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Our Multilingual World: Multilingualism and Children

Stock for The Multilingual Children's Library. Photo © 2022 Sabine Little.

In this issue

Editorial

We do indeed live in a multilingual world. Walking down any city street, sitting on the bus, standing in a queue at the supermarket, it quickly becomes apparent that there are conversations going on the whole time in languages from around the world. Nor will this be confined to crowded cities – though not necessarily as visible, there will be families and communities where more than one language will be spoken; or it may be that a different 'language' is part of everyday life. Awareness, acceptance and the realisation that multilingualism is not a barrier is growing – but the misconceptions – the myths as David Crystal terms them, still exist, preventing real understanding – myths he challenges in his article. Theresa Scibor also challenges assumptions and preconceptions as she describes both growing up in a multilingual family and creating a multilingual family of her own. What emerges is that it is not an easy path and requires determination and discipline but the rewards are life-enhancing.

However, it remains true that we live in a monolingual society and our institutions – libraries among them – focus on that language. How can young readers and families see themselves and their languages? How can the fact they may communicate in different languages be something to celebrate – something that can help them access their own histories and to feel validated? Sadly for many of us the acquisition of another language may not be possible but the provision of books and materials in home languages is not beyond the bounds of possibility. Certainly the concept of the 'bilingual' text with publishers such as Mantra Lingua producing picture books in English and another language with the aim of providing wider access is familiar in this country. But it is very limited. It is exciting to learn about the vision of real multilingual libraries stocking books in myriad languages for communities to access. In 1991 the St Johann JUKIBU Library opened in Basel – though it wasn't the first – and now serves a community representing 53 languages with English just one of them. The importance of such spaces and the access to such materials for children and their families is emphasised by Sabine Little who introduces the multilingual library that has been created in Sheffield and the philosophy behind The Lost Wor(l)ds project which aims to bring an understanding and recognition of the need for a multilingual practice in the schoolroom. As David Crystal points out – multilingualism enhances learning and achievement, it is not a barrier.

What if your 'multilingualism' is not verbal? As Leigh Turina reminds us young readers might have other needs. In her article introducing the IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities she draws attention to a wider definition of language as a means of communication. 'Language' includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken 'languages'. The material housed in Toronto reflects this and she illustrates her text with examples. These will have been gathered from across the world – they are not drawn from one culture or monolingual society – and the catalogues for the collection which are available online demonstrate this.

There is nothing to be afraid of and the resources exist – every library and classroom has the potential to be multilingual.

Ferelith Hordon

Being Bilingual: Facts and Fictions

David Crystal is honorary professor of linguistics at the University of Bangor, and works from his home in Holyhead, North Wales, as a writer, editor, lecturer, and broadcaster in language and linguistics. He lives online at www.davidcrystal.com, www.originalpronunciation.com and www.shakespeareswords.com.

Multilingualism is the default human condition. When we look around the world, that is what we find. Estimates can never be precise, in the language field, but the best opinions suggest that three-quarters of the world's population use at least two languages in their everyday lives, and perhaps half use at least three. Only a few nations – chiefly those with a recent colonial past – have developed an egotistical monolingualism.

Ten myths about multilingualism

Myth 1: Multilingual people are equally fluent in the languages they speak (they are 'balanced').

Reality: This is never the case; there are always situations in which people are better in one language than others (e.g. the language used for nursery rhymes, for making love, or in which a specialised subject has been learned).

Myth 2: Multilingual people have a dominant language.

Reality: Different languages take turns to dominate, depending on the nature of the communicative situation.

Myth 3: One language needs to be given special educational attention to ensure that children develop their full cognitive potential.

Reality: One language is usually chosen as the primary language of education, but this does not prevent subjects being taught in other languages or other languages being used to provide an additional perspective on a subject.

Myth 4: Multilinguals have no mother tongue.

Reality: Multilinguals may have several mother tongues. Similarly, asking a multilingual 'Which is your mother tongue?' is the kind of question asked only by people who see language from a monolingual point of view.

Myth 5: Successful multilingualism is for children only.

Reality: Adults can learn other languages to any required fluency level, depending on such factors as motivation and opportunity.

There is no absolute target that has to be achieved (such as number of words) and some targets are artificial, the result of a monolingual mindset (such as the need to acquire a native-like accent).

Myth 6: Mixing languages shows inadequate learning – semilingualism.

Reality: Mixing languages is the norm. All it shows is that speakers use all the linguistic resources available to them when need arises. When a speaker switches from Language A to Language B (in mid-sentence), it is not a matter of A being deficient, but of B being a preferred means of expressing what the speaker wants to say. Monolinguals mix languages too, in the form of loan words and phrases. C'est la vie.

Myth 7: The brain cannot cope with multilingualism. Learning a new language threatens the quality of the one already there because there is limited brain space.

Reality: The brain can cope with an indefinitely large number of languages. With over 100 billion neurons available, a language takes up a relatively small amount of space (with just a few dozen sounds, a few thousand grammatical constructions, and a few tens-of-thousand words).

Myth 8: Multilingualism impairs thinking because one language gets in the way of another.

Reality: That would mean most of the human race can't think properly! Nobody knows exactly how languages are represented in the brain, but what is known is that they are not assigned individual spaces, like bricks in a box, and there is no basis for the idea that one language is somehow blocking another. A multilingual's languages are 'always on', equally available to access. Multilingual people often don't know which of their languages they used on a particular occasion.

Myth 9: Multilingualism retards language development in children, and causes speech disorders (such as stammering).

Reality: This is the result of assessment tools originally devised for monolingual children being inappropriately used to evaluate multilingual ability. If monolingual children were assessed in terms of their multilingual strengths, they would come out as retarded too. There are huge individual differences in both monolingual and bilingual development, so that a simple notion of 'delay' is unrealistic. As for specific symptoms: all monolingual children become non-fluent when they are coping with complex speech processing tasks or where the teaching methods are too demanding.

