

# Designing Bilingual Books



for children

im KINDEL

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### Designing bilingual books for children

Hodgson and Saronak in an earlier volume of this journal (1987, 20) introduce the notion of 'languages in contact' and 'languages in conflict' in discussing bilingual typography. In this paper we want to look at these notions in a specific context – that of the design of bilingual children's books.

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This topic was one of the focuses of The Multilingual Resources for Children Project undertaken at The University of Reading, United Kingdom from 1992-4. The aim of this Project was to investigate the nature and use of multilingual resources for reading, writing and speaking and listening in United Kingdom primary schools. The languages the Project was concerned with – Chinese, Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu and Panjabi – are the five most widely used languages other than English in the United Kingdom. The main focus of the Project was resources for reading: both single language and dual language books.

It was clear from the outset that this Project straddled three disciplines: education, linguistics and typography. This interdisciplinary mix has been the fermentation ground for new perspectives on producing and using resources in and for multilingual schools. The research team for the Project brought together speakers of all the Project languages as well as teachers, typographers and linguists. To return to Hodgson and Saronak: "...it is necessary to cross the boundaries which traditionally have separated the various disciplines devoted to language phenomena fields as diverse as sociolinguistics, the comparative study of two or more languages, as well as typography and the analysis of literary texts – all have a contribution to make to the study of 'languages in contact and/or conflict.'"

### Languages in contact

Dual language books provide a good example of "languages in contact." The design of such books

raises some interesting issues for typographers ranging from the choice of typeface to graphic organization of two languages on a page. Dual texts for children pose additional questions because they contain pictures: where should the texts be placed in relation to the pictures? Design issues such as these are discussed in full in *Multilingual Matters, building bridges: multilingual resources for children* (1995).

In the United Kingdom dual texts have been available since the early 1980s; the first of these were folk tales and myths probably because the subject matter transfers easily across languages. More recently publishers have added other languages to already popular English titles. Many dual texts, however, are published locally using local writers, translators, artists and calligraphers.

The use of dual texts in schools is somewhat controversial. While good resources are necessary for success, they will only work in schools where linguistic diversity is regarded as an asset, not a problem, and where teachers recognize that appropriate resources are not an answer in themselves, but just one part of a much wider response. What emerged from our discussions with teachers and children was that there were many perceptions about the place of dual texts in the classroom. When they were first introduced in the United Kingdom they were favorably received and seen as being useful to monolingual and bilingual children alike. Their more recent arrival in Canadian schools has met with equally favorable reactions (see Feuerverger, 1994).

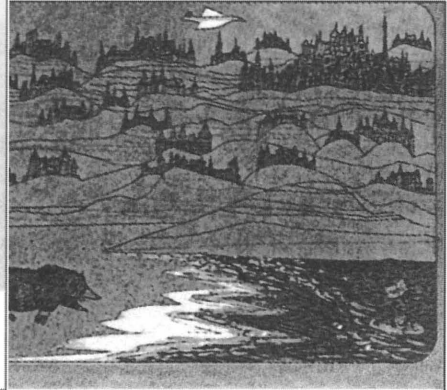
Teachers in our project schools identified various uses for dual language books. Like their Canadian colleagues they saw the potential for raising all children's awareness of multiculturalism through exposure to different languages and scripts. They also saw dual texts as a valuable bridge between home and school making it possible, for instance, for parents, grandparents and others literate in the community language to read with their children. However, teachers in community schools in the United Kingdom are sometimes adamant that dual texts are unhelpful in community language teaching

because they encourage children to concentrate on English at the expense of the other language.

Children we spoke with (both monolingual and bilingual) were positive about dual language books. An eleven year old, for instance, pointed out that: *You can work with an adult and learn how to read Gujarati at the same time as reading English ... Those who don't know English can read the Gujarati and those who don't know Gujarati can read the English.* Monolingual children spoke of reading the non-English text for fun. They also offered interesting insights into the kinds of hypotheses they were developing about how different languages work. Some children clearly think that word order remains the same irrespective of the language, and that, in translation, the two texts can be matched word for word, with each taking up the same amount of space on the page. We also asked children: given a free choice would they take a single language or a dual language book? Some were clear that their decision would be based on the subject rather than the language format of the book. Others confirmed suspicions of the community language teachers by saying they would choose a dual text because they 'knew English better.' One child explained he would take a single language book 'otherwise I would just read the English and make no effort to read the Bengali.'

