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# Foreign language acquisition : a study of the influence of a plurilingual/bilingual family environment

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Mémoire

Présenté pour l'obtention du Grade de

MASTER

**« Métiers de l'Enseignement, de l'Éducation et de la Formation »**

**Mention 2<sup>nd</sup> degré, Professeur des Lycées et Collèges,**

Foreign Language Acquisition:  
A study of the influence of a plurilingual/bilingual family environment

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Grade : MCF

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## **DESCRIPTIF DU MÉMOIRE**

Champs scientifiques : Science de l'éducation, Sociolinguistiques, Didactique des langues et des cultures

Objet d'étude : Cette étude de recherche vise à explorer les attitudes et comportements parentaux qui influencent l'acquisition d'une langue étrangère chez leurs enfants.

Mots clés : Plurilinguisme, les attitudes parentales, l'acquisition des langues étrangères

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## Introduction

I come from a country where more than 19,500 languages and dialects are spoken, India. With a change of a few kilometers, one finds oneself listening to a new dialect. I was born and raised in the capital city of the country, New Delhi. I grew up speaking Hindi, my mother tongue, with my family and friends.

**Table 1**

*Language Map of India*



<sup>1</sup> Source : <https://www.mapsofindia.com/maps/india/indianlanguages.htm>

India being a British colony until 1947, English has a major role in the nation's language repertoire. Most private schools and colleges in India prefer English as the language of instruction and so I received my education in this language. Hindi and English are the two languages I have spoken in almost equal proportions which has personally led to my increased usage of Hinglish, a hybrid of the two languages, something which is observed amongst the urban population of some part of the country. Usage of 'Hinglish' can be observed across the Hindi belt<sup>2</sup> through various mediums one of which is advertising. For example, the slogan of Domino's Pizza in India is 'Hungry Kya?' which translates to 'Are you hungry?'

The subject of my dissertation has led me to reflect on my own story. My mother has been very influential in my language journey. During my childhood, I used to hear her converse with my grandparents in Punjabi<sup>3</sup> which has a lot of transparent words with Hindi.

Consequently, I can comprehend spoken Punjabi. However, as Hindi uses Devanagari script and Punjabi uses Gurmukhi script (Table 2), I cannot read or write in this language and due to no practice, I cannot speak it either.

**Table 2**

*Devanagari and Gurmukhi script*

Devanagari	क	ख	ग	घ	ङ
Gurmukhi	ਕ	ਖ	ਗ	ਘ	ਙ
Devanagari	च	छ	ज	झ	ञ
Gurmukhi	ਚ	ਛ	ਜ	ਝ	ਞ
Devanagari	त	थ	द	ध	न
Gurmukhi	ਤ	ਥ	ਦ	ਧ	ਨ
Devanagari	ट	ठ	ड	ढ	ण
Gurmukhi	ਟ	ਠ	ਡ	ਢ	ਣ
Devanagari	प	फ	ब	भ	म
Gurmukhi	ਪ	ਫ	ਬ	ਭ	ਮ
Devanagari	य	र	ल	व	

<sup>2</sup> The Hindi Belt is a swath across north/central India encompassing the capital, New Delhi, and includes a majority of the Indian population (Parshad et al., 2015)

<sup>3</sup> an Indo-Aryan language spoken by people native to the Punjab region of India and Pakistan

My first interaction with French was at the age of 10 years when I had the option of studying it in school. My mother had done a diploma course in French at Punjab University which motivated me to opt for this language. I studied French in school for six years and became really interested in the language and wanted to continue learning it.

However, after grade 10 there was no provision of learning it at my school, so I enrolled myself for weekend classes at a French language institute, Alliance Française de Delhi. A few years later, I worked in France as a language assistant. This experience motivated me to pursue my masters' degree in this country.

Another related aspect drawing me to this research subject is the growing number of intercultural relationships due to two factors; globalisation and immigration (Crohn, 1998; Wilding, 2006) and the subsequent impact of these developments on the next generation's behaviour and attitudes.

To conclude my introduction, the choice of theme of this study is a consequence of my personal interests arising from my own language repertoire and the reasons behind it, which has been formed over the course of my life.



## **Part I: Monolingualism, bilingualism, plurilingualism and cultural capital**

### **literature review**

#### **2.1 Monolingualism**

The dictionary definition of monolingualism is: ‘1. a person who knows and uses only one language 2. a person who has an active knowledge of only one language, though perhaps a passive knowledge of others.’ Longman Dictionary of Language Teaching and Applied Linguistics (Richards and Schmidt, 2002).

However, the question I would like to raise here is whether monolingualism actually exists. According to Ellis, the ‘default form of human language repertoire’ (Ellis, 2006) is more complex than just defining it as usage of one language.

Rothman (2008) suggests ‘that most, if not all, so-called monolingual speakers are not really monolingual in the true spirit of the word.’ He justifies this statement by referring to the presence of multiple grammars stored in a monolingual brain, similar to that of multilinguals. Likewise, Derrida (1996) advocated the idea of the non-existence of absolute monolingualism. In his book ‘*Le monolinguisme de l’autre*’, he writes that languages have evolved through one’s own experiences but also that we are plurilingual and at the same time monolingual. In his words, “la langue m’étaient à moi-même inconnus ou interdits, comme si j’essayais de traduire dans la seule langue et dans la seule culture franco-occidentale dont je dispose, dans laquelle j’ai été jeté à la naissance, une possibilité à moi-même inaccessible, comme si j’essayais de traduire dans ma « monolange » une parole que je ne connaissais pas encore...” (Derrida, 1996, pg. 132).

From this we can conclude that a person uses various forms of a language based on the context in which the language is being used. Monique De Mattia-Viviès highlights this in ‘Language Learning and the Mother Tongue’. In the first chapter, ‘Entering into Language and into Languages: From the Mother Tongue to the (M)other Tongue’, De Mattia-Viviès

writes about *lalangue*, an intimate language shared between a mother and her child. This ‘private language’ makes us both plurilingual and at the same time monolingual because of its duality. That is to say, monolingual in the sense that we use one language but plurilingual in the sense that we use varying degrees in this language. She explains that ‘all children are at least bilingual, and most often trilingual within their mother tongue, which can be broadly subdivided into three categories:

- *lalangue*, which is body and sound oriented, a private language shared by mother and child;
- the language of the interior, an articulated language, at once sociolect, idiolect, and the language of affect; the language of the child’s close family circle, of their people; and finally
- the language of the exterior, including the language used at school, which is of varying degrees of sociological and idiolectal discrepancy in relation to the interior language.’

