

# How bilingual learning contributes to educational achievement



Charmian Kenner  
Goldsmiths, University of London  
[c.kenner@gold.ac.uk](mailto:c.kenner@gold.ac.uk)

# Icecream or glace?

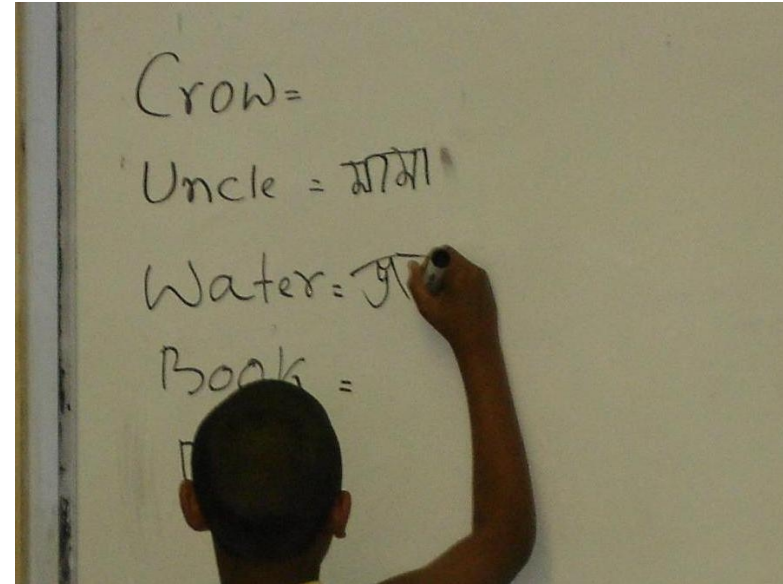
- 2-year-old offering 'icecream' to his English-speaking mother and then 'glace' to his French-speaking grandmother
- He knows which language is which and who speaks which one

# Speaking two languages is the norm

- More children in the world grow up bilingual than monolingual
- Children in India learn three languages in school (eg Bengali, Hindi and English) – each written in a different script
- Yet in the UK it's often seen as a 'problem' if a child has another language when entering school – what about Ireland?

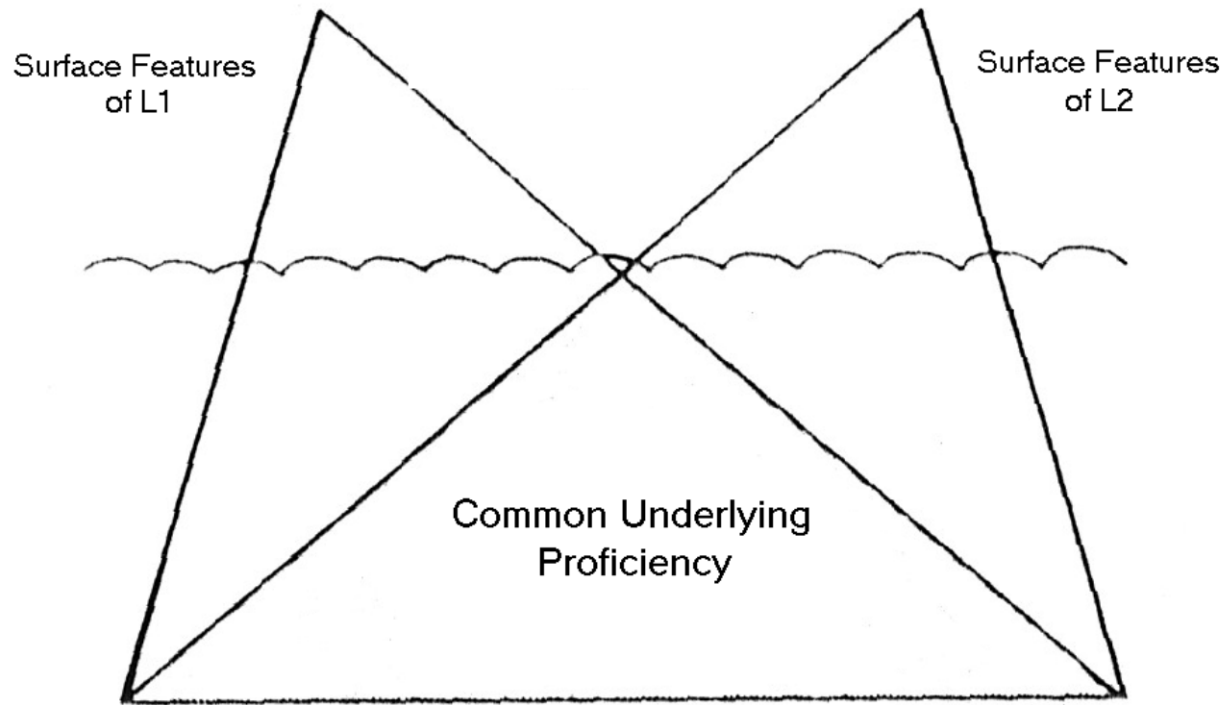
# Benefits of bilingualism for learning

- Helps children's learning because they can think about their ideas in both languages
- Children find out how language works (metalinguistic skills)  
Even very young children can compare their languages, rather than being confused  
*Kenner, 2004: Becoming Biliterate*
- Children feel secure in their identities and have deeper self-confidence
- Easier to learn further languages



# The 'Dual Iceberg' Model of Bilingualism

(Jim Cummins, 1984)



In the child's mind, the languages are inter-connected. If a child understands an idea in one language, it helps them learn the word for that concept in the other language. Or if a child develops a skill in one language, such as predicting a story from pictures, the skill will transfer to the other language.