The dual texts we studied in the Project showed a range of design approaches. Some, for example, emphasized the bilingual nature of the text by exploiting the structure of the book as a whole. An example of a book that falls into this category is Brian Wildsmith's *The tunnel/Le tunnel* (OUP, 1993). This book is a dual text in French and English. The cover at one end of the book is in French and, opening the book from this end the French text is dominant (it is placed above the English text and is set in bold type). When readers get to the middle of the book they are invited to turn the book around and read from the other cover which has the title in English and opens onto pages where the English text takes the dominant role.

A few dual texts integrate the two languages at the level of the chapter: one chapter in one language, the next in another and so on. *Découvrez... who stole Granny?* (Gemini Books, 1990), for



**Figure 1:**  
Two pages from  
*The Tunnel/*  
*Le Tunnel*  
by Brian Wildsmith,  
French translation  
by Anne-Marie  
Dalmais. Oxford:  
Oxford University  
Press, 1993.

In this dual text in French and English, the French text is predominant in one half of the book, when English is the dominant language, it is placed above the other in bold type.

instance, is a bilingual 'choose your own adventure story' about a French-speaking brother and sister who are visiting their grandmother in English-speaking Ontario. The first chapter appears in two languages, the English occupying the left-hand page and the French the right-hand page. At the end of this first chapter, the reader is invited to choose between two possible routes. The language of each subsequent chapter is determined by the situation.

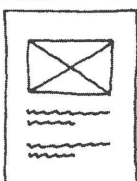
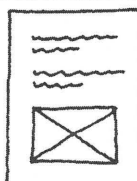
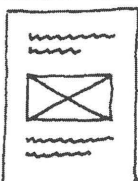
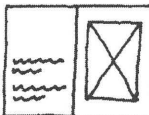
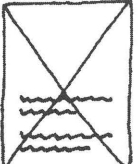
Phone conversations with the emergency operator and the police, for instance, take place in English. Conversations between the Francophone hero and heroine of the adventure take place in French. To make your way through the book, you have to use both languages.

Most dual texts, however, are designed at the level of the double-page spread or single page. In some examples, text and illustrations fall in the same position on the page throughout the book, in others the position of text and pictures varies throughout the book.

Dual texts arranged at the page level highlight the importance of the relationship between pictures and text as a key issue for designers of children's books and one that needs careful consideration (see Goldsmith, 1984 and Smith and Watkins, 1972). In dual texts this relationship has the additional dimension of another text – it is a picture/text/text configuration that has to be considered.

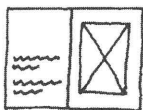
Take first the arrangement of the two texts. By far the most common configuration is for texts to be placed one above the other. Sometimes texts are placed side by side and occasionally one text runs vertically, the other horizontally. When pictures are added, possibilities for page layout increase as illustrated in the following table. Here the texts are consis-

**Table 1:**  
Ways of organizing  
text and pictures in  
dual texts

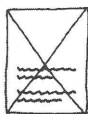
		
<p><b>Layout 1</b> picture above both texts</p>	<p><b>Layout 2</b> picture below both texts</p>	<p><b>Layout 3</b> picture between both texts</p>
		
<p><b>Layout 4</b> picture on one page, both texts on the other</p>		<p><b>Layout 5</b> Picture covering page (texts within)</p>

tently placed one above another, but the way the picture is placed in relation to these texts produces very different-looking pages.

The effectiveness of a particular page design relates closely to how a book is read – it became clear in our research that dual



Layout 4



Layout 5

texts are used in many different ways. In the Project schools they were read by monolingual and bilingual teachers with large or small groups of children or by children on their own. Sometimes the whole story was read (or paraphrased), first in one language, then in the other; sometimes the languages were alternated one page at a time, and at other times the less familiar language was read using the more familiar one as reference. It was clear there were many variables: age of child, whether the book was used in a mainstream or community school, whether the book was to be read aloud.

We asked teachers for their views about three widely used layout options (table 1, numbers 3,4,5).

