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A Longitudinal Case-Study of French-English Bilingual First  
Language Acquisition**

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## **Musical, Audio-Visual, Poetic, and Narrative Input: A Longitudinal Case-Study of French-English Bilingual First Language Acquisition**

### **Introduction**

In what way do stories, songs, rhymes and audio-visual media contribute to the acquisition of two languages and two cultures? This study is an attempt to answer that question by observing four children growing up with two languages. As the mother of four simultaneous French-English bilinguals, I have a privileged observational position. Since the birth of my eldest child, I have been keeping diaries noting observations related to language acquisition, and making and transcribing video sequences. The starting point of the study was my desire to understand bilingual language acquisition and the cognitive organisation of two languages. As time went on, I began to observe some interesting behaviour which led me to examine more closely the role of stories, songs and audio-visual media in the acquisition process. I noticed that the children were re-using, in their own language production, phrases that they had encountered in these sources of input. Upon closer analysis of such examples, it became apparent that these phrases were often identifiable as instances of formulaic language. Observation of the children's bilingualism also revealed the fascinating process of the acquisition of natural translation competence, a process in which examples of formulaic language can be analysed with interesting results. The discussion of the relationship between language and culture, and the transmission of culture from one generation to the next, can also refer to examples from this case-study, as can discussion of bilingual and bicultural identity. Is the process of linguistic appropriation which we seem to observe paralleled by a similar process of cultural and even philosophical appropriation? Are the two inextricably linked? And how are these relationships and processes revealed through translation? Is it possible, or desirable, to truly say the same thing in two different languages? Do the children learn different approaches to the subject matter, to their way of thinking about things and interacting with other people, as a result of, or function of, successful interaction in two languages? There is so much more to be taken into account than the acquisition of two grammatical systems and two lexicons. The children are required to demonstrate a keen sense of interlocutor sensitivity when dealing with speakers of either language. Not only must they know which words to use and how to combine them, but they must know which notions are shared, acceptable, understandable, which manner of communicating is required. All children need to develop skills in discerning what is required in different circumstances and when interacting with different people. Does the

bilingual, bicultural child need to double these skills and the knowledge required for them? Exposure to stories, songs, and audio-visual media can help children to acquire that knowledge, to practice those skills. I will categorise these sources of input in the following way: songs will be referred to as musical input; children's television programmes and films, including those made with human presenters and actors, as well as animation, will be referred to as audio-visual input; poetic input refers to rhymes, such as nursery rhymes, but can also refer to the rhyming elements in songs and narratives; narrative input refers to stories for children, with some overlap into poetic input, since many children's stories are rhyming narratives. I will use the acronym MAPNI to refer to this Musical, Audio-visual, Poetic, and Narrative Input.

## **The Case Study and the Corpus**

The children concerned by this study were born in 2003, 2005, 2006, and 2010 and so are presently aged 8;9, 6;7, 5;0, and 1;0. In the corpus examples, the children are referred to by the first two letters of their names and their ages, at the time of the example, are included in brackets. I am referred to as C and their father as E. The corpus comprises a mixture of diary notes and transcribed video recordings. I do not attempt to record everything the children say; I confine my note-taking to examples that demonstrate the re-use of language encountered in MAPNI and examples of translation of MAPNI. This is not only for practical reasons, but also since the choice of studying the role of MAPNI in bilingual acquisition is a way of providing a framework within which to examine the relationship between input and output. Most of the more interesting examples are in the form of diary notes. There is often a delay between hearing something interesting and being able to write it down, so some error in transcription may occur. A certain amount of luck is required to capture relevant examples on video. For this reason, some video sequences were set up with specific purposes in mind, for example recording our conversation while reading or watching a film together. The difficulties of capturing relevant examples of re-use on video are far outweighed by the advantages of being present as the children's mother and not just a researcher with weekly visits. I am able to hear examples in many contexts, at any time of day (or night!), and analyse them with rich interpretation thanks to my detailed knowledge of the children's linguistic experience, particularly concerning English.

## **Some Examples of Re-Use**

Many examples from the corpus illustrate the way the children seem to be reminded of MAPNI by a context or a phrase which triggers their re-use of previously encountered language.

#### Example 1)

C: Put your hood up. It's raining.

