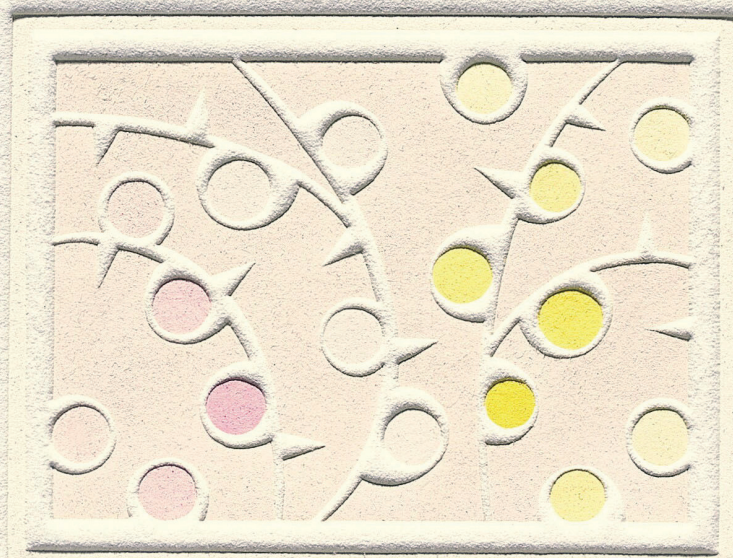


TWO LANGUAGES, NUMBER ONE AUTHORS:
THE INFLUENCE OF BILINGUAL UPBRINGING
ON THE LITERARY ACCOMPLISHMENTS OF
ROALD DAHL AND DR. SEUSS

IVANA MARINIĆ, ŽELJKA NEMET

English
Language
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Enquiries



Editors: SMILJANA KOMAR and UROŠ MOZETIČ

**AS YOU WRITE IT: ISSUES IN LITERATURE,
LANGUAGE, AND TRANSLATION IN THE
CONTEXT OF EUROPE IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

Slovensko društvo za angleške študije
Slovene Association for the Study of English

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Two Languages, Number One Authors: The Influence of Bilingual Upbringing on the Literary Accomplishments of Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss

Summary

This paper focuses on the nature and impact of bilingual upbringing on cognitive development, thought and cultural experience of two bestselling authors, Roald Dahl and Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss). It argues that this bilingual upbringing resulted in a specific use of language in their literary accomplishments. Several segments from representative works by Dahl and Dr. Seuss are examined in order to reveal the stylistic particularities of the two authors, such as their original argot, word play, neologisms, the art of exaggeration and nonsense, as well as various aspects of metaphor. This is to show that bilingualism may be a decisive factor in creating a fruitful environment for the development of original and recognizable mode of written expression, which not only transcends cognitive and linguistic boundaries, but also cultural borderlines, resulting in the emergence of a new cultural artistic identity.

Key words: bilingualism, autobiography, word play, neologism, nonsense, conceptual metaphor, exaggeration

Dva jezika, dva vrhunska pisatelja: vpliv dvojezične vzgoje na literarno ustvarjanje Roalda Dahla in Dr. Seussa

Povzetek

Prispevek se osredotoča na kognitivno razvojno misel in kulturno izkustvo dveh najbolje prodajanih mladinskih pisateljev, in sicer Roalda Dahla in Theodorja Seussa Geisela (Dr. Seussa). Zagovarja tezo, da je njuna specifična raba jezika posledica njune dvojezične vzgoje. Slogovna razčlemba reprezentativnih del avtorjev izpostavi prvine, kot so argo, besedne igre, neologizmi, pretiravanje, nesmisel ter različne vidike metaforične rabe. Sklene z ugotovitvijo, da je dvojezičnost odločilnega pomena pri zagotavljanju pogojev za razvoj izvirnega in prepoznavnega načina pisane besede, ki ne samo presega kognitivne in jezikovne, temveč tudi kulturne meje, kar ima za posledico pojav nove kulturne umetniške identitete.

Ključne besede: dvojezičnost, avtobiografija, besedne igre, neologizmi, nesmisel (nonsense), konceptualna metafora, pretiravanje

Two Languages, Number One Authors: The Influence of Bilingual Upbringing on the Literary Accomplishments of Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss

1. Introduction

When one considers the legacy of two celebrated authors, Roald Dahl and Theodor Seuss Geisel (Dr. Seuss), it becomes apparent that both exhibited a great amount of widely appreciated talent. Every year on September 13, Great Britain celebrates Roald Dahl Day to honour the accomplished author of nineteen children's books, nine short story collections, as well as television scripts and screenplays. Dahl is, according to children's writer Anthony Horowitz (2006), solely responsible for a "renaissance in children's literature".¹ The 2006 celebration, for example, featured everything from exhibitions to children's reading campaigns, from yellow costumes to "gobblefunking" to films and tea parties. Similarly, in 2004 America marked the National Education Read Across America day in honour of Dr. Seuss on what would have been his hundredth birthday, with fans wearing red and white stovepipe hats and breaking the Guinness World Record for most people simultaneously reading aloud (*Reading Today*, 2004). Upon his death on September 24, 1991, Theodor Seuss Geisel had written and illustrated forty-four children's books. Tellingly, Herb Cheyette of Dr. Seuss Enterprises claims that "one out of every four children born in the United States receives as its first book a Dr. Seuss book" (Nel 2003, 3–4). Additionally, the 2001 *Publisher's Weekly* list of all-time best-selling hardcover children's books contained sixteen Dr. Seuss books in the top 100, a number matched by no other author. Likewise, Roald Dahl, whom *The Norton Anthology of Children's Literature* (Zipes et al. 2005, 359) calls "one of the most innovative writers for children in the latter half of the twentieth century," is one of the best-selling children's authors nowadays, both in Britain and abroad, and his wonderfully shocking, grotesque and subversive works, such as *Matilda* or *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, have remained irresistible to generations of children (Nudd 1989).

Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl shared a lot more than their ability to write fantastic children's books. Their distinct style possibly owes a lot to their background and circumstances, as they were both raised in bilingual homes. Therefore, the inquiry into their respective works reveals stylistic parallels marked by an almost anarchic use of language filled with neologisms, word play, exaggeration, nonsense and subversive use of metaphor. This paper will deal with bilingualism as a factor affecting various aspects of verbal expression, especially the promotion of divergent thinking. The singular approach to language employed by both authors suggests, in the words of Philip Nel (2003, 24), that "language is both practical and impractical, both a means of communication and a game played for the sheer fun of it." For this reason, Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl may well have profited from their bilingual background by having developed early in their childhood a sense of linguistic flexibility that shaped their unique artistic expression established them not only as literary, but also as cultural icons.

¹ Prior to this report, on March 10, 2000, BBC News had published a report of a World Book Day survey among a major number of British readers, the result of which placed Roald Dahl at the top of the list of all British authors, even ahead of J. K. Rowling.

2. A Writer's Background

It is easily noticeable that much of Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss' lives constitute an integral part of their creation. Events, characters, social relations and attitudes contained on the pages of their works are what once used to be their real-life experiences and observations, as is evident from Dahl's autobiographical *Boy: Tales of Childhood* (1984) and *Going Solo* (1986), as well as reports made by Seuss' biographers Judith and Neil Morgan (1995) or Philip Nel (2003). Arranging non-fictional events into works of fiction requires a large amount of creative talent and authors usually focus on metaphor, assonance, rhythms, and dramatising, as noted by Singleton (in Round 2000). In autobiographical writing, one is provided with material, and is free to focus on one's craft. However, the skill of Theodor Seuss Geisel and Roald Dahl originated in their childhood experiences as well, by means of exposure to simultaneously available cultural backgrounds.

2.1 The "Viking" Heritage

Liles (1999) claims that all of Dahl's works mirror a part of his personal life which is enlarged, exaggerated, and therefore fictionalized, much like Miss Trunchbull in *Matilda* (1988), an image of an oppressive authority figure that Dahl encountered at St Peter's and Repton School. Roald Dahl was born in 1916 in Llandaff, Cardiff, Wales, into the Norwegian household of Harald Dahl and Sofie Magdalene Dahl; he developed a strong attachment to his Norwegian roots and folklore (Zipes et al. 2005, 359). In his autobiography *Boy* Roald Dahl (1986, 53) recalls his visits to Norway thus:

All my summer holidays, from when I was four years old to when I was seventeen (1920-1932), were totally idyllic. This, I am certain, was because we always went to the same idyllic place and that place was Norway. Except for my ancient half-sister and my not-quite-so-ancient half-brother, the rest of us were all pure Norwegian by blood. We all spoke Norwegian and all our relations lived there. So in a way, going to Norway every summer was like going home.

This excerpt shows the idealized nature of Roald Dahl's relationship to his heritage initiated through the fact that his parents maintained a connection to their homeland in various ways, but mainly by speaking their native language at home. Accordingly, Roald Dahl's fictionalized attitude towards Norway and the languages he grew up with is evident in *The Witches* (1983, 12):

My grandmother was Norwegian. The Norwegians know all about witches, for Norway, with its black and icy mountains, is where the first witches came from. My father and my mother were also Norwegian, but because my father had a business in England, I had been born there and had lived there and had started going to an English school. Twice a year, at Christmas and in the summer, we went back to Norway to visit my grandmother. This old lady, as far as I could gather, was just about the only surviving relative we had on either side of our family. She was my mother's mother and I absolutely adored her. When she and I were together we spoke in either Norwegian or English. It didn't matter which. We were equally fluent in both languages, and I have to admit that I felt closer to her than to my mother.

It is obvious that Dahl had equal command of both English and Norwegian, because he was raised speaking both, which suggests *simultaneous* or *true* bilingualism (Harley 2001, 143). His parents were also fluent in both languages.

After having been raised as a young child in both Norwegian and English, Roald Dahl started his formal education in English schools, in accord with the wish of his late father, who believed that there was “some kind of magic” connected to English schooling which, in his opinion, transformed a small island into an Empire with the greatest literature in the world (Dahl 1986, 21–2). However, towards the end of his schooling Roald Dahl rejected the prospect of going to Oxford or Cambridge and instead opted to work for the Shell Oil Company which would send him to exciting foreign places such as Africa or China:

I was off to the land of palm-trees and coconuts and coral reefs and lions and elephants and deadly snakes, and a white hunter who had lived ten years in Mwanzahad told me that if a black mamba bit you, you died within the hour writhing in agony and foaming at the mouth. I couldn't wait. (Dahl 1986, 166–75).

Such an appetite for the exotic could have easily been conditioned by his multicultural upbringing, causing him to enjoy flying across cultural and territorial boundaries, while transcending linguistic ones. As one of his reports from school read, “I have never met a boy who so persistently writes the exact opposite of what he means. He seems incapable of marshalling his thoughts on paper” (Nudd 1989). It is precisely this subversive manipulation of language that defined Dahl's literary status.

