to distinguish different sounds, intonation, pauses, rhythm, and tone.

When they are 4 or 5 we form groups of different levels. Sometimes the difference is between children with joint learning at the school and their families and the children who only practice during the 4 hours with us and less with their parents. This is sometimes due to their parent's work schedule (or otherwise) and the gap can be really huge. We use different techniques, teaching materials and games for each group.

We use different categories, lessons and working methods for each age group (5-6, 6-7). When the children are 7, they have to take another test to continue their learning process. Children who were 3 or 4 when they began don't usually have problems to continue their learning in Russian schools. However, some children need a system called "Russian as a second language" (due to the multicultural nature of our country this system was used to teach Russian in the former Soviet republics and regions). There are also those who will continue learning Russian but as a "foreign language."

We use different techniques to get parents more involved such as theater and some festivals, (the autumn festival, New Year's with a great performance and the participation of DedMoroz, the eight of March, the Maslenitza).

Everything seemed so simple until the children are 3 and went to school. Back then we revised all the activities from the school to widen his vocabulary, before going to bed. If he didn't know a word, we translated it into Russian and the next day we included it in a story. This way he could always explain his experiences. Another compulsory "Russian" task every day was (and still is) to read a book before going to sleep. I am very lucky with his school (CEIP Baro de Viver, Barcelona). They work on projects and don't overwhelm children with homework. This way, children can voluntarily seek for information about a project in their free time. I take this opportunity to look for the information needed in Russian (encyclopedias, Internet, educational programs). In this way my child is widening his vocabulary on that topic in three languages at the same time.



So far we are very happy with the results and we hope to be able to maintain our association and learn from others!

Now I am going to explain my experience as a mother. It is already clear that I am Russian; my husband is Catalan and we live in Spain, in a neighborhood where the main language is Spanish. So far the three languages are quite balanced in every way: listening, speaking, reading and writing.

I've always wanted my children to speak Russian, my father was worried and afraid he would not be able to communicate with his grandchildren. When Sasha was 3 he used predominantly Russian. He even taught it in the Family Espai (a place within the city civic centers for children who don't go to nursery schools). Once a teacher asked me what was the meaning of "Gaduka" or if it was a game. At that time my son was thrilled with snakes and other reptiles and any piece of cord was a snake for him. Thanks to this all the children in the Espai were playing with their particular "gadukas-vipers."

As for my little daughter, education is not that difficult, because she's watching and listening to her brother using all the three languages. She's very happy the moment she hears a word in Russian in the news (a lot lately) or in films.

Obviously both my son and daughter are involved in all the activities of the association and enjoy themselves while they are there. Being a mother of trilingual children help me to choose appropriate activities and be effective with the help of other parents and professionals.

[WWW.KOLOBOKBCN.COM](http://WWW.KOLOBOKBCN.COM)

[HTTPS://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ORESHEKRAKATUK](https://WWW.FACEBOOK.COM/ORESHEKRAKATUK)

Written by: Anna Arguchinskaya, May 2014

Photos: Anna Arguchinskaya







These quotes were taken from a ESF funded development partnership (MEVIEL) [www.vhs.at/MEVIEL](http://www.vhs.at/MEVIEL) with kind permission of the partnership. The results of Multilingual Families were presented in turn at various MEVIEL meetings and were part of the discussion at the final MEVIEL conference.

„This is my resume as an expat (it's posted in [WWW.MAMEMI.COM](http://WWW.MAMEMI.COM), a website I'm working on): I am a mother and an expat. In our home, where we live together, are myself, my husband and our two sons. We live in a community with people from all over the world. It's amazing. Many languages are spoken and cultures honoured. We all do things differently but we are all the same.

This is what I want to show in the stories on this webpage. You can listen to stories from all over the world, some traditional and some original, taking you from an inventor's corner with Flynn or on an adventure with Jules.

I hope you enjoy this webpage as much as I have in creating it.”

Who are the winners in our expatriation? Our sons. They are learning new languages, they have friends from everywhere, they become open-minded. Our children are multilingual and happy.