Myth 10: Parents need to structure the learning environment of the child to ensure efficiency multilingualism.

Reality: Parents need to be natural at all times, using the different languages as need arises. Over the first three years or so of life, children are unaware that what they hear around them are in fact different languages.

Seven benefits

Cognitive skills: Languages make people think in different ways. As a result, multilingualism is likely to promote greater flexibility of thought, creativity, problem-solving abilities, and both verbal and non-verbal IQ. The greater brain activity involved may, as with all forms of mental exercise, reduce the onset of mental disorders in later life.

Human understanding: The world is a mosaic of visions, each expressed through an individual language. The totality of human wisdom is not found in any one language. The more languages we know, the more we understand what it is to be human.

Achievement: Learning another language (even to a limited level) removes the frustration of being unable to communicate in its setting, and generates a strong sense of fulfilment. As with any acquired skill, people are justly proud of what they have achieved.

Political benefits: Mutual understanding, alliances and alignments, and other forms of political cooperation are enhanced when the parties know each other's languages. Interpreters and translators foster intelligible communication, but cannot replace the sense of mutual respect which comes from first-hand linguistic ability.

Economic benefits: Multilingualism is a desirable skill in the modern highly competitive marketplace. At an individual level, it provides a wider range of opportunities for jobseekers. At a corporate level, it promotes interest in a company's products and services, if they are expressed in the language of the customer.

Linguistic ability: The more languages we know (even in a limited way), the more we come to understand 'how language works'. We stop being scared of languages and find new languages easier to learn. We also become more aware of the characteristic features of our mother tongue. English-speaking people often say they learned about English grammar as a result of having to learn a foreign language.

Social skills: Learning another language is to learn another culture and another way of behaving. As a result, multilinguals develop a wider range of social skills, become more outward looking, and are likely to have a greater respect for cultural difference.

How to remember this list? Use the initial letters of each point and think CHAPELS.

Good luck! Bonne chance (French). Buona fortuna (Italian). Pob lwc (Welsh). Buena suerte (Spanish). Viel Glück (German). Semoga berjaya (Malay). Bahati njema (Swahili) . . . There are another 6000 or so languages awaiting your call.

The IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities

Denise Scott is a disabled librarian at the Toronto Public Library. She is dedicated to learning and teaching others about how to make libraries more accessible for disabled people.
Leigh Turina is the lead librarian for the IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities as well as working as a children's librarian. Two things that bring her great joy.

Everyone has a right to read. This is one of the primary tenets for IBBY. We would go further to say that everyone has a right to read in the format that best meets their needs. We believe passionately in the right of children to have access to formats that allow them to read independently, where possible, rather than having the only access to the book be through another person. Since IBBY is all about bringing books and children together, let's talk about access through language and formats.

What is language?

We talk to babies, to plants, to our dogs and cats. We wave to people over the road. We use facial expressions to make our points. Language is a system we use to communicate with other living things.

We work with the IBBY Collection for Young People with Disabilities, an international project under the IBBY Secretariat, and thus holding official status under UNESCO and UNICEF. Therefore, we may define languages slightly differently than some of you. Consider the definitions offered under the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities:

> **'Communication' includes languages, display of text, Braille, tactile communication, large print, accessible multimedia as well as written, audio, plain-language, human-reader and augmentative and alternative modes, means and formats of communication, including accessible information and communication technology.**
>
> **'Language' includes spoken and signed languages and other forms of non-spoken languages.**

Mirroring the IBBY National Sections, the IBBY Collection is a multilingual one. We have books in over 50 different languages, from Gaelic, Galician, German, Greek and Gujarati to Tagalog, Tamil,

Thai and Turkish with large collections in French, Italian, English, Spanish, Japanese and Swedish.

But, how could it not be multilingual? Young people all over the world have disabilities and this collection reflects their stories as well as the formats they use for reading.

Not only do we have books in a multitude of written languages, but the collection also includes materials in other accessible languages, formats and systems: Braille, Picture Communication Symbols (PCS), easy-to-read text, tactile books and books with no text (silent books).

Accessible languages

Let's look at printed communication systems which are not exclusively text based. Many of us have memories of sharing picture books with our babies and toddlers. For young, sighted children with no knowledge of the printed word, pictures are their first and preferred language. As we well know, they are reading their own story while you are reading the words.

For some people with disabilities the use of pictures as a communication tool continues throughout their lives. They may use them to interpret written text or to express their needs and thoughts. The Picture Communication Symbols (PCS) provide graphic symbols as an alternative and augmentative communication. These symbols are often standardised and generally include a word in simplified text alongside each symbol. (See *Dracula* below).

British Sign Language (BSL) is a visual-based language used by the deaf community. More than a communication system such as PCS, it is a language with regional dialects, grammar, syntax, classifiers, etc., just like spoken languages. British Sign Language has official language status in Scotland, England and the European Union, with minority status in Wales. However, it is not a universally used, international language. Many countries and areas around the world have their own unique sign languages. While there are books in the IBBY Collection in sign languages, many have fairly simple text. Sign languages are vibrant languages built with body movement and facial gestures in addition to the signs. They do not easily translate into a printed format and therefore are seldom the medium chosen for longer stories. In addition, it is important to remember that readers who learned to sign from birth may have difficulties when learning to read the printed word in, for example English, as it is their second language. (See *David: Mission Possible* below.)

Technology is changing everything around us. We often groan that these changes are not always good. However, for people with disabilities, technology continues to provide additional equitable access for reading independently. Technological advances, such as screen readers or automatic Braille displays, create new ways for some disabled people to access and interact with written material. However, there is still great value in the more traditional accessible formats like printed Braille and tactile books. We believe providing text in accessible formats is as important as providing it in a variety of languages.

Braille is probably the most common and well-known accessible format. It is an important tool for readers with vision loss to develop literacy skills and gain independence. Consider a reader who is blind and reads a novel in Braille. They can read at their own pace and control the way the story rolls out. Will they rush into the spooky scene or draw it out? In this way, accessible formats allow readers to create their own imagined version of the story.