In, chapter 1, ‘Entering into Language and into Languages: From the Mother Tongue to the (M)other Tongue’, of *Language Learning and the Mother Tongue*, Sara Greaves states, ‘Learning one’s own language is not necessarily an automatic process but one that is affected by psychological and emotional complexes’ (Greaves, 2022, pg. 19). It can be concluded from this that everyone has their own monolanguge, their own language based on their life experiences and learning, and therefore, languages are deeply bonded to one’s feelings/emotional life.

## **2.2 Bilingualism**

Bilingualism, a Latin word emanated in the 1800s, meant literally “two-tongued,” and, figuratively, “speaking a jumble of languages.”<sup>4</sup>

This term has been subjected to perpetual evolution. Hence, it is important for my research to

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.etymonline.com/word/bilingual> as consulted on 25/03/23.

gather various perspectives to understand what being bilingual truly means.

According to Bloomfield (1935) in an early definition of the term, bilinguals are capable of speaking two languages perfectly. He defines it as having ‘the native-like control of two languages.’

At the other end of the spectrum to defining the term is the following definition by Macnamara (1967) ‘a bilingual is anyone who possesses a minimal competence in only one of the four language skills, listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing, in a language other than his mother tongue’.

Many alternative definitions of the term fall somewhere between these extremes.

For instance, Titone (1972) defines bilingualism as an ‘individual’s capacity to speak a second language while following the concepts and structures of that language rather than paraphrasing his or her mother tongue.’ Although all the other definitions have had a huge contribution in the evolution of the term ‘bilingualism’, the definition that seems most aligned with my understanding of the word is that by Titone (1972). He takes into account the exigence required to consider one as bilingual. Similarly, according to Haugen (1953), a bilingual produces “complete and meaningful utterances in other languages.”

Grosjean and Lüdi share the same idea when comparing bilinguals and monolinguals. They consider ‘a bilingual speaker as more than the sum of two monolinguals in the sense that the bilingual has also developed some unique language behaviour’ (Grosjean, 1985).

Regarding second language acquisition, according to Krashen's (1988) definition of the Acquisition-Learning hypothesis, speaking a second language involves two separate systems: ‘the acquired system’ and ‘the learned system’. The former is the outcome of a subconscious process very similar to the acquisition of first language; whereas the latter is the result of formal instructions and it involves a conscious process, for example knowledge and efforts towards learning the language (Krashen & Terrel, 1988, in Schutz, 2005).

The manner in which languages are used may change over time. We may or may not use our first language (L1) acquired in childhood as the dominant language in adulthood. Grosjean (2012) states that ‘a bilingual’s language history can be quite complex due to life events that reduce or increase the importance of a language (e.g., meeting a companion, losing a family member with whom one spoke a language exclusively, moving to another language region or country, and so on).’

Another perspective on bilingualism, similar to the arguments presented by Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès, is provided by Chomsky (2000), who describes how a person can be bilingual in one language. ‘Everyone grows up hearing many different languages. Sometimes they are called ‘dialects’ or ‘stylistic variants’ or whatever, but they are really different languages. It is just that they are so close to each other that we don’t bother calling them different languages. We can conclude from this review of research on bilingualism that, everyone grows up in a multilingual environment. Sometimes the multilingual environment involves systems so unlike that we call them different languages. But that is just a question of degree; it is not a question of ‘yes or no.’

The term bilingualism may seem simple and straight forward at first, but on diving deeper we understand the different layers the term has attached to it.

### **2.3 Social and Institutional Attitudes to Plurilingualism and Multilingualism**

Multilingualism is an inevitable by-product of all aspects of globalisation (Aronin & Singleton, 2008). Linguistic heterogeneity is a reality in today’s world of physical and virtual mobility.

The Council of Europe has been extensively working on the development and implementation of language education policy (From Linguistic Diversity to Plurilingual Education (Beacco,

2007). In 1997, the final conference of the Project Language learning for a new Europe introduced the innovative concept of ‘plurilingualism’: ‘Plurilingualism’ refers to languages not as objects but from the point of view of those who speak them. It refers to the repertoire of varieties of language which many individuals use, and is therefore the opposite of monolingualism; it includes the language variety referred to as ‘mother tongue’ or ‘first language’ and any number of other languages or varieties.’ (Beacco, 2007).

Lüdi and Py (2009) have a more severe criterion for plurilingualism: “Each individual currently practising two (or more) languages, and able, where necessary, to switch from one language to the other without major difficulty, is bilingual (or plurilingual)” (p. 158).

However, according to Piccardo and Capron, plurilingualism implies a ‘subtle but profound shift in perspective: horizontally, toward the use of multiple languages, and vertically, toward valuing even the most partial knowledge of a language’ (Piccardo and Capron, 2015).

The words ‘multilingualism’ and ‘plurilingualism’ may create confusion, as the prefixes multi- and pluri- have the same meaning.

‘Multilingualism’ refers to the presence in a geographical area, large or small, of more than one ‘variety of language’ (i.e., the mode of speaking of a social group whether it is formally recognised as a language or not; in such an area, individuals may be monolingual speaking only their own variety’ (Council of Europe, 2007).

As the discrepancy between the two definitions of plurilingualism becomes visible through the above-mentioned definitions by Lüdi and Py (2009) compared to those of Piccardo and Capron (2015), Skutnabb-Kangas and McCarty (2008) have made a distinction between balanced and unbalanced multilingualism. A balanced multilingual is equally proficient in two or more languages, while an unbalanced multilingual has varying degrees of fluency in different languages.

Furthermore, Cenoz (2013) distinguishes between the individual and social dimensions of multilingualism. ‘Individual multilingualism is sometimes referred to as plurilingualism’ (Cenoz, 2013). It is the ability of a person to communicate in multiple languages. Here, the individual is the point of focus (Moore and Gajo, 2009), whereas in societal multilingualism, geographical area is the key word.