Ow (2;2): It's pouring?

In example (1) Owen is reminded of the song 'It's raining, it's pouring, the old man is snoring..' I know that this is an example of re-use from MAPNI rather than from ordinary speech because this formulation was only encountered by Owen in that particular source of input. If I were referring to heavy rainfall, I would not use this formulation but would prefer something like 'it's tipping down'.

#### Example (2)

Lo (4;3): (*seeing a little boy on TV going out in the rain*) Raindrops keep falling on his head.

Again, the re-used sequence is directly borrowed from a song. It was said in a conversational intonation, not as a sung or quoted borrowing. The formulation of this sequence is specific to the lyrics of the song. In conversational dialogue we would say 'raindrops *are* falling on his head'.

#### Example (3)

C: (to E) that'll teach you

Lo (4;6): that'll teach him a lesson

From the intonation and stress he used, I could tell that Loïc was re-using, and adapting, a phrase from the story 'Thomas and James' in which Thomas says to the trucks "This'll teach you a lesson, this'll teach you a lesson", and the trucks reply, "Yes, it will. Yes, it will."

Some examples of re-use are only possible because of the bilingual nature of the children's linguistic experience. Loïc had watched an 'Oswald' cartoon in which Oswald does some baking. The ingredients are listed: flour, butter, sugar. Loïc confused 'flour' and 'flower'.

#### Example (4)

Lo (1;11;20): (*upon seeing a flower*) flower, butter, and sugar

Loïc had been watching Babar cartoons in French and I couldn't remember the English names of the characters, such as Flora instead of Fleur. The following example is translation to homophone confusion, reminding Loïc of the semantic association he had made the day before (in example 4).

#### Example (5)

C: Babar's children are called Alexander, Pom and Fleur.

Lo (1;11;21): butter and sugar

## Why Is MAPNI So Relevant to Language Acquisition?

Aside from the possibility that examples of re-use from MAPNI are a result of the quantity of exposure to MAPNI, we can also identify several characteristics of MAPNI which may contribute to its role in language acquisition. Children's songs, rhymes and sometimes television programmes, often use gestures and actions to help create links between words, movement and meaning. The relationship between movement and language learning has been identified as a key element both in first and second language acquisition, (e.g. Krashen, Asher). Very young infants can begin to communicate with gestures at an early stage, and gestures from MAPNI are often among the first to be adopted. For example, Owen's first communicative gesture, when aged 0;8, was a hand movement from a French children's song. This gesture quickly took on other more pragmatic meanings, thanks to the responses of his family and carer. Similarly, at 1;0;13, Léonie began trying to say a nursery rhyme that was only identifiable because of the accompanying gesture. Songs and rhymes can help infants by providing a favourable context for them to practise with language in a repetitive, context-based way. And because the context is easily recognised by family members and care-givers, it then leads the infant into a communicative role. Songs and rhymes can accompany other activities, often with semantic relevance as well as practical utility, for example saying the five fat sausages rhyme while waiting for the sausages to cook. The phonological features of MAPNI may be relevant to its role in language acquisition. Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett identify phonological and rhythmic/structural qualities in children's word play, including rhymes and riddles, that make them particularly salient for young children. They put the phonological level of language at the head of a list of children's concerns, which 'shift from phonological to grammatical to semantic and finally to the sociolinguistic level of language' (Sanches and Kirshenblatt-Gimblett 1976:102). They also point out that 'for a young child...the *phonological* component of language is much more strongly organized than the syntactic, semantic, or sociolinguistic' (*ibid*:77).

As the children grow and their linguistic skills progress, MAPNI can become relevant to them in ways that extend beyond form or the immediate mapping of 'here and now' experience onto linguistic symbols. Stories and television can provide children with experiences that are not possible within the confines of their own limited environment, and can enable them to deal hypothetically with issues that they have not yet encountered in reality. Also, despite their young audience and the informal, unprestigious, context of their telling, the stories, songs and rhymes that are part of MAPNI can sometimes be considered as having certain literary and cultural qualities. Since language and culture are intimately linked, folklore and nursery lore that provide small children access to both is valuable, particularly for bilingual children living in a monolingual community. Sharing and talking about MAPNI is a context within which parents and children can address issues of different beliefs and practices, and different language uses. Finally, the notion of convergence, the idea that children will