# Children in migration contexts: multilingual and multicultural identities



- Living in ‘simultaneous worlds’  
*Kenner, 2004: Becoming Biliterate*
- Multiple identities, changing according to context and over time: eg Afro Irish Youth Club – youth arts in Dublin  
*Do schools create a space to be ‘Afro Irish’?*

# Intercultural Education Strategy for Ireland (IES) 2010-2015

- 'integration is a dynamic, two-way process'
- all students should experience an education that 'respects the diversity of values, beliefs, languages and traditions in Irish society and is conducted in a spirit of partnership'
- 'everybody has a role to play in creating an inclusive, integrated and intercultural environment'

## How will second-generation children perform at school?

'In several countries second-generation migrants fare less well than those of the first generation and in other countries second-generation children perform better than their parents. Ireland will want to take advantage of the potential of its migrants by ensuring that they fall into the latter category.'

(OECD, 2009)



- Additive bilingualism

a new language is added to the mother tongue,  
with positive effects for the child's development  
(the child can operate in both languages)

- Subtractive bilingualism

a new language replaces the mother tongue,  
with negative effects for the child's development  
(language learning becomes fragmented)

# A London setting: Multilingual classrooms in Tower Hamlets



- Majority second and third generation British Bangladeshi children
- Some children with other languages: eg Somali, Arabic, Russian...
- Newcomer children from Bangladesh
- Teaching assistants bilingual in Sylheti/Bengali
- Some bilingual teachers
- Only English being used in class

# Identity issues in mainstream school

'At home we speak Bengali, then we come to school and slowly slowly we forget Bengali and then we will be like the English people only speaking one language'

'This is the school hall, we're not used to speaking Bengali here'

School as a monolingual space where children can only express certain aspects of their identities (Kenner & Ruby, 2012)

# Children may already be learning at home in another language



- Sahil – parents and grandparents speak Bengali
- Grandmother teaches rhyme, rhythm and literary language through Bengali poetry

Goldsmiths research on learning with grandparents

# Supporting bilingual learning: Community-run complementary classes

(thanks to [www.stifford.org.uk](http://www.stifford.org.uk) for the image)



- After-school or weekends
- Children learning mother tongue and often maths or other curriculum subjects as well
- Strong links with families
- Creating space for multilingual identities to develop
- 436 migrant organisations in Ireland (Office for the Promotion of Migrant Integration website): Chinese and Vietnamese schools in Dublin, Finnish school in Cork
- UK government-funded project linking complementary and mainstream schools: [www.ourlanguages.org.uk](http://www.ourlanguages.org.uk)

# Research study in London: Partnerships between primary and complementary teachers

- Collaborative action research on bilingual learning
- Teachers visit each other's settings
- Plan jointly around a topic, adapt to own context
- Supported by Goldsmiths and Tower Hamlets Languages Service

(Kenner & Ruby, 2012)

# Sulaman and Annika: poetry work

*Kajla Didi* : well-known Bengali poem about a girl whose sister has mysteriously disappeared

*What Happened to Lulu?* : English poem by Charles Causley on the same subject



## কাজলা দিদি যতীন্দ্রমোহন বাগচী

বাঁশবাগানের মাথার ওপর চাঁদ উঠেছে ওই—  
মাগো, আমার শোলক-বরা কাজলা দিদি কই?  
পুকুর ধারে, নেবুর তলে খোকায় খোকায় জোনাই জলে—  
ফুলের গন্ধে ঘুম আসে না, একলা জেপে রই;  
মাগো আমার কোলের কাছে কাজলা দিদি কই?

সে দিন হতে দিদিকে আর কেনই বা না ডাকো,  
দিদির কথায় আঁচল দিয়ে মুখটি কেন ঢাকো?  
হাবার খেতে আসি যখন দিদি বলে ডাকি, তখন  
ও ঘর থেকে কেন মা আর দিদি আসে নাকো,  
আমি ডাকি, —তুমি কেন চুপটি করে থাকো?

