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## Constructing a bilingual French-English habitus through language experience: A socialisation account from children attending a bilingual programme at a state school in France

Anna Ghimenton<sup>1</sup>

Cathy Cohen<sup>2</sup>

Jacob Neal Minniear<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Université Lumière Lyon 2, Laboratoire Dynamique du Langage UMR 5596, LABEX ASLAN (ANR-10-LABX-0081)

Corresponding author: [anna.ghimenton@univ-lyon2.fr](mailto:anna.ghimenton@univ-lyon2.fr)

<sup>2</sup> Université Claude Bernard Lyon 1, Laboratoire Interactions, Corpus, Apprentissages, Représentations UMR 5191, LABEX ASLAN (ANR-10-LABX-0081)

<sup>3</sup> Bilkent University, Ankara, Turkey

### Abstract

We investigate bilingual habitus and socialisation in 49 French-English bilinguals (aged 5;9-11;00) attending a French school with a bilingual programme in France, from three family profiles: two Anglophone parents (EE); one Anglophone and one Francophone parent (EF); two Francophone parents (FF). Data come from parent questionnaires and child and parent interviews. Quantitative analyses explored current declared language practices between children and mothers, fathers, siblings and peers in each profile. Qualitative analyses of one representative sample case per profile honed the socialisation trajectories from birth. Findings showed that international mobility impacted the relation between language and place in the three profiles differentially, yet all valued English maintenance. Moreover, the language which felt “natural” contrasted in EE and FF families. Using French at home felt unnatural for EE parents whilst for FF parents, using English in family interactions felt natural and necessary for family socialisation in the Anglophone host country. We analyse the factors accounting for children’s bilingual habitus and question the contribution of English prestige, children’s school and families’ strong affective attachment to English as a heritage language or a language acquired through mobility. New insights into the complexity of bilingual habitus and socialisation are discussed within the French school system.

**Key-words:** socialisation spaces; bilingual habitus; affective factors; impact belief; French; English

### 1. Introduction

Geographical mobility may lead to bilingual socialisation where children and adults embrace new languages and cultures. Language prestige can influence family language repertoires, favouring bilingualism or a rapid shift towards monolingualism in the dominant societal

language. We examine the complexity of the development of bilingual habitus in language socialisation experiences in French-English bilinguals attending a bilingual programme at a state school in France (henceforth, the School). In this context, families experienced mobility for professional or personal reasons.

Officially monolingual, the French school system generally recreates “a predominantly monolingual habitus” (Hélot, 2008, p. 205), with few programmes where children taught through two languages receive support for the development of bilingual habitus. Following Bourdieu (1979) or Lahire (1998), *habitus* is used to refer to an individual’s set of bilingual resources and dispositions to act and behave in the socialisation places they are invested.

Three family language profiles are represented in our sample: English dominant; both English and French; French dominant. To attend the School, children require near-native or native competence in English while French may be taught as a foreign language. Quantitative analyses of declared language practices between 49 children and different social actors in their environment (parents, siblings, peers) are conducted, enabling us to appreciate the complex dynamics within each profile. Based on these analyses, three case-studies, each representative of their family profile, complete the analyses, by honing declared practices from birth to present.

In the literature review, we discuss issues relating to language prestige and language education policies in France regarding French and English, as these may influence family language repertoires. Then we explore the concept of habitus as it is operationalised in this paper and we hone the relationship between language and space through the prism of language socialisation.

## **2. Literature review**

### **Language prestige and language education policies in France**

Power differences between languages are inevitable. French is the national language of France, a country known for its monolingual ideology (Hélot, 2008). Article 2 of the French Constitution states that “la langue de la République est le français”<sup>1</sup>. National legislative institutions in France, such as the *Académie Française* and the *Délégation Générale à la Langue Française et aux Langues de France*, endeavour to protect and maintain French in France, but also internationally (Bouchés, 2017). Since national policy constrains language

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<sup>1</sup> [https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article\\_lc/LEGIARTI000006527453](https://www.legifrance.gouv.fr/loda/article_lc/LEGIARTI000006527453)

education policy, French is compulsory in school and is a highly valued component guaranteeing national unity (Haque, 2012).

As the most widely spoken second language in the world, English is recognised as a global language. English therefore favours social mobility, has significant symbolic capital and a high status even in France. The *Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale* (MEN) in France sets all national school programmes and plans foreign language education policy. In 2006, the MEN's language renewal plan aimed to better prepare pupils for European and international mobility and the intensification of international exchanges (MEN, 2006). The 2013 Bill "*Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la refondation de l'École de la République*" (National Education Bill n.2013-595, July 8, 2013) later decreed that learning a foreign language is compulsory from the start of primary school (age 6). English is studied by over 95% of pupils in mainstream state and private primary schools, while it is the first foreign language for over 96% of secondary school pupils (RERS, 2022). In the French context both French and English are highly valued and French-English bilingualism is highly prestigious, and may impact family practices and parental educational choices.

### ***Habitus, language, space and socialisation***

As a system of dispositions (ways of being), habitus is the product of socialisation (Bourdieu, 1979; 1981/1982 [2019]). The social world is composed of spaces where pressures may be exerted as soon as an entity enters it (Bourdieu, 1981/1982 [2019]). Depending on their life experiences, individuals dispose of different forms of capital, contributing to their endurance to societal pressures. Bourdieu (1981/1982 [2019]) insisted that each habitus has its specificities because social conditionings are never the same and that there are as many social classes as social conditionings. Consequently, sociological approaches to singular habitus may help unravel the logic behind social conditioning.