imitate members of the surrounding speech community, motivated by a desire to sound like them and be recognised as belonging to that community, becomes particularly apparent in children's role-play games. The notion of convergence is applicable to language acquisition in general, but here its relevance can be applied to the way children will assign roles to themselves and others in order to act out scenes from daily life and from MAPNI. Children's stories, and particularly television, can provide models for role play, in which the model may or may not be adapted to the child's own life. If we consider that L2-speaking film and television characters represent the L2 speech community, and that L2 films and television are a proportionally major source of children's contact with that community (in lieu of regular, real, physical contact), then it is not unreasonable to suggest that when children imitate those characters and adopt their manners of speech, they are identifying with the represented speech community and wishing to be a part of it.

### **Formulaic Language**

Many examples from the corpus can be identified as formulaic sequences. This suggests that MAPNI is rich in formulaic language and it is for this reason that children borrow and adapt whole sequences from MAPNI. In this way, MAPNI contributes to children's holistic language processing and production, particularly at a stage in their development when the balance of holistic to analytic processing is tipped towards more holistic processing. Alison Wray defines the formulaic sequence as, 'a sequence, continuous or discontinuous, of words or other elements, which is, or appears to be, prefabricated: that is stored and retrieved whole from memory at the time of use, rather than being subject to generation of analysis by the language grammar'. (Wray 2002:9). According to Wray's 'Needs Only Analysis (NOA), we break down linguistic material only when we need to in order to access or create new meaning' (Wray 2008:189). In other words, the default strategy for humans is 'to engage in the minimal possible processing capable of matching forms with meanings' (*ibid*:202). Formulaic language, which Wray has also termed multiword morpheme equivalence units (MEUs), is therefore the default processing option. Wray identifies three populations as especially fruitful for exploring the nature and role of formulaic language: young children, foreign/second language learners, and code-switchers (Wray 2002:39). Our subjects fit into all three categories. Wray proposes that formulaic language serves the function of promoting children's social and physical interests, as well as supporting language acquisition, and that language acquisition is a natural consequence of this function and is achieved by children's use of large units with complex meaning, which are analysed as little as possible.

Patterns of formulaicity in child language include fused strings, which the child has constructed and stored for subsequent retrieval. These strings may or may not be grammatical, and they will probably be used repeatedly. Also present are underanalyzed strings, such as *cup of tea*, which have a more complex structure than the child thinks they have, and display grammatical and/or lexical knowledge beyond the child's current

generative capacities, (Wray 2002:106-7). ‘Some underanalyzed strings are specifically memorized, as opposed to just picked up, and they play a particular role in the linguistic behaviour of the child and its carers,’ (*ibid*:108). Such strings are rhymes, songs, chants, and socializing institutionalized routines. ‘In the case of songs and rhymes, having realized that the most important thing to do is reproduce the material as closely as possible to the original, the child may even fail to perceive it as message-carrying at all, or, at least, may consider the message incidental to the purpose of the learning. In this respect, the child is right, of course.’ (*ibid*:109).

One of the main problems with formulaic sequences, from a research point of view, is the difficulty of their identification. ‘The main reason for this difficulty is that the majority of formulaic sequences are, to the casual ear or eye, indistinguishable from novel strings because they are grammatically unexceptional and their meaning is entirely predictable’ (Wray and Namba 2003:26). Wray and Namba's response to this problem is to propose a criterion-based approach to identification, with the aim of enabling the researcher ‘to explore why he or she feels that a particular wordstring is formulaic, by establishing reliable justifications for that intuitive judgement’ (*ibid*:27). Another advantage of being a parent/researcher is that I am able to make judgements based on detailed knowledge of the children's linguistic capacities and their input experience, something which helps particularly with the identification of formulaic sequences.

### **Institutionalized Routines**

In the classic English children's story ‘The Tiger Who Came to Tea’ by Judith Kerr, published in 1968, Sophie and her mother are interrupted during tea by a tiger who asks to be invited in because he is hungry. The tiger eats and drinks everything in the house and then says, “Thank you for my nice tea. I think I'd better go now.” As the quotation indicates, this tiger is quite the gentleman, and although he goes as far as emptying the taps of all their water, and even eats Daddy's dinner, he is remarkably gentle and polite. Sophie clearly enjoys his visit immensely and there is a definite note of regret when, at the end of the story, we realise he will probably never call again. The children in this study not only enjoyed listening to the story many times, they also had fun role-playing the story with me, taking it in turns to play the different characters. The first reason for noting this story is because the children re-used the previously quoted dialogue as their own means of communication.