বল মা, দিদি কোথায় গেছে, আসবে আবার কবে?  
কাল যে আমার নতুন ঘরে পুতুল বিয়ে হবে।  
দিদির মন্তন ফাঁকি দিয়ে আমিও যদি লুকোই গিয়ে—  
তুমি তখন একলা ঘরে কেমন করে রবে?  
আমিও নাই দিদিও নাই— কেমন মজা হবে।

তুঁইচাঁপাতে ভরে গেছে শিউলি গাছের তল,  
মাড়াস নে মা পুকুর থেকে আনবি যখন জল,  
জানিম গাছের ডালের ফাঁকে বুলবুলি লুকিয়ে থাকে,  
দিস না তারে উড়িয়ে মাগো, ছিঁড়তে গিয়ে ফল,—  
দিদি এসে শুনবে যখন, বলবে কী মা বল।

বাঁশবাগানের মাথার ওপর চাঁদ উঠেছে ওই—  
এমন সময়, মাগো আমার কাজলা দিদি কই?  
বেড়ার ধারে, পুকুর পাড়ে ঝিকি ডাকে কোপে-ঝড়ে  
নেবুর গন্ধে ঘুম আসে না—তাই তো জেপে রই,—  
রাত হল যে, মাগো, আমার কাজলা দিদি কই?

### পাঠ শিখি

১. নিচের শব্দগুলোর অর্থ জেনে নিই ও বাক্য তৈরি করি :  
শোলক — রোক, ছোট-পদা, ছড়া। — চাঁদনি রাতে উঠানে বসে মা শোলক  
বলতেন।  
জোনাই — জোনাকি, আলো-জালানো পোকা। — আঁধার রাতে কোপে-ঝড়ে  
জোনাই জলে।  
দিদি — বড় বোন, আপা। — দিদি আমার চুলে কুটি বেঁধে দিয়েছে।
২. বিপরীত শব্দগুলো জেনে নিই ও লিখি :  
দিন—রাত। ঘুম—জাগরণ। ঢাকা—খোলা। নতুন—পুরনো। জলা—মেজা।
৩. জন দিক থেকে ঠিক উত্তরটি বেছে নিই :  
ক) কোথায় জোনাকি জলে? নেবুর তলে/বাঁশবাগানে/শিউলি-তলে।  
খ) বুলবুলি কোথায় লুকিয়ে থাকে? শিউলির ডালে/তুঁইচাঁপার ডালে/  
ডালিমের ডালে।  
গ) কে শোলক বলতেন? মা/দিদি/দাদু।  
ঘ) ঝিকি কোথায় ডাকে? কোপে-ঝড়ে/গাছের ডালে/আঁধার  
রাতে।  
ঙ) ঘুম আসে না কেন? নেবুর গন্ধে/ঝিকির ডাকে/চাঁদের  
আলোতে।



# Transliterated and translated versions

## **Kajla Didi by Jatindra Mohon Bagchi**

Baash baganer mather upor chad uteche oi  
Mago amaar solok bola Kajla didi koi?  
Pukur dhare, nebur tole thokai thokai jonak jole  
Phooler gondhe ghum ase na ekla jege roi  
Maago amar koler kache Kajla didi koi?

The moon has appeared on the top of the bamboo garden  
Mother, where is my quiz teller sister Kajla?  
Near the pond and underneath the lemon plant  
Where lots of fire flies are flying  
The flowers' smell kept me awake and it's only me who is awake  
Mother, where is my very dear sister Kajla?

(Transliteration and translation by Shabita Shamsad)



# Bilingual learning approaches

- Use all three versions of *Kajla Didi* to investigate meaning
- Involve parents and grandparents: ask for poems in other languages
- Compare *Kajla Didi* and *What Happened to Lulu*
- Write own poems about loss, using Bengali / English / other languages

# Multiple aspects of learning

- Literary heritage: importance of poem, use of poetry recitation and songs
- Natural history: plants, birds, insects in other countries
- Social and cultural knowledge: village life, living close to nature, gender relationships
- Linguistic knowledge: word meanings, issues in translation
- 'creating an inclusive, integrated and intercultural environment' ? (cf the IES)



## The Rag Trade

- Use photos to prompt discussion around child labour
- Learning key words through drama and role play
- Children think of questions to take home to parents in different languages using script or transliteration e.g.



Bangladesher bachara ki bhabe thake?

(How do the children in Bangladesh live?)

Ora pora shunar kototuku shujug pai?

(What opportunities do they get to read and write?)



# Developing 'learning power'

- Mainstream curriculum devalues and excludes children's cultural and linguistic knowledge
- Partnerships with families and complementary teachers challenge coercive power relations and develop 'learning power': working together as a community, co-constructing knowledge that draws on multilingual and multicultural resources and enables children to develop multilingual identities (Kenner & Ruby, 2012)
- 'It is the efforts of the single school/institution which matter' (final statement in the IES)

# Publications and resources

- Goldsmiths Multilingual Learning website  
[www.gold.ac.uk/clcl/multilingual-learning](http://www.gold.ac.uk/clcl/multilingual-learning)  
Teaching resources and publications
  - Learning with Grandparents
  - Bilingual Learning
  - Complementary-Mainstream Partnerships
- Kenner, C. (2004) *Becoming Biliterate* (Trentham)
- Kenner, C. and Hickey, T. (eds) (2008) *Multilingual Europe* (Trentham)
- Kenner, C. and Ruby, M. (2012) *Interconnecting Worlds* (Trentham)