Within the bilingual family, practices (re)produced are influenced by forces from inside and outside its perimeters, namely school and wider social spheres (Ghimenton & Riley, 2020; Kanagy, 1999; Luykx, 2003; Nandi, 2018). Thus, caregivers' practices may reflect attitudes of favour towards one language (Cohen, 2011; 2015; Ghimenton, 2015) which may influence educational choices (De Houwer, 1999), including school selection (Cohen, 2011; Cohen, 2016; Siguán & Mackey, 1986) and access to media and social networking (Cohen, 2011). Issues of power and prestige may determine whether speakers have enough resources to maintain their bilingualism, thus influencing parental choices regarding child-rearing and language practices (Maseko & Mutasa, 2018). De Houwer (1999) coined the term *impact belief*

referring to parents' belief about their impact on their children's language development. Bilingual parents' impact belief in English-Japanese households in Japan was shown through their investment in social networks (e.g., playgroups), which encouraged them to value the use of English at home (Nakamura, 2019). Investing in social networks influences the relations individuals develop towards people, language and social spaces. For instance, Gieryn (2000, p. 481) discussed how the attachment and sense of belonging linked to a place creates "a sense of security and [of] well-being." Conversely, loss of place can have "devastating implications for the individual and collective identity, memory and history" (Gieryn, 2000, p. 482).

The current study investigates the complexities of bilingual French-English socialisation in children from three family profiles. To our knowledge, analyses of the complexity underpinning bilingual habitus in children attending a bilingual programme at a state school in France have not been undertaken. Through quantitative and qualitative analyses, we investigate how bilingual habitus is (co)constructed through the children and other social actors' engagements within their respective networks (family, friends, school, etc.). Habitus is used to describe the dispositions of children and their families to understand how their socialisation trajectories influence bilingualism maintenance. While the children are from middle to high socioeconomic backgrounds, they differ in their language biographies, experiences, and family profiles. From a Bourdieusian point of view, placing individuals in homogenous groups presents considerable pitfalls because the diversity of social conditionings contributes to the complexity and heterogeneity within the same social class. Hence, we investigate the factors influencing families' experiences of place and socialisation that shape their language practices and bilingual habitus.

To explore this, we address the following research questions:

RQ1: What are the typical language practices between children and their parents, siblings, and peers within the three family profiles?

RQ2: Based on the children and their families' experiences of place and language socialisation, what factors shape children's bilingual habitus?

Quantitative analyses provide a snapshot of declared practices within each profile (RQ1), between 49 children and key interlocutors. Through a qualitative approach (RQ2), we analyse one representative sample case per profile, to hone the family practices from birth and explore factors shaping bilingual socialisation and habitus leading to the current practices. We hypothesise that since participants were raised with two prestigious languages, their

bilingualism provides an ideal situation to investigate both research questions because in this context while their languages are not competing for prestige, they may be competing for space/use within the different family profiles. Thus, issues of language power may become secondary, enabling us to explore other factors.

### **3. Method**

We draw from data from a larger five-year longitudinal project (Cohen, 2015) exploring the impact of input and experience in bilingual development.

#### *3.1 Participants*

Participants were 49 French-English bilinguals (25 girls, 24 boys), aged from 5;9 to 11;00 ( $M=8;7$ ,  $SD=2$ ). Questionnaires showed that (in all but one case) both parents were involved in children's daily upbringing<sup>2</sup> and that all participants came from middle to high SES homes based on parents' highest educational level: 48 mothers and 43 fathers had a least a Bachelor's degree, while three-quarters of mothers and two-thirds of fathers also had a postgraduate qualification.

Parents were identified as native-French or native-English speakers from information in the parent questionnaire requesting their language acquisition order. Three family profiles emerged:

- 1) Children with two Anglophone parents (EE families;  $N=15$ ); six were born and raised in France while nine had lived in an Anglophone country at some point before the study began.
- 2) Children with one Anglophone and one Francophone parent (EF families;  $N=18$ ); 14 had lived only in France/Francophone country while four had lived in an Anglophone country at some point before the study started. Thirteen EF children had an Anglophone mother.
- 3) Children with two Francophone parents who had lived in an Anglophone country for between two and five years, at some point before the study onset, before returning to France (FF families;  $N=16$ ).

The reasons underpinning international mobility varied depending on the profile. Moving to France for EE families or an Anglophone country for FF families generally resulted from a professional opportunity for one or both parents. In EF families, the Anglophone parent moved to France either for professional reasons and later met their Francophone partner there, or they relocated to France to join their Francophone partner.

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<sup>2</sup> The father of one EE child was deceased.

One sample child per profile was selected to conduct qualitative analyses of declared practices from birth to gain deeper insights into children's bilingual habitus and forces shaping their repertoires. These children shared primary characteristics with most children within their family profile, regarding social background and socialisation data, including language practices from birth, family mobility and presence of siblings (see 3.3). To facilitate comparisons, we selected three children who had arrived at the school in first grade shortly before data collection began, Ava (EE), Oliver (EF), and Victor (FF).

### 3.2 Context

Since bilingual education models vary, comprehending the context and model of our study is essential. *Sections internationales* (international sections, henceforth IS), which can run from kindergarten through secondary school, are present in only a limited number of schools across France. Although schools usually propose several languages, over 75% of pupils attend an English section (RERS, 2022). To attend an IS, children take an entrance test as they require at least near-native proficiency in the section language which they should maintain as long as they remain in the school. Near-native French proficiency is not mandatory, since support is offered if necessary. This habitus, supported and sanctioned by the MEN, facilitates linguistic engagement and bilingual socialisation. While these children might maintain their languages if they did not attend an IS because of their cultural capital, they have more opportunities because of this programme's symbolic capital.

The MEN has a centripetal force over educational policies and curricula. ISs follow the standard French national curriculum, taught in French. Additional time is dedicated to teaching non-linguistic subjects (e.g., literature; history) in the section language (e.g., English, Polish, Portuguese). While ISs ensure high levels of bilingualism and biliteracy, and encourage bilingual habitus, the two languages are generally separated within the curriculum, resulting in “a form of double monolingualism” (Hélot, 2011, p. 42). Translanguaging practices (e.g., García & Wei, 2014; Hélot, 2008) are not encouraged in class.