#### Example (11)

(I had made some soup for dinner, but the children didn't like it. They could see I was disappointed so when leaving the table they thanked me and excused themselves politely.)

Lo (5;5): Thank you for my nice dinner. It was very nice.

Me (3;3): Thank you for my nice dinner. I'd better go now.

This example illustrates the way context can trigger the memory and re-use of phrases encountered in MAPNI. From a linguistic perspective, it is interesting to note the way the original phrase was slightly altered to suit the interaction for which it was re-used: ‘tea’ becomes ‘dinner’. It is possible that the children did not consciously borrow this dialogue. Loïc’s phrasing is not necessarily inspired by the story and could be simply a polite formula that he has acquired. Meriel, on the other hand, appears to be (unconsciously?) reminded of the story both by the context and by what Loïc said. She repeats his polite formula and then adds a direct quote from the tiger. I don’t believe she was pretending to be the tiger at that moment. I believe she was re-using his phrase as a means of communicating in a way she had construed to be appropriate thanks to her exposure to the story. In fact, the wording is not really suitable to the context in which she actually found herself, another indication that she was ‘borrowing’ dialogue. This example also demonstrates the way children sometimes re-use phrases from MAPNI in inappropriate ways, thus pointing to a process of linguistic appropriation by experimentation, tentatively trying out different formulas that have been encountered but possibly not understood, in the hope that successful communication will take place. Example (11) clearly demonstrates the way MAPNI can help children acquire the necessary ‘institutionalised routines, such as thank you and bye bye’, routines which ‘set up significant social signals of the child’s compliance with the expectations of the adult world’ (Wray 2002:18).

The second reason for noting the story ‘The Tiger Who Came to Tea’ is because of the cultural message transmitted through it. ‘Old fashioned values shine in this children’s classic’ writes Tim Walker in his Sunday Telegraph review of David Wood’s theatre adaptation of the book. Walker does not specify which values are shining, but Donald Hutera of The Times makes bold claims. ‘Perhaps *The Tiger Who Came to Tea* reinforces a pre-feminist notion of the nuclear family, with Daddy as the breadwinner and Mummy as a stay-at-home domestic. And the issue of the tiger’s manners is never addressed, especially within an economic context (food is not cheap these days).’ (The Times, 12th July 2011). That the book reinforces such a notion is not at all obvious. The fact that Sophie has tea with her Mummy does not exclude the possibility that Mummy also has a career. I believe even feminists eat with their children and go shopping for groceries! What the story does communicate, however, are certain cultural practices which are rooted in their time and place, such as the boy from the grocer’s delivering by bicycle, the milkman delivering fresh milk to the door, the fact that Sophie eats sandwiches, buns and cakes for ‘tea’ with Mummy, whereas Daddy has a cooked ‘dinner’ when he gets home. And we can add a cultural dimension to the previous linguistic discussion of politeness formulas since this tiger does seem to be particularly *English* in his manner of thanking and parting from the scene of his otherwise shocking behaviour! How interesting, therefore, to note that the author lived in Berlin till the age of nine, when she and her family fled from Hitler’s Germany, living long enough in Paris to become fluent in French, before finally settling in

London and learning English with an American family. Did this multilingual, multicultural child grow up to create an English tiger, or are we blinkered by our adult notions of identity and national stereotypes when analysing what could be a universal tale of childish pleasure in the unexpectedness and strangeness of impossible fantasy encounters within ordinary life?

### **Inappropriate Re-Use**

Owen provides us with some interesting examples with his inappropriate re-use of a formula encountered in the storybook 'Sharing a Shell' by Julia Donaldson and Lydia Monks. He understood the message of the story, which is teamwork, achieving something by working together, each accomplishing the task they are best equipped for. However, he associated this notion with the title of the book, and also a frequently repeated phrase in the text, 'two/three friends sharing a shell', and went on to partially adapt the phrase to another context, ('friends' becomes 'boys').