2.2 German Springfield

In Springfield, Massachusetts, where Theodor Seuss Geisel was born in 1904 to Henrietta Seuss and Theodor Robert Geisel, there was a strong community of German-Americans to which the Geisel family belonged. Ted, as he was known, grew up speaking German with his family and English with other the Americans of Springfield (Kaplan 1995). In other words, Theodor Seuss Geisel, much like Roald Dahl, was *truly bilingual* as well, which, according to Brooks' research from 1964, means that he spoke both languages well and with minimal interference (in Javier 2007, 41–2). In their biographical work *Dr. Seuss and Mr. Geisel* (1995, 14), Judith and Neil Morgan report that Seuss' father encouraged his drawing endeavours, while his mother “Nettie” introduced him to the magic of words, as well as intricacies of sound and language:

From the start this tall, skinny, dark-haired boy showed a love of the absurd and a penchant for exaggeration, elevating ordinary neighbourhood happenings into events of excitement and intrigue. His parents came to consider his recall to be formidable and his ear for meter unrelenting – in both English and German, the language of the household. (4)

Theodor Geisel's playfulness with words did indeed originate in his familial circumstances and attitude. His mother, who worked at his grandfather's bakery, often memorized names of pies by creating little chants and reciting them to children following their bedtime stories (Kaplan 1995). Seuss often said that his mother was responsible “for the rhythms in which I write and

the urgency with which I do it” (Morgan 1995, 7). His sister Margaretha named herself Marnie Mecca Ding Ding Guy, and the locals’ name for the family brewery, originally Kalmbach and Geisel, was “Come Back and Guzzle.”

The Springfield surroundings, including the zoo, the Main Street parades, civic statues and inhabitants with “lollapalooza” names were an obvious inspiration to Seuss, and they often made an appearance in his works later on, “Ted delighted in the world around him – trolleys and horse-drawn carriages, bicycles and ice wagons, delivery vans and yipping dogs, gas lights and the power to wiggle one’s ears, neighbours and names – especially the given name of one friend, Norval” (Derksen 2001).

It is most significant that young Theodor Geisel belonged to the German-American community which aimed was to preserve its native traditions by conducting German services at the Trinity Evangelical Lutheran Church, the gatherings at the Schützenverein and Turnverein,² or Christmas Eve celebrations when songs such as “O Tannenbaum” and “Stille Nacht” were sung and German food was prepared (Morgan 1995, 13–8). Yet, when Seuss turned thirteen, two threats started looming over the Geisel household, namely the prospect of America entering the war against Germany and the possibility of nationwide Prohibition, which would result in closing of the family brewery (Morgan 1995, 19). As a result of the anti-German sentiments, the Congress established a Committee on Public Information, declaring that sauerkraut was in fact “liberty cabbage” and frankfurters “hot dogs;” back in Springfield, young Dr. Seuss became known as “the German brewer’s kid with the three-legged dog” (Morgan 1995, 16–20). In the words of Philip Nel (2003, 124), these events which unsettled Seuss’ cultural identity but also caused him to develop a sharp sense of humour and later on attack prejudice in books such as *The Sneetches* and *Horton Hears a Who!*. Consequently, he confessed later on to having been influenced by writers like Voltaire and Swift (Fenkl 2001), causing him often to exhibit revolutionary, radical ideas, “I’m subversive as hell! I’ve always had a mistrust of adults. [And] one reason I dropped out of Oxford and the Sorbonne was that I thought they were taking life too damn seriously” (Kaplan 1995).

In his report on bilingualism, Rafael Art Javier (2007, 57) mentions studies which show that a bilingual may shift his or her languages to “communicate social preference” due to higher “social desirability” of one of the languages. Even though Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss naturally used English as the language in which they communicated their art, vital aspects of their work were based in their childhood experiences, marked by interactions in two languages. Research done by Ahtola (2007, 49–50) further suggests that children raised bilingually are exposed to a wider range of experiences because of increased amount of social interaction, have higher understanding of the communication of others, “the linguistic input in social relations” and “fine detail of social situations.” Therefore, the bilingual upbringing of the two authors might have been the decisive foundation in shaping the unique style of both, by providing them with insights into ways of the world and its inhabitants.

² The riflery club and the gym.

3. Being Bilingual

In view of recent studies, there seem to be numerous advantages to bilingualism, and therefore it might not be a mere coincidence that two authors with such a distinct mode of expression also happened to be raised bilingually. In the words of U. C. Knoepfmacher and Mitzi Myers (Nel 2003, 98–9), “Authors who write for children inevitably create a colloquy between past and present selves,” and, cognitively speaking, the childhoods of Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss were strongly marked by simultaneous exposure to two different cultures and languages. The spectrum of definitions for bilingualism is broad, ranging from Bloomfield’s (1933) which defines the bilingual person as one who possesses “native-like control of two or more languages” to, for instance, Titone’s (1972), describing a bilingual as a proprietor of the capacity “to speak a second language while following concepts and structures of that language rather than paraphrasing his or her mother tongue” (in Kirkici 2004). For a long time, bilinguals were believed to be overwhelmed with two languages and therefore mentally confused, resulting in lower intellectual abilities, performance and cognition, until 1962 when Peal and Lambert suggested that bilingualism might in fact have a beneficial effect on individuals, causing them to develop increased verbal fluency and mental flexibility due to their exposure to bicultural environment (Ahtola 2007, 43). Some, like Bialystok and Hakuta (1994) have gone so far as to characterize the mind of a bilingual as being structurally different from the mind of a monolingual (in Francis 2002, 375). Essentially, Javier (2007, 76–7) claims that language and its meaning develop through relationships with people and contexts (smells, tastes, sounds, etc.) important to our lives and that “the different emotions associated with these types of experiences are normally represented and stored in what Bucci (1984) calls the *perceptual channels*.”