The School goes from first to twelfth grade and has several ISs, each child affiliated to one section. There are three family profiles in the English section: one Anglophone and one Francophone parent; two Anglophone or two Francophone parents. For the latter, bilingualism was introduced following international mobility. The French national curriculum is taught over three-quarters of the week. The remaining quarter, taught at native-speaker level, is dedicated to language and literature components of the British national curriculum. No English enrichment programmes are offered.

Choosing to enrol one's child in a French-English bilingual programme rather than a mainstream monolingual school in France emphasises the importance parents attribute to bilingualism. Cohen (2011) explored why parents of 38 second graders in the English section chose the School. The principal motivations across family profiles were the acquisition of biliteracy in French and English, the acquisition of a strong bilingual and bicultural identity and the quality of education the School offered. Families with at least one Anglophone parent also emphasised the importance of English for maintaining links with family in their country of origin.

Informal discussions over two decades between this paper's second author (henceforth, the second author) and teachers and parents from the various language sections demonstrate that parents choose the School because they want their children to learn French but are also committed to maintaining the section language, which may be a family or heritage language, or a language acquired following family mobility. Parents also emphasise that their children feel more normal at this school compared to mainstream French schools since their peers speak two languages and often come from bilingual homes.

### *3.3 Materials and methods*

Parents gave written informed consent for their child's participation in the study. We report on data collected through parent language background questionnaires, semi-structured individual child interviews, and follow-up interviews with certain volunteer parents. To preserve anonymity, each family (F) was attributed a random number. When referencing qualitative information reported in the paper, F (family) is followed by the family number (F1, F2, etc.).

#### *3.3.1 Parent questionnaires*

The current study takes an emic perspective of declared language practices. Parents completed a language background questionnaire reporting language practices year on year from birth, from each family member to the child, and from the child to each family member on a five-point Likert scale (Only French; Mostly French; French and English equally; Mostly English; Only English). For the *quantitative analyses* in RQ1, parents to child practices in the year of data collection were analysed. For each dyad (mother-child; father-child; siblings-child), the response frequencies were calculated, per family profile. For the *qualitative analyses* of the



sample cases in RQ2, we refer to the longitudinal data provided in these questions on language practices *to* and *from* the child with family members.

Information on children's social background and language socialisation was sought from birth. *Social background data* included variables shown to impact language practices: parent education (Hoff, 2006; Paradis, 2011); parents' self-rated French and English speaking abilities (Hoff, 2006; Paradis, 2011); presence of siblings (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011; Gathercole & Thomas, 2005); how long families planned to stay in France.

Parents rated their French and English speaking abilities on a seven-point Likert scale (1. No knowledge; 2. Poor; 3. Fair; 4. Functional; 5. Good; 6. Very good; 7. Native-Like) revealing whether parents communicated in a language in which they were more or less comfortable. Information was also sought on the presence of siblings as potential agents in steering home language practices (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011). Parents also reported how long they intended to stay in France, which might impact their motivation to acquire French or maintain English (Cohen, 2011). *Socialisation data* included languages used in children's social networks from birth; family geographical mobility; home literacy practices in French and English; and playdates at home with French and English-speaking children, using a scale from 1 (never) to 7 (usually daily).

### 3.3.2 *Semi-structured child interviews*

Individual semi-structured interviews were conducted in English with the children in a quiet classroom. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed orthographically. The interviews probed children's representations of their current language practices, mirroring questions in the parent questionnaire, with the same Likert scale. Children were asked which language(s) they used to each parent. Frequencies were calculated for each dyad, per family profile for the variables *child-to-mother*, and *child-to-father declared practices* in RQ1.

Children were also asked about the language(s) used when playing with friends during recess. Since the School has several ISs, French was shared with all peers in their French class, while English was shared only with children in the English section. Frequencies were calculated per family profile for the variable *child's declared practices with peers*. Children were also asked in which language(s) they watched television (including Internet and video on demand). The same response options noted above were proposed.

### *3.3.3 Parent interviews*

Individual interviews were conducted with certain parents to explore further topics addressed in the parent questionnaires related to language socialisation and family background. Fieldnotes were taken, and certain extracts are included in the qualitative analyses and the Discussion.

### *3.4 Data analysis*

SPSS (v.26) was used to calculate frequencies and descriptive statistics per family profile. Frequency data from the 49 parent questionnaires were used for RQ1 for current declared practices from mothers, fathers, and siblings to children, and from the child semi-structured interviews for declared practices from children to mothers, fathers, and peers. Analyses of all social background and socialisation data then led to selecting one sample case per profile for the qualitative analyses in RQ2.

## **4. Results**

Analyses are conducted per family profile (EE, EF, FF). Each subsection begins with a summary of the social background and socialisation data, contextualising the profile so as to identify recurrent characteristics justifying the selection of sample cases for analysis.

### *4.1 EE families*

#### *4.1.1 Social background and socialisation*

Mothers' and fathers' French speaking skills ranged from poor to native-like, with the average corresponding to functional ability. Nine families had lived in an Anglophone country where children were exposed to English in daycare and/or preschool. Nine families planned to stay in France for at least the next 10 years. Depending on children's age of arrival in France, they may have had French exposure before primary school. Those who had lived only in France (or a Francophone country) attended only French daycare and preschool. Most children read or were read to in English, at least four times a week. Reading in French was, for all but one child, at most once or twice weekly, and often less frequent. Similarly, playdates at home occurred more often with Anglophones. Television viewing was either exclusively or predominantly English for most children. Visits to Anglophone countries and from Anglophones from abroad occurred at least once or twice a year for most families, and at least three or four times a year for over a third of families.