Although listening to an audiobook offers a different type of reading experience, it, too, offers a measure of control. Not only can the listener control the volume, but they can also adjust the playback speed. Readers accustomed to the faster speeds of screen readers may choose to increase the playback while those with audio processing issues may slow it down. In addition, with the advent of voice controls and assistive switch technology, readers with limited movement can even browse and select their own books and operate all the control functions of their audio player, such as play/pause and fast forward.

The most popular books in the IBBY Collection are the tactile books, many of which are handmade by skilled artists. Everyone reaches out to touch these beautiful books when they are on display. Made with a variety of fabrics, papers, or plastic materials, they are designed to further engage the reader with the story through the sense of touch. Some books will include miniature three-dimensional objects, such as a small doll or a plastic spoon, while others will include abstract tactile representations, like a patch of fake fur to symbolise an animal. Learning to decipher tactile representations is an important skill for blind children working towards independence. (See *Off to the Park!* and *Magico Inverno* below.)

Wish list for publishers

For deaf or disabled people, having access to accessible languages and formats is essential. Despite this need, producing materials in accessible formats and languages is not always a priority for publishers. How can publishers begin to make changes? Consulting with the community is always the best practice, but here are some tips to start:

- Often a change of the font type can make a book more inclusive. The publisher Barrington Stoke provides some excellent examples for readers who benefit from the dyslexia-friendly type font and other features. In general, some consider a sans serif font more universally accessible, but, either way, a discussion on the importance of fonts is worth having.
- A large print font improves accessibility for many children with low vision. It also benefits children with reading difficulties as well as those for whom books with small, dense print are overwhelming.
- Graphic novels can be a great option for those who benefit from limited text, or illustrations alongside the text. However, they are often not accessible for readers with low vision or certain reading disabilities. Consider the text size and font used in speech bubbles.
- In addition to Braille and large print, children who are blind or have low vision benefit from tactile illustrations, particularly in picture books. This is also true for children with certain learning or developmental disabilities. Tactile adaptations are most effective when they are kept simple and highlight only the key elements of the illustrations, rather than every detail.
- Dual languages or alternate formats in the same publication, such as Braille or PCS alongside printed text, allows for a more inclusive, shared reading experience. A parent with a disability is able to read to their child, and children with different access needs can read together. It is also a way of introducing the concept of diversity and equal access to all readers.
- Where possible, books should be ‘born accessible’. It is more inclusive and effective to design books with accessible formats in mind right from the beginning, rather than trying to adapt or revise them afterwards. However, materials that are not born accessible can and should still be adapted after the fact. In addition to creating e-book and audiobook formats, another option is to add sign language and image descriptions using video and audio files, respectively, made available by using a QR code or website.

Examples

One of the benefits, nay, joys of the IBBY Collection is to see outstanding examples from all over the world in accessible formats. The glorious books, created by authors, illustrators and publishers working to provide stories, books, and information in increasingly diverse formats, are astounding.

Here are some examples. The bibliographic information includes the year each item was published in the IBBY Collection of Outstanding Books for Young People with Disabilities catalogues so that you may look online for annotations and more information. See www.tpl.ca/ibby or https://www.ibby.org/awards-activities/activities/ibby-collection-for-young-people-with-disabilities.

Example 1
This book incorporates tactile and interactive elements, plus bold, large print and onomatopoeic language to emphasise movement and to engage readers.

Child's Play (text), Cheetham, Stephen (illus.). *Off to the Park!* Swindon, UK: Child's Play International Ltd., 2014. ISBN 978-1-84643-502-7 (2015 IBBY catalogue)

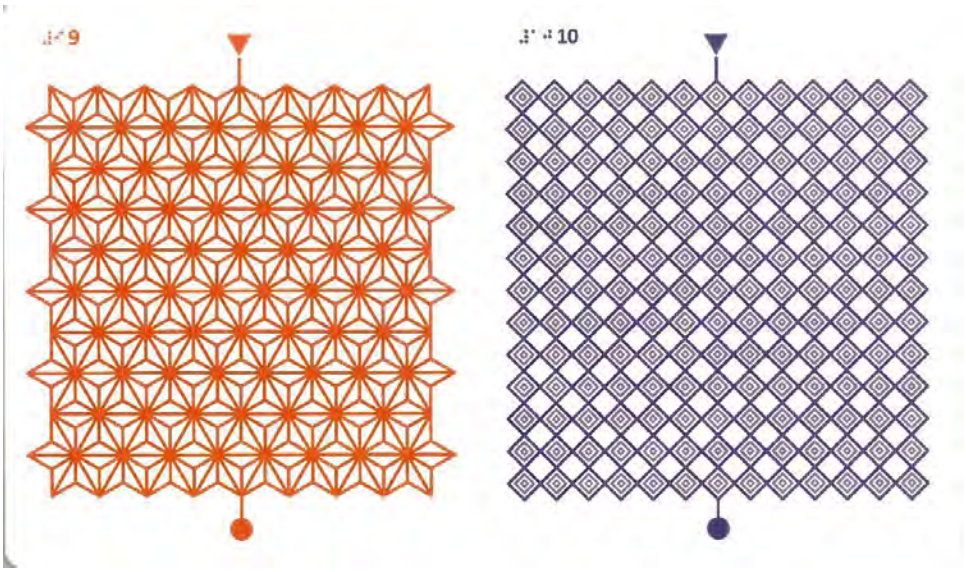
Example 2
Dracula is a graphic novel in PCS and simplified Italian. While most books using PCS are designed for young children and beginning readers, this title is intended for more advanced, teen readers. The original text and story of Dracula was adapted in collaboration with readers who are the book's target audience. Inclusion in the creative process should be guided by the principle: *nothing about us without us*. This publishing group believes emphatically that classics can and should be adapted for all cognitive levels and includes an adapted version of *The Diary of Anne Frank* amongst its titles.

