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Submersion schooling across the French-Belgian borders: bilingual children in monolingual families ?

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Abstract

Our paper deals with sociolinguistic aspects of multilingualism through the study of trans-border schooling in the geographic triangle formed by the "Nord Departement" in France and the provinces of West Flanders and Hainaut in Belgium. A number of families living in this area have made the choice to cross the border every day in order to allow their children to be educated through "submersion" schooling, a method through which they are educated in a language which is not their mother tongue, contrary to the other pupils in their class at school who share the same L1. We analyze the effects of such educational choices on family language practices and, beyond this, on the whole family structure, observing that, in some families, these effects go much farther than what was initially expected by the parents.

1. Introduction

Families living in the geographic triangle formed by the "Nord Departement" in France and the provinces of West Flanders and Hainaut in Belgium are in the immediate proximity of several borders, whether administrative (international between France and Belgium, intranational between Flanders and Hainaut) or linguistic (between French- and Dutch-speaking areas). This international and multilingual environment considerably increases and diversifies the range of different educational possibilities offered within a radius of less than 20 km. In view of these possibilities, some families have made the choice to cross the border every day to bring their children to school, which is quite a noteworthy choice in that it leads to a situation where the children have to deal with *submersion* schooling, through which instruction is given in a language which is not their mother tongue, and also a language which their parents often do not know.

Contrary to *immersion* programmes, which are "bilingual school curricula in which the mother tongue and the second language are used to different degrees" and "which involve a group of children who share a mother tongue which is the language of the community" (Hamers, 2007)¹, the notion of *submersion* schooling is generally used to describe the case of pupils constituting a minority group within a larger group of children who share the same language (which is also the language used by the teacher) and for whom, non-native pupils, no particular pedagogical action is implemented (Beheydt & Klein, 2002; De Bleyser & al., 2001; Genesee et al., 1985; Hamers & Blanc, 1983; etc.).

Our aim is to analyze the effects of such submersion educational choices on family language practices, as children educated in submersion rapidly become fluent speakers in their second language. Is the children's L2 taken into account within family communication? If so, in which contexts and for what purposes? How do family members manage to overcome the linguistic competence gap which often exists at different levels (parents/children, younger/older children, father/mother, etc.)? Do the parents succeed in fulfilling their role as educators despite not knowing the language in which instruction is given to their children at school? In other words, this study leads us to question the permeability of the division between school and home when language and culture separate both worlds.

¹ Our translation.

Our analysis is based on a series of qualitative interviews carried out between February 2004 and March 2005 with families who have chosen cross-border education in order to allow their children to be educated through submersion. Out of about 60 interviews, we have selected for this paper 17 families who are all « monolingual »² French-speaking families and whose children go to school in Flanders (thus with Dutch as the language used at school). Twelve families are French while five live in a French-speaking part of Belgium. The children's ages are from 3 to 18 but most of them are primary school pupils (from 6 to 12).

Before addressing the questions raised in this paper, it seems necessary to add a few words about the motivations of families who choose submersion schooling for their children³. Most families have made this choice for linguistic reasons, knowing the advantages of the early acquisition of a second language and attracted by the specific form of language acquisition offered to their children when they are integrated in a Dutch-speaking school. Linguistic motivations can be related to various factors: next to cultural or more pragmatic considerations about the border context in which the families live, some parents are also motivated by identity representations linked to their family history and roots. The choice of submersion schooling can also principally depend on practical factors: proximity of the Dutch-speaking school, easier organisation of daily activities of all members of the family, etc. It should also be noted that most parents are extremely conscious that their choice diverges from habitual educational choices and are also conscious of the extent of the risks involved, risks which the parents often reflect upon for a long period, which explains why they generally need much time before making their decision (Puren & Babault, 2005).