#### 4.1.2 Quantitative analysis of current declared language practices

Figure 1 shows the current declared practices between EE children and family members and school peers during recess.

< Figure\_1\_here >

English dominated practices between EE children and their families. Ten mothers used English exclusively while five used English predominantly. Several observed that they used some French, either “*when non-English speakers were present*” (F19; F22) or “*when helping children with French homework.*” (F16; F23). All but one child used only English with their mother. Regarding father to child practices, almost three-quarters used English exclusively, while the remainder had dominant English practices. Children’s practices with their fathers were entirely Anglophone. Of the six parents with very good or native French (three mothers; three fathers), only two occasionally used French with their child. The remaining six occasionally using French had functional skills or below. Most children used English exclusively or predominantly with siblings. Concerning practices with peers in school, while around half interacted primarily or solely in English, the remainder had balanced or dominant French practices. French was never used exclusively. Considering these characteristics, we now focus on the EE sample case whose social background and socialisation reflected those within this profile.

#### 4.1.3 EE longitudinal sample case

Ava had always lived in France where she attended French daycare, then French preschool for three years before joining the School. Her family planned to stay in France indefinitely. Both parents had university degrees and rated their French as “very good” for Ava’s mother and “native-like” for her father. Interactions between both parents and Ava each year were in English only. Ava’s parents noted that using French with their children “*would not feel right.*” However, they questioned whether the absence of French at home might negatively impact French school results. Interactions with her elder sister were also in English until Ava’s second year in preschool, after which they occasionally included some French. Ava observed that in her daily life, “*I talk more English and I see more English people.*” At school, she played more in English than French during recess. Anglophones came for playdates once or twice a week, while Francophones visited much less frequently, suggesting that Ava’s closest friends were Anglophones. Ava was read to daily by her parents in English who explained “*it felt unnatural*” to read French to their children, which they did very infrequently. Ava watched more English

than French television. The family visited Anglophone countries and received Anglophone visitors from abroad three to four times a year.

#### *4.1.4 Summary EE families*

Language practices among EE family members, as shown by the quantitative analysis and subsequent sample case, were homogeneous, largely impermeable to the societal language, regardless of parents' French skills, and unaffected by mobility. French was sometimes present to varying degrees alongside English outside the home with peers although Ava's case showed that language socialisation practices were largely Anglophone.

## 4.2 EF families

### *4.2.1 Social background and socialisation*

Mothers rated their speaking skills in their non-native language higher than fathers rated theirs. The 13 native English mothers assessed their French as very good or native-like and the five native French mothers self-rated their English from good to native-like. The 13 native French fathers' English skills ranged from good to very good, whilst the five native English fathers' French skills ranged from poor to native-like. Four children had lived in an Anglophone country at some point before the study onset, where they had attended English-medium daycare and/or preschool. The remaining 14 had lived only in France (or another Francophone country). While most had attended only French-medium daycare and preschool, a few had attended bilingual structures in France. Twelve families intended to remain in France for at least the following ten years. Reading in English occurred at least four or five times a week, in all but one family, with two-thirds of children reading English daily. While there was more variation in French reading frequency, from once or twice a month to daily, over half the children read at least four times a week. Most watched television in French and English equally, and the remainder were divided fairly equally between French or predominantly French and English or predominantly English. Like EE families, most EF families visited Anglophone countries or received Anglophone visitors at least once or twice a year, and more frequently for around a third of families.

### *4.2.2 Quantitative analysis of current declared language practices*

Figures 2a and 2b show the current declared practices between EF children and family members and with school peers. To better distinguish their practices, information is separated depending on parents' native language.

<Insert\_figures\_2a\_and\_2b\_here>

For mother to child practices, 11 native Anglophone mothers used only English while two used mostly English. All 13 assessed their French skills as very good or native. Of the five native Francophone mothers, one used French exclusively, two mostly French, and two mostly English. Those who used some English had very good or native skills. Child to mother practices were similar, with ten children with an Anglophone mother using English exclusively, and three using English predominantly. Four children with a Francophone mother spoke only or mostly French, while one spoke only English.

Practices between fathers and children mirrored one another. When the father was Anglophone, both parties used English exclusively for four families. Three of these fathers had very good or native French, while one had a poor level. The father using mainly French had native French skills. Over two-thirds of Francophone fathers used French exclusively, while three used more French and one used more English. Four fathers who never used English had a very good or native level. Fathers using some English had good to native skills.

Half the children had exclusively English or dominant English practices with siblings. Five declared either exclusive or predominant French practices. The remaining four interacted in both languages equally.

During recess, children used either more French or both languages equally, suggesting that children used English with certain peers and French with others.

We selected one typical EF family, in terms of, among other characteristics, family language choices, parents' native languages, proficiency and mobility background.

#### *4.2.3 EF longitudinal sample case*

Oliver had always lived in French-speaking countries. His mother's native language was English, while his father's was French. The parents always communicated in French although each had very good or native skills in the other's language. Both held postgraduate qualifications. From birth, Oliver's parents followed a one-person-one-language strategy with their son, who responded to each parent in the appropriate language. The other language was used exceptionally between family members, for pragmatic reasons: Oliver's mother declared this was "*to include visitors who do not speak the usual parent-child language of communication.*" Oliver had a younger sister, born when Oliver was still at a mainstream French preschool. His mother stated that Oliver spoke English exclusively to her. She also reported a conversation with Oliver before the birth: "*When I asked him which language he*

would use when speaking to his future baby sister he replied “English of course Mummy, we’re an English family!” – which I thought was quite amusing, considering we’re not!”. Despite the family’s bilingual profile, the child appeared to identify strongly with his mother’s language. Indeed, she was his primary caregiver until he was three, when he attended French medium preschool for three years. At the School, he used English and French equally with classmates. The family received Anglophone visitors at least five times a year and visited family in England three to four times annually. Anglophones played at home once or twice monthly, while Oliver played with French neighbours daily. Each parent read daily to Oliver in their native language. Oliver reported watching more English television.