Stoker, Bram (original text). Coop. Accaparlante, Assoc. Arca-Comunità L'Arcobaleno onlus (adapted text). *Dracula*. Molfetta, Italy: Ed. La meridian, 2018. ISBN 978-88-6153-657-9 (2021 IBBY catalogue)

Example 3
A mystery story written in everyday language and simplified easy-to-read text. It is printed in both large print font and Braille. Award winner from the 2019 International Association for Universal Design. One of the more accessible books in the IBBY Collection.

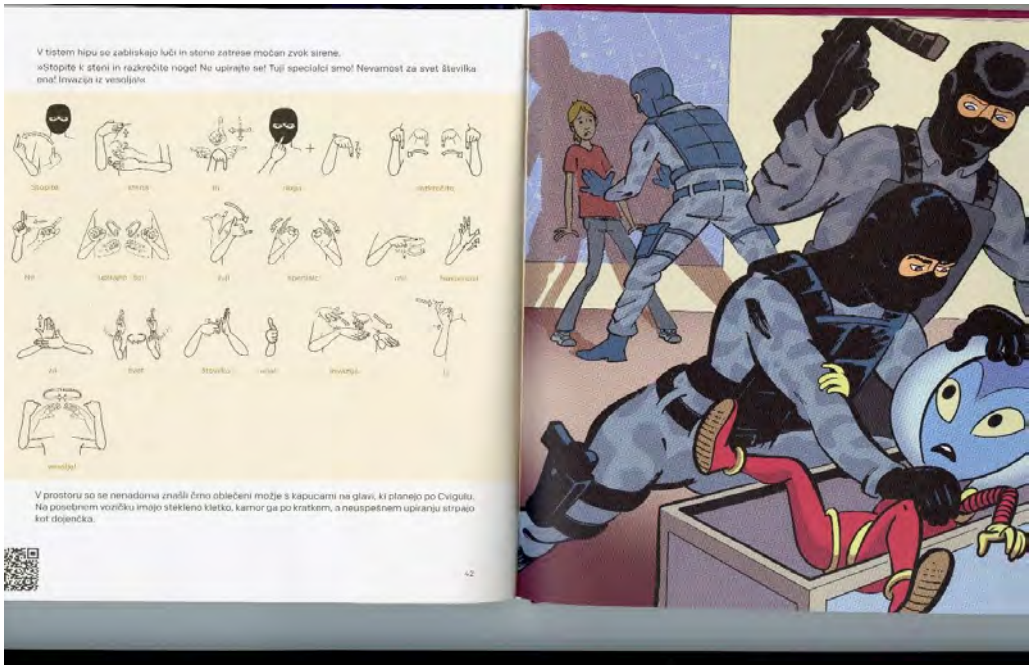
Fuchs, Corinna (text). *Die Bunte Bande: Das Gestohlene Fahrrad*. (The Variety Gang: The Stolen Bicycle). Hamburg, Germany: Carlsen Verlag GmbH, 2018. ISBN 978-3-551-06699-2. (2019 IBBY Catalogue)

Example 4
Mazes designed with bumpy braille-like dots for fingers to discern pathways from top to bottom. Each of the 11 designs grows more complex and harder to navigate. The book is a pre-literacy tool for children who are learning to follow Braille but is also a fun activity for any reader.



Murayama, Junko (design). *Tenjitsukisawaruehon: Sawarumeiro* (Touch Picture Book with Braille: Mazes by Touch). Tokyo: Shogakukan, Inc., 2013. ISBN 978-4-09-726497-2 (2015 IBBY Catalogue)

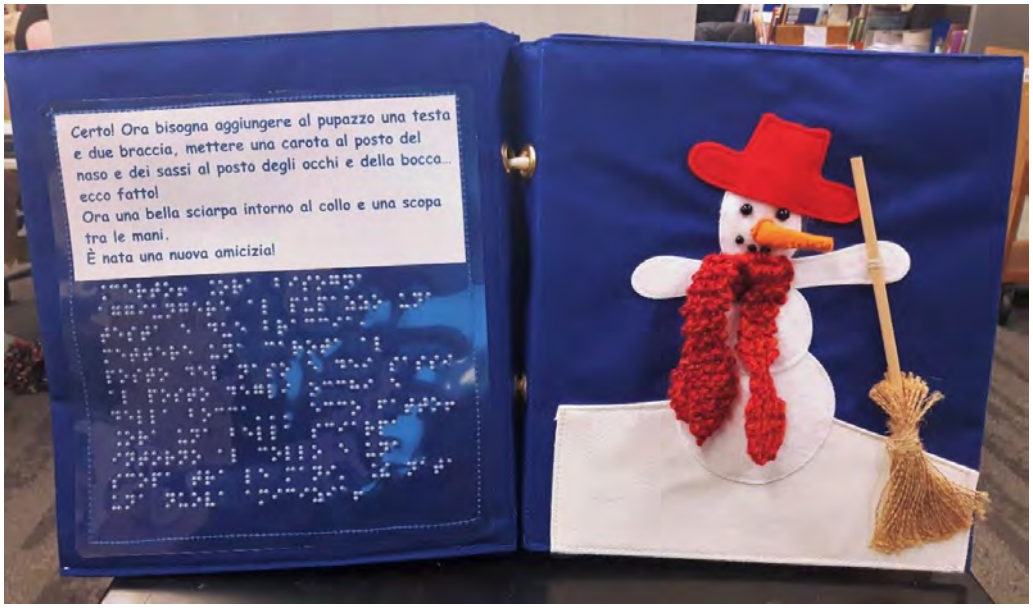
Example 5
A science fiction book for older readers, in print and Slovenian Sign Language. Signed versions of conversations between the alien and main character are also available on videos accessed by QR codes. Special care was taken in the printed text to ensure that the sign language gestures included movement and facial expressions by an artist with lived experience.