Consequently, due to exposure to two languages/cultures in the early phase of development, a child raised bilingually may develop flexibility and representational abilities in expressing concepts in different ways, as well as better faculties in representing different mental states (Kovács 2007, 308). The list of linguistic, cognitive and social benefits resulting from a bilingual upbringing includes “better linguistic skills, orientation to linguistic structures, sensitivity to feedback cues, general intellectual development and divergent thinking,” or “concept formation, classification, creativity, analogical reasoning and visuospatial skills, metalinguistic skills, and sensitivity to language structure and detail,” (Ahtola 2007, 43).³ Mental flexibility, mentioned in many scientific sources, is of great importance for the creations of two authors discussed in this paper, as it is the source of *divergent thinking* and *arbitrary connection between a word and its meaning*. Thus, Ahtola is of the opinion that divergent thinking is a highly elaborative process which includes much creativity, and bilinguals, who possess two sets of vocabulary for one object, exhibit the higher capacity to generate novel ideas, which was confirmed by means of studies such as that conducted by Baker (1988). Finally, as will be demonstrated later on, bilinguals seem to “resist the tendency to believe that the specific word is a property of the object” (Bialystok and Codd 1997). It is therefore implied that the non-conventional style of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl was shaped by the mental flexibility that originated in their early use of two languages.

³ The research referred to in this instance was conducted by Cummins and Swain in 1986 and Diaz and Klinger in 1991.

4. Matters of Style

Superficially speaking, the literary styles of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl have little resemblance to one another. The difference in tone and form is heavily influenced by the uniqueness of each author's handling of words. Yet the origin and the process of constructing a style so distinctive are situated in the same type of linguistic exposure. Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl utilize the same elements in order to construct a language for expression which bends the rules and questions linguistic boundaries. By means of word play, neologisms, exaggeration, humour and nonsense, as well as unconscious implementation of conceptual metaphors, the two authors disregard the conventional form and engage in play rooted in their childhood experiences.

4.1 Word Play

In his book *Dr. Seuss: American Icon*, Philip Nel (2003) focuses primarily on Dr. Seuss' style and meter and claims that Seuss' poetry "reveals language as a complex game, with rules made to be bent, and meanings that shift as quickly as their context changes" (Nel 2003, 23). As for the complexity of Dr. Seuss' expression, Nel (2003, 101) even claims that reading his books would be too difficult if employed as a sobriety test. Furthermore, it might be useful to add that Dr. Seuss achieved real success in 1957 with the book *The Cat in the Hat*, which was created out of approximately two hundred and twenty easy-to-read words sent to him by the textbook editor at Houghton Mifflin (Zipes et al. 2005, 27) or *Green Eggs and Ham* (1960), a result of a bet that he could not create a book using only fifty words (Kaplan 1995). Nel (2003, 20) further emphasizes that, while Dr. Seuss encourages forward movement, "the poetic devices and linguistic games invite us to linger," hereby providing the example "No former performer's performed the performance," a word play which is evidence to the fact that one root (*form*) can be the origin of many different words (Nel 2003, 20). The following example, the text of a cartoon published in June 1941, illustrates Dr. Seuss' playfulness with language and its rules in the context of his bilingual background:

Said a bird in the midst of a Blitz,
 "Up to now, they've scored very few hitz,
 So I'll sit on my canny,
 Old Star Spangled fanny..."
 And on it he sitz and he sitz.

(Dr. Seuss, "Said a bird in the midst of a blitz" in Nel 2003, 40–1)

From the text of the cartoon, it is obvious that Dr. Seuss jovially employs *blending* of English and German, also topical in the political context, in order to produce a humorous effect. Another interesting characteristic of great importance to Seuss' opus is the fact that he accidentally establishes connection to the regional language of America, evident in the excerpt from *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950), "A zoo should have bugs, so I'll capture a *Thwerll* / Whose legs are snarled up in a terrible *snarl*,"⁴ (Nel 2003, 10). Certainly, Seuss' "snerl," "figgering," "biggering" or "Super-dee-Dooper-dee-Booper" cannot be described as standard English words; however, such expressions

⁴ "Snarl" sounds like a word belonging to the dialect characteristic of central Appalachia (eastern Kentucky).

are a part of Seussian vocabulary brought on by Theodor Geisel's willingness to experiment and invent a new language altogether.

Clearly, bending rules could occur inadvertently, due to the fact that bilinguals are "blessed" with metalinguistic awareness and cognitive flexibility, which is why, as mentioned earlier, a word is merely an *arbitrary* name for an object (Harley 2001, 144). The study by Cummins and Swain in 1986 (in Ahtola 2007, 49) shows that early bilingualism in certain cases accelerates the "separation of sound and meaning," which gives an individual the opportunity to focus on other language aspects more closely. Therefore, numerous observations have proven that bilinguals are indeed superior when performing various verbal tasks, in verbal creativity, language arbitrariness and relation between words (Kirkici 2004, 115).⁵ Likewise, BenZeev, in her studies on Hebrew English bilinguals (1977), has concluded that bilinguals tend to analyze language more intensely than their monolingual counterparts (in Athola 2007, 48). Consequently, in tests containing tasks with renaming objects or changing their names, according to Baker (1988), bilinguals exhibited far better skills, not only in the category of meaning, but also grammar (in Athola 2007, 47). Thus, the exposure to two linguistic systems and their rules can lead to "intellectual emancipation" because of the developed dichotomy between form and meaning (Kirkici 2004, 116).⁶