- **Layout 3** where the two texts are separated by a picture tended to cause concern in community schools because it was feared that children would read only the English without referring to the other language. Some teachers (in mainstream schools), however, preferred this layout because in some teaching situations the English could be covered up and the other language focused on.
- **Layout 4** where the picture takes up one page of a double-page spread, supports reading strategies where both languages are read together. It also allows teachers to use pictures independently of the text, a useful strategy with inexperienced readers. A bilingual infant teacher confirmed this: *If the texts are on one page and the picture on the other, you can cover the text and talk about the picture – with the younger ones I prefer something like that.*
- **Layout 5** is where the picture covers the whole page and the texts are placed one above the other. Some teachers thought it better to keep text and pictures separate and were concerned that the position of the texts is likely to change from page to page because they have to be fitted in where there is space within the illustration.

Our conclusions about the close relationship between the arrangement of a dual text and its effective use would suggest that designers of these books need to have a clear understand-

	issues	key questions
<b>Typography</b>	One script takes precedence over the other.	Are typographic features such as size, space, weight and color applied consistently across both languages?
<b>Production</b>	One script is of a higher quality than the other.	What messages are sent to readers when the English text is typeset, and the other is handwritten?
<b>Language</b>	The typography/page layout has been compromised because of the printing process.	Has the other language been squashed in to fit an existing single language page layout?
	The translation of the non-English text is inappropriate.	Is the translation suitable for educational use?
	The text is inaccessible to the audience.	Is the language too formal or literary?

**Table 2:**  
Issues and questions  
in bilingual publica-  
tion

ing of such issues before they can begin to design effectively for a bilingual audience.

### Languages in conflict

The main motivation for producing dual language books has been to increase the status of minority languages; but ironically, inadequate attention to typography and translation sometimes has the opposite effect. Here we have a potential situation of “languages in conflict”: it was clear from the outset that there were many ways that one language can be perceived as being more important than another. Some of these issues are summarized in table 2.

Giving both languages equal typographic status can be problematic when Latin and non-Latin scripts are combined. Successful integration of both languages depends in part on being aware of technical problems of typesetting and of linguistic and graphic conventions. Designing for children adds another dimension: the typography in both languages must be appropriate for young readers. The Project fieldwork gave clear indications as to which design features were thought by teachers and children to be important. These were differences

in mode of writing (whether text has been typeset, word processed or handwritten), use of space and size of type and amount of the text on the page (Multi-lingual Resources for Children Project, 1995).

Mode of writing is a particular issue when combining a Latin and non-Latin script. Many books we studied had the English text typeset at high resolution with the other text either typed or handwritten. One teacher summarized the potential problems: *They'll [children] read the nicely printed professional looking*

So the Miller and his son both rode on the donkey. Soon they passed some children who shouted, "Fancy making the poor donkey carry so much. How cruel!"

ਜੇ ਏਏ ਪਿਉ ਪੁੱਤੋ ਗਾਏ ਉੱਪਰ ਜਾਣਾ  
 ਨੇ ਗਏ। ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਕੋਲੋਂ ਕੋਈਨੀ ਗਾਏ ਜਲਾਵ ਕਰੇ ਕੱਚੇ ਲੰਘੇ ਕਿ ਗਾਪਾ  
 ਵਿਚਾਰ ਭਾਰ ਨਾਲ ਮਰ ਰਿਹਾ ਹੈ।  
 "ਇਹ ਕਿੰਨੇ ਜ਼ਾਲਮ ਨਿਰਦਈ"