#### *4.2.4 Summary EF families*

Anglophone parents and Francophone fathers tended to use their native language, either exclusively or predominantly, despite frequently having high-level skills in the other language. Francophone mothers integrated more English into family interactions. Despite more variation in language choices between siblings and peers, overall practices involved more English.

### 4.3 FF families

#### *4.3.1 Social background and socialisation*

Parents’ English speaking skills ranged from functional to native-like, with an average between good and very good. All families had lived in an Anglophone country, a professional move generally related to the father. Ten families intended to remain in France for at least the following ten years. Depending on children’s age during the mobility period, daycare and preschool may have been in one or both languages. While the range of home literacy practices was quite broad, numerous children read each language at least four times a week. Five children read in English less than once or twice a month. French playdates were more frequent. Two-thirds of children had English television, with over half watching more in English than French. Contact with English through visits abroad and from English speakers from abroad was less frequent than in the other profiles: ten families visited an Anglophone country and seven received English speakers less than once a year.

### 4.3.2 *Quantitative analysis of current declared language practices*

Figure 3 presents the declared practices between FF children and family members and peers in school.

< Insert\_Figure\_3\_here >

Only three mothers used French exclusively with their children, while eleven used more French than English, and two used both languages equally. Of the mothers using some English, while none considered themselves to have native skills, 13 had at least a good level. Children's practices with their mothers were quite diverse. Ten used only or predominantly French. Three used only or predominantly English, while three used both languages equally. Fathers' practices were either exclusively or mainly French. Just under half the fathers used only French. Of the fathers who used some English, only two had very good or native skills. Two fathers who never used English estimated their English as native. All but one child used French predominantly or exclusively with their father. FF children's practices with siblings were quite varied. Over half used either only or mainly French. Five used only or mainly English. Two used both languages equally.

With school peers, five children used both languages equally, five used only or more French while the remainder used only or predominantly English. We selected a child whose characteristics represented FF families in terms of home language practices (including changes following mobility) and practices with peers, mobility background, and parents' English skills.

### 4.3.3 *FF longitudinal sample case*

Victor lived in France until he was three when his family moved to Australia for three years for his father's job. He attended full-time English daycare for six months, then English preschool for two and half years. Both parents had postgraduate degrees and were fluent English speakers. Victor had two elder siblings. Before moving abroad, the family was a monolingual French household. To facilitate a smooth reintegration into the French educational system, the children took the *CNED* programme (*National Centre for Distance Education*), which followed the French school curricula, while in Australia. On arriving there, both parents introduced some English at home "to help the children get used to English." Although French was the dominant language addressed to their children until shortly before returning to France, the parents systematically used some English with them while abroad. Victor used only French with his

parents for the first year in Australia but started using some English with his siblings towards the end of the first year. His parents reported that the move had been traumatic for the children who had “*suffered*” during the first year, “*frustrated as they couldn’t communicate with their peers.*” However, returning to Australia following a month-long trip to France at the end of the first year, Victor’s English practices at home increased considerably. Throughout the second year, his practices were balanced French and English with his parents, and dominant English with his siblings. The speed of transition towards English at home concerned his parents who worried that their children “*would lose their French*” as English “*was dominating all family interactions.*” By the following year, Victor was using more English than French with his parents while sibling interactions had become exclusively English. The parents then considered “*forbidding English at home.*” However, shortly after learning that the family would soon be returning to France, they decided to promote English, to “*reinforce it*” as much as possible. The parents then modified their practices with their children, mirroring Victor’s English-dominant practices. What appears clearly here is the delicate balance between the two languages in the children’s repertoires. The parents seemed to regulate their choices according to the opportunities a language afforded, depending on their personal experiences and on their projects for the near future. Once back in France, Victor started the final year of French-medium preschool and the parents reported having “*a strong family discipline of practising English together to maintain Victor’s skills in view of the School enrolment test.*” They hired an English-speaking au-pair and Victor had private English lessons. However, French practices gradually increased amongst all family members. Once Victor started at the School, interactions between family members were French dominant although English was still sometimes present in family interactions. Victor played with classmates in both languages equally. The family received Anglophone visitors infrequently and had no plans to visit an Anglophone country. Francophones played at home once or twice a month while Anglophones came occasionally. Literacy practices were valued in both languages and Victor was read to in each four or five times a week. His father observed that the family had “*invested considerable time and money to maintain the children’s bilingualism, including buying books in both languages*” showing that parents wanted to provide rich language exposure to their children.

#### 4.3.4 Summary of FF families

Language practices in FF families were influenced by mobility. English was included in the family language practices after moving to an Anglophone country, although exclusive English practices with parents were exceptional. In sibling communication, language choices were more



varied and, despite FF families' initial language configuration, some children used English exclusively or predominantly. Fathers and children were more likely to use French predominantly or exclusively while English was more present in interactions between children and mothers. Importantly, just under half the children interacted with siblings in English for at least half their time. Similarly, balanced English and French or dominant English practices were largely reported for peer interactions in school.

## 5. Discussion

The quantitative and qualitative analyses investigated the factors shaping bilingual habitus and the bilingual socialisation configurations of the practices observed. We discuss the contribution of certain factors and how they impact social engagements in places of socialisation, like home and school.