As for Roald Dahl, the most obvious example of divergent thinking and inventiveness with words would be the language in his own creation, "Gobblefunk", originally a part of his 1982 book *The BFG* ("Big Friendly Giant"), and later on compiled and published as the *Gobblefunk Dictionary*, a collection of two hundred made-up words (Sullivan 2007). There are several principles according to which the words are formed, yet again mostly by means of *blending*, and the categories include "words that don't exist (yet) but should because they sound just right for the thing they are describing," such as "delumptious," mixing up words and phrases, such as "dinghummer" and "hippodumpling," mixing two words together, such as "catasterous disastrophe," and strange similes, e.g. "deaf as a dumpling" or "helpless as horsefeathers." For this reason *The BFG* also contains a vegetable known as "snozzcumber," a delicious drink "froboscottle," and noises such as "Whizzpoppers." "Gobblefunk" demonstrates the fact that Dahl does not see language as a set of fixed units, but rather a system which can be easily expanded, changed and enriched. Equally, *Matilda's* Miss Honey illustrates Dahl's attitude well, "...the name on the gate said COSY NOOK. Nosey cook might have been better, Miss Honey thought" (Dahl 2004, 86). Furthermore, Roald Dahl's style is opulent with sound patterns, often including onomatopoeia, alliteration or assonance, as presented in the following insults by the headmistress Miss Trunchbull, "You witless weed! You empty headed hamster! You stupid glob of glue!" (Dahl 2004, 142) as well as in combination with humorous similes, as is evident from the excerpt from *The Witches* (1983), "That face of hers was the most frightful and frightening thing I have ever seen. (...) It was so crumpled and wizened, so shrunken and shriveled, it looked as though it had been pickled in vinegar" (Dahl 1998, 66). Similar stylistic patterns frequently occur in Dr. Seuss' opus as well:

⁵ See also Hamers and Blanc (1989); Powers and Lopez 1985; Okoh 1980; Peal and Lambert 1962.

⁶ Also consult Harley et al. 1986; Segalowitz 1977.

“I am the Lorax,” he coughed and he whiffed.
 He sneezed and he snuffled. He snarggled. He sniffed.
 “Once-ler!” he cried with a cruffulous croak.
 “Once-ler! You’re making such smogulous smoke!...” (Dr. Seuss 1971, 40).

Therefore, by means of separating different aspects of language, its meaning, sound and form, both bilingually raised authors managed to upset the boundaries of linguistic rules and create their own easily recognizable mode of expression.

Due to the greater verbal intelligence and originality caused by being bilingual, as well as the awareness that the linguistic sign is arbitrary, those two authors seem to be playing with words in an almost subversive way. They enjoy renaming objects, twisting or breaking rules or resisting only one meaning. Their word play is also the reason why Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss are highly appreciated as children’s authors. Some German researchers state that children enjoy deviation from the norm, both social and linguistic, which usually consists of symbols denoting a departure from everyday life, such as breaking or twisting rules (Ensinger 2003, 55–6). The style of both authors appeals to the aesthetic categories of humour, perceivable through senses, among which is also unfamiliar language, demonstrated by either human or animal. This “play with language and meaning” consisting of “rhymes, cool expressions, the use of scatological language, playing with the context and the meaning of concepts, humorous designations and terms, as well as plays on words and language” (Neuß 2003, 17) which is both attractive to and characteristic of children, suggests a connection of both writers to their childhood selves and therefore their young audiences as well. The dialogue between the present and past self can, therefore, in the case of bilingually raised individuals, function on a rather sophisticated level.

4.2 Neologisms

An obvious parallel between the style of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl is their affinity towards creating new words and names for creatures, objects and places, a trait which can once more be connected to the awareness of the arbitrary meaning and linguistic flexibility characteristic of bilinguals. Therefore, innovative and divergent terminology appears in many of Roald Dahl’s works, for instance in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (1964, 26), populated with exotic types of candy, such as “WONKA’S WHIPPLE-SCRUMPTIOUS FUDGEMALLOW DELIGHT,” “swudge,” or “LICKABLE WALLPAPER FOR NURSERIES” with pictures of “snozzberries.”⁷ The presence of blending seems to be unavoidable in the case of both authors, and therefore in *The Witches* the term “witchophile”⁸ makes its debut, while in Dr. Seuss’ *Scrambled Eggs Super!* Peter T. Hooper meets “Wogs” (“the world’s sweetest frogs”) (Nel 2003, 22), as well as the Tizzle-Topped Grouse, the Lass-a-Lack, the Stroodel, the Spritz,⁹ the Kweet, the Kwigger, etc. Zipes et al. claim that Theodor Geisel, “whose specialty was high-spirited anarchy,” managed to introduce even more bizarre names of creatures than his predecessor and the father of nonsense, Edward

⁷ Examples of blending: sweet+fudge and snooze+berries

⁸ “A person who studies witches and knows a lot about them” (39-40).

⁹ German borrowings.

Lear (Zipes 2005, 27). Sound patterns seem to be a recurring element and a crucial ingredient in creating neologisms as well, which is why the villains in *The Witches* readily proclaim that they would “spear the blabbersnitch and trap the crabcruncher and shoot the gobblesquirt and catch the catspringer in his burrow” (Dahl 1998, 95). Equally so, in the case of Dr. Seuss, Nel (2003, 26–7) observes:

In *The Lorax*, the Once-ler’s machinery goes “Gullpity-Glupp” and “Schloppity-Schlopp,” which has the effect of “glumping the pond where the Humming-Fish hummed!” The Lorax himself, choking on the “smogulous smoke”, speaks with a “cruffulous croak.” The verb “glumping” sounds like dumping clumps of goo, “smogulous” turns “smog” into an adjective, and “cruffulous” sounds like crusty, huffing, wheezing old man. These words not only sound like what they mean - they’re fun to say. ... Taking rhyme, alliteration, consonance, and assonance to their logical extremes, Seuss reduces words to sounds, amusing to say, but distracting from sense.

