



UMR 5191 - CNRS / Université Lyon 2  
Interactions, Corpus, Apprentissages, Représentations



# The relationship between linguistic factors and bilingual proficiency in French-English bilingual children

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- Large number of individual factors can account for child's success or failure in becoming bilingual
- Quality & quantity of input and output (De Houwer, 1995; Yamamoto, 2001; Oller & Eilers, 2002; Genesee *et al.*, 2004; Pearson, 2008)
- Language spoken at home influences oral language outcomes (Verhoeven, 1987; Cobo-Lewis *et al.*, 2002; Gathercole, 2005)

- Children's peers – what languages do they speak? (Verhoeven, 1991; Yamamoto, 2001; Oller & Eilers, 2002; Gathercole & Thomas, 2005)
- Language used in school – NB development of literacy (Yamamoto, 2001; Gathercole & Thomas, 2005)
- Children's cultural attitudes (Grosjean, 1982; Verhoeven, 1991)

# Research questions (1)

1. What is strength of the relationship between current overall language exposure estimates & language proficiency measures in each language?
2. What is strength of the relationship between current language input & output estimates, & scores on language proficiency measures in each language?

## Research questions (2)

3. What is strength of the relationship between stronger language & variables related to language use?
  - Language child finds easier to speak & prefers speaking
  - Language child finds easier to read & prefers reading
  - Cultural allegiance
  - Language used with friends in school playground
  - Language child would choose to use in perfect school

- **Setting**
- International state primary school in France
- To be admitted to school's English section: excellent working knowledge of English (native/near-native)
- No EFL classes
- French as a foreign language classes for children with little or no French (max. 2 years)
- French national curriculum taught in 20 hours (>75%)
- British national curriculum taught in 6 hours (<25%)
- Optional lunchtime activities (French & English)

- Participants
- 38 French-English bilinguals (23 girls, 15 boys),
- 6;10 to 8;3 ( $M = 7;6$ ;  $SD = 4$ ), 2<sup>nd</sup> year primary school
- Mid to high SES families
- 4 family types:
  - 1 native F & 1 native E parent ( $N=19$ )
  - 2 native F parents lived in E environment for 3-5 y with children, back in France for 4 and 30 m ( $N=11$ )
  - 2 E parents in France with children for > 3 y ( $N=4$ )
  - 2 E parents in France with children for < 18 m ( $N=4$ )

- Language proficiency
  - British Picture Vocabulary Scale-II (BPVS) (Dunn *et al.*, 1997)
  - L'Echelle de Vocabulaire en Images Peabody (EVIP) (Dunn *et al.*, 1993)
  - Student Oral Language Observation Matrix (SOLOM)
  
- Language experiences & family background
  - Parents' questionnaire
  - Children's questionnaire



## RQ 1 – English overall exposure

Pearson correlations % contact time for English & English proficiency measures

N=38	BPVS	SOLOM (E)
% contact time E term	**	**
% contact time E holidays	**	**

## RQ 1 – French overall exposure

Pearson correlations % contact time for French & French proficiency measures

N=38	EVIP	SOLOM (F)
% contact time F term	*	**
% contact time F holidays	*	**

## RQ 1 – Comments

- Language proficiency measures highly correlated with overall language exposure estimates
- Lower exposure linked to lower proficiency, higher exposure linked to higher proficiency
- Exposure really important up to a threshold (critical mass of data), around age 10 (Gathercole, 2002)

## RQ 2 – English input

Pearson correlations English **input** & English proficiency

N=38	BPVS	SOLOM(E)
Mother to child	*	**
Father to child	**	**
Sibling(s) to child	*	**
Friends in playground to child	*	**

## RQ 2 – English output

Pearson correlations English **output** & English proficiency

N=38	BPVS	SOLOM(E)
Child to mother	*	**
Child to father	**	**
Child to sibling(s)	**	**
Child to friends in playground	*	**

## RQ 2 – English – Comments (1)

- Levels of input & output in English correlate highly with performance levels in English
  - Children's contact with English in France limited mainly to these interlocutors
- => Amount of English contact children have with these people likely to determine their proficiency in English

## RQ 2 – English – Comments (2)

- If English not present in the home, harder for it to be maintained (limited contact)
- Particularly difficult for children with 2 French parents

## RQ 2 – French input

Pearson correlations French **input** & French proficiency

N=38	EVIP	SOLOM(F)
Mother to child	NS	NS
Father to child	**	**
Sibling(s) to child	*	**
Friends in playground to child	NS	*



## RQ 2 – French output

Pearson correlations French **output** & French proficiency

N=38	EVIP	SOLOM(F)
Child to mother	NS	NS
Child to father	*	*
Child to sibling(s)	*	**
Child to friends in playground	NS	*

## RQ 2 – French – Comments (1)

- Levels of input & output in French generally less correlated to performance levels in French
- French not main language of communication between mothers and children (used more between fathers and children)

## RQ 2 – French – Comments (2)

- Children's contact with French goes beyond these interlocutors => French readings not representative of children's overall contact with French
- French much more present in school and wider community

## RQ 3 (1)

Spearman correlations **stronger language & language use**

N=38	Lang easier to speak	Lang prefers speaking	Lang easier to read	Lang prefers reading
Stronger language	**	**	*	**

## RQ 3 (2)

Spearman correlations **stronger language & language use**

N=38	Dominant culture acc to parents	Dominant culture acc to child	Lang with friends in playground	Lang in perfect school
Stronger language	**	**	**	**

## RQ3 - Comments

- Child's stronger language: good predictor of each variable (but not causal relationship)
- If child has weaker language, may be less likely to seek out opportunities to use it => lower proficiency

- Strong relationship between language contact & language proficiency
- Need for consistent, prolonged & rich exposure with range of interlocutors
- Create opportunities to promote weaker language, especially if it's minority language
- Weaker language, particularly if it's minority language, vulnerable to language loss

- How much exposure is sufficient for language development?
- 20/80 exposure to a language is (too?) low
- 30/70 split preferable



- What can the school do?
- Increase number of hours taught in English? (French must have at least 50%)
- Offer EFL classes?
- Offer French as a foreign language classes for longer?
- Make lunchtime activities obligatory for certain children?

## What can parents do?

- Cultivate friendships for their children with native speakers of weaker language to increase contact with it
- Find other ways of increasing contact with weaker language (e.g. holiday camps, au-pairs)
- As children get older, language contact with friends will impact increasingly on proficiency in each language and children will organise own social networks

Thank you for your attention

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