#### Example (12)

Ow (2;8;18): (*Watching Loïc at football training*) Two boys sharing a shell

C : what do you mean?

Ow: Two boys sharing a shell.

C : Where?

Ow: there (points to group of boys on pitch)

C : I don't understand, Owen. How are they sharing a shell? Where's the shell? There are more than two boys.

Ow: Two boys sharing a shell, there. (*points*)

C : Do you mean they are in a team?

Ow: Yes, in a team.

### **Variable Gaps in Frames: Communicative Variation**

The lines "Sit up nicely now, be good" and "oops a daisy, mop it up", from the baby board book 'Time for Dinner' were frequently reused by Meriel, when aged 2;8. During and after intensive reading of the book, which was a favourite for a few months, these lines quickly became mealtime usage, clearly with reference to the story we had shared. Whenever I asked a child to "sit up" or "sit nicely", Meriel would invariably add "be good", echoing the line from the book. Meriel did not content herself with merely echoing the text of the story. Her repeated use of the line "oops a daisy, mop it up" when a drink was spilled (example (13)), enabled her to then move on to her own creation, example (14) which she said when an object was dropped on the floor.

#### Example (13)

Me (2;8;15): Oops a daisy, mop it up.

#### Example (14)

Me (2;8;21): Oops a daisy, pick it up.

Meriel's re-use of the formula demonstrates the ease with which such formulas are acquired from MAPNI and applied to the equivalent real-life context, particularly when the context is relevant to the child and forms a regular part of their personal experience. In terms of identifying the formulaicity of the expression, using Wray and Namba's criteria, we can note that it is grammatically unusual, and part of the wordstring lacks semantic transparency. It is associated with a specific situation, that of 'something has been spilled' and a specific register, 'language used with a small child'. This precise formulation is the one most used by this speaker to convey this idea. The wordstring is accompanied by a phonological pattern that gives it special status as a unit and is a repetition of something heard. It is a formula learned through imitation as Meriel encountered it before in communication from other people. Meriel's ability to move on to create her own version, "Oops a daisy, pick it up", is a lovely example of the way children learn that it is possible for a formula to have 'gaps' within the formulaic frame which can be filled according to the context. This example is a case of Wray and Namba's second kind of three possible types of variation: limited lexical variation: closed sets such as pronouns or a small group of interchangeable words.

#### **Variable Gaps in Frames: Creating For Fun**

The corpus also contains examples of the children playing with variable gaps in formulaic frames from MAPNI with apparently no function other than amusement and creativity. The following two examples demonstrate one of the ways in which MAPNI can provide a means for children to experiment with language, discovering what is semantically (im)possible and what is creatively acceptable.

Example (15) (variation on the song 'Old MacDonald had a farm')

Lo (2;6): Old MacDonald had a chair, e-i-e-i-o. With a sit down here and a sit down there.

Example (16) (variation on the song 'Do you know the muffin man?')

Lo (2;4): Oh do you know the muffin elephant? (etc)

#### **MAPNI and the Acquisition of Natural Translation Competence**

In a bilingual family, children may often translate when passing on messages, or code-switch to repeat information to another person, as do the children in this study, but this is not what interests us here; we will focus on the translation of MAPNI. By analysing examples of their translation of stories, we can identify key linguistic elements, such as formulaic language, which help children to memorise and tell stories. Parental strategy, such as the one-person-one-language input condition may have an impact on children's awareness and manipulation of translation equivalents (Nicoladis 1998:105 in Baker

2006:99; Clyne 1987 in de Houwer 1995:225). Such a strategy may help bilingual children learn early on to distinguish the symbol (word) from the concept. In our family, the bedtime story ritual sometimes provides a terrain for experimenting with translation and talking about the challenges involved as parent and child try to translate a story together. The children will grow up learning about the sometimes slippery nature of translation equivalents, particularly concerning things like emotion terms or abstractions. They will become aware of the fixedness and culture-specific nature of some phrases, and the possibility that in some cases the notion stays the same while only the words change. It may be thanks to such exercises that the child bilingual (who is bilingual since childhood) is equipped to provide culturally appropriate translations for terms and ideas whose subtleties may remain more elusive to the adult bilingual (who became bilingual as an adult). The notion of dual cultural knowledge for bilinguals (Kaya 2007) is open to discussion when referring to children, and depends on definitions of culture, and the exposure to culture in childhood. The study of the relationship between the acquisition of language and manifestations of culture traditionally aimed at children, (i.e. MAPNI), may provide some insight into this tricky question. Is the bilingual child, who is exposed to bicultural input of this kind, able to produce culturally appropriate translations? What can the translation process tell us about the child's developing lexicons and the organisation of their two languages?