Multilingualism can be studied from **atomistic and holistic perspectives.**

‘The atomistic view, which is the most widespread view adopted in multilingualism studies, is characterised by focusing on specific elements and separating the languages. Atomistic views of multilingualism consider languages as discrete, fixed, and independent entities and imply that multilinguals are expected to be like two or more monolinguals (Cenoz, 2013). This point of view has been opposed by Wandruszka (1979), Grosjean (1985), and Cook (1992), who examine multilingualism through a holistic lens and criticise viewing languages as separate entities. Wandruszka (1979) described languages as a dynamic ‘polysystem’ that is interconnected and overlapping. Cook (2003) believed that because learning a second language can have an impact on the first language, multilingual speakers have a different understanding of their native tongue than monolingual speakers. ‘A holistic approach to multilingualism does not look at each ideal native speaker of each of the languages, but at the multilingual person as a whole’ (Cenoz, 2013).

### **2.3.1 Valorisation of plurilingualism**

In Europe, the status of the languages in question is a significant factor. While European languages are highly valued at the social and economic levels, the languages of immigrant populations are linked to poverty and past dominance (Hélot and Young, 2002).

This differentiation of language status begins early. Considering the educational context in France, immigrants’ first language is called the language of origin ‘langue d’origine’ which

gives a ‘negative representation of migrant languages (Hélot and Young, 2002).

This particular form of bilingualism has been labelled ‘invisible’ by some researchers (Martin-Jones and Romaine, 1986).

According to Hélot and Young (2002), as not all languages are given the same status in the French curriculum, it influences teachers’ attitudes towards migrant languages and even towards their speakers.

This influence is not limited to schools but extends to the economic needs of the world.

Cummins (2001) writes about the devaluation of ‘home languages’ due to English being at the forefront for ‘economic and social mobility’ (Cummins, 2001). This is reflected in the French education system, where the choice to study English dominates other languages such as German, Italian, Russian, and Spanish (Réseau Eurydice, 2008).

The choice of a second language in most European school systems shows that a language is often viewed as ‘important’ if the said language is widely spoken in the world. Consequently, there can be a direct link between a student’s choice of a second language and parents’ choice of their child’s second/foreign language. Such a choice is highly influenced by the parents’ importance given to a particular language. Different factors, such as a person’s life experiences, geographical positioning, and historical context, should be considered. For instance, a school located next to the Spanish border is more likely to teach Spanish rather than German, and vice versa for a school located in Strasbourg, France. Historical events also have a significant influence on language curriculum. For example, the colonial encounter continues to frame, inform, and regulate notions about the English language in India (Bhattacharya, 2017).

## 2.4. Cultural capital and parental influence

### 2.4.1 The notion of capital in language acquisition

I shall now consider some of the social factors which may influence an individual's language repertoire after having taken into account the debate surrounding the definition of the above terms.

In the books 'Les Héritiers' (1966) as well as in 'La Reproduction' (1970), Pierre Bourdieu and Jean-Claude Passeron developed the notion of 'capital' which they described as a set of resources that an individual possesses through his/her parents in order to be incorporated into society.

Capital can have many variables: social, economic, symbolic or cultural.

Cultural capital can be classified into three forms: embodied, objective, and institutionalized (Bourdieu, 1986). The embodied state includes the knowledge and skills that a human receives from his/her habitus<sup>5</sup>, such as one's accent. The objectified state comprises materialistic wealth that exhibits one's social class, such as a luxury car. The institutionalised state encompasses recognition of a parent by a valued institution for example, receiving a degree from a prestigious college.

More recently, Tramonte and Willms (2010) expanded the concept of cultural capital to distinguish between static and dynamic cultural capital. 'Static cultural capital' includes both the possession of high culture goods, such as art works, musical instruments, and classical music; and highbrow activities, such as going to museums or the ballet or theatre.' This kind of consistency is 'held and managed' by the parents.

---

<sup>5</sup> A set of norms and expectations unconsciously acquired by individuals through experience and socialization as embodied dispositions, 'internalized as second nature' (Bourdieu), predisposing us to act improvisationally in certain ways within the constraints of particular social fields.

<https://www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/oi/authority.20110803095914456;jsessionid=3A3768F389F467FA4236221147A37DB2>



In contrast, 'relational cultural capital' includes cultural resources and activities expressed in the relationships between parents and children. It includes discussions between children and parents on cultural, political, and social matters, on school activities, and on books that children have read.' This calls for parents and children to invest in relationships that go beyond financial resources at their disposal.

In terms of impact, richer cultural capital is directly proportional to better academic performance. 'Those parents equipped with cultural capital are able to drill their children in the cultural forms that predispose them to perform well in the educational system through their ability to handle "abstract" and "formal" categories.' (Bennett, Savage, Silva, Warde, Gayo, Wright, 2009).

#### **2.4.2 Complexity of family influence**

The complexity of family influence has various dimensions.

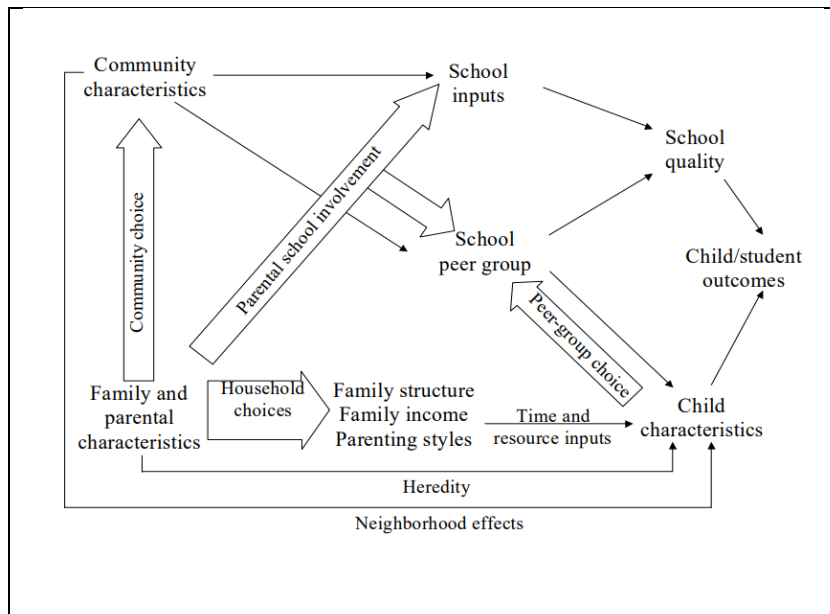
As previously seen with De Mattia-Viviès who writes about her concept of *lalangue* (2022),

De Houwer (1999) sought this idea by stating that an influential factor in a child becoming bilingual or not is the projection of the bilingual or monolingual persona of the parents which means how they interact with their children (one parent one language, one parent is bilingual, the other is not, etc.) along with the frequency of different languages used.