2. Impact of submersion schooling on family language practices

2.1. A compartmentalization between school life and family life

All parents notice in their children's language practices a strict compartmentalization between school, where Dutch is the language in which they gain their knowledge, and home where French regains its position as the only language of communication. Some parents sometimes try to speak to them with the few words they know in Dutch, but the children generally refuse to answer in this language, as if it were for them a kind of violation of the spatial and functional divisions of the two languages:

l'année passée / V était en 2e maternelle / à table / un truc pour rigoler / on est occupés de manger / mon mari lui dit un truc en néerlandais / il l'a regardé et lui a dit / ici c'est en français /

[last year / V was in his second preschool year / during dinner / as a joke my husband said something in Dutch / he looked at him and said / here we speak in French] (family 10 : M15)⁴

(about a 4-year-old child) à la maison on parlait français et ce que j'essayais de faire le matin quand je l'amenais à l'école c'était tout doucement de lui parler néerlandais parce que j'essayais de lui faire son adaptation / je me disais comme ça que durant le trajet il allait se remettre tout doucement dedans / alors / il râlait / il me disait / oh oh parle français /

[at home we spoke French so what I tried to do in the morning when I brought him to school was to speak Dutch softly to him because I tried to help him to adapt / to come back softly to Dutch / then he said / oh oh speak in French] (family 21 : M57)

However, there are situations where children, at their own initiative, make use of Dutch. One of these situations is play time: immersed in their imaginary world and hidden from their parents' watch or requests, children often naturally use their second language:

² The use of the adjective « monolingual » is clearly a simplification of the reality: among these families, some parents have notably a certain knowledge of Dutch, at different levels, but here we use this term to describe people who don't speak Dutch fluently and who have not acquired it as a mother tongue (which means that we have excluded mixed couples from this sample).

³ For a more detailed analysis, see Puren & Babault (2005).

⁴ Conventions used in the transcription of the interviews: / = break; HEUreux = stressed syllable; c'est: = longer syllable; [] = English translation. Convention for the numerotation of the speech turns: M= mother; P= father; E= interviewer.

ça lui arrive de raconter des histoires à ses poupées en néerlandais /
[she sometimes speaks to her dolls in Dutch](family 13 : P25)

quand il joue tout seul / avec ses playmobil ou ses action man / c'est en néerlandais / tout seul
hein ! / c'est en néerlandais /
[when he is playing alone / it's in Dutch / when he is alone you know ! / it's in Dutch](family
10 : M15)

But Dutch often abruptly disappears when the children become conscious of their parents' observations:

Ici quand il veut chanter / il se cache un petit peu / il n'essaie pas de nous faire entendre /
quand il est tout seul il se met à chanter / quand on arrive et qu'on lui demande ce qu'il
chante / rien rien rien / il arrête /
[at home when he wants to sing / he hides himself a little bit / he doesn't try to get us to
listen to what he is singing / when he is alone he begins to sing / when we come and ask him
what he is singing / nothing nothing nothing / he stops] (family 6 : M12)

Dutch is also sometimes used for communication between brothers and sisters when each sibling masters the language, which is not always the case⁵. However it is important to make clear that, in all the families we have met, Dutch is never the main language used between brothers and sisters for common communication, but is generally used with a specific intention, for example as a coded language:

quand ils ne voulaient pas qu'on écoute et qu'on comprenne / ils parlaient néerlandais entre
eux / entre eux ils parlaient surtout français sauf de temps en temps /
[when they didn't want to be listened to nor to be understood / they spoke Dutch together/
together they mostly spoke French with one or two exceptions] (family 12 : M75)

2.2. Some unexpected effects

The first unexpected effect of submersion schooling is the uncontrolled appearance of Dutch in the language practices. While, as stated above, children are generally reluctant to use with their parents a language that the adults do not master or are not used to speaking spontaneously, they cannot permanently hide their bilingualism. Thus, Dutch sometimes involuntarily appears in the children's discourse, generally for terms or expressions belonging to school life, which the children are not accustomed to using in the family context and sometimes even don't know how to express in French. These cases of code-switching can be disturbing for some parents who feel uncomfortable not being able to understand the entire message emitted by their children. The next example is extremely revealing of this kind of attitude. In this family, the mother understands Dutch because she comes from a household where French and Dutch were spoken but, as she works as an air-hostess, she is absent from home most of the time. So her husband, who does not speak a word of Dutch, is the one who generally looks after their 4-year-old son. The father is literally panic-stricken every time his son uses some Dutch words, and he cannot do anything else other than call his mother in law, who lives in the Netherlands, so that she can help him to understand what his son says:

M48 (...) je peux comprendre aussi mon époux / c'est vrai que son gamin il lui parlait le soir /
il lui parlait en français et dans la phrase il lui sortait des mots en néerlandais parce qu'il
ne trouvait pas le mot en français /

[I can understand my husband's reaction / it's true that his son / when he talked to him
in the evening / he talked to him in French and in the sentences he also used some Dutch
words because he couldn't find the words in French]

P49 il disait par exemple / papa / n'oublie pas mon *jas* /
[he said for example / daddy / don't forget my *jas*]

M50 n'oublie pas mon *jas* / il disait mais c'est quoi ça alors il appelait ma mère et elle lui
disait / c'est le manteau /

⁵ The different schooling choices from one sibling to another can follow various patterns : the whole sibling going to school in submersion (early decision of the family, sometimes even before the first child was born); the youngest child(ren) going to school in submersion (late decision of the family who in some cases didn't know at the beginning about this kind of schooling or needed to reinforce their choice by hearing the experience of other families); only one child going to school in submersion by personal interest or because of other reasons ; etc.

[don't forget my jas / he said but what is it and he called my mother and she told him / it is his coat]

P51 ou bien il me disait / n'oublie pas de mettre un *drank* dans mon *schooltas* /
[or he said / don't forget to put a *drank* in my *schooltas*⁶]
(family 21)

It should be emphasized that this situation was so stressful for the husband, afraid of the idea of not being good enough and not being able to follow his son's education that he put pressure on his wife to send him to a French-speaking school as soon as nursery school finished, a demand which his wife reluctantly accepted.

All parents do not react in such an extreme way. Most of them are rather amused by this phenomenon of linguistic hybridation which characterises their children's discourse. Some of them are also surprised to notice that even they find themselves involuntarily involved in a world where some referents only have a Dutch meaning, the consequence of a phenomenon of linguistic (and certainly cultural) interpenetration between the world of school and family life:

Il y a toujours des petits mots de néerlandais qui sortent / que ce soit à table ou n'importe dans la vie familiale / que ce soit pour les faire marcher ou parce que ça sort comme ça / parce que EUX utilisent ce mot-là et que nous on le ressort automatiquement / je veut dire ça m'est arrivé tout à coup de / au moment d'Halloween / le petit est revenu avec ses *pompoen* donc hein la citrouille / mais je trouvais plus le mot en français parce que je l'entendais toujours parler de ça / je me suis dit bah mince ! / ça c'est le pompon / je ne trouve plus le mot en français / parce que lui il le disait tout le temps en néerlandais /
[there are always some Dutch words which are uttered / either when eating or at other moments in our family life / either as a joke or because it just comes out like that / because THEY use this word we then say it automatically / I mean it happened to me suddenly / at Halloween / my son came with his *pompoen* / his pumpkin / but I could no longer find the French word for it because I always heard him speak about it / I thought damn ! that's the « pompon » / I cannot find the word for it in French any more / because he was always saying it in Dutch] (family 10 : M73)

Submersion schooling also leads, in a number of cases, to Dutch reappearing in a family where it had disappeared for one generation. In many French families and in some French-speaking Belgian families, the grandparents used to speak Flemish as their mother tongue. As Flemish was a stigmatized language, the grandparents generally decided not to transmit it to their children (Puren & Babault, 2005). But the fact that the children now learn it at school leads to a reactivation of this linguistic patrimony. The differences between the dialectal variety spoken by the grandparents and standard Dutch that the children have acquired at school does not disturb the intergenerational communication ; they are rather a source of mutual discovery, as shown in the following example, relating the lexical comparisons that a grandfather and his grandson like to make between the varieties they are accustomed to using :

M74 (...) ils parlent en flamand tous les deux / alors parfois mon fils lui dit non c'est pas comme ça qu'on dit /
[they speak Flemish together / and sometimes my son tells him no that's not the way you say it]

E75 et ils parlent de quoi alors ? /
[what do they talk about ?]