Kermauner, Aksinja (text) Rus, Gašper (ill.), Vogel, Nikolaj (gestures), Ciglar, Veronika (sign language interpreter) *David: MisijaMogoče* (David: Mission Possible) Ljubljana, Slovenia: Zvezadruštevgluhih in naglušnihSlovenije, 2020. ISBN 978-961-94804-1-0 (2021 IBBY catalogue)

Example 6

This amazing tactile book, fabricated by Les Doigts Qui Rêvent, and presented in bold large print and Braille, allows busy fingers to follow along page by page as a snowman is constructed. More than simply touching the pages, readers are also able to mimic the sound of a person crunching through the snow by pressing their fingertips into the snowbank on the first page. There is always more involvement and fun when the reader is able to employ more than one sense at a time.



Holstein, Irmeli and Katela, Minna. *Un magicoinverno* (A Magical Winter). Rome: ZajednoSocietàCooperativa, 2012. Original title: Talven Taika (Finlande, 2011) (2013 IBBY Catalogue)

St. Johann JUKIBU: One Library, Many Languages

Maureen Senn-Carroll was born and raised in McGregor, Iowa, USA. She taught for 14 years at primary schools in the USA, Germany and Switzerland. In Zürich she co-founded a bilingual primary school, taught at a teachers' training college and published teaching materials. In Basel she trained as a librarian and has been the head of the JUKIBU library since 2005. She has two sons and lives with her husband in Basel, Switzerland.

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On a given afternoon at the St. Johann JUKIBU library in Basel, Switzerland, a visitor may hear stories being read to children in any of the 53 languages which make up the intercultural section of the library.

Bibliothek, Lothringerplatz 1, Basel.

During the 1980s, the accepted idea that newcomers should fully integrate into Swiss society began to change and it was thought that for this to be successful immigrants should retain their own language and culture in order to learn a second language and become at home in their adopted country. From this premise, the idea of intercultural libraries began to take form and the first intercultural library was opened in Renens, in Swiss Romand near Lausanne in 1988. Shortly after that, a group of parents from various countries, as well as some interested Swiss citizens, met and

decided that Basel would also benefit from such a library. There was a need to provide multicultural families with access to books in the languages spoken within their family and a space where they could share their stories and culture. Thus, in 1991, the JUKIBU opened its doors in St Johann, Basel.

Heidi in various languages.

Stories are part of every culture. They are the carrier of life's messages and are rich in language. Stories engage the listener's and reader's emotions; their images and messages last a lifetime. Each culture has its own set of titles which are important to pass on to the next generation.

Acquiring media in 53 languages is a challenging task. In order to meet this challenge a group of dedicated volunteers from around the globe have taken on the role of a 'language delegate'. A vital part of the library's staff, they are instrumental in purchasing and cataloguing new media for the intercultural section of the library.

Books in many languages.

Julie Telford is the library's language delegate for the English collection for children and young adults. Her story, which follows, is exemplary for many of the language delegates, a personal interest leads to getting involved in a greater cause.

When we came to Basel in 1991 my two-year-old and I were delighted to discover the very new JUKIBU and its (then) small collection of English books for children. The JUKIBU and my daughter grew bigger together and before long I became a volunteer. For over 20 years now, I have been responsible for the English section, the biggest and most popular section after German, with almost 4000 books and a borrowing rate of around 6000 per year. This reflects that Basel is an international city with many organisations functioning in English. It has a large anglophone population, and many others want their children to become proficient in this world language.

My role as the English section representative is to select and buy books, catalogue and display them, and maintaining the best possible collection of English media with the resources available. Occasionally, I read stories aloud at events, and I write reviews for a Basel book-review magazine.

Numbers written out in many languages.

Illustrated books for small children form by far the biggest and most popular subsection. Other subsections include learn-to-read books, fiction for primary school-aged children, fiction for older children and young adults, non-fiction, which covers every subject, and comics.

My selection is guided by requests and reviews of recent publications, always keeping an eye on what our readers like to borrow. But I also like to offer books which might widen their reading experience. One ongoing theme is that of the outsider. Living in a foreign country is hard in many ways. Reading stories that reflect a young person's own experiences is consoling and validating. It is also heartening to find books in one's own language and about one's own culture. We believe that providing a facility which allows immigrants to feel better about themselves helps them to integrate, which, in turn, is better for everybody.

The local government and the city library in Basel also recognised this fact. In 2019 the intercultural library JUKIBU merged with the GGG Stadtbibliothek (the city library network). Under the name, St. Johann JUKIBU library, the newest branch of the GGG Stadtbibliothek opened at a new location. The library now has a German collection for adults and a small collection in English for adults in addition to the collections in 53 languages. This uniquely diverse selection of books and non-books is an asset to Basel's German-speaking community as well. They can be used at home or in classrooms to provide an awareness of the languages spoken around them, which promotes mutual understanding

Notes

There are 25 intercultural libraries in Switzerland. *Interbiblio* is the association and competency centre that links them together. https://www.interbiblio.ch/de/. [In German, French and Italian.]

Link to the St. Johann JUKIBU library: https://www.stadtbibliothekbasel.ch/de/stjohannjukibu.html. [In German.]

‘Nobody Wants to Know about That’: On the Importance of Creating Multilingual Spaces

Sabine Little is a senior lecturer at the University of Sheffield. She is interested in links between language, identity, and belonging, and the role of multilingualism in society. Working with families, schools, and public spaces such as libraries, she explores what it means to grow up multilingual, and developed and worked on a number of projects that explore multilingualism and identity as a social justice issue, seeking to push against the deficit model of English as an Additional Language.

I once interviewed a group of school children about their multilingual reading experiences. They had all been hand-picked by their teacher precisely because they were multilingual, and they were reading in all their languages. And yet, twenty minutes into our discussions, only English language books had been mentioned. I had tried hard not to steer the conversation, instead asking open-ended questions about reading in general, favourite books, and reading with family members. Finally, after I took a more direct approach, asking: ‘. . . and do you read anything that is not in English?’ One 8-year-old girl replied: ‘Yeah, I read all the Harry Potter books in Bengali, but why do you want to know about that? Nobody wants to know about that.’ This response stuck with me, and I now use it frequently in teacher training and conference presentations – it spoke, in such a young child, about a certain defeat, an understanding that there were aspects of her that were not welcome, and nothing she could do about it, and it is something I have been trying to change ever since.

