

Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-Parent-One-Language Approach

Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert. Clevedon, England: Multilingual Matters. 2004. Pp. xv + 219.

The volume, *Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-Parent-One-Language Approach*, written by Suzanne Barron-Hauwaert, is a well-organized report on bilingualism and the one-parent-one-language approach (OPOL) to raising children in bilingual families that straddles the line. Unlike many research studies, which are only intended for an academic audience, the writer has attempted to provide both a researched yet practical guide for parents of differing linguistic backgrounds who hope to raise their children bilingually. Generally speaking, the approaches the author takes in presenting her data are both informative and accessible to the lay reader.

Barron-Hauwaert has a very clear and systematic approach to the text that reminds one of a thesis. For example, there is the introduction that clearly states: (a) her motivation to undertake this study; (b) a list of ten questions that she is to investigate; (c) a detailed explanation of the eight chapters of the book; (d) a brief yet detailed description of the families that responded to her questionnaire (her primary source of data); (e) and lastly, her personal background which also serves as a reference point for the inclusion of the author's personal anecdotes and observations (her secondary source of data) with raising her own children bilingually.

In terms of organization and writing style, chapter 1 serves as an example of what to expect throughout the book. Barron-Hauwaert begins with the theoretical, in this case the historical and linguistic origins of OPOL, moves on to the more current findings in research into bilingualism, and then deftly incorporates her findings from both the questionnaire and her personal observations. The survey instrument is provided in the back of the text and one can see that it consists of a combination of close- and open-ended questions. As in this and subsequent chapters, the findings from the questionnaire are presented in the form of quotes and statistics; the latter being presented in reader-friendly bar graphs and pie charts. In yet another boon for organization, feedback from the surveyed parents, in the form of quotes, is grouped and presented in distinct categories as being either: positive or negative, pro or con. Occasionally, a third or even fourth category is provided for comments that are neither. In short, the author is attempting to and succeeding at incorporating as much of the parents' voices as possible and is being more than fair to all sides of the OPOL approach to raising bilingual children. Moreover, throughout the text there are a total of 30 case studies from a wide array of couples with varying nationalities and living situations. This additional dimension of data presentation will be of considerable interest to readers from similar backgrounds or living situations, but due to issues of cultural, linguistic, or economic specificity, the case studies may be of little use to others. Lastly, the final segment of each chapter is a summary where the main points are reviewed; Barron-Hauwaert shares her observations and opinions, and then leads the reader into the upcoming chapter.

Chapter 2 begins with a brief summation of how children acquire language. As mentioned above, a very systematic approach is taken with a look at what research and experts in the field have to say. Unfortunately, and as is the case with many of these first sections of each chapter, the author seems confused as to who her target audience is. The first issue is with terminology. For example, when speaking of language acquisition she freely interchanges the

term “acquisition” with “learning” (p. 23). Strictly speaking, and even if the book is intended for a lay readership, such mixing of terminology will surely lead to confusion when speaking about language. Moreover, instead of taking an academic approach to the reporting of the findings of previous studies, that is, quoting sources to support comments made, many statements are made without quotes and could very well come off seemingly as fact. Whether or not this was the intended outcome by the author, this and the widespread use of generalizations and value judgments throughout the chapter (and the book in general) made the text more like a magazine or newspaper article as opposed to a thoroughly researched volume on how to raise children to be bilingual.

In chapter 3, Barron-Hauwaert takes a sociolinguistic look at bilingualism and the influence a child’s school environment, parents’ feelings on cultural identity, and gender may play in the success or failure of school-aged children to maintain and use a minority language in a differing majority-language environment. It was here where I found considerable food for thought. Not so much on what was said, but regarding how things were said. For example, in her introduction to the role(s) gender play with children and language, the author writes “School age children are known to congregate in either gangs of boys or groups of girls....” (p. 23). Not only is it a gross generalization, but also one has to wonder about the choice of wording. Why “gangs” of boys? The same disparagement appears a second time on page 56. This is also the chapter where the author quickly confuses the reader by stating that, “One myth that exists is that girls begin to talk earlier and to talk more” (p. 55). Then two pages later writes, “This is acknowledged by child experts who agree that boys generally speak later than girls do, although they soon catch up (p. 57). In addition to slightly contradicting herself, neither statement is referenced.

On a more positive note though, it is in this chapter where the author, for the first time, passes on actual advice, provided from the surveyed parents, on how to support cultural heritage: an integral aspect to the acquisition or learning of any language. Surely, to the relief of the reader, the ten tips provided are both straightforward and economical (especially in this age of the Internet). Throughout the remaining chapters, other advice and tips passed on from the surveyed parents or from the author herself are presented. They are one of the obvious strengths of the text.

The next chapter, written in four parts, is where Barron-Hauwaert, in regard to OPOL, examines how family members and friends influence the raising of bilingual children. The roles of each parent, the grandparents, siblings and birth order, and friends are examined. It is in this chapter, too, where a considerable amount of data from the questionnaire is presented as well as a number of case studies. A text such as *Language Strategies for Bilingual Families: The One-Parent-One-Language Approach* shows its greatest strength with a very common sense approach to the raising of children to be bilingual. In summarizing the chapter, key words such as *empathy* and *adapting* very much stand out.

Chapter 5, in a continuation of the previous chapter, takes a hard look at the realities couples in international marriages will encounter in regard to raising their children bilingually. The bottom line being that many people have high expectations for their children and yet may be surprised at how complicated the process can become when all factors are taken into account. The section on speech problems was excellent and may make the book entirely worthwhile for

the manner in which a number of parents' fears may be alleviated. The three case studies and number of studies referenced will surely help fortify parents' resolve in not giving up on raising their children bilingually.

The last two chapters are devoted to providing strategies, both non-OPOL and OPOL in nature. As mentioned previously, many of these come from parents who participated in the survey, and others are from the author. All in all, the strategies, even those not in line with the OPOL approach, were presented in a non-judgemental fashion and the author has allowed for the parents to decide whether or not to employ the strategies presented. The last chapter though, true to the title of the text, focuses primarily on how to implement OPOL. Ten strategies and an overview of the text are provided.

In conclusion, while it is obvious that Barron-Hauwaert spent a considerable amount of time in conducting and writing up her research, more time with a critical editing process would have surely helped to have made the text much stronger and more appropriate for both budding academics and parents hoping to raise children bilingually. In general though, it would be hard to recommend this book as a text for a graduate level course on bilingual education or language acquisition. In addition to the previously mentioned issues with terminology, generalizations, value judgments, and lack of referencing, there are also the issues of punctuation and grammar. I find it hard to believe that the text was carefully edited. Yet, having said that, I feel that the text would have considerable value in allaying any fears parents-to-be in an international marriage would have while hoping to raise their children bilingually in the 21st century. The range of issues covered throughout the text: dealing with monolingual relatives and friends to commonly encountered speech problems, will help serve readers as a guide to how to raise their children bilingually. On a final note, the frequent references throughout the text to "The Bilingual Family Newsletter", a forum for parents around the world who are seeking support and answers for raising their children bilingually, will also be of great value.

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