While time and space are important factors influencing the reconfiguration of family repertoires, dispositions varied per profile following mobility. All parents strove to maintain their children's bilingualism but did so differently. EE families saw the household as responsible for maintaining English, while social spaces outside the home provided French exposure and enhanced children's French skills and practices. This was feasible since French was the dominant societal language but also accounted for three times more curriculum time than English. In EF families, because of parents' language configuration, bilingual habitus was developed within the home through interactions with parents frequently in their native language. While Anglophone mothers or fathers and Francophone fathers created monolingual spaces for their language, Francophone mothers in EF households created more opportunities for children to use both languages with them. The EF sample case, Oliver, showed that practices within EF families were stable over time and children's and parents' practices were aligned. EF parents maintained their practices which, as in EE families, were influenced by parents' belief that their language practices would influence their children's language development (De Houwer, 1999). FF families recreated a bilingual habitus within the home following the move abroad which often led to a rapid shift to bilingual practices, integrating and legitimising the new societal language at home, even when parents were not highly proficient English speakers, as was the case with Victor's mother. Interviews with certain FF mothers elucidated the motivations behind these shifts. One explained that "*sometimes parents bring the local language into the home to show they're favourable to it and encourage children to integrate*" (F44) and she continued "*mothers are more likely to use the local language with their children*"

(F44). Another, involved in networking activities with French expatriates around the world for several years, observed that for her and many mothers “*using the local language was essential for integration, be it English or another language. Mothers, particularly if they didn’t work, wanted to become part of the local community, for their children but also for themselves, to participate in different activities, like sports. To do this, they needed a good grasp of the local language.*” (F9). Using the local language efficiently was therefore seen as essential, enabling children and their families to integrate the host community. For these mothers, language was the means to access social networks and community involvement.

Bilingual habitus was further enhanced in all profiles by home literacy practices, ensuring reading in one or both languages. Television was often available in both languages. Visits to Anglophone countries were fairly frequent, particularly for EE and EF children, creating opportunities for children to engage with Anglophone interlocutors.

Siblings’ practices varied according to family profile. Whilst most EE siblings maintained monolingual English choices, FF and EF siblings supported English maintenance, creating places for both languages. In all families, efforts to maintain English showed that it was viewed as valuable. This contrasts with findings reported in the literature showing that siblings favour a shift towards the societal language (Barron-Hauwaert, 2011; Knoester & Plikuhn, 2016; Obied, 2009). In this regard, FF siblings continued using English once back in France when French, the original family language, might have gradually become the dominant, if not exclusive, home language. One FF child illustrated sibling agency, explaining that “*At home I speak English with my elder sister every day, particularly to help my brother who was very young when we got back to France so he doesn’t forget his English. So we use English as a family.*” (F45). Thus, supporting bilingualism in what was an originally monolingual French household fits into a family project. Since the School offered no English enrichment programmes, FF children’s English maintenance was more vulnerable. FF families were therefore more pressurised to support English outside school. Siblings were thus important vectors of bilingual socialisation contributing to constructing children’s bilingual habitus and providing additional English support.

Peers may also influence the maintenance of bilingual repertoires (Gathercole, 2005a). Our data showed that children from all three profiles participated actively in the co-construction of bilingual habitus, tending to use both languages to varying degrees with peers at school, creating the conditions and increasing the affordances through bilingual socialisation. Children often reported using English when playing with Anglophone friends, regardless of whether they were competent French speakers, while French was the *lingua franca* with friends from other

language sections (e.g., F11, F19, F40). Sharing the bilingual experience with peers at school carved places where children's doing being bilingual, reformulating Sacks (1984), could be supported by different social agents.

Exploring our data more closely, parents across family profiles frequently mentioned what was felt to be the “natural” language choice. Yet the interpretation of “naturalness” varied according to families. In EE families, parents insisted on the naturalness of using English at home regardless of their French proficiency. Having themselves been socialised in English., priority was given to supporting the family language. This corroborates Gathercole's (2005b) findings in Wales which demonstrated that parents found it more natural to address their children in the language they had heard as children. EE children did not appear to negotiate parents' language practices, demonstrating the powerful effect of parents' language choices steered by a strong impact belief (De Houwer, 1999) favouring English. Furthermore, certain EE children indicated that using French with their parents felt unnatural, as one child explained: *“it just doesn't feel right using French with them and they don't sound the same in French!”* (F16). Breaking this person-language bond would therefore feel awkward (Grosjean, 2010), hence “unnatural.”

What felt natural contrasted particularly in EE and FF mothers' discourse. For EE mothers, using a language different from the family language was considered unnatural, as one mother observed, *“We only ever speak English together. Why would we speak French? It would feel so artificial.”* (F16). However, FF mothers contextualised “naturalness” differently. For them, “naturalness” of the practice was driven by the desire and need to socialise and integrate in the new community. Hence, to use the new community language was anchored in the sense of place where speakers invested their English practices to engage in the local Anglophone way of life, when abroad. However, even if FF families welcomed English when abroad, they were sensitive to keeping balanced exposure to both the family and societal language. Victor's father showed that the family became aware of the importance of safe-guarding French when English became too dominant. As a form of linguistic regulation within the family, the parents considered banning English at home. Perhaps the fact that FF families' stay abroad was time-bound made it easier to be open to new family practices, an attitude not found in EE families whose stay in France was often open-ended. The intimate link between language and place was illustrated by one FF mother who observed that *“once French families return to France, it feels natural to use French more and more together”* (F45). Additionally, another FF mother remarked that once back in France *“it's harder to use English with the children. I look for my words more and more and although I can have a conversation, there's much less detail, less*

*subtlety, it requires much more effort.*” (F6). FF parents’ discourse therefore revealed that English practices seemed less efficient, further challenging English maintenance in the family. The fact that English was one of the children’s languages may account partially for our findings. As discussed earlier, English is highly valuable on the linguistic market, explaining why Anglophone parents wished to maintain it and felt less obliged to use French with their children, despite having good French skills. Moreover, EE parents in France would be highly unlikely to be subjected to ideological pressures about the need to speak French to integrate, as is often reported for children in France speaking certain minoritised languages, such as Turkish or Arabic who attend mainstream monolingual schools (Hélot, 2008). So the contribution of English to families’ symbolic capital partially, but not solely, explains FF families’ efforts to welcome English into the home during mobility to an Anglophone country and to maintain it once back in France.

