

Minority Ethnic Pupils in Mainly White Schools: What it Means to Be “Bilingual”

Tony Cline and Guida de Abreu
University of Luton, U.K.

1. Introduction

The data that we are discussing in this paper was collected during a project which was commissioned by the Department for Education and Skills (DfES), the government department for education in England¹. They had noted that most research on the education of minority ethnic pupils had been conducted in ethnically mixed areas with relatively large numbers of minority ethnic pupils. This initiative was an attempt to correct that bias and learn more about a population that is growing rapidly as minority communities disperse from their initial areas of urban settlement – minority ethnic pupils in mainly white schools. Those who were responsible for commissioning the research were primarily concerned to inform policy and practice. As our work continued, we became convinced that studying this special situation has the potential to inform wider theoretical debate too.

The study was conducted in three parts:

- An analysis of the performance in national tests and exams of over 34,000 pupils in mainly white schools in 35 local education authorities (school districts).
- A questionnaire survey of 2,885 white and 217 minority ethnic pupils in 14 mainly white primary and secondary schools.
- A series of case studies of 61 pupils in Years 3 - 9 in the same 14 schools based on interviews with the pupils themselves, one or both of their parents (in most cases) and a sample of 77 of their teachers.

Many issues were addressed during the project, including, for example, curriculum, educational methods, teachers’ knowledge (and ignorance), bullying and harassment. A full report on other aspects of the research may be found in Cline et al (2002). In this paper we will discuss work relating to two research questions that were not addressed in that report:

- Under what conditions do children who attend mainly white schools acquire and use a minority family language?
- In what ways do the children’s language practices relate to their sense of ethnic identity?

In order to address those questions we will draw on findings from the interviews with children and parents during the third part of the study.

2. Participants in the study

The case studies focused on fourteen schools which were located in four English regions (London, South East, Eastern, East Midlands). All the schools admitted both boys and girls, were non-selective and had 4 - 6% minority ethnic pupils at the time of their last official return. They were either primary schools (where we studied Years 3 – 6) or secondary schools (where we studied Years 7 - 9). Four secondary schools and one primary school were situated in an affluent village or in a suburb on the outskirts of a small town, two secondary schools and one primary school in a village or small town

¹ There were four other members of the research team. Hannah Lambert and Jo Neale were involved in all aspects of the research, while Cornelius Fihosy and Hilary Gray joined us for the third phase of the work which is the main focus of this paper.

with industrial facilities, three primary schools in an area of subsidised housing in a small town, and three primary schools in an area of subsidised housing in a large metropolitan region.

We interviewed 33 boys and 28 girls, 61 children in total, in Years 3 - 9 (aged 8 - 14). The ethnic backgrounds of the full sample are shown in Table 1. The subject of the research programme was minority ethnic pupils generally. In this paper we will outline the language situation of the whole sample but focus in more detail on a subset of the pupils we studied - those who had a minority ethnic background in which, in addition, some members of the family spoke a language other than English - children who, on the face of it, had the possibility of growing up to be bilingual.

Table 1 Ethnic backgrounds of the children in the sample

Black Caribbean	4
Black African	7
Indian	12
Pakistani	10
Chinese	6
Any other	7
Dual heritage	15

There was a relatively small number of Black Caribbean children and a higher number of children from Black African families. Countries of origin of the latter group included Nigeria, Sierra Leone and Uganda. In some cases, as will be seen later, their home language was English. The two largest groups were South Asian, originating from families who had originally come from India and Pakistan. The children listed in the “Any Other” category came from families whose roots were in East Africa (Asian), Greece, Iraq, Japan (2) and Mauritius.

We were surprised to find that almost a quarter of the children in the sample were from mixed or dual heritage backgrounds. The official statistics for the LEAs (school districts) and schools had not prepared us for what appeared to be a relatively high proportion of dual heritage pupils among the small so-called “minority ethnic” populations of these schools. A third of the mixed/dual heritage children had one White British parent. Some others had parents who shared a cultural heritage but came from different continents (e.g. a Kenyan Asian woman married to a man from her family’s original region of India). The ambiguous situation of mixed and dual heritage children appears to be a significant feature of some schools with small ethnic minority populations. We will say something more about this group when we turn to questions about language choice and language use.