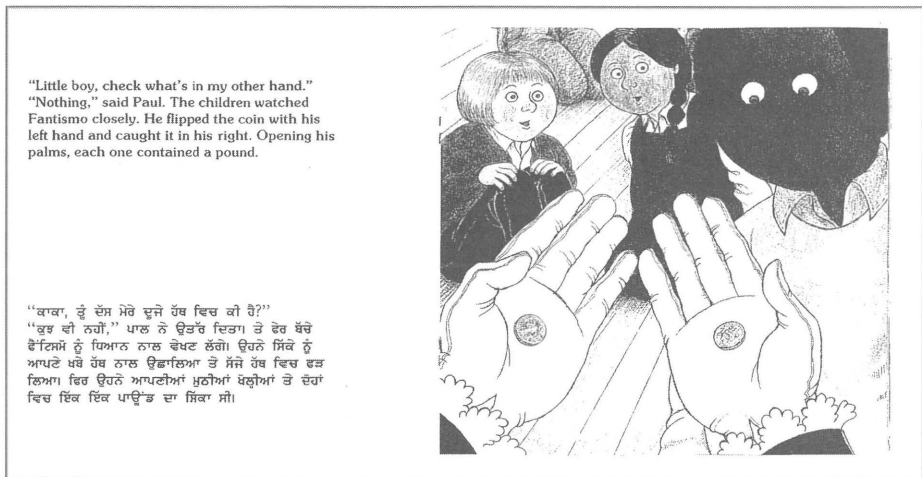
**Figure 2:**  
 Detail from *The Elves  
 and the Shoemaker  
 and Other Tales*,  
 English and Panjabi  
 edition, Ilford:  
 Newham Women's  
 Community Writing  
 Group, 1983.

This example shows  
 inconsistency in line  
 spacing from  
 language  
 to language.

[typeset] English text . . . they might look at the other subsidiary [handwritten] text. But if they have any problems at all they certainly won't consider it . . . There is a place for handwritten texts, but in a dual text both languages should be the same. (Multilingual Resources for Children Project, 1995, 69.)

Use of space is a key issue in typography in children's books. In the dual texts we looked at, the spacing between lines and words was often different for the two languages. Again, this can have the effect of making one language appear more significant than the other. Space as an aid to ease of reading was also noticed by children: long lines of closely spaced type were rejected in favor of shorter lines with more space between them. If one language was set with less space than the other, children immediately saw it as more difficult to read (see figures 2 and 3).

Size of letterforms and amount of text on the page are two characteristics readily noticed by readers. In a dual text, or indeed any piece of bilingual typography, some languages take up more space than others. In many of the dual texts we have seen, changing the size of one of the scripts is a common solution to this problem, but this raises the issue of relative size and importance. In books designed with a grid that accommodates texts of different lengths on a page, text size and spacing can be kept constant. But, when one language takes up more space than another some children expressed concern



**Figure 3:**  
 Detail from *Anita  
 and the Magician*  
 by Swaran Chandan.  
 Hayes: Magi Publica-  
 tions, 1987.

This book was consistently singled out by children as a 'good example.' They noted that both typefaces looked the same size and that the type was set with plenty of space around it.

about the balance between the two languages and thought that one had more to say than the other.

Designing in two languages raises many other questions. Even in languages that use the Latin alphabet there can be visual anomalies. A typeface that works well in English, for instance, can have a different visual effect in other Latin-script languages, and may even reduce the legibility of the text (Szanto, 1972). When Latin and non-Latin forms are combined in the same document, there are other concerns. Lubell (1993), for instance, raises some of the issues involved in trying to typeset Hebrew and non-Hebrew texts: problems of alignment, directionality and use of graphic conventions.

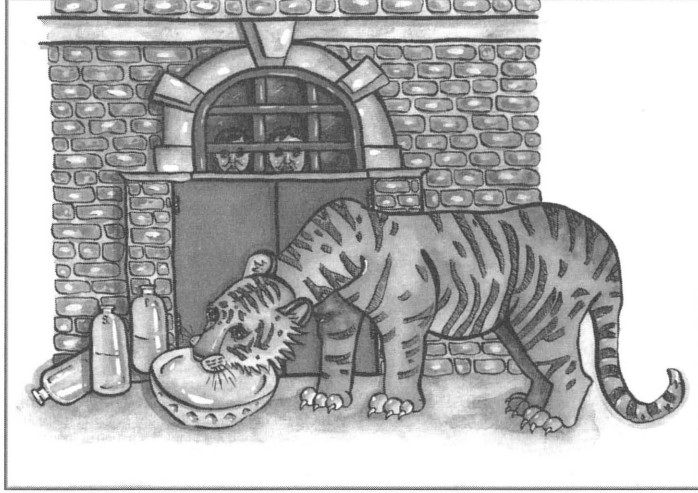


Figure 4:

Two pages from *Send for Sohail* by Grange Road First School, Bradford, illustrated by Sean Pike. Bradford: Partnership Publishing, 1993.