M76 de tout / des animaux / comment ça se dit en flamand / chacun à leur tour / ils disent comment ça se dit dans leur langue / et puis après ils commencent à discuter ensemble mais là je comprends pas trop /
[about everything / animals / their names in Flemish / they take it in turns / they say what it is called in their tongue / and then they begin to speak together but I don't understand very much of it]
(family 24)

This intergenerational dialogue carried out in a language that was buried, nearly rejected from the family memory, helps to a reinforcement of the affective links between grandchildren and grandparents. At this level, languages can even have a much greater effect than generally expected, developing in some cases remarkable therapeutic

⁶ A drink in my schoolbag

qualities. In the family quoted above, the fact that the grandson can speak Dutch leads to a real revival of the grandfather, who had been withdrawn and mute since the death of his wife and who now only speaks to his grandson:

- E73 votre père est fier que son petit-fils parle flamand ? /
[is your father proud that his grand-son can speak Flemish ?]
- M74 oui parce que quand je vais chez lui / il ne nous parle jamais à nous / c'est pour ça que je viens avec mon fils / je profite qu'il est là et ils n'arrêtent pas / ils parlent à deux (...) /
[yes he is / because when I go to see him / he never talks to us / that's why I go with my son / I take advantage of the fact that he is there and they don't stop talking / they speak to each other]
- (...)
- E77 et votre fils ça lui plaît de parler avec son grand-père ? /
[and does your son like speaking with his grandfather?]
- M78 ah oui / il me demande souvent d'aller mais j'ai pas souvent le temps / il me dit souvent / on va aller chez papy / parce qu'il sait qu'il va parler flamand avec lui / il est heureux /
[yes he does / he often asks me to go to see him but I often don't have enough time / he often tells me / let's go to granddad / because he knows he is going to speak Flemish with him / he is happy]
- E79 donc le fait qu'il parle la langue / ça lui donne une relation privilégiée avec son grand-père /
[so being able to speak Flemish enables him to have a privileged relationship with his grandfather]
- M80 voilà / parce que mon père / il parle à personne / ni à ses enfants / ni à ses petits-enfants / et avec lui il parle toujours /
[that's it / because my father doesn't speak to anyone / neither to his children/ nor to his grandchildren / but with him he always speaks]
(family 24)

3. Impact of submersion schooling on the way in which the family is structured

The last extract shown above already allows us to understand that submersion schooling not only has an effect on family language practices, but can also affect relations between members of the family. We will develop this point by considering the impact of submersion schooling on the way in which the family is organized.

3.1. When the child speaks a different language

The first point that obviously appears is a greater degree of esteem from the parents for the child on the basis of his/her competence in Dutch. The fluent and natural way in which the children speak, added to their mastery of the Dutch phonetic system (equivalent to that of a native speaker) command the respect of their parents:

Ben moi il m'épate / [personally he really impresses me] (family 8: M36)

C'est fou hein / si petit / [it's crazy isn't it / so small] (family 1: M18)

C'est un rêve / c'est: c'est magique / [it's like a dream / it's magic] (family 10: M39)

Beyond their reaction of admiration and wonder, some parents feel a little uneasy, probably because hearing their child speaking a foreign language with such ease accelerates in them the awareness that their child is an entity distinct from his/her genitors and whose identity goes further than his/her status inside the family:

La voir parler en néerlandais avec sa maîtresse puis l'instant d'après français avec moi / ça fait extrêmement bizarre / et en même temps je trouvais ça merveilleux /

[seeing her talking in Dutch with her teacher and the next instant in French with me / it's extremely strange / and at the same time I found it wonderful] (famille 25: M42)

In other families, this awareness gives birth to different types of fears which are not necessarily bound to real facts but are obviously linked to a feeling of losing control of the child when he/she is integrated in a Dutch-speaking world :