Figure 1 below by Thomas Nechyba, Patrick McEwan and Dina Older-Aguilar (1999) highlights how parental choices and hereditary characteristics influence child/student's academic outcomes.

**Figure 1**

*A conceptual model*



The above study offers some insight into the complexity of family influence in general.

According to Williams, S., Conger K., & Blozis, S. (2007), ‘The vast majority of the family socialisation literature focuses on the parent – child dyad, as the hierarchical structure of parent – child interactions are particularly conducive to socialisation efforts, with parents holding higher status and more power than the child or adolescent’ (pg. 1527). Consequently, parental role is crucial in this research.

Parental choices can be treated under three headings.

- (i) Household choices such as ‘parenting styles, work habits and financial investments in children’
- (ii) Community choice which is the selection of a ‘geographical and a social community’ that could have an impact on the child (especially in France with the concept of *carte scolaire*<sup>6</sup>)

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.education.gouv.fr/le-fonctionnement-de-la-carte-scolaire-dans-le-second-degre-11555> as consulted on 18/04/23

- (iii) The decision of being involved in their child's school

This leads to the question as to how these social factors might influence the linguistic performance of a child.

### **2.4.3 Factors influencing attitudes to learning a foreign language**

Focusing on parental attitudes and linguistic performance of a child, Jones (1950) concluded that parents with limited linguistic backgrounds tend to be more negative towards language learning. This idea is reinforced by Bartram (2006) who found that parents' positive attitude towards foreign language learning has a huge influence on their children adopting a positive attitude about foreign language learning.

Moreover, the home environment plays a significant role in children's academic achievement. Gardener (1975) states 'the degree of skill which the student attains in a second language will be dependent upon the attitudinal atmosphere in the home.' Both Gardner's (1975) and Bartram's (2012) studies came to the conclusion that having a supportive home environment helps children learn new languages because parents are more likely to encourage and assist their children if they have experience learning new languages themselves.

Supporting this view, Young (1994) delves deeper into parental attitudes and deduces that an increase in self-esteem is directly proportionate to an increase in motivation to learn a foreign language: 'An augmentation in self-esteem is a pleasurable and therefore a desirable experience. It therefore follows that children may be motivated to learn a foreign language as a result of a basic need for the esteem of others, which may in turn increase the child's personal self-worth.' Along with parental attitude, it is also their behaviour that influences their child's language learning: 'by encouraging participation in foreign language exchange programmes and excursions, helping the child with homework, encouraging the child to read

material written in the foreign language and by making the target language country the destination for a family holiday' (Young, 1994).

To conclude this reflexion on the various factors influencing a child's language repertoire, the following points have been identified.

First, identifying whether or not a pupil is mono-bi or plurilingual will depend on the definition of the term used. For the purpose of this study the following definition will be adopted: "Each individual currently practising two (or more) languages, and able, where necessary, to switch from one language to the other without major difficulty, is bilingual (or plurilingual)" (Lüdi & Py, 2009, pg. 158). However, the latent potential for everyone to develop their bilingualism can be noted from the discussion of Greaves and De Mattia-Viviès's work (2.2).

Second, parental attitudes influencing a child's language repertoire will themselves be strongly influenced by social, economic and cultural factors.

Third, research (Bartram (2006) has shown that positive parental attitudes towards language learning are reflected in children's positive attitude towards foreign language learning.

## **Research Question**

A family plays a huge role in an individual's development in various aspects of life (Kagen, 1999). Families are children's first teachers (Morrison & Cooney, 2002). Our point of focus in this study is the impact of family on a child's motivation and performance in school. Research has proven a positive direct relationship between children's learning experiences in their families and their learning behaviour in school (Sha et al., 2016).

This research study aims to explore the parental attitudes and behaviour that influence foreign language acquisition in children. The key objectives of this study will be explored with the following questions: (a) what are the possible correlations between parental influence and children's motivation to learn a foreign language at school? and (b) what kinds of family behaviour or background help foreign language acquisition at school?

## **Hypotheses explored in the study**

This research aims to explore two aspects of plurilingualism and to do this the following hypotheses have been identified. First, the hypothesis that plurilingualism is a common phenomenon. According to Georges Lüdi and Bernard Py, more than half of the population speaks more than one language every day. Their study was conducted in the region of Neuchâtel, in French-speaking Switzerland, not far from Besançon where this research takes place.

Second, the hypothesis that certain populations might valorise their plurilingualism less than others (Piller, p.158). According to Piller, this difference in valorisation is not limited to languages but also to different speakers. In cases of migration, it is possible that some

families give more value to the language used in the migrated country which is ‘crucial to their assimilation, on which their healthy growth and development depends’ (Greaves, 2022) Finally, the third hypothesis is that a family language environment has a major influence on foreign language acquisition.

## **Part II: Empirical Study**

In order to conduct this research, the process of data collection was divided into three phases which spanned over a period of eight months.

I decided to pursue my analysis of plurilingualism using the following methodological tools: a language biography, a questionnaire and interviewing.

This three-step qualitative and quantitative research was analysed on a macro and micro level.

It was made possible using several methodological tools: students’ language biography productions, questionnaire responses of their parents, and in a separate setting, individual interviews with a different set of pupils.

For the first part of the study, a questionnaire was sent to 14 parents of the students studying in a private high school. Of the 14 parents, 9 parents responded.

Second, the didactic activity of the language biography which was used to explore pupil attitudes took place in a language class.