The project title was initially “*minority ethnic pupils in isolated communities*”. But we soon found that the term “*isolated communities*” was problematic. For the families with whom we were working two dimensions of isolation might have been identified:

- Ethnic/cultural isolation - the degree to which members of a family are in contact with others from the same ethnic or cultural background and maintain some elements of its social practices and traditions in their daily lives.
- Social isolation - the degree to which members of a family are in contact with neighbours or have a network of friends and social contacts in the area where they live, irrespective of ethnic/cultural background.

It could be imagined that these two aspects of isolation might interact. But it quickly emerged that many of the minority ethnic families whose children attended the mainly white schools that we visited were not “isolated” in any sense. They certainly did not live in isolation from their ethnic group. Some who lived in a mainly white area maintained regular contact with a network of family, friends or co-religionists from their own ethnic background in other areas. Others lived in an area that had a

substantial proportion of families from the same ethnic background but chose to send their child to school in a mainly white area. We analysed their reasons in the main report of the project (Cline et al, 2002, pp. 52 - 57).

3. The acquisition and use of minority family languages by children who attend mainly white schools

3.1 The background

There is an extensive literature on the factors that foster or inhibit minority groups' maintenance of their community languages. For example, Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) introduced the concept of "ethnolinguistic vitality" which was said to include:

- Institutional support for the language
- The status of the language vis a vis the majority language in the society
- The demographic concentration of speakers of the language

It is relevant to our study to note the importance given to a demographic concentration of speakers - something none of our informants had, at least in their schools.

In an overview of the literature Baker (1996, pp. 44 – 46) highlighted three types of factor:

1. Political, social and demographic factors
e.g. planned return to homeland, strong identification with own ethnic group
2. Cultural factors
e.g. language institutions, religious ceremonies
3. Linguistic factors
e.g. Mother tongue is standardised and exists in a written form; the language has an alphabet which makes printing and literacy relatively easy.

For individuals the development and maintenance of a minority family language is likely to depend, firstly, on their exposure to it and opportunity to use it. Some children lose their proficiency in a family language because they are placed in a situation where their knowledge is simply not used enough to stay fresh (Hoffman, 1991). They may feel that they do not really need it, notably in the situations in which children in our sample were living. The extent of the social support for the use of the language within both minority and majority communities will be a significant issue. For example, an important factor for our sample might be expected to be negative treatment of minority languages by other pupils in their mainly white schools. Finally, for the substantial group in our sample who had a mixed heritage background an influential factor might be the consistency with which each parent speaks their first language. If parents are consistent in their use of their languages, their children are more likely to learn and use both of them, even if one is rarely used in the wider society in which they are living (Saunders, 1988).

Table 2 Languages spoken by the families of children in the sample

<i>Languages spoken at home</i>	<i>Families</i>
English alone	19
English and another language	35
Another language entirely/ almost entirely without English	5

Table 2 gives an overview of the children's language backgrounds. It should be noted that there were 61 children but only 59 families as two of the children were twins in the same family, and two others were brother and sister. In about a third of the families English was the only language spoken. For the largest group, over half of the total, a combination of English and another language was spoken at home. Apart from English the languages spoken most often were Urdu, Punjabi, Chinese (mainly

Cantonese) and Hindi. The composition of this group is discussed in more detail below. The smallest group in the sample (less than a tenth of the families) spoke another language at home entirely or almost entirely without English. The languages in this group were Bengali/Hindi, Buganda, Japanese and Sinhala (which was described by our informant as “Sri Lankan”).

3.2 *Families who spoke only English at home*

Of the 19 families who spoke only English at home 11 had a dual heritage background with one or both parents having come from homes in which they had spoken English as their first language (White British or Black Caribbean homes). Four families had straight Black Caribbean, English-speaking origins. There were two Black African children in the group. One, Margaret, was born in this country to parents who came from different parts of Nigeria and spoke different community languages. English was the language they had in common. The second child, Mandy, came from Sierra Leone and was living with a woman from that country who was not biologically related to her but acted as her mother in the UK. The other adult in the household was this woman’s White British husband. Although Mandy did not herself have a dual heritage ethnic background, she was living in what was effectively a dual heritage household.