Additionally, in *The Lorax* (Dr. Seuss 1971) one encounters creatures such as the Brown Bar-baloots, Humming-Fish and Swomee Swans, plants like Grickle-grass, Truffula Trees, places like Lerkim, North Nitch, South Stitch, and objects such as Snuvv, Whisper-ma-phone, Super-Axe-Hacker and Thneed, humorous and absurd much like Dahl’s Oompa-Loompas in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* or The Bonecruncher, The Manhugger or The Gizzardgulper in *The BFG*. Interestingly enough, two words by Dr. Seuss have managed to enter the English language, i.e. *nerd* from *If I Ran the Zoo* (1950) and *Grinch* from *How the Grinch Stole Christmas!* (1957) (Nel 2003, 25), which proves that unleashed linguistic creativity and subversiveness can also become respectable and proper.

4.3 Exaggeration

Exaggeration as a poetic device can be seen as a by-product of bilingualism as well, and both authors are extremely prone to it. As Dahl’s (2004, 111) Matilda says, “[N]ever do anything by halves if you want to get away with it. Be outrageous. Go the whole hog. Make sure everything you do is so completely crazy it’s unbelievable.” As mentioned before, Ahtola’s (2007, 49–50) research places bilinguals in a more fruitful environment with increased social interaction, which is why bilinguals tend to exhibit higher understanding of communication, linguistic input and details involved in social situations. These faculties are more than obvious in both Roald Dahl’s and Dr. Seuss’ works because they intentionally portray ordinary relationships and concepts in such an exaggerated manner in order to evoke a multilayered and in-depth representation of such phenomena.

Liles (1999) claims that the key theme in Roald Dahl’s books is “the use of violence and cruelty by authority figures on the weak,” a direct consequence of his troubled schooling in boarding schools of England described in *Boy*, “... I was appalled by the fact that masters and senior boys were allowed literally to wound other boys, and sometimes quite severely. I couldn’t get over it. I never have got over it” (Dahl 1986, 145). Similarly, the Trunchbull in *Matilda* swings a

child round her head by her pigtails, constructs “The Chokey,” a narrow cupboard designed for torturing pupils, and contemplates inventing a “spray for getting rid of small children” (Dahl 2004, 153). Yet, all the severity of situations described in Dahl’s novels is framed in humour and amidst all the grotesque good wins in rather unconventional ways. In the words of Zipes et al. (2005, 359), “[O]nly the poor and downtrodden children are rewarded. Dahl (...) believed that they [children] respond to forthright portrayals of their lives exaggerated through fantasy.” Therefore, in *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* one encounters a main protagonist who is so poor that he only gets one chocolate per year and competes against four embodiments of child vices, such as Augustus Gloop who is “so enormously fat he looked as though he had been blown up with a powerful pump” (Dahl 2005, 21). However, the sadistic characters are usually juxtaposed to idealized authority figures based on Dahl’s own mother, such as Miss Honey in *Matilda* or the grandmother in *The Witches*, a protector and ally who occasionally offers the boy a puff of her cigar and advises him not to bathe too often because “it’s a dangerous habit” (Dahl 1998, 129). Such and other taboo topics are a usual feature in Dahl’s works; his characters are flat and blown out of proportion, which is why Willy Wonka’s chocolate factory is the biggest in the world and he is “the most *amazing*, the most *fantastic*, the most *extraordinary* chocolate maker the world has ever seen!” who does the most “impossible” and “absurd” deeds (Dahl 2005, 8–11). However, the vulgarity often ascribed to Dahl is primarily embedded in the language he uses, in which insults are quite common, “Your mummy’s a twit!’ the Trunchbull bellowed. (...) ‘You look like a rat with a tail coming out of its head,’” (Dahl 2004, 108). In most cases, Dahl really does “go the whole hog.”

Equally so, Maurice Sendak (in Nel 2003, 195) characterizes Seuss’ works as “big noisy books with noisy pictures and noisy language... He was a bull in a china closet.” Furthermore, his energetic language accompanied by colourful illustrations seems to “affirm the child’s need to make noise, to be creative, and to make a mess, if need be” (Nel 2003, 195). As in Dahl’s case, Dr. Seuss’ characters also tend to be rebels and underdogs, which explains the existence of green eggs and ham offered by Sam-I-Am and the need to fly a kite in the house in *The Cat in the Hat*. Each in his own way, both authors manage to transform the ordinary into the extraordinary and evoke a sense of liberation. In creating his characters, Dr. Seuss also used recollections of the frustrations of his childhood, having been the outsider in his community due to his ethnicity, and therefore his attitude towards children is very similar to Dahl’s, resulting in characters who “protest the powerlessness of childhood,” are smart and ultimately alone, as Bart in the film *The 5,000 Fingers of Dr. T* (1953) sings:

But we’ll grow up some day, and when we do, I pray
 We won’t just grow in size and sound.
 And just be bigger pound by pound
 I’d hate to grow, like some I know,
 Who push and shove us little kids around (Nel 2003, 128).