In this example, a dual text successfully addresses the issue of directionality. The book opens from the top: an unconventional approach for both languages.

Then Haruna had a problem. "There's a tiger in my classroom," she said. "My teacher is sitting on top of the cupboard and he's too frightened to come down."

All the children in the playground knew what to do. They all said immediately...

#### "Send for Sohail!"

Now whenever Sohail was sent for, he always came, quick as a flash.

"A tiger," he remarked. "That's only a small problem. Didn't you know that tigers love milk?" and he went to the milkman and got thirty bottles of milk.

"Come on tiger," he shouted, as he poured all the milk into a dustbin lid. The tiger looked wary, but very slowly came out and had a big, big drink. Then before the tiger could blink, Sohail slipped a skipping-rope around his neck and took him back to the zoo.



مھر ہارونہ کو ایک مشکیل پیش آئی۔ وہ بولی۔ سکول کے کمرے میں ایک شیر ہے اور اسٹاڈنما جب ڈسکے مارے لٹاری کے کپڑے پھینچے ہوئے ہیں اور سچے نہیں آسکتے۔ جو سچے سکول کے میدان میں تھے انکو پتہ تھا کہ کیا کرنا چاہیے۔ وہ جلدی بول لگے

سہیل کو بلا دو!

سہیل جہاں گئیں بھی تھا وہ جگہ انکو موجود ہوا اسے شیر آئے تو چھوٹی سی بات ہے۔ کیا آپ یہ نہیں جانتے کہ شیروں کو دودھ پسند ہے؟ دودھ دلے کے پاس جا کر وہ تیس دودھ کی بوتلیں لے کر آیا۔ اس دودھ کو ڈسٹین کے ڈسٹین میں ڈال کر اس نے شیر کو آواز دی۔ آج دودھ لے لو۔ شیر بہت تھکا ہوا تھا لیکن پر بھی آہستہ آہستہ آگے بڑھ کر اس نے پتی پتی کھڑک کر دودھ پی لیا شیر نگاہ اٹھانے بھی نہ پایا کہ سہیل نے اس کے گلے میں رسی ڈالی اور اسے پتیا پتیا کھینچ لیا۔

Alignment problems can occur when insufficient attention is paid to the relative sizes and inter-baseline spacing of type. Typefaces of the same nominal size may not appear the same size, for example, so a 14 point Bengali typeface may look significantly smaller than a 14 point Latin font. Also, non-Latins for desktop publishing are likely to be available in a limited range of sizes only. When choosing type for dual texts therefore, it is better to choose the non-Latin font and size first so that the Latin font can be matched to it.

Directionality is a design issue in dual texts when right-left reading languages are combined with left-right reading ones. Most dual texts incorporating right-left reading languages tend to be produced within the book conventions of left-right reading languages. Readers of the Urdu part of a dual text, therefore, have to open the book from the 'wrong' end. Some arrangements of text, however, allow for successful incorporation of right-left reading languages. Some Urdu/English books which have been designed as dual texts from the outset, present innovative approaches to the problem. In *Send for Sohail!*, for example, a dual text produced by Partnership Publishing, a small community publisher in the UK, the book is designed in a landscape format opening from the top, with full-page illustrations on the top half of the spread and the text (English on the left and Urdu on the right) on the bottom half. The two languages have equal directional status and the illustrations relate equally to both texts (see figure 4).

When languages are placed alongside each other it is important that designers are aware that different scripts have different graphic conventions for articulating text. In figure 5 the Panjabi text has been set without any significant space between words. Such mistakes not only hinder children's reading development, but also send out negative status messages. They emphasize the importance of getting texts checked by people that are aware of the publishing conventions in the language concerned and that have some awareness of the typographic factors that may be important in helping children learn to read.

I wrote to the zoo  
to send me a pet.  
They sent me an . . .

ਮੈਂ ਚਿੜੀਆਘਰ ਨੂੰ ਲਿਖਿਆ  
ਕਿ ਉਹ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਪਾਲਤੂ ਜਾਨਵਰ ਭੇਜਣ।  
ਉਨ੍ਹਾਂ ਨੇ ਮੈਨੂੰ ਭੇਜਿਆ . . .