One child had an East African Asian family which presented a complex picture. We interviewed Artar and his mother separately when he was in Year 9. His mother had originally come to England from Kenya when she was 11 years old. She spoke Punjabi occasionally with relatives and with her husband who was a Kenyan citizen from the same ethnic background. They both spoke English with the children and much of the time between themselves too. Their marriage had broken up when Artar was a toddler, and she had looked after him and his older brother on her own for about nine years, living in a mainly white area. She explained: “I lived, basically, very much by myself, away from the community. I never gave a hoot what community thought of me... Um, I wasn’t involved in community,... (Then) three years back, he came back and he joined me, we worked it out and he wanted to come back, after the divorce. So we recently got married, a year ago... re-married.” The two boys were not altogether welcoming when their father returned. He spoke Punjabi more fluently than English, but Artar’s own Punjabi was not strong. He could understand a conversation: “I can speak it, but I don’t use it.” He could carry on a conversation if he needed to, he said, “but it would take me a bit of time to get the words out”.

There was one Chinese family who spoke only English at home. The parents had both originally come from Brunei. The children knew a few words in Chinese but rarely had occasion to use them. Rachel, their mother, spoke Chinese to her father, but she said that she did not see him often, although he lived in this country. She and her husband spoke different Chinese dialects, which was why they used English to each other. Even before having the children, they spoke English. Rachel had attended an English-speaking convent school in Brunei. She spoke Chinese at home, but English at school. She had never expected any of her children to learn Chinese. The parents had not been back to Brunei for almost thirty years. None of the children have ever been there. The interviewer asked if she thought they would like to go.

Mother: [pause] Er, I don’t think they are particularly interested. Their life lies here. That’s what they know. That’s their home.

Interviewer: It’s their culture.

Mother: That’s right. I mean, my parents are here. My husband’s here. All the brothers and sisters are here. So, the community is here.

3.3 *Families who spoke a combination of another language and English at home*

The largest group of families comprised those who spoke both a family language and English at home in some combination. This group included eleven Indian and ten Pakistani families as well as smaller numbers of Black African, Chinese and others. There were three families with dual heritage backgrounds. In these households there was no White British parent. The parents’ backgrounds were Malay/Pakistani, Polish/Egyptian and Pakistani/Indian.

We were sometimes given conflicting accounts of the patterns of language use. Sometimes children gave a more positive description of their proficiency in and frequent use of the family language than their parents were prepared to confirm. For example, the mother of Maha, a Year 7 Pakistani girl, was surprised when told what her daughter had said:

- I: ...At home, I ask everybody about languages and, obviously, that's relevant. Uh, she told me that she speaks Urdu mostly, within the family, but English is her-
- P: Yeah, yeah, most of the time I think it's English. She hardly knows a word of Urdu,
- I: Oh really!
- P: Yes.
- I: Does she speak Urdu with you, or-?
- P: I encourage them to speak Urdu, because in case if I have to, even for holidays, I actually, am quite happily set up here, I'm adapted to this country... But, I mean, if I have time to see my family back home,
- I: Yes
- P: It's going to be a big complication for her to communicate with the rest of the family. I remember, 'cause, um, four years ago and she could not speak a word of Urdu,
- I: Right
- P: So I told her, "Please, try to speak at least three words", you know, a day. But instead, she speaks English.

It emerged that Maha and her younger brother had been using Urdu more frequently during a period shortly before our interview because her grandmother had been visiting from Pakistan, and she did not speak English.

- I: Bu, uh-! So Urdu is not, uh, really a feature in her language-?
- P: No, no, I would not say, no. I think, it probably, I actually, I try to take most out of her. I tell her, "Look, I mean, speak at least three words of Urdu a day". And what, what, I mean, I get in return, I speak Urdu to her and she, she answers in English.
- I: Right
- P: So it's a hard- But while my mum was here, she was speaking, yeah, Urdu. So it's not, it, it gives me a little bit satisfactory that, yeah, she will be able to communicate with-
- I: She could communicate with your mother?
- P: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah.
- I: That's brilliant.
- P: Yeah, even without, um, a thing, I mean, not, even if she doesn't communicate in Urdu, I mean during normal daily life.

The grandmother's visit ended with what was evidently set to become a family joke, as her youngest grandchildren tried to teach her survival phrases in English for the flight she was about to make to Canada on her own as the next stage of her itinerary seeing overseas relatives.

Parents had different views on the importance of speaking the family language well. The mother of Man-Leung, a Year 5 Chinese boy, expressed some doubts:

- I: Do you think English schools should be helping ethnic minority children to learn their own language?
- M: I don't think so. If they have it, it's good, but if they haven't, it don't matter. My children stay in England. They should learn English better, then in the future they got a job. It's using English more than Chinese. Except they go back to China or Hong Kong, they need the Chinese, but if not they don't need it. If they know it, it's better. But just now they're too small. You can only put one cup of the water inside the packet. You put two, they will be broken. I don't think its good to put too much in one cup. That's why we don't push learning Chinese or English. I tell them. Now you in school. You learn your school homework, it's good. We don't want you do any more thing. We never push to learn.