It is precisely due to exaggeration in style and language that both Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl are easily recognizable and, equally, that the reception of their works has been rather divided. Dr. Seuss was accused of “vulgarity, ugly pictures, and [interestingly enough] American-ness” (Nel

2003, 9–10) evident in the titles, even accompanied by exclamation marks, such as *I Can Lick 30 Tigers Today!* (1969), *Oh, the Things You Can Think!* (1975), or *Scrambled Eggs Super!* (1953). As for Dahl, “some praised the clear-cut characters, the grotesque villains, the wit, the incidents both dramatic and hilarious; others considered his work bizarre, unethical, sentimental, and nauseating,” because of, for example, *The Twits* (1980), featuring one of the most repugnant couples in children’s literature, *Revolting Rhymes* (1982), a disrespectful retelling of fairy-tales in verse, or apparent misogyny in *The Witches* (Watkins and Sutherland 1995, 306–7). Yet, the same exaggeration constitutes humour typical of both authors. According to Prommer et al. (2003, 59), exaggeration pushes the character further into the world of comedy. Therefore, thanks to the bilingual eye for fine detail of social encounters of both authors, the reader is invited to disregard fear of the ugly ways of the world or moralise about them, but rather verbalise them and laugh at them. In this way the language becomes the carrier of powerful messages. Finally, to many critics who question the validity of his writing, Roald Dahl replies, “I never get any protests from children. All you get are giggles of mirth and squirms of delight. I know what children like” (BBC Four). Therefore, for both writers children are the decisive factor in recognizing the appropriate degree of exaggeration.

4.4 Nonsense

By means of nonsense and experimenting with the rules of language, Dr. Seuss taught children how to read in Dr. Seuss’ ABC, “X is very useful / if your name is / Nixie Knox / It also / comes in handy / spelling axe / and extra fox” (Nel 2003, 25) and Mr. Wonka in Dahl’s *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory* (2005, 86) entertains by claiming that “whipped cream isn’t whipped cream at all unless it’s been whipped with whips. Just as poached egg isn’t a poached egg unless it’s been stolen from the woods in the dead of night,” or that Supervitamin Candy does not have “vitamin S, because it makes you sick, and vitamin H, because it makes you grow horns out of the top of your head, like a bull...” (Dahl 2005, 136). Aside from inventing much candy that challenges all common sense, Roald Dahl also transformed his main protagonist in *The Witches* (1998) into a mouse as a means of achieving a happy ending. Similarly, Dr. Seuss commented on his own books, “I would not call my work a ‘celebration of idiocy.’ I think of it rather as ‘logical nonsense.’ It seems logical to me and children, being strange, find it logical” (Avery et al. 1995, 248). Interestingly enough, Dr. Seuss, a “gallant child-man” (Morgan 1995, 85), also lived his nonsense, as reported by one of his classmates at Dartmouth:

He was not gregarious in the sense of hail-fellow-well-met; there was no self-importance about him. But when he walked into a room it was like a magician’s act. Birds flew out of his hands, and endless bright scarves and fireworks. Everything became brighter, happier, funnier. And he didn’t try. Everything Ted did seemed to be a surprise, even to him. (Morgan 1995, 36)

Probably for this reason his first children’s book *And to Think that I Saw It on Mulberry Street* (1937) was inspired by the sound of the *Kungsholm* ship engine while crossing the Atlantic and his *Green Eggs and Ham*, “a masterpiece of minimalism and of nonsense poetry” (Nel 2003, 32), became his most popular book.

The joy found in producing nonsense in the case of both authors can once more be linked to their attachment to two languages, foremostly to the aspect of *arbitrariness* between meaning and form, as well as *divergent thinking*. Bialystok (1987) thus argues that “[bilingual] children must ignore their usual experiences with the sun and moon, cats and dogs, in order to manipulate the names of these objects.” This aspect is clearly expressed in the fantastical and unconfined attitudes of Roald Dahl’s and Dr. Seuss’ characters, which are all the product of a playful imagination. But although Dr. Seuss’ and Roald Dahl’s work seems like fun and play, and nonsense is rarely taken seriously, these two authors were nevertheless hard-working perfectionists. In fact, Bennet Cerf’s claim that Dr. Seuss was a genius evoked the following response, “[I]f I’m a genius, why do I have to work so hard? I know my stuff looks like it was rattled off in 28 seconds, but every word is a struggle and every sentence is like the pangs of birth” (Nel 2003, 35). As for Dahl, sources claim that he heavily relied on his editors and often spent up to six months creating a single short story (Round 2000). It is, therefore, obvious that the tendency to play with language and meaning, frequently accompanied by the need to challenge logic, required skilled craftsmen – something that Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl most definitely were.

5. Conceptual Metaphors

Finally, conceptual metaphors underlying the work of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl can also be brought into connection with their bilingualism. Dahl’s conceptualization of relations among people reflects very fine feeling for social relations that occur despite the ruling conventional metaphors. Although the conventional concept of family involves caring parents who love and understand children, Dahl makes fun of this concept, showing very cruelly how dysfunctional some families can be, using all of the previously mentioned stylistic patterns:

Occasionally one comes across parents who take the opposite line, who show no interest at all in their children, and these of course are far worse than the doting ones. Mr. and Mrs. Wormwood were two such parents. They had a son called Michael and a daughter called Matilda, and the parents looked upon Matilda in particular as nothing more than a scab. A scab is something you have to put up with until the time comes when you can pick it off and flick it away. Mr. Mrs. Wormwood looked forward enormously to the time when they could pick their little daughter off and flick her away, preferably into the next country or even further than that. (Dahl 2004, 4)