On closer inspection, it turned out that every single child had, in taciturn agreement, edited their multilingual identity out of the discussion, assuming that I, an adult visiting them in a formal education context, would be interested only in the part of their identity that the formal education context assesses and validates. This is a long way from the Bullock Report’s (DES, 1975) dream that:

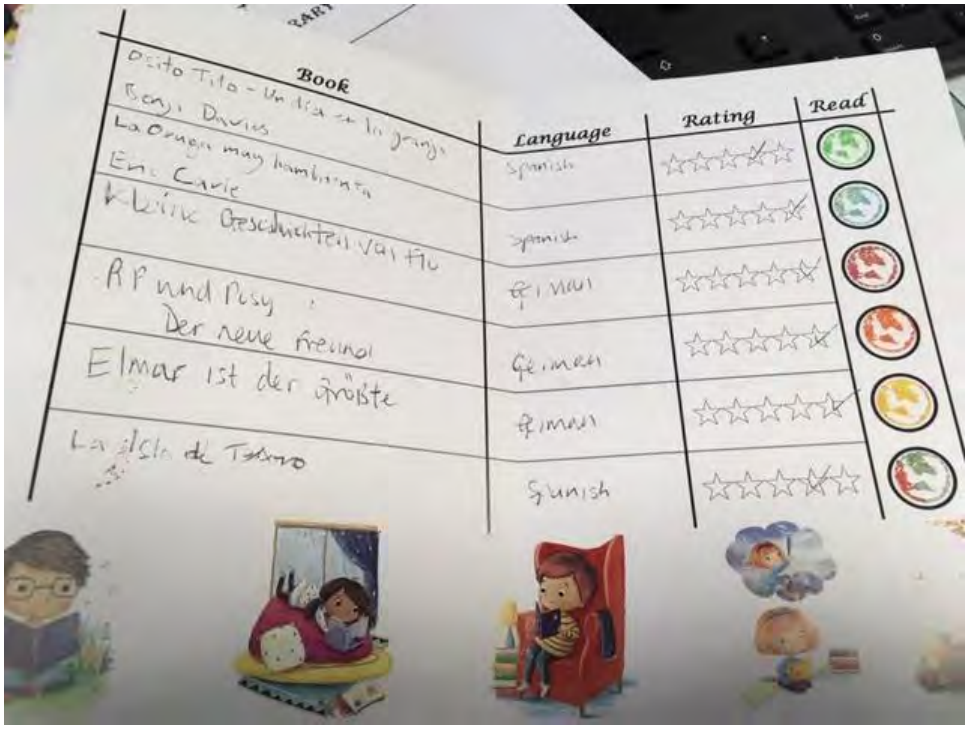
> **No child should be expected to cast off the language and culture of the home as he [sic] crosses the school threshold, nor to live and act as though school and home represent two totally separate and different cultures which have to be kept firmly apart. (p. 286)**

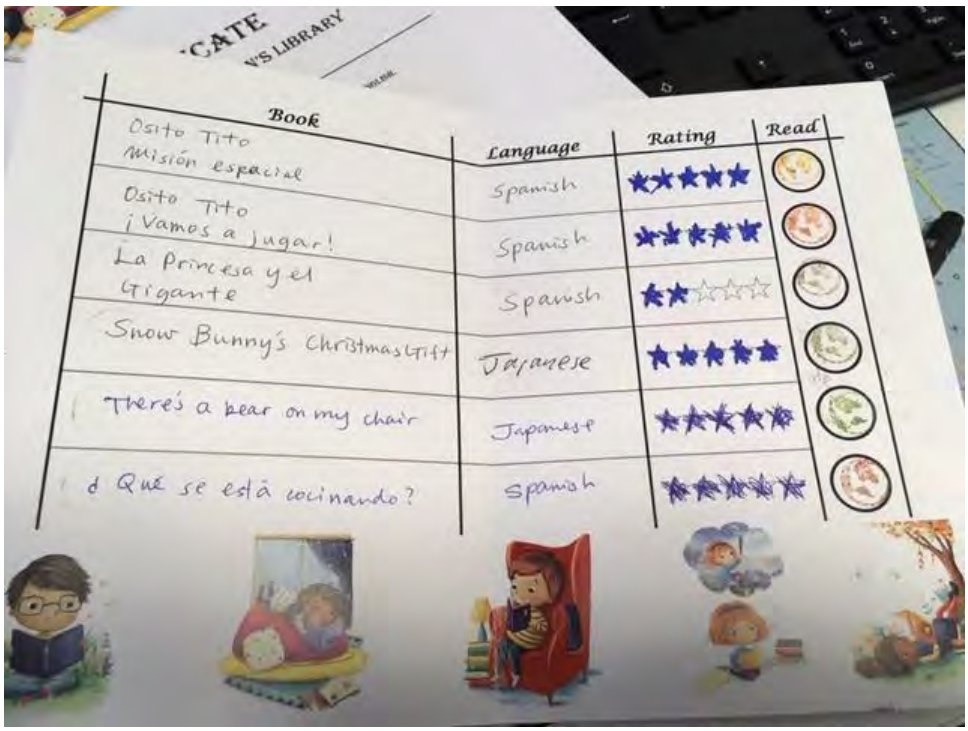
It also highlights how important it is that we ensure children understand that all aspects of their identity are welcome – in our schools, in our libraries, and in other public spaces.