(a mother relating a discussion with her son) c'est ce que je disais à K / je lui disais quand tu parles à tes copains et à tes copines / tu dis du mal sur moi ? /

[it is like what I said to K / I said to him when you are talking to your friends / do you say bad things about me ?] (family 24 / M100)

(about a child's grandmother who was reluctant about the choice of sending him to school in Flanders) elle avait surtout peur qu'il soit complètement enrobé par le néerlandais / qu'elle le perde

[above all she was afraid that he would be completely surrounded by Dutch/that she might lose him] (family 22: P58)

The relationships between brothers and sisters are generally not affected⁷ when only one child speaks Dutch, probably partly because of the language compartmentalization between school and home which seems to be a strict rule for children being taught through submersion education, but also because language competence is not the only means that children have at their disposal to project a positive image of themselves. However, in one family, the younger son, who was the only one out of four children to go to school in Flanders⁸, was subject, over the course of several years, to extremely belittling remarks from his older sisters:

au début / quand il revenait de l'école / pour compter en néerlandais / il se cachait sous la table parce que ses sœurs se sont tellement moquées de lui / il chantait et il comptait en néerlandais en-dessous de la table / il savait pourtant le faire mais il ne le montrait jamais parce qu'il avait honte / il était gêné / parce que ses sœurs lui disaient toujours / tu seras bête / à force il avait honte / il se cachait / parce que tout le monde lui disait qu'il était bête / alors que maintenant il est fier de lui / il dit je sais parler deux langues /

[at the beginning / when he came back from school / when he wanted to count in Dutch / he hid himself under the table because his sisters laughed at him so much / he used to sing and count under the table / he could do it but he never showed it because he was ashamed / because his sisters always told him / you will be stupid / in the end he was ashamed / he hid himself / because everyone told him he was stupid / whereas now he is proud of himself / he says I can speak two languages] (family 24 : M40)

The despising reaction on the part of his sisters can be interpreted as a classical reaction of rejection of any behavior differing from that of the rest of the group, maybe linked to a certain degree of jealousy. However, the following extract helps us to understand that, in this specific case, the reaction of the girls was not only directed towards their brother, but also indirectly towards their mother, whose choice they did not accept:

elles me disaient toujours / tu vas jamais rien comprendre / il aura des papiers / tu sauras jamais rien / tu ne sauras pas suivre / déjà tu ne sais pas nous suivre nous autres alors comment tu vas faire pour le suivre lui / alors c'était la guerre /

[they always told me / you won't understand anything / he will have some papers / you won't know what is written on them / you won't be able to follow / you cannot even follow us so how are you going to follow him / so it was a real battle] (family 24 : M32)

In the end, the boy got his revenge after a few years, as one of his sisters finally understood that it could be useful to learn Dutch:

L'aînée à un moment elle disait / oh ben tu as de la chance / tu sais parler les deux langues / ben je lui ai dit / apprends avec lui / alors lui il disait / tu n'as qu'à apprendre avec les petits bouquins dans lesquels on apprend l'alphabet et les premiers mots /

[once my oldest daughter said / you are lucky / you can speak both languages / I told her / learn Dutch with him / then he said / learn it with the small books with the alphabet and the first words] (family 24 : M82)

3.2. A redistribution of roles

In a general way, one effect of submersion schooling is to modify partly the way knowledge is distributed among the family members. This observation is very clear in families where the parents have absolutely no knowledge of Dutch, but it is also true in most of the other families, where the adults rapidly feel left behind by the linguistic knowledge of their children. It leads to situations where even the education relationships are inverted, children taking the position of teachers or assessors of their elders: parents, grandparents or even older brothers and sisters:

si je ne comprends pas un mot / S me traduit / c'est devenu mon professeur /

⁷ Or, at least, not in a dramatic way that would preoccupy the parents.

⁸ For practical reasons, because it was more expensive for the family to send him to a French school (the administration would only pay for the school bus from the age of 6).