**Figure 5:**  
Detail from *Dear Zoo*  
by Rod Cambell.  
Panjabi translation:  
Amarjit Chandan.  
London: Ingham Yates  
Associates, 1987.

In this example there  
is hardly any space  
between the words in  
the Panjabi text.

The way dual texts are produced can also have status implications. Many publishers of dual texts choose already popular books and add other languages to an existing English version. For such books to be cost-effective, the same plates are used for printing the illustrations; the other language is either fitted into available space alongside the English, or both languages are reset. Such solutions can lead to compromise: type is made to 'fit the space' rather than being redesigned for the new dual text edition. The position of the text in relation to the illustrations can also be significant because the English text can appear to take precedence if it, rather than the other language, relates to the action in the pictures.

### **Translation**

The quality of translation is critical to the success of a book and in the course of the Project we presented native speakers with a wide selection of translated texts. The consensus was

that the quality was quite variable and many felt that poor translation lessened the effective educational use of dual texts. (This issue is discussed more fully in Edwards and Walker, 1996.) It was quite often the case, for example, that translations were grammatically correct, but stylistically flawed. This can occur when translators use standard literary language rather than the more colloquial language children are accustomed to.

Good practice in translation was shown in one of our Project case studies: Hounslow Language Service. Hounslow is a vibrant multilingual community to the west of London. The largest minority groups are Sikh and Moslem Panjabi speakers who first came to England either from the Panjab or via the east African countries of Kenya, Uganda and Tanzania. Hounslow Language Service provides support for bilingual learners both in English and their other languages. It consists of over forty teachers, forty per cent of whom are bilingual. Materials production is an important area of work for the Language Service and designated teachers are responsible for aspects such as Panjabi language support and bilingual word-processing. Bilingual materials in Hounslow are generally produced in response to varied requests from schools. Recent initiatives include materials which have grown out of a project offering advice to parents on reading; resources to support national curriculum assessment books; and vocabulary lists on different classroom topics.

Dialect variation is a particular concern for the Hounslow team. Their policy is to provide the standard form of a language but to acknowledge dialect differences and discuss them openly with children. Thus the standard Urdu word for white /səfəd/ might be used, but provoke comment from children who would be more likely to use /ʃʃɪʔa/ in their own speech. Standardization across languages raises similar issues. Decisions need to be made, for instance, as to whether 'book' should be translated as /kəʔab/, the form used in both Urdu and everyday Panjabi, or /pəʔstək/, the Panjabi alternative which is considered 'purer' and 'more educated.' Occasionally, when there is no consensus, assistants seek advice from outside ex-

perts. Transliteration is used as a matter of course in producing materials such as vocabulary lists. Although beginners in English may not know a term like 'energy,' they may well understand this concept in another language. Transliteration makes it possible for monolingual teachers to cue the meaning of a word for children who can't read the community language. It is also useful for bilingual children whose spoken skills in the community language outstrip their literacy skills. However, it isn't always easy to find an acceptable transliteration and attempts are usually tested on readers who don't know the language in question.

Hounslow Language Service, in their approach to the production of dual texts, liaison with user groups both to find out what their language needs are, and to get feedback during the writing and design process, help to emphasize that the design of effective dual texts depends on teamwork. Their work and that of other groups studied during The Multilingual Resources for Children project has clearly shown that there are significant links between the look of the book, the language used and the readers and users. The most effective dual texts are those designed with these three strands in mind.

### **Conclusion**

Designing bilingual material is a challenging task for designers. Although the context of The Multilingual Resources for Children Project was very specific it has allowed us to identify some key issues. First, the most successful dual texts were those where potential readers of the texts were consulted during the writing/translation and design process so that their needs and the circumstances of use were taken into account. Secondly, because there has been very little research that looks at typography for children (see Walker, 1993) we would encourage investigative work in this area to find out (through trial and evaluation) what typographic solutions work best for children. Finally, on the question of status: without careful consideration of typographic and linguistic variables in designing there will be 'conflict'—the languages will not sit harmoniously together on the page.

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