At the same time the parents spoke Cantonese at home, and Man-Leung was able to use it when he met Chinese children outside. It was evident that in many of the families where a combination of a family language and English was spoken, there were uncertainties about the balance between them and the reasons for using either language in a particular context.

3.4 Families who spoke another language at home entirely or almost entirely without English

Rather few families used their family language all the time with little or no English. The reasons given by the five families concerned included that one or both parents did not speak English, that the parents planned to return to their home country after two or three years, and the parents wished to facilitate communication with their extended family during visits home, and finally that they were committed to trying to ensure that their children did not forget their language and culture. The main group planning to return to their home country after two or three years were two Japanese families in different towns who had come to the UK while the father was working in a facility or factory run by his company there. In a somewhat more complex explanation the mother of Mohini (a Year 3 girl) explained that it was very important to her and her husband that the children should be able to communicate with their family and friends during their regular (annual) visits home to India. They spoke Bengali at home (the family came originally from Calcutta), and the children had learned Hindi during a three year residence in Delhi before they came to England. They kept up their Hindi now mainly through watching television, “because she has to keep in touch with the national language because when she goes back, she will need it again”.

A quite different account was given to us by the mother of Saad, a Year 6 boy who had come from Uganda with his brother just six months before we interviewed him. They were joining their mother (our informant) and their older sister. The mother had strong views on their upbringing and disapproved of many aspects of how English children are brought up. She did not want the children to forget their first language - Buganda. The interviewer who met her at home commented that it was good to hear her sons speaking it with her. She put that down to their age when they left Uganda. She explained that she insisted on them speaking it at home. She did not want them to forget their language. They would learn English as well. “They are so lucky knowing two languages. There is no reason why they speak here English with me. They can speak English. But I told them - you can speak English whenever you are with your friends, but when you come back - Buganda.” They speak it too with their cousin who lives not far away and with her Ugandan friends.

The pattern was very clear. The small number of children and parents who spoke a family language exclusively at home had close or recent ties with their country of origin. In addition, the parents had a determination that this should be the family’s practice. It was already evident that Saad’s mother was feeling it to be a fight. She spoke fiercely in favour of her policy and seemed to see it partly as a barrier to neighbouring English children of whose behaviour she disapproved. It may also have had a symbolic value for her in reaffirming the cultural values of her own upbringing at a point in her life when she was becoming reconciled to never returning to where she had grown up.

3.5 Opportunities and obstacles

The children’s accounts indicated that some of the apparent occasions for using their family languages at home and in the community were associated in their minds with obstacles too. For example, visiting community language speakers within the family might offer an opportunity, but the children might find it embarrassing to speak the language in the presence of more competent speakers. Their parents recognised the problem too. Yasmin, a Year 9 Indian girl, had told us that she and her siblings spoke English together and with their parents, even with their grandparents – though the family did try to teach them Gujarati. Her mother, who was interviewed separately, acknowledged that, because even the grandparents spoke English, the children got little practice with Gujarati. She thought that, as a result, they were embarrassed to speak Gujarati when they visited family friends “just in case they get in wrong... getting it wrong and looking silly in front of them”. An Indian father commented: “They’re more Westernised now, and I think when my son speaks Gujarati, it sounds funny, and I feel laughing. And I don’t... But when he talks English, you think that’s his mother tongue.”

The literature suggests that religious prayers and celebrations are important community occasions that can bring fellow speakers together, but some co-religionists may not share an ethnic identity or a community language (Paulston, 1994). This point can be illustrated from an interview with the mother of Pramsu, a Year 5 boy who had migrated from Mauritius some months earlier to join his parents. They had come here a few years earlier to work as nurses in a hospital on the outskirts of London. He

had used English at school in Mauritius. His vocabulary was more limited than it would have been if he had lived here for longer but he could get by. The family spoke English at home now most of the time. His younger sister would answer in English if spoken to in French. Their mother felt it was hard to require her to talk in the French Creole that was the family's original language. Pramsu would speak in Creole to his grandmother in Mauritius over the phone. He was sustaining his Creole better than his sister. The interviewer asked about the family's long term plans. The parents had contracts of employment for four years. For the moment they were planning to stay long term. It would depend on the National Health Service.