Finally, individual interviews were conducted in a different secondary school with 11 volunteers.

### **5.1 Language Biography**

A language biography is an account of a person’s language journey: language acquisition and their abilities in these language(s). ‘This tool seeks in particular to help subjects (language learners or future teachers) to better perceive the linguistic and cultural plurality of their environment, while revisiting and becoming aware of their own cultural and linguistic

repertoire.’ (Domp martin-Normand & Thamin, 2018).

This tool was chosen as it encourages the participants to be more involved in exploring their own language journey<sup>7</sup>.

In order to explore pupils’ relationship with their own language repertoire, the first part of the study was conducted with 14 students in *Seconde*<sup>8</sup> during a Chinese class at a private Lycée (high school) in Besançon, France.

Two activities were undertaken with these pupils: the first activity comprised introducing the concept of a language biography to the students and the second activity was their presentation of their own language biographies to the class.

### The Language Biography Class

I started the class by greeting the pupils in various languages. This helped them to anticipate the topic: ‘Languages’. I used the visual support of a presentation<sup>9</sup>.



*Screenshot of the presentation*

The presentation included a list of questions such as:

1. What is a language?

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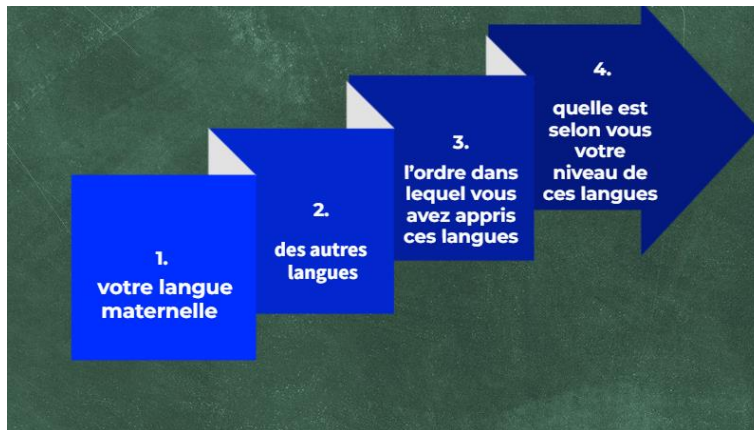
<sup>7</sup> Source: <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portfolio/the-language-biography#:~:text=The%20Language%20Biography%20facilitates%20the,in%20the%20Self%2Dassessment%20Grid>. consulted on 08/02/2023

<sup>8</sup> Seconde is equivalent to Year 11 of the British education system or 10<sup>th</sup> grade in the American system

<sup>9</sup> <https://view.genial.ly/6238ab660458930010a5976a/presentation-biographie-langagiere>

2. What languages do you speak?
3. How did you learn these languages?
4. What is a language biography?

For simplification, I gave them a step-by-step guide to create their own language biography. It included four steps:



The pupils were given a choice of various formats to present their language biography such as: text, mind maps, drawings, timelines, etc. They were free to explore any means of presentation for which they were given one week to prepare.

The analysis of these presentations for my study was done using video and audio recordings which were transcribed. This was to provide an analogic representation of the actual didactic activity in class. That is to say, a representation which included a maximum of detail without any additional commentary or interpretation: “Whilst filmed activity is not to be confused with reality itself, it nonetheless is an excellent source of empirical data for representing the social world” (Bloor, 2020).



## 5.2 Questionnaire

A questionnaire was filled in by parents of the same students who had presented their language biography. The questionnaire was shared with 14 families through *Ecole Directe* (a communication platform for families, students, teachers and school staff).

The questionnaire was composed of 20 questions, developed with the aim of identifying parental attitudes and behaviors regarding their children's foreign language acquisition.

Questions 1 to 7 inform us of parents' age, profession and nationality as well as their child's age and nationality.

Questions 8 and 9 inform us of the number of languages the parents use and the age at which they started learning these languages.

Questions 10, 11, 12 and 13 are about language usage at home which is linked to the respondent's child's exposure to these particular language(s).

Questions 14 and 15 allow us to understand the respondent's attitudes towards language learning.

Questions 16 and 17 pertain to language behaviour at home.

Questions 18, 19 and 20 enable us to understand the respondent's child's language learning motivation and results.

### Table 3

#### *Questionnaire for parents*

**Questionnaire pour les parents:**

1. Quel âge avez-vous?
  - 20-30
  - 30-40
  - 40-50
  - 50-60
  - 60-70
2. Profession : \_\_\_\_\_
3. Nationalité : \_\_\_\_\_
4. Nationalité du conjoint(e): \_\_\_\_\_
5. Année de naissance de l'enfant :

6. Pays de naissance de l'enfant :
7. Si le pays de naissance n'est pas la France, veuillez mentionner votre année d'arrivée : \_\_\_\_\_
8. Combien de langues utilisez-vous dans votre vie quotidienne ou utilisez-vous ces langues de façon périodique ?
- 1
  - 2
  - 3
  - 4
  - Plus de 4
9. À quel âge avez-vous commencé à apprendre ces langues ? Veuillez mentionner la langue également.
- Langage 1 (L1): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Langage 2 (L2): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Langage 3 (L3): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Langage 4 (L4): \_\_\_\_\_
  - Langage 5 (L5): \_\_\_\_\_
10. Veuillez cocher les langues que vous utilisez avec votre famille.
- L1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L5 \_\_\_\_\_
11. Veuillez cocher les langues auxquelles votre enfant est exposé à la maison ou avec des proches.
- L1 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L2 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L3 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L4 \_\_\_\_\_
  - L5 \_\_\_\_\_
12. À quel âge cette exposition a-t-elle commencée pour votre enfant ? \_\_\_\_\_
13. Veuillez sélectionner l'énoncé le plus près de votre communication avec votre enfant :
- Utilisation de L1 seulement
  - Utilisation égale de L1 et L2
  - Utilisation de L1 avec quelques mots de L2
  - Utilisation de L2 seulement
  - Utilisation de L2 avec quelques mots de L1
  - Utilisation de L1, L2 et L3 dans une conversation
  - Utilisation de L1, L2 et L3 à différents moments
14. À votre avis, est-ce que l'apprentissage des langues étrangères est important ?
- Oui
  - Non
  - Peut être

15. À votre avis, l'apprentissage des langues étrangères est facile ou difficile sur une échelle de 1 à 10 ? (1 étant très facile et 10 étant très difficile)

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	---	----

16. À quelle fréquence utilisez-vous une langue autre que le français à la maison avec votre enfant ?