[if I don't understand a word / S translates for me / she has become my teacher] (family 19: P40)

A corrige les devoirs de néerlandais de son frère aîné /
[A corrects the Dutch exercises of his older brother] (family 8: M91)

ça arrive aux enfants de dire / eh oh mamie / c'est pas comme ça qu'on dit hein / on dit ça comme ça / ils la corrigent / (...) parce que les enfants parlent le BEAU néerlandais / [sometimes the children say to their grandmother / hey ! that's not how you say it / you have to say it like this / they correct her / (...) / because they speak PROPER Dutch] (family 9: P77 and P79)

This modification of knowledge relationships is generally very well accepted by the families, for whom these changes are a sign that their educational choices are successful and who also take advantage of the emergence of new family relationships based on mutual contribution:

Il y a certaines choses qu'on ne sait pas et qu'eux ont appris à l'école donc on leur demande de nous expliquer / (...) et puis il y a le contraire quand nous on connaît quelque chose qu'eux n'ont pas appris c'est à nous de leur expliquer / donc c'est à nouveau ce petit jeu très agréable de profiter l'un de l'autre dans ce choix d'apprentissage /

[there are certain things that we don't know and that they have learnt at school so we ask them to explain them to us / (...) and there is also the contrary when we know something that they haven't learnt it's our turn to explain / so there is in this schooling choice a very nice game since everyone benefits from each other] (family 17: M213)

The fact that the children are frequently asked to translate something for communication between their parents and other persons also brings changes in the parent-children relationships because it leads the children to become mediators between participants in communication, these participants generally being adults. At this point, the child is no longer in the position of a young subject placed under the authority of his/her parents, but finds him/herself in a position of equality with them on the basis of his/her linguistic competence, which often makes him/her very proud:

Quand on est dans les Flandres / par exemple je dois demander ma route et je suis incapable de le demander en néerlandais / alors je lui demande très spontanément / (...) et bon elle est fière de nous montrer que ELLE / le sait /

[when we are in Flanders / for example if I have to ask for directions I am unable to ask in Dutch / so I ask her spontaneously / (...) and she is proud to show us that SHE / knows how to do it] (family 4: M80)

Again, this new kind of relationships is normally very well managed by the families, all the more so since generally the messages that the child is asked to translate belong to daily communication and that important issues are not at stake. The case is different in some families where communication between parents and school is conducted through the children because of the parents' lack of knowledge of the Dutch language. The next extract is very significant in that it depicts a mother who feels left out of discussions in which her parental authority is at stake and depends totally on her daughter in order to understand the content of the discussions:

On est allées voir cette école / là j'ai eu un problème / le directeur a pris F et moi / pour discuter / j'ai pas compris un mot de la conversation / pas UN mot / (...) donc pendant l'heure qu'on a passée là il a fallu qu'elle fasse l'interprète / entre le directeur et moi / à la limite F me racontait ce qu'elle voulait / (...)

[we went to this school / but once there I had a problem / the headmaster received my daughter and me / I didn't understand a word / not a SINGLE word / (...) so during the whole hour that we spent there she had to translate/ between the headmaster and me / I would almost say that she could have told me whatever she wanted](family 16 : M35)

Sometimes, even ordinary actions belonging to the daily life of a mother are, in fact, revealing of her incompetence and seen as calling into question her parental authority:

Une fois elle a été à un anniversaire donc elle reçoit une invitation / il fallait contacter les parents pour leur dire si elle venait / donc je téléphone et la maman ne parlait pas du tout français / bon moi je suis mal parce que je ne parle pas du tout néerlandais / donc D s'est arrangée avec quoi / alors j'ai dit à mon mari je suis juste bonne à faire le numéro quoi /

[one day she was invited to a birthday party / she got an invitation and it was necessary to call the parents to say if she was coming / so I called them but the mum didn't speak French / I was

very uneasy because I speak no Dutch / so D was the one who spoke with them / so I told my husband / in fact the only thing I'm useful for is dialling the number](family 26 : M33)