At the time of the examples presented here, the subjects were pre-literate, natural translators / interpreters, who did not produce written translation (for the notions of 'natural' and 'native' translator see Harris and Sherwood 1978 and Toury 1995). Since this study is concerned primarily with narrative translation, we must distinguish between interpreting, or the reformulation of speech, and the translation of sung or spoken texts. Spoken texts, which are examples of decontextualised language which has been "constructed, reread, [and] reconstructed" (*ibid*) are accessible to the pre-literate bilingual thanks to other readers around her. The pre-literate bilingual child can produce a translation of a written text when that text has been read aloud to her in one language, and the child in turn tells the same story in another language. In this case, the young translator uses skills other than those used for the interpreting of spoken, conversational-type language acts, since she is truly translating a text, with all its textual specificities, even if the translation is presented in a spoken form. However, the child is not able to go through the construction and reorganisation process carried out by the literate translator, and the translation will remain spontaneous and instinctive.

For very young children, access to written stories is through being read to by a literate person, usually an adult, sometimes an older sibling. Most of the time, children look at a book while listening to the story and the illustrations are complementary, helping them to understand the text. Some children's books rely so heavily on the illustrations that simply reading the text, without referring to the pictures, would hinder full comprehension of the story. 'Toutes Les

Couleurs' is a good example of this kind of book. In order to translate it the children referred to the oral reading they had heard plus comments on the illustrations they had made together with their teacher and friends. The language is simple, direct, descriptive, and in the present tense. The translation of such a story could resemble the translation of an account of an experience, an ongoing event, or something heard in conversation, for example. More complex, traditional fairy tales, on the other hand, may be accompanied by illustrations, but do not depend on them for their meaning. The whole story is presented in the text, the language is more literary with the use of formulas and, in the case of French, the past historic tense. In order to translate them, equivalents must be found which have a corresponding register in the target language. The translation requires knowledge of textual language, knowledge that the child can only acquire if a literate person reads aloud to them. In his preface to Dalgalian (2000:12), Weinreich calls this knowledge "oral textual competence". The corpus contains two particularly interesting examples of the children's narrative translations. The first is a translation by Loïc (5;7) and then Meriel (3;5) of a story they had co-constructed with the other pupils and the teacher at school. The text of the original book, 'Toutes les couleurs', is composed of simple dialogue in the first and second persons. There is, in fact, no narrative text. However, since the narrative had been created orally by the pupils, using the text and illustrations as a guide, the translation Loïc and then Meriel gave me was in narrative form.

#### Example (18)

Text of 'Toutes les Couleurs'

Youpi! J'ai le derrière tout VERT. Miam! Miam! Des fraises!... Oh! J'ai la bouche toute ROUGE. Et PLOUF! J'ai les pieds tout MARRON. Wah! Les jolies fleurs! Tiens maman! C'est pour toi. Oh! Merci mon lulu, mais! Tu as les mains toutesJAUNES!!! Et le derrière tout VERT et la bouche toute ROUGE et les pieds tous MARRON. Oui maman! Je suis de TOUTES LES COULEURS. Et le BLEU? Tu as oubié le BLEU!

#### Example (19)

Lo (5;7): First the little rabbit rolls in the green grass and when he gets up his bottom is all green. He sees some strawberries and then his mouth is all red. Then he sees some mud. He splashes his feet in the mud. Then his feet are all brown. He picks some flowers and then he has his hands all yellow. He gives them to his mummy.

C: what does he give?

L: The flowers. Then his mummy says, "you need some blue. Go in the bath". And then the little rabbit doesn't have any colours any more.

C: Does he become a particular colour after that?

Lo: White. White is his normal colour.