- Tous les jours
- Deux fois par semaine/ pendant le week-end
- Souvent
- Parfois
- Jamais

17. De quelle façon utilisez-vous la/les langues étrangères avec votre enfant ?

- Des conversations dans cette/ces langues
- Regarder des films et des séries ensemble dans cette/ces langues
- Jouer à des jeux dans cette/ces langues
- Lire ensemble dans cette/ces langues
- Ecouter de la musique dans cette/ces langues
- Enseigner la langue à votre enfant ou l'apprendre ensemble
- Des vacances dans le pays où la langue est parlée

18. Votre enfant est-il/elle motive(e) par l'apprentissage d'une langue étrangère ?

- Oui
- Non
- Un peu
- Je ne suis pas sûr

19. Quelles notes obtient votre enfant habituellement en langues étrangères au lycée ?

- Très bien
- Bien
- Assez bien
- Passable
- Echec

20. Êtes-vous satisfait de son rendement scolaire en langue étrangère à l'école ?

- Oui
- Non
- Je ne suis pas sûr
- Je ne préfère pas dire

### 5.3 Interviewing

In the second part of this study, my research project extended to a completely different educational structure: a *collège*<sup>10</sup> located in a priority education area REP+<sup>11</sup> in Besançon, France. About 700 students from diverse backgrounds were enrolled in this school for the year (2022-2023).

Participants in these interviews were volunteers from two sections of 4<sup>ème</sup><sup>12</sup> and one of 3<sup>ème</sup><sup>13</sup> SEGPA (Section d'enseignement général et professionnel adapté). The interview was conducted individually and in French so that the students would be at ease and express their personal feelings.

Questions 3, 4, 6, 7 and 10 inform us of their behaviour regarding languages.

Questions 5, 8 and 9 inform us of their attitude/motivation towards languages.

Question 2 is about their performance at school.

#### Table 4

##### *Interview questions for pupils*

The interview was based on the following questions:

1. Name, age and if they had any brothers or sisters
2. Marks in languages (approximately)
3. How many languages do you speak?
4. Which language do you use at home?
5. According to you, is it an advantage or disadvantage to speak multiple languages?
6. What is the mother tongue of your parents? Do you understand these languages?
7. Are there any other people (family or friends) around you who use other languages?
8. Was there any particular experience that made you want to learn a language?
9. On a scale of 1 to 10, how motivated are you to learn languages?
10. According to you what is the best way of learning a language?

---

<sup>10</sup> Collège in the French education system is equivalent to 6<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> grade in the US or year 7 to 10 in the British system

<sup>11</sup> REP+ refers to isolated neighbourhoods or areas that experience the greatest concentration of difficulties in the territory.

<sup>12</sup> pupils aged 12 to 14

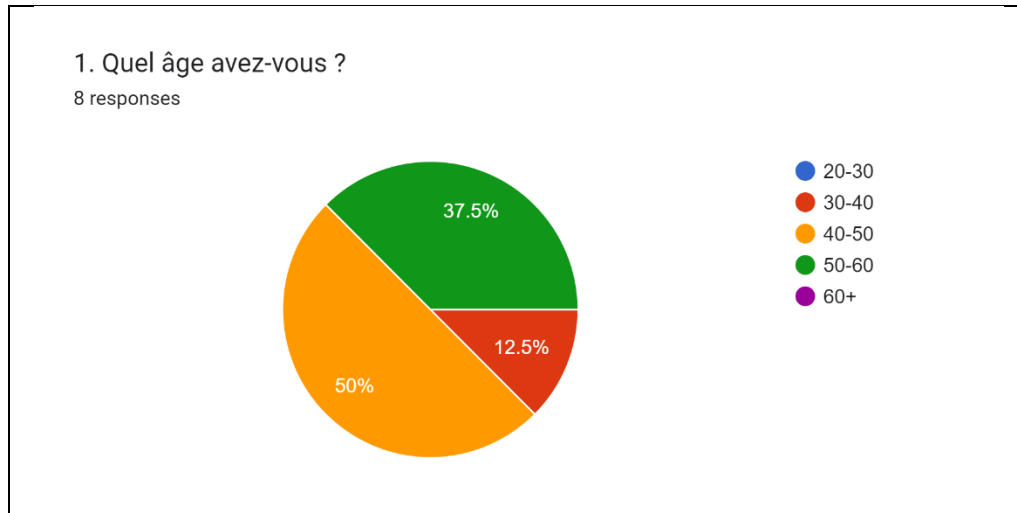
<sup>13</sup> pupil aged 14

## Preliminary Findings

### 6.1 Questionnaire responses

Of the 14 students participating in the study in the lycée, 9 parents answered the questionnaire which had been sent to them online through *Ecole Directe*. Here are their responses:

Graph 1

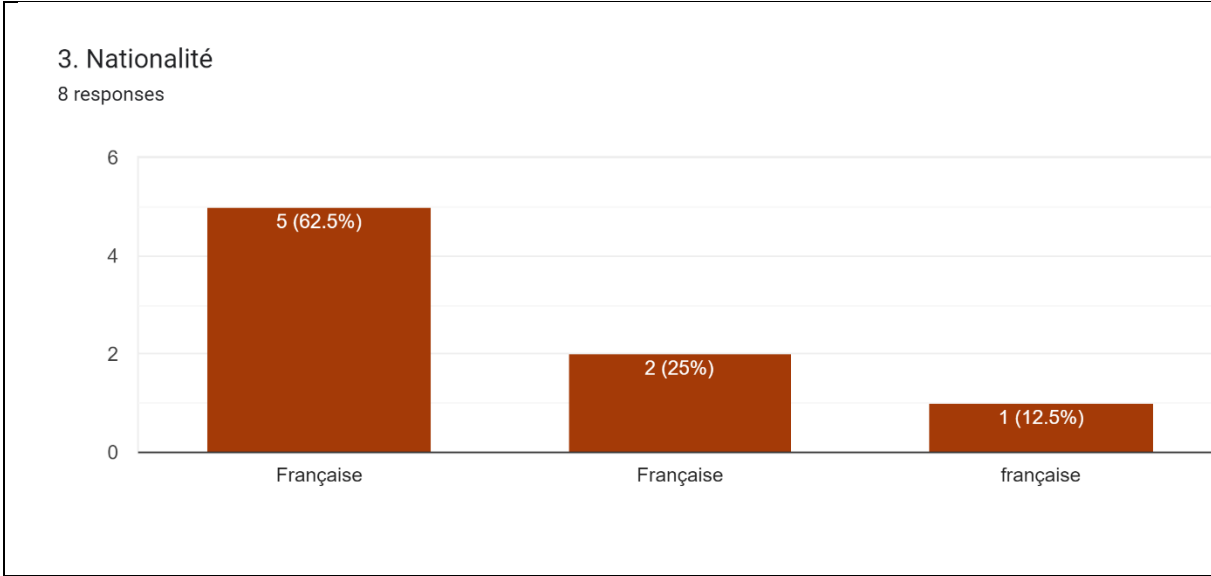


Question 1 Half of the parents belong to the age group of 40-50. More than 30% of the respondents are between 50 and 60. The minority is aged from 30-40 years.

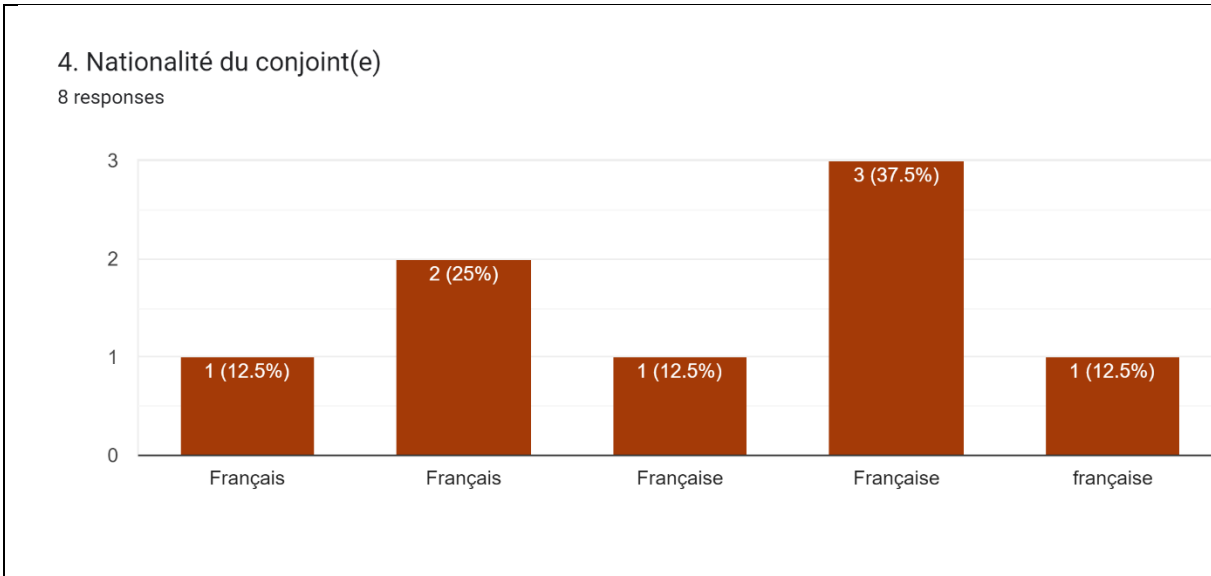


The responses to question 2 revealed that the parents in the study were active in diverse professional fields. As we can see, the group is composed of a farmer, an artisan, a pharmacist, a sophrologist, a builder, a company head, a freelancer, a site manager and a bank manager.