My old son aged 7, translated a text from Angry birds T-shirt from english to Catalan:

Sentence in english: big pig has stolen my homework.

Sentence in catalan: el gran porc ha robat els meus deures.

Sentence translated by my elder son: el big porc ha robat el meu homework.

Who are the losers in our expatriation? Our parents. Grandma and grandpa miss my children. Quite often, while we're on Skype, my mum cries a little bit, as she does not have my children to take care of, to play, to laugh.

As a mum, I'm proud to be an expat. My children are growing more mature, adapted to changes.



As a person, I'm happy to know different people from all over the world. Discovering a new country, a new language, a new way of thinking. I often like to compare different words for the same meaning. I remember one day, a Japanese friend and I, were saying the animal sounds in Japanese and in Catalan: they are totally different!!!! Sometimes I discover different languages have similar words. Many Romanian words are similar to Catalan, although both languages are really different!

I recommend to live in different countries: you'll discover probably the best and the worst of both countries, yours and the new one. And this always has value.

Written by: Roser Rovira Riera, April 2014

Photos: Roser Rovira Riera

## ECOLE MATERNELLE – A BILINGUAL KINDERGARTEN IN GERMANY NATURAL SCIENCE EXPERIMENTS IN FRENCH WITH JEAN-PIERRE

Jean-Pierre and Fred are two cuddly toys with an important mission. They speak German and French with the children visiting the bilingual kindergarten *Ecole Maternelle* (Germany) and support the children in their language learning process. Fred speaks German while Jean-Pierre speaks French, which is the children’s second language. Most of the children have German as their first language.

The petals of each flower are now folded towards the center of the flower and the children carefully drop their own flower into the water. Now the children watch the flowers “bloom” – how they unfold their petals and the names become visible. Needless to say that the experiment was a success! Of course Jean-Pierre is watching too. Sometimes he also asks the children questions or tells them what to do next. The children also take care that Jean-Pierre is involved and has a good view –right next to the water bowl. Next week the children, Fabienne and Jean-Pierre are ready for new experiments.



The children watching their flowers bloom on the water. Please note Jean-Pierre at the bottom of the photo

Once a week Jean-Pierre practices natural science with the children and the French speaking kindergarten teacher, Fabienne. All activities with Fabienne and Jean-Pierre are in French. The “natural science research” combines language learning with the discovery of small miracles of nature. During the experiments the children concentrate more on the activity than on their language. They use all their senses and take part in the experiments while carefully listening to Fabiennes instructions. Language learning is fully integrated in an interesting and catchy activity shared by the children

Fabienne takes a group of children to the “kindergarten laboratory”. Today’s experiment can start. Fabienne and Jean-Pierre have already prepared the required materials: a large bowl with water and small flowers made of paper. First the children test what kind of materials float and which not: *Le papier flotte; la boule ne flotte pas!* Afterwards the children get a paper flower each and write their names on it.



Fabienne and Jean-Pierre telling the children about today’s experiment

Thanks to *Ecole Maternelle!*

Interview conducted by *Julia Christensen*, March 2014,

Written by *Julia Christensen*, April 2014

Photos *Julia Christensen*

I work as a teacher in kindergarten which is mainly focused on integration of foreign children into Czech education and school system. The issue of adaptation is the main priority and why we had a great interest in participating in the project Multilingual Families. I had the opportunity to attend a workshop held in language school Pelican aimed at promoting multilingualism in schools, families and society. The workshop was a great experience which made me think that there are more institutions engaged in the field of multilingualism. The whole project was presented at a session with parents later. Parents seemed very enthusiastic about the issue and started working with project materials.

We intend to keep our collaboration with Multilingual Families representatives and make reports and record progress. We highly appreciate the project materials which enrich our ordinary teaching units. Parents are open to work with the these materials. We look forward to the next step which covers teacher training courses made by language school Pelican where materials for teachers will be presented.

We hope for more positive achievements. Children's smiles and parents' satisfaction is the greatest reward for us!

Written by Veronika Veselá,  
Kindergarten Sluníčko  
May 2014  
Photos: Veronika Veselá