The situations described by these parents are quite comparable with the case of immigrant families or families coming from the working class, where the parents' status as knowledge bearers is endangered because of the gap which separates their knowledge – linguistic or otherwise – and what their children know or what is socially valued⁹. The cleavage which sometimes appears between the family environment and the environment in which the child, educated through submersion, spends most of his/her time reminds us of the kind of situations described by many researchers in the domain of the sociology of Education (Charlot et al., 1992; Jellab, 2004; Zehraoui, 1998; etc.). The analysis proposed, for example, by Lahire (1995) regarding the conflicts which may appear between school culture and the culture of some families coming from modest socio-economic backgrounds could be used to describe the case of some families we have met, like family 16, a Belgian family where the mother told us of her extreme distress, feeling that her 12-year-old daughter is drifting away:

Moi franchement maintenant quand on parle d'elle / j'avoue / ça me fait peur / j'ai peur / en tant que parent / en tant que maman / (...) parce que je n'ai PLUS de suivi / j'ai beau lui donner une structure de vie à la maison / ou tout ce qu'on veut / je sais très bien qu'en claquant la porte elle a / elle pense autrem / allez / elle a une autre mentalité / elle a cette mentalité néerlandophone quoi /

[as far as I am concerned when we talk about her / I admit that I am afraid / I am afraid / as a parent / as a mum / (...) because I can NO LONGER follow-up on what she's doing / it's all well and good structuring her life at home / or whatever / I know very well that as soon as she goes out the door she has / she thinks diff / lets's just say / she has another mentality / she has this Dutch mentality] (family 16: M92)¹⁰

It should be noted that, contrary to immigrant families or families from modest socio-economic backgrounds, who have no other choice than to be subjected to the linguistic and cultural cleavage separating home and school, the parents whose children are educated in submersion are following their own choice and are free to put an end to this type of schooling at any time.

Conclusion

In conclusion, let us address the question posed in the title of this paper: does submersion schooling lead to the emergence of bilingual children in monolingual families? We have to recognize that, even if some marks of permeability between school life and family life are noticeable, submersion schooling does not have a great impact on language practices at home and on parents' language acquisition strategies. In other words, the fact that the children are integrated at school in another linguistic sphere does not lead the whole family to converge towards this sphere. However, these families give us a good illustration of new types of plurilingual families, where the linguistic competence of the children participates in the construction of the global cultural capital of the family, which can benefit all members of the family and leads to a redefinition of the children's position inside the family unit.

It is also necessary to question the possible success of such a schooling choice, as we have seen that, in some families, it can have dramatic consequences. Is there a way to successfully implement submersion schooling ? Does it work even if there is an impenetrable border between school and home ? What are the factors that seem to lead

⁹ Analysing the case of French families from the working classes, De Queiroz states : "Parental identity, the status of superiority which traditionally defines the relationship between generations, is called into question because of changes that invert the hierarchy for families from modest socio-economic backgrounds by making ignorants or uneducated persons of the parents in the eyes of their children"(1984 : 51, our translation).

¹⁰ The expression « a Dutch-speaking mentality » gives us an insight into the complexity of the problem, in which several levels are involved. In this Belgian family, the parent-daughter conflicts which are intensified by the daughter's type of schooling are closely linked to Belgian sociolinguistic realities, as it is easy to understand that a « Dutch-speaking mentality » is not necessarily a very positive characteristic in the eyes of this woman.

some families with children in submersion education to really blossom whereas others have much less success and seem to suffer from the repercussions of their educational choices? The answer to these questions may be found in the complexity of each family configuration. In family 17, for example, the parents do their best to help and follow up as much as possible the education of their children, learning Dutch themselves so as to be able to fulfill the role they assigned themselves as best they can. The parents of family 12, however, who don't have any competence in Dutch, easily admit that submersion schooling was for them a good means to be able to leave the children to study alone, and seem very satisfied with it. Next to these families, family 16 really seem to suffer from the linguistic and cultural gap which has progressively emerged between the daughter and her parents, without really trying to explore every available means, linguistic or otherwise, to bridge it. Thus, it seems that the members of each family have their own keys for interpreting the reality and their specific way of interacting with their social environment. « It all depends in the end on how the family handles what school does to it»¹¹ (Perrenoud, 1994: 135).

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¹¹ Our translation.