However, we consider that language prestige alone cannot account for the maintenance of English in the three profiles. We argue that the importance families attribute to the section language would be similar regardless of the language (e.g., Italian, Polish, Portuguese). By choosing to send their child to the School rather than a mainstream monolingual school, parents demonstrate a strong desire to maintain their family/heritage or mobility language alongside French, as already shown in Cohen (2011). Once admitted, the School supports both languages through its curriculum and offers socialisation spaces for children to share their languages and cultures with peers (and teachers), thus facilitating the development of bilingual habitus. Being part of this community may to some extent compensate for the “loss of place” (Gieryn, 2000, p. 482) that certain families might experience following mobility, enabling them to sustain their “individual and collective identity, memory and history” (ibid). Moreover, parents are encouraged by the School to create opportunities outside school for children to use and develop both languages through contact with native models.

Furthermore, children also develop strong affective attachments to their section language. One FF child (F6) explained that he had to maintain his English as Australia and English were a key part of his identity, having spent his early years there, “*it’s a bit the years where you build yourself.*” His mother also observed that English and Australia were “*part of him and he’s so attached to them*”. Another FF child (F50), born in Australia, emphasised why developing English was crucial, “*I need to stay Australian because if I’m going to speak French for a lot of time, I’m going to forget English.*” An EF child (F47), born and raised in France, justified his need for English, “*because I feel more English inside than French*”. Similarly, as reported

earlier, Oliver self-identified as English, informing his mother that he would speak English to his sister because, “*we’re an English family!*”.

Children’s affective attachment to their section language also emerged through a project led by two fifth grade French teachers at the School in collaboration with the second author. The project, which included children who participated in our study, explored 60 pupils’ home and school language use and their language and cultural identity (Cohen, 2020). Findings indicated that regardless of children’s language section and home language configuration, they and their families valued the section language and strove to maintain it through interactions in spaces inside and outside the family and through literacy activities for example. All children therefore developed a bilingual habitus and expressed pride in being bilingual. These findings emphasise that the value the School gives to children’s bilingualism is empowering, encouraging and motivating them to maintain their bilingual repertoires in a country characterised by a strong monolingual habitus.

Admittedly, the population of the School represents various forms of privilege, in which there are fewer obstacles compared to the aforementioned minority Turkish or Arabic speaking communities attending mainstream monolingual French schools, especially, when one considers the French context where until recently, the education system mostly ignored bilingual populations. To explore the structural impacts on bilingual habitus, this study needed a school that supported bilingualism. Therefore, this population has more symbolic capital, but that does not equate to static findings, rather it demonstrates that even in a similar demographic, habitus is dynamic and not singular.

This study was conducted before modifications in the French curricula (MEN, 2020). The new programmes explicitly encourage teachers to include and value all languages present in pupils’ linguistic repertoires in mainstream classrooms. Acknowledging the importance of institutional support not only for English and European languages but for all students’ home languages, allows future studies to explore socialisation and habitus in different contexts with populations with various levels of capital, to better serve the multilingual population which has been marginalised far too long. Thus, going beyond the argument of the power of English, this study has shown the positive effects of having institutional support for bilingualism, which is seen as an asset rather than an obstacle to French acquisition.

## **6. Conclusion**

This study investigated possible factors influencing bilingual socialisation and maintenance and how these created the bilingual dispositions enabling children to move smoothly from one

socialisation space to another. While all families valued English maintenance, the social conditionings seemed to interact differently depending on family language configuration. Mobility, parental educational project, school and social actors actively contributed to shaping the children's bilingual habitus of bilingual socialisation.

While we have acknowledged that the prestige of English might have contributed to parents' family project, our analyses have shown that it is not so much the utilitarian value of English put forward by parents and children. Rather their discourse more often alluded to more personal affective factors leading to the development of children's bilingual habitus.

Most of the literature does not focus on the socialisation effects of children enrolled in bilingual programmes, so this study brings in new data to the field and is a first step in understanding socialisation effects within the French context. More research is needed to assess more finely the role of institutional support on bilingual socialisation, for example by comparing practices observed in our sample with those of children attending mainstream monolingual French school who are socialised in a context where monolingualism has, until very recently, been the norm and reference. We have provided evidence supporting the importance of a positive approach to bilingualism in school as recommended in the new education policies in France. It is hoped that these recent changes in the French school programmes will allow all children's languages to be recognised, valued, and included in mainstream classrooms, to facilitate the harmonious development of bilingual habitus.