Pramsu had told the researcher that the family was Hindu. His mother explained that, although they had been in Mauritius for some generations, their ancestors had come from India. She had never met their relations there (if they have any) and had never been to India. But they did keep all the traditions - all the celebrations, the festivals and so on. There were temples here in London. But because of work and shifts they did not attend much. It was, in any case, more difficult to keep it up in an area like the outer suburb where there were living now than it had been in the inner city area where the parents had first stayed when they arrived. Well, actually even there it was hard. "The temples are Indian", she said, "and we are not members of that community".

A further example along the same lines was given to us by Moslem informants, parents who had been refugees from Iraq. The family moved into the small town where we met them because the husband's brother and his family already lived there. But the parents had not felt comfortable attending the well-supported mosque in the local town, as most of the congregation were Pakistani. Instead, the family travelled a much longer distance to the mosque in a larger town where no one group dominated and they used English as the lingua franca. There was still a problem though, because the children did not like going to religious classes in the accessible local mosque because, as Sabirah (the Year 8 girl whom we interviewed) put it, "*it's all Pakistani kids speaking Urdu*".

Thus we can identify the conditions that encouraged the use of family languages by children in this sample. They tended to have close relatives who spoke only that language and not English; their parents strongly encouraged the use of the language; there were community language classes or a school available nearby; and they had access to peers who spoke the language fluently. It will be noted that this list of factors closely echoes accounts of language maintenance in the literature. Minority ethnic children in mainly white schools do not differ from those in multiethnic schools in that respect.

4. In what ways do the children's language practices relate to their sense of ethnic identity?

4.1 The formation of ethnic identity by minority ethnic children

Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) outlined three options that are open to children from minority backgrounds as they develop ethnic identities:

- *Ethnic flight* - identifying strongly with the dominant majority culture
- *Adversarial identities* - constructing an identity by rejecting the mainstream culture
- *Transcultural identities* - evolving a sense of self that encompasses bicultural and bilingual competencies

They based this simple categorisation of the available options on a study of the children of immigrants to the USA. They argued strongly that the third option, evolving a sense of self that encompasses bicultural and bilingual competencies, is the "most adaptive of the three styles" on the grounds that "it preserves the affective ties of the home culture while enabling the child to acquire the skills required to cope successfully in the mainstream culture". (p. 113) Bilingualism was an important aspect of a transcultural identity, as they saw it.

That analysis was based on empirical work in a North American context. We anticipated that their second option, "adversarial identities", would rarely be adopted by minority ethnic pupils in mainly white schools in the UK (unless, for example, the sample partly comprised pupils who were excluded from school). The following set of options seems to have more advantages in that situation for most children and young people:

- *Ethnic flight* - identifying strongly with the dominant majority culture
- *Split identities* - presenting different identities in different contexts
- *Transcultural identities* - evolving a sense of self that encompasses bicultural and bilingual competencies

We encountered a number of examples in our sample of the second option of minority ethnic children presenting different identities in different contexts. This occurred, in particular, where they experienced conformity pressures from the White majority peer group at school. This led them to suppress their minority ethnic identity there. For example, while most of the children appeared to enjoy their private interviews with a researcher at school and were quite comfortable talking about issues relating to ethnicity in a mainly white environment, there were exceptions. Ben, a Year 8 boy from a Chinese background, kept his answers short, screwed up his face when asked about his Chinese name, and said firmly that he had never visited his parents' country of origin and "*actually I don't want to either*". He was able to explain his family history but had difficulty defining his own background, as he did not want to commit himself to being Chinese or English and appeared to see them as mutually exclusive choices. The interviewer suggested that he seemed to be saying that his Chinese background really did not make a lot of difference to him.

B: Yeah.

I: Can you tell me a bit more about that? 'Cause some people would say that they're very, very proud of being Chinese and different and going to a school like your school in C (i.e. the Chinese school he goes to on Saturdays).

B: I just feel the same, really...

I: You just feel the same?

B: Yeah, you know, the same as other people. (Cline et al, 2002, p. 43)

Thus, on a superficial level he gave the impression of "ethnic flight". At the same time, however, he attended a private Chinese school every Saturday morning in a metropolitan suburb where his grandmother lived about an hour's drive away, had Chinese friends at the school and lived an encapsulated family-centred life at home (where the family lived over the small Chinese take-away which his parents ran). He found his Chinese school both boring and difficult.

B. Chinese is actually harder, so I know more English than Chinese.

While the weekly overnight stay with his grandmother followed by the Saturday morning at the school remained a central feature of his home routine, he talked more comfortably about his social contacts near his family home in the town where the interview took place, about skateboarding with friends, football, etc. These contacts were all based on the mainly white school he attended, and there were no other Chinese boys, in fact no other minority ethnic boys, in that network.

Working in mainly white schools we noted that identification with a peer group played a smaller part in the evolution of our minority informants' sense of ethnic identity than other researchers have found when working with minority ethnic pupils who live in ethnically mixed areas or areas with a substantial community from the same minority background. For example, Ryan (1999) highlighted the role of peer group pressure on minority pupils in his account of the Canadian secondary school he called Suburbia School. In contrast, in the situations we studied children were more heavily influenced by their family's teaching, modelling and networking, as in the example of Ben.

4.2 *The disentangling of key elements in the development of ethnic identity*

It has been argued that language, religion, traditions of dress, cuisine and race interact as key elements that combine to underpin a person's sense of ethnic identity. Minority ethnic children who attend mainly white schools appear to be in a situation in which these key elements may become disentangled. This has a particular impact on language maintenance and language loss in the case of religion because of the way in which religious practices may provide a stimulus to the use of community languages (both through the use of the language in traditional ceremonies and through the opportunities for language use that it provides when people come together for religious purposes). But we should not understate either the significance for language use of maintaining traditions of dress and diet.

This can be illustrated from an interview with the Korean mother of a Year 7 boy with split identities. The household comprised a White British father, the dual heritage child and herself:

M. Oh, yes, yes. Well, it was very difficult, because I want him to learn the Korean language, so I usually spoke to him in Korean, but he will never answer me back in Korean, and, uh, he sees

himself, uh, he's a bit handicapped, being, having a foreign mother. And uh, he, just refuse me back in Korean.

I: He sees himself as a bit handicapped, having a foreign mother?

P: I think so, yes. He does- I: How does he show that, not wanting to study Korean.

P: Um, lots of ways. It's, sort of, little things, like even having a, food, eating at a table, food manners different than English. I mean, I don't, don't like very much English way of cooking, eating, you know, it doesn't suit me at all, so I still have Korean style.

I: Right.

P: So when we're, three of us, he's quite happy about that. You know, he's quite happy to be in that group, in, 'cause my husband loves Korean food as well. And he's, he loves that bit, but when his friends visit, or whatever, then he obviously wants burgers and chips and,

I: Right.

P: he doesn't like me eating Korean in front of his friends, or- Not quite strongly, but he, just a, just a, you know-

I: It's something that you can sense.

P: Yes, yes.

One element of ethnic identity has overshadowed all others in the cultural history of Western Europe and North America - race. We explored with the children we interviewed their experiences of and strategies for dealing with what Suarez-Orozco and Suarez-Orozco (2001) called negative social mirroring. The focus of the enquiries we will discuss here was on what happened at school. An account of their experiences in their neighbourhood and communities can be found in Cline et al (2002, Chap. 6). The children's reactions to their situation at school included feeling embarrassed to speak the family language in the presence of white friends, avoiding being associated with other members of the same ethnic group so as to "be one of the crowd" in school, and (rarely) feeling that they were seen by some teachers as "stupid" because of their language. The words "be one of the crowd" are in quotation marks because they were used by the older brother of one of our informants. He was trying to explain why he did not go around with Indian boys and did not speak Gujarati with friends until *after* he had left school. Other examples of the pressures on the children included an account by Nadeem, a Year 9 Pakistani/Indian boy, who described a boy he did not know well talking in "my language" at school. "They thought it was a bit funny... He thought they were laughing with him... but they were actually laughing at him." Nadeem believed that he may have expected them to understand because in the multiethnic urban area where he had previously lived white boys had picked up a few words of Urdu. Nadeem emphasised that it was not like that in his area. Asha, a Year 7 Indian girl who was less articulate, simply laughed at the idea of speaking Punjabi to friends in school. Maria, a Year 7 Pakistani girl, described how a boy tried to tease her and an Asian friend in school by speaking Urdu. "He just uses it to, he just shows off in front of his friends... If he keeps on saying it and you don't answer back, he just, like, he just gets really on your nerves. So he just does it."