When Sheffield's multilingual children's library opened its doors, it adhered to a few core principles: the multilingual section would be part of the main children's library, sharing a space in the prominent building, and there would be events that would not only support multilingual children, but also normalise multilingualism in the city. Multilingual storytelling events and multilingual readathons were frequented not just by the multilingual community in the city, but, due to being in a public space and part of the main library events, visited by passers-by, who remarked things like 'I never heard Farsi before – it's a beautiful language' or 'I stayed for three languages, it was fun trying to work out what the stories meant'. These comments, generic as they sound, play an important part in normalising multilingualism in a nation that has one of the worst reputations for foreign language learning. They also serve as important markers for social justice – public spaces serve the public, and when approximately one in five members of the public is multilingual, it is only right that the offer represents this. Parents interviewed as part of the multilingual children's library project stated that the space meant they felt more welcome in the city as a whole, and more proud to call the city their home – a city that had made an effort to dedicate space and resource to the multilingual community. For some children, visiting the multilingual children's library was the first time they had witnessed their home language outside the home context. Heritage language schools contributed books and expertise, organising trips to attend multilingual storytelling events, or using the library as a space to promote heritage languages and culture.

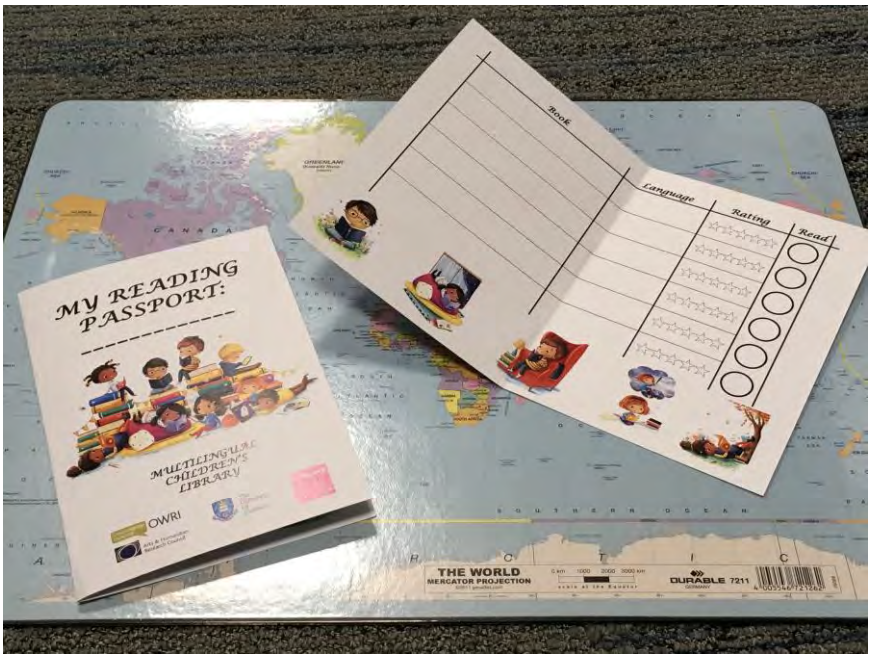
Over a series of events, children themselves became confident contributors, reading out loud in their home language to anybody who would listen, and claiming the space as theirs. The evaluation showed that the library helped children to become 'language curious' – a review of children's 'reading passports' showed that children often borrowed books in languages other than their home language, because they were interested in exploring further, and growing their language skills. Similarly, the library is used by language learners to support foreign language acquisition.

Having a multilingual library – whether in a public library, in a school library, or in the classroom, sends an important message. It is a message of representation, certainly, of seeing books in the languages spoken by children of the city, of the school. But it also sends a message regarding space, or, more precisely, the right to take up space: space on a bookshelf, space in a classroom reading box, space in the world. This physical manifestation of space, as a representation of ideological space, matters, even to the youngest children.

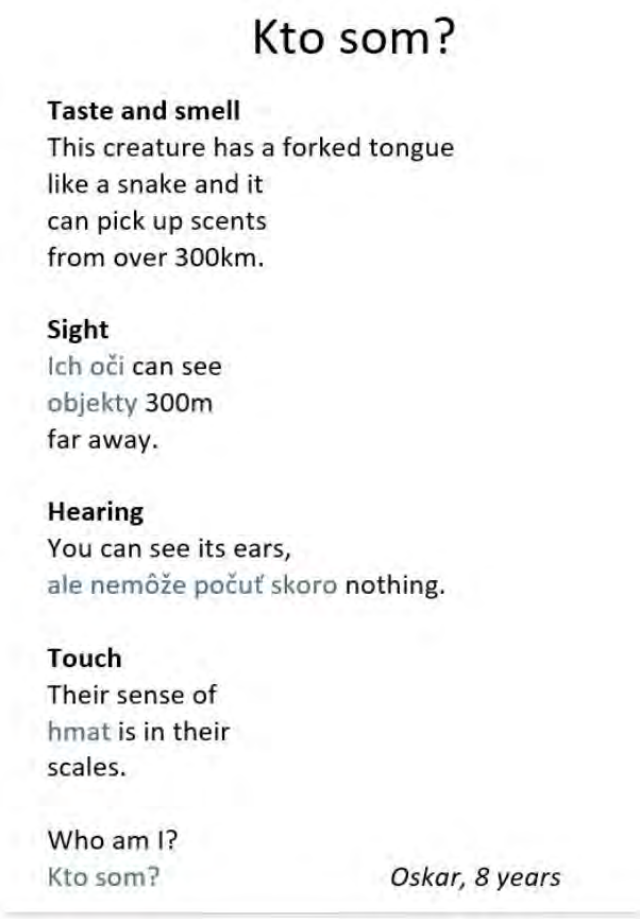




Libraries, however, are not the only spaces where the normalisation of multilingualism not only matters, but benefits all, multilingual and monolingual alike. The classroom itself offers countless opportunities to validate pupils' multilingual skills. Encouraging multilingual entries in home reading diaries, displaying multilingual book reviews, enabling children to draft work in all their languages – even if the final outcome is in English – are just some of the examples any classroom teacher can use to create multilingual spaces.