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## Figures

Figure 1: Declared language use in EE families

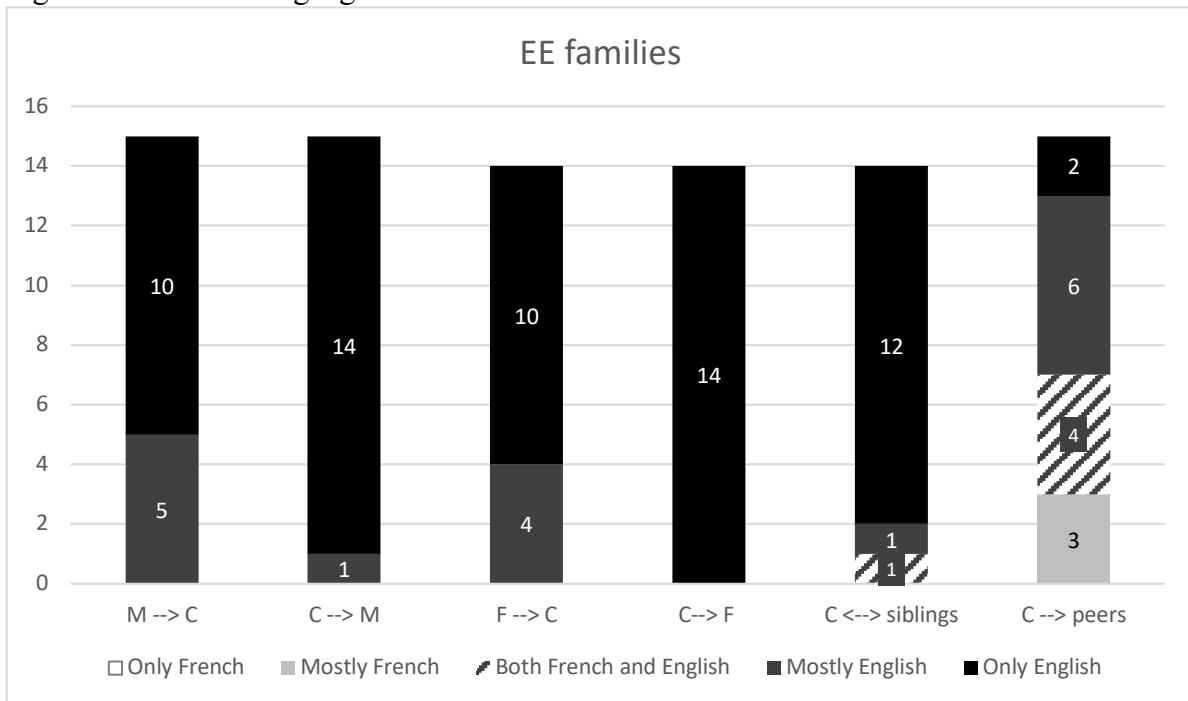


Figure 2a: Declared language use in EF families with English mothers and French fathers

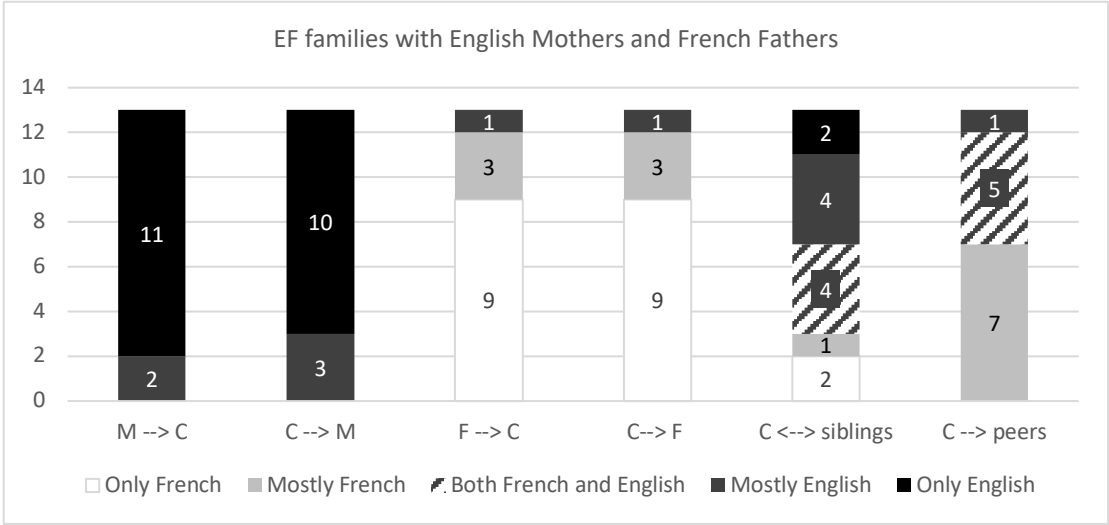


Figure 2b: Declared language use in EF families with French mothers and English fathers

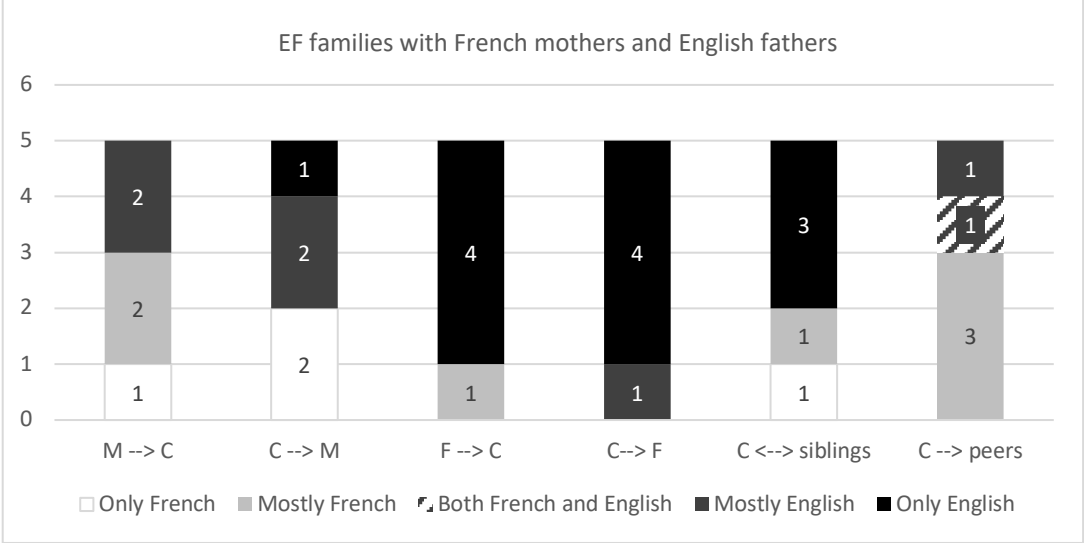


Figure 3: Declared language use in FF families