Though *Matilda* in particular is full of such examples, many of Dahl’s works deal with unjust treatment of children by authority figures. For this reason Round (2000) emphasizes the sense of isolation and an outsider as the centre of Dahl’s creative process. Even insisting on physical isolation while writing, Dahl developed a narrative voice which usually “lines up with the child reader against the bullying, stupid adults” (Round 2000).¹⁰ In other words, although adults are supposed to help children and protect them, they hurt them, hate them, or even worse, do not care about them. Miss Trunchbull is thus characterized as a “gigantic holy terror” or a “bloodthirsty follower of the stag-hounds” (Dahl 2004, 61, 77) and “A REAL WITCH hates children with red-hot sizzling hatred that is more sizzling and red-hot than any hatred you

¹⁰ Round also quotes Charles Sarland, *The Secret Seven Vs The Twits: Cultural Clash or Cosy Combination?*, *Signal* 42 (1983): 162.

could possibly imagine” (Dahl 1998, 7). However, Dahl also shows contempt for children who are lavished with attention and fully unworthy of it, which explains the existence of “spoiled brats” juxtaposed to the heroes in Dahl’s black and white world. Therefore, a child becomes a “disgusting little blister,” “little viper,” “robber-bandit,” “safe-cracker,” “highwayman” (Dahl 2004, 83, 114), etc. By doing this he subverts readers’ expectations and displays his own personal outlook on human relations.

On the other hand, the underlying conceptual metaphor in Dr. Seuss’ works is LIFE IS ENTERTAINMENT – a typically American metaphor (Kövecses 2005), in this case derived from and influenced by the “vernacular of American advertising” (Nel 2003, 10). Having worked in advertising prior to becoming a children’s writer and having acquired the status of an advertising icon with his 1928 insecticide campaign “Quick, Henry, the Flit!”, Dr. Seuss embedded many upbeat, loud and attention-grabbing elements in his work. This is why scrambled eggs are “Super-dee-Dooper-dee-Booper,” and the words of the Once-ler in *The Lorax* (Dr. Seuss 1971) are, “And, for your information, you Lorax, I’m figgering on biggering / and BIGGERING / and BIGGERING / and BIGGERING, / turning MORE Truffula Trees into Thneeds / which everyone, EVERYONE, EVERYONE needs” (Dr. Seuss 1971,10). In the words of Fenkl, Seuss applies a “complex interweaving of symbolism and anagrams,” relies on the appearance and sound of text, and in this way presents a number of potential meanings supporting the main theme (Fenkl 2001). Furthermore, he tends to systematically add tension to the plot “as if over-inflating a balloon until we, the readers, can’t stand waiting for the ‘pop!’ and then he doesn’t pop it, he just deflates the balloon” (Hurst). Consequently, due to the nature of their upbringing, in their literary works Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss captured the essence of the culture in which they were raised.

In order for a book to become a success, many people need to be able to connect with it on several different levels. In the case of both authors the connection is the product of a lifetime of close observation and experimenting. According to Erbes (2006, 33), effective humour for children is “a kind of humour that goes back to their culture, boosts their self-esteem, connects with their culture and helps them to understand things better. Good humour shows that there can be several points of view.” Therefore, despite the fact that both authors dealt with in this essay were simultaneously drawing experiences from two different cultures, their literature became indigenous to the countries in which they lived. Roald Dahl, who grew up speaking Norwegian and English, is the favourite British author, and Dr. Seuss, who was raised speaking German and English, according to Philip Nel (2003, 1), has gradually become an American icon.

From these examples it is possible to conclude that bilingualism and biculturalism do not muddle identity but, on the contrary, create a distinct cultural voice resulting in the emergence of a new artistic identity. The written expression of both authors is at least partly a reflection of their bilingualism and biculturalism.

6. Conclusion

Due to the merging of Europe and global accessibility to various types of information, it has become virtually impossible to confine oneself to one language, one culture, or a single environment. The example of celebrated children's authors, Theodor Seuss Geisel and Roald Dahl, is proof of the fact that bi/multilingualism and bi/multiculturalism are in many ways extremely beneficial. Accordingly, both authors were able to preserve connection to their heritage and nevertheless find a narrative voice which captured the spirit of the country they inhabited. The bilingual upbringing of Dr. Seuss and Roald Dahl significantly influenced their verbal skills and written expression, and was a decisive factor in constructing their unique style, resulting in the heightened degree of divergent thinking, linguistic arbitrariness and perceptive faculties. Therefore, the analysis of selected works by Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss has shown obvious parallels between the stylistic patterns and poetic devices employed in their texts, such as "anarchic" implementation of word play, sound patterns, neologisms, exaggeration, nonsense and humour, as well as unconventionality of conceptual metaphors. Furthermore, the tendency towards subversiveness in all aspects of verbal expression is very apparent in the case of both authors, accompanied by disregard for linguistic rules and expected social norms, which in turn causes deviation from the convention and a delight in children's hearts. Each in his own way, Roald Dahl and Dr. Seuss managed to develop a style so distinct that it cannot be displaced from its maker. Modern Europe implies widespread acceptance of diversity, as well as a population with broad personal understanding of languages, cultures, conceptual backgrounds, history, literature, and the ability to create new types of expression. Incidentally, a "multi-oriented" environment often results in unrestrained and highly entertaining progress. For, as Lewis Nichols (in Nel 2003, 11) observed in his profile of Dr. Seuss:

One further note, this directed to those writers of dissertations and theses on Dr. Seuss. On the table in his hotel room were these objects: One copy of *Live and Let Live* by Ian Fleming; one folder of delicacies offered by Room Service; six partly used folders of matches; two bars of chocolate, one large pear. Dr. Seuss could make something out of this. Can the scholars?

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