### Example (20)

Me (3;5): The little rabbit's all white. And the rabbit's got every colour but not blue. He's go in the grass and get his botton [bottom] wet. He's step in the mud for get his feet all brown. How about the flowers. I not say. He give the flowers to his mummy and he's got all yellow. He's need some blue. He's eat some strawberries and get his mouth all red. Something else. But not the same. I go to bed!

Meriel had been listening to Loïc and then wanted to tell the story too. It is probable that she was largely influenced by Loïc's version. I found these translations so interesting that I borrowed the book from the teacher who explained to me how the group of children had told the story together, with the help of the illustrations, adding their comments to the dialogue which had been read aloud. When the children switched to English to tell the story, were they translating the speakers or the text? To what extent did they understand that they were dealing with a text, and what influence did this understanding have on their translation strategy? The following example provides us with some clues. Meriel had another go at translating the same story. This time, I gave her the book and asked her to tell the story first in French and then in English. I recorded her on video; here is a short extract:

### Example (21)

M (3 ;5): Yeah! Um, youpi!  
Oh! J'ai, um je, I've got my bottom all green!  
Oh! Yum yum! Je vais manger quoi?  
C: Strawberries.  
M: I gonna eat the strawberries, and then I'm gonna get my mouth all, all  
C: Red  
M: Red  
C: that's right  
M: Oh! J'ai la bouche toute rouge. Oh! J'ai les pieds touts marrons.

Firstly, we can note that here Meriel provides a translation of the text of the book and not a narrative. This may be because she is 'reading' to me from the book and I can see the action for myself in the pictures. She might assume I don't need narrative explanation of the events, or she may be reproducing what she remembers hearing her teacher say when reading aloud. We can see from this extract that Meriel was still acquiring colour terms. When translating the book into English she code-switches frequently, and not always in the usual direction. In this extract we can see how she code-switched to French to ask me a question, whereas she usually speaks to me in English. It may have been triggered by the French word 'fraise' being the first to come to mind, since in her earlier telling of the story

in French she had no trouble with this word, and a memory lapse concerning the English equivalent ‘strawberries’. Meriel’s use of “I’ve got my bottom all green” instead of “my bottom is all green” (which is the way I translate it later on), is a more appropriate one, since it can include the meaning of having caused oneself to become green, an element of cause and effect which is a pertinent interpretation of the story. It is more likely due to luck than design, nevertheless it works. It is possible to argue that Meriel’s exposure at home to the variable formulaic frame in expressions like “you’ve got your sleeves all wet” or “you’ve got your face all mucky”, has directly enabled her to produce this very natural translation by taking into account the reaction of the little rabbit’s mother, of chiding the little rabbit for having got himself in a mess, reaction that Meriel could firmly identify with!

The last examples come from a bilingual ‘Sleeping Beauty’ book that Loïc and I made using his drawings when he was aged 5;5. He began by dictating the story to me in French. I then read him what I had written and he translated his own text into English. The story contains examples of formulaic story-telling phrases such as ‘Once upon a time, a long time ago’ and its translation equivalent, ‘il était une fois, il y a longtemps’. Sometimes no equivalence is provided, as with ‘and they lived happily ever after’ which Loïc did not translate. We can see that Loïc’s fairytale vocabulary is pretty good in both languages. He correctly uses the terms ‘roi, reine, princesse, prince’ and ‘king, queen, princess, prince’, ‘cauldron’ and ‘chaudron’, ‘sorcière’ and ‘witch’, ‘dragon’, ‘château’ and ‘castle’. He has trouble with ‘rouet’ and ‘spinning wheel’, although I am certain he had heard the English ‘spinning wheel’ in stories before. To replace his lexical gap, Loïc gives a functional definition, which differs slightly across languages, demonstrating the question of translation equivalents:

Example (22)

Lo (5;5)      ...un objet pour faire de la laine  
                   ...another object to do some cotton

Does Loïc believe that ‘laine’ and ‘cotton’ are the same thing? Or does he choose an English option from the same lexical group, with similar properties, because the real translation equivalent of ‘laine’, and the more appropriate ‘fil / thread’, are unavailable to him? Sometimes Loïc’s vocabulary is more precise and suitable for a fairytale in one language than the other (23) and sometimes cultural influence is detectable in his vocabulary choices (24):

Example (23)

Lo (5;5):      Le roi enferma sa fille dans une petite chambre. (trans: *the king locked his daughter in a little bedroom*)  
                   The king locked his daughter in the cellar.