At a more advanced level, pupils can actively learn to use their language skills in their creative writing. One example for this is Oskar's 'creature feature', where the eight-year-old used his English and Slovak skills to create a puzzle for his peers to guess the creature he is referring to. Such exercises raise language awareness for the whole class, and forefront pupils' multilingual skills as valuable assets in the classroom, rather than something that 'nobody wants to know about'. The 'creature feature' task is one of (currently) 29 tasks featuring on the Lost Wor(l)ds website.



Kto som?

Taste and smell
This creature has a forked tongue
like a snake and it
can pick up scents
from over 300km.

Sight
Ich oči can see
objekty 300m
far away.

Hearing
You can see its ears,
ale nemôže počuť skoro nothing.

Touch
Their sense of
hmat is in their
scales.

Who am I?
Kto som? *Oskar, 8 years*

Kto-som (1) – credit Oskar – Lost Wor(l)ds

The project's premise is that children who lose their home language end up losing part of their world, and the activities are aimed at classroom practitioners – rather than language specialists – who are interested in 'making space' for pupils' multilingual skills. This is not always easy in the current climate, and so all tasks are aligned to the English National Curriculum, with all activities having links to nature and sustainability.

When I talk to multilingual children, it is clear that many have developed strategies to navigate their multilingual worlds (Little, 2021), to grow their skills and confidence across all their languages. But it is also clear that they need a support net to do so, and that they rely on support from parents, teachers, schools, siblings, peers,

and even society as a whole to navigate their identity development, and their sense of belonging. Whether children are reading books, producing texts, or using their full linguistic repertoire to learn – giving them the space to do so is an important component of preparing all children to live in a multilingual, multicultural world, and sends multilingual children a clear message that all parts of their identity are welcome, no matter where they are.

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Living as a Multilingual Family

Teresa Scibor. Brought up bilingually and fluent in four languages; pioneer in introducing French to young children; founder of the Scibor Method (cornerstone of Le Club Tricolore); teacher, author, composer of songs, advisor/lecturer to teachers and parents on bilingualism and early years teaching – and parent.

A question-and-answer session: Ferelith Hordon and Teresa Scibor

How does living as a multilingual family work?
Teresa Scibor has plenty of experience and I talked to her about this. I wanted to know had she grown up in a multilingual family herself.

> **I was born here. My parents were both Polish and they settled here after the Second World War and we spoke Polish at home. I was educated in the UK.**

However, multilingualism in her family goes further back. She tells me that her father was born in Poland, his parents then went to the Ukraine, he had a French governess and Russian was the language outside the home. Apparently he caused concern by not speaking until suddenly at the age of four he did – in all three languages. Teresa felt this has given her a greater understanding of what goes on in children's brains in multilingual situations and she is very interested in the latest thinking and research in this area.

Has she has ever regretted being multilingual?
'Not at all. It was a very natural experience' – but she did lead two separate lives. She is very clear that a multilingual background has been an enrichment. But she is aware that there does come a moment that if one is very much surrounded by a monolingual society one can lose certain vocabulary. She can easily make everyday conversation in Polish – but a more philosophical or political debate might be a challenge.

> **You have to be disciplined if you want to have a multilingual family and make a conscious decision about it.**

This decision was easy for her and her husband. But it does not have be limited to two languages; she knows from experience you can have as many languages as are represented by those in the family. She and her husband also speak fluent French and would sometimes speak French to each other – and this led to the children being very keen to learn French to know what their parents were saying – and now they and their partners have a whole raft of languages.

Language should be a game and should happen from the cradle. It is an investment and like a plant that needs nurturing.

For her this means the discipline she mentioned earlier – it should be clear who speaks which language. She tells how her grandson at 17 months to whom she speaks Polish suddenly heard her speaking English.

His head turned and he was watching my mouth. They have the face of the person who is speaking that language, and that is it.

Children make a very definite distinction between speakers and their language. Nor will they lose their ability to speak and understand and do not need to be constantly reminded of vocabulary – 'It is like riding a bicycle'. The main challenge is really not mixing the languages – half a sentence in one, half in another.

What other challenges did she experience in bringing up a multilingual family?
The attitude among teachers and others that the child needs to speak English only was certainly one, also the belief that very young children cannot be exposed to another language in a playful way. The message being that it will confuse the children. This message she feels is, at last, changing.

Joys and successes?
Her children are passing on their languages to their children – so now they have three generations of a multilingual family. Their lives are enriched, there is the ability to communicate widely (she remembers the pleasure of being able to talk to the Polish workmen who came into the house when they had a building project) and the children have a recognition of other languages and cultures.

Should we should introduce different languages in school?
She agrees that it is such a shame that language teaching has been cut. She would like to see a training course for teachers to enable them to become familiar with other languages and a way they could be taught in the earliest years – she used a process of play with her own children. Children at an early age don't want to know the mechanics, they just want to 'drive the car'.

Creating a multi-lingual family is not easy – to be successful in bringing up children bilingually one needs huge amounts of patience and discipline and ideally daily practice of the language. There is no room for 'sloppiness' or laziness. It is a real commitment but the rewards are great in the end.

Her family is proof of their commitment.

The UK section of the International Board on Books for Young People

The next issue of *IBBYLink* is *IBBYLink* 63, Spring 2022 and will take a look at Book Promotion.

Articles on other subjects are also welcomed. Contributions to Ferelith Hordon: fhordon@btinternet.com.

If you are interested in becoming a reviewer for *IBBYLink*, contact Lina Iordanaki: reviewseditor@ibby.org.uk. New reviewers are always welcome.

Titles for Review

Publishers and others with books to be reviewed in *IBBYLink* (books on children's literature) or to be reviewed on the IBBY UK website (books for children and young adults) should send them to Lina Iordanaki at University College London, Institute of Education (Room 650, Bay 1), 20 Bedford Way, Bloomsbury, London WC1H 0AL. Pdfs are welcome and should be sent to reviewseditor@ibby.org.uk.

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