Thus the impact of negative social mirroring was to discourage the children from using their minority languages in front of their peers at school. That dynamic could be counteracted, however, where school staff created an ethos in which cultural diversity was accepted and shown respect. We found no examples of this in relation to linguistic diversity, but work on minority faiths in the religious education curriculum had a positive influence on attitudes in more than one school. For example, Avtar, a Year 9 boy from an East African Asian Sikh background talked about ignorant racist teasing in which a dual heritage child was called a "Paki" by white peers. He was asked if there was anything in the education in this school which helped people to understand these things better:

A: Yeah. In R.E., it's like, they talk about Sikhism and I wear these bracelets... That's, like, something to do with religion and, like, people, well after they'd done the R.E. work, they're like, "Yeah, you're Sikh - you wear the bangle and stuff".

I: Right. So then, they recognised it a bit better?

A: Yeah.

I: Did that lead, did they treat that with respect, or did they use it as an opportunity to sort of like tease you, call you names?

A: No. I don't think anyone would tease me, really, about that.

I: They'd respect it?

A: Yeah...

I: So, the school, in its R.E. is trying to cover... those sorts of things?

A: Yeah, it's covered most things, like Jews, Jewish religion and Hinduism and Muslim religion and things like that.

Multi-faith religious education is a requirement in schools alongside the National Curriculum. There was no evidence in the schools we visited of minority languages being treated with the respect given to minority faiths.

4.3 Conclusion

Speaking a minority language when attending a mainly white school begins to look like an ethnic identity assault course. There are challenging fences, there are punishing ditches, and there are many hidden challenges, even within their own communities. With so many problems to overcome what factors allow some children and young people in this situation to emerge as fluent speakers of their family's minority language? External factors are crucial, such as family encouragement and opportunities for contact with peers and adults who use the language habitually. But these factors will not be effective on their own. In addition, there is a crucial personal factor. Only those children who are evolving a confident sense of themselves as bicultural people will be likely to use their family language successfully. Some commentators have implied that bilingual proficiency is a crucial element in fostering a personal sense of having a transcultural identity. That may be the case. But the special situation of this group of children suggests that the developmental process is interactive: language use follows self-identification as self-identification follows language use. In the context of all that is implied by attending a mainly white school the learning and use of a minority language has to be a conscious and deliberate act of engagement with a particular form of ethnic identity.

References

- Baker, C. (1996). *Foundations of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*. 2nd edn. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cline, T., Abreu, G. de, Fihosy, C., Gray, H., Lambert, H. and Neale, J. (2002). *Minority Ethnic Pupils in Mainly White Schools*. London: Department for Education and Skills.
<<http://www.dfes.gov.uk/research/data/uploadfiles/RR365.doc>>.
- Giles, H., Bourhis, R., & Taylor, D. (1977). Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, Ethnicity and Intergroup Relations*. London: Academic Press.
- Hoffman, C. (1991). *An Introduction to Bilingualism*. London: Longman Group.
- Paulston, C. B. (1994). *Linguistic Minorities in Multilingual Settings*. Amsterdam/Philadelphia: John Benjamins.
- Ryan, J. (1999) *Race and Ethnicity in Multi-Ethnic Schools*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Saunders, G. (1988). *Bilingual Children: From Birth to Teens*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Suarez-Orozco, C., & Suarez-Orozco, M. M. (2001). *Children of Immigration*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.

ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism

edited by James Cohen, Kara T. McAlister,
Kellie Rolstad, and Jeff MacSwan

Cascadilla Press Somerville, MA 2005

Copyright information

ISB4: Proceedings of the 4th International Symposium on Bilingualism
© 2005 Cascadilla Press, Somerville, MA. All rights reserved

ISBN 978-1-57473-210-8 CD-ROM
ISBN 978-1-57473-107-1 library binding (5-volume set)

A copyright notice for each paper is located at the bottom of the first page of the paper.
Reprints for course packs can be authorized by Cascadilla Press.

Ordering information

To order a copy of the proceedings, contact:

Cascadilla Press
P.O. Box 440355
Somerville, MA 02144, USA

phone: 1-617-776-2370
fax: 1-617-776-2271
sales@cascadilla.com
www.cascadilla.com

Web access and citation information

This paper is available from www.cascadilla.com/isb4.html and is identical
to the version published by Cascadilla Press on CD-ROM and in library binding.