Graph 2

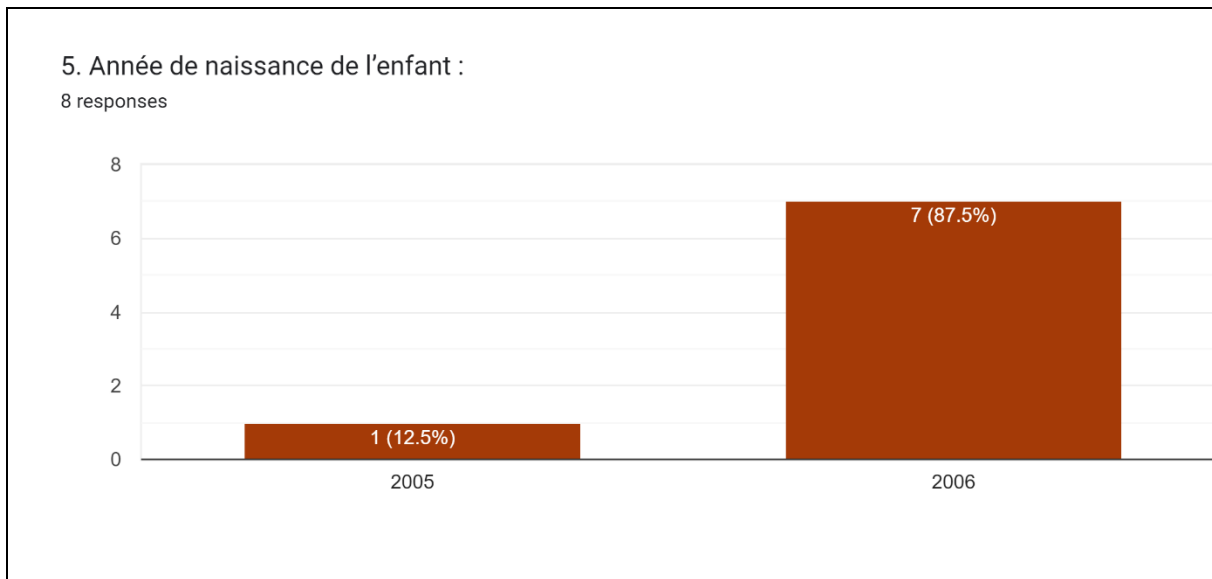


Graph 3



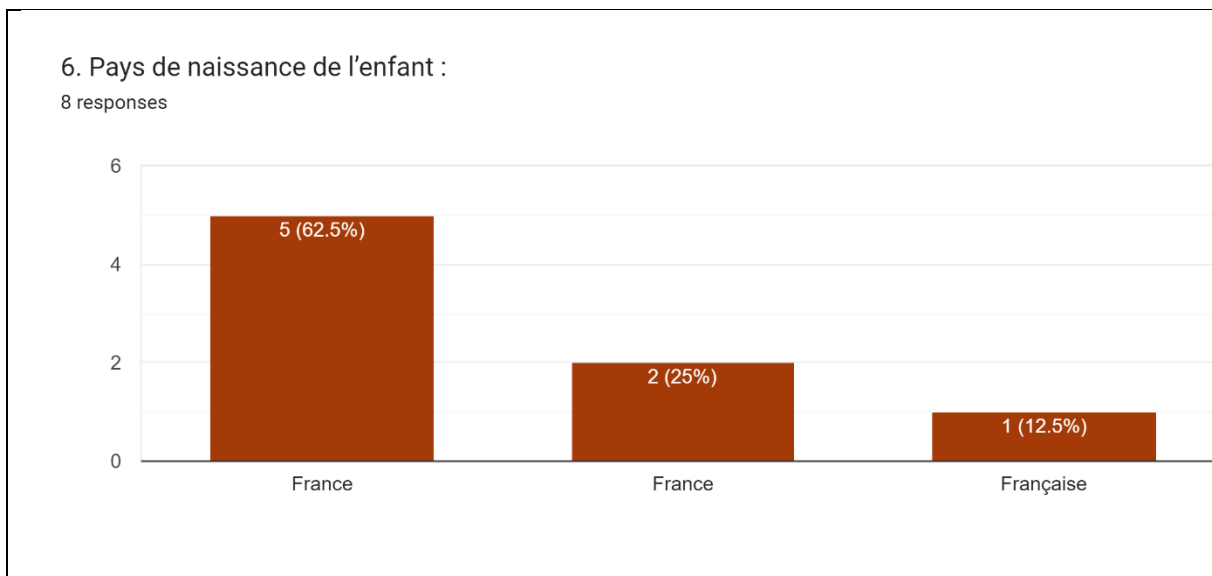
All the respondents as well as their spouses are French.

Graph 4



Apart from one student born in 2005, all the other students are born in 2006.

Graph 5



All the students were born in France.

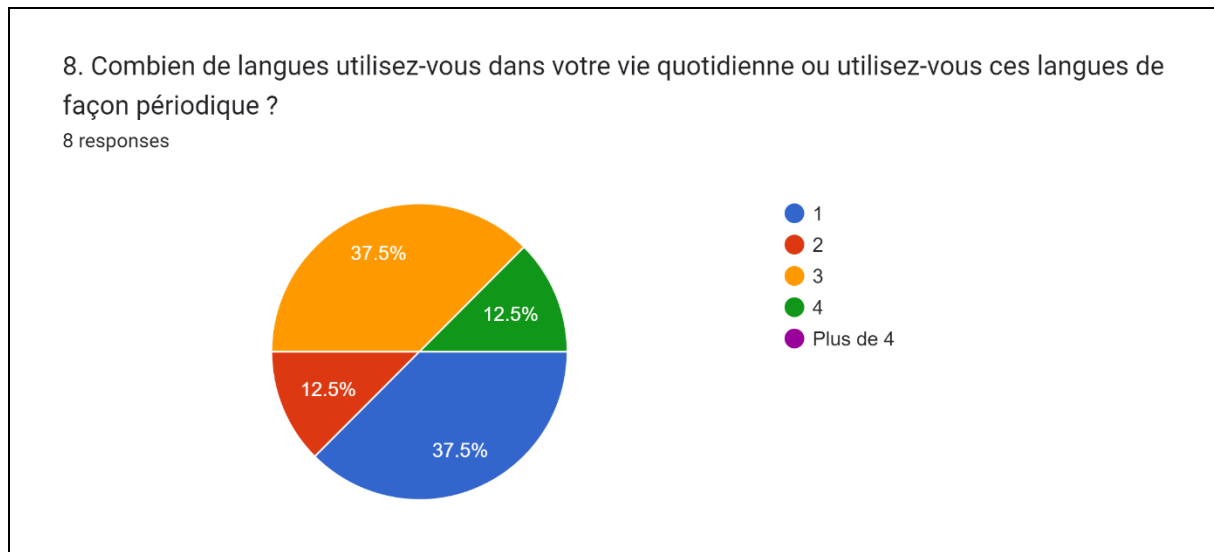
7. Si le pays de naissance n'est pas la France, veuillez mentionner votre année d'arrivée

0 responses

No responses yet for this question.

The answers to questions 4 -7 show that French and France is likely to be the main cultural influence as all the pupils were born in France and both their parents consider themselves to be French.

Graph 6



Out of 8 parents, 3 use only one language on a day-to-day basis (37.5%). The same number of parents use three languages almost daily. One parent uses two languages and there is only one parent left who uses four languages every day.

Table 6.1

9. À quel âge avez-vous commence à apprendre ces langues ? Veuillez mentionner la langue également. (Par exemple, Language 1 (L1) : \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ Language 2 (L2) : \_\_\_\_\_ Age: \_\_\_\_\_ , etc.)  
8 responses

L1 français naissance L2 collège L3 allemand collège
L1 naissance
L 1 : français à la naissance, L 2 : anglais à 11 ans, L 3 : allemand à 13 ans
Entre 12 et 25. L1 français L2 arabe argot L3 arabe littéraire L4 anglais
Language 1 (L1) : Français Age: 6 ans Language 2 (L2) :Anglais Age 11 ans Language 3 (L3) :Allemand Age 13 ans
Langage (L1): Turc, Age: Dès la naissance, Langage 2(L2): Français, Age: 3ans, L3: Allemand, Age: 6ème, L4: Anglais, Age:4ème