Example (24)

Lo (5;5):      Elle tomba sur le carrelage. (trans: *She fell on the tiles*)

She fell on the floor.

Here, Loïc's version conjures up images of French homes, where floors are commonly tiled and the floor is often referred to as 'le carrelage' (the tiles). In the next example, Loïc produces a linguistically correct but culturally inappropriate translation. It would have been more appropriate to use a phrase such as 'don't worry' or 'it's alright', since in the situation he has created in his story the speaker is comforting the princess.

Example (25)

Lo (5;5): C'est pas grave...  
It doesn't matter...

Loïc's confusion no doubt stems from the common French usage of 'c'est pas grave' when comforting a child. Here we can see that despite his understanding of the words in both languages, and his otherwise correct choice of whole phrase translation equivalent, he cannot see the cultural inappropriateness, even though he would never have heard me, or any other English speaker he knows, say 'it doesn't matter' to a crying child.

### **The role of formulaic language in children's narrative translation**

Wray's explanation of the balance of analytic and holistic language processing from birth to adulthood (Wray 2002:133), could lead us to hypothesise a parallel development of the manner in which bilingual children approach translation acts. During the first, holistic, processing phase, (from birth to age 2) the bilingual child might tend to translate formulas, or entire sequences, which are stored whole in the bilingual memory. During the second phase, (age 2 to 8), of analytic processing, the child may break up sequences in order to process and translate them. As a result, the child may have to produce a greater effort to generate new sentences from their components and the language's grammar, with a translation of components, rather than sequences, taking place. In this case the child will be confronted with the difficulties of analytically translating fixed formulas and idioms, for example. In the third phase of language processing (age 8 to 18), the child might then gradually return towards a more holistic translation strategy which, in phase 4 (adulthood) would involve a balance between the translation of equivalent sequences and equivalent components.

Close examination of translated sequences can show us some of the linguistic challenges of translating formulas, whether they be fixed formulas for the entire speech community or for the individual child. Examples (26) and (27) indicate that the French sequence, which we could model as [VERB of movement + jusqu'à + PRON], is formulaic for Loïc despite it not being the most natural form of expressing the idea. We can wonder whether his understanding and use of this sequence is confused by interference from English to French, since the English version of Example (26) is quite acceptable, whereas the French version would have been better expressed 'il traversa la forêt en courant'.

Example (26)

Lo(5;5): Il \*coura jusqu'à l'autre côté de la forêt  
He ran all the way to the other side of the forest

Example (27)

Lo(5;5): Le prince \*vu dans le canal un dragon qui vola jusqu'au prince.  
The prince saw a dragon which came up to the prince, flying.

In example (28) we meet again, a year later, the formula presented in example (3) which Loïc had first encountered in the 'Thomas and James' book.

Example (28)

Ca \*l'apprendra cette petite fille  
That will teach her a lesson.

This example serves to reinforce the judgement of this sequence as formulaic. Not only does Loïc use it repeatedly, on many different occasions, but he also attempts to translate it into French as it is, rather than using a more appropriate, equivalent expression. Such an example may suggest that Loïc was in the second phase of acquisition, moving towards a more analytical processing, breaking down strings and trying to translate them component by component, rather than seeking a holistic translation equivalent, as he would have been more likely to do in the first phase of acquisition.

## Conclusion

A systematic analysis of the data collected so far has only served to add weight to my intuitive belief in a gradual accumulation of language, knowledge, and thought on both an individual level and a societal one. I believe that the human race is a vast network advancing as one thanks to each individual contribution. We inherit our predecessors' experience, we appropriate it and add to it, and then pass it on. The gradual transformations which undergo language and culture are evidence of this process, simultaneously the cause and result of it. The early beginnings of the process on an individual scale can be observed in the acquisition of language and culture by children. The manifestations of language and culture that are literature, music, television and cinema (among other things), are available to children from an early age, and as children are exposed to these media they are invited to become a part of that vast network, to appropriate for themselves the fruit of the reflection and creation of those who have gone before. They are implicitly presented with the possibility that they too may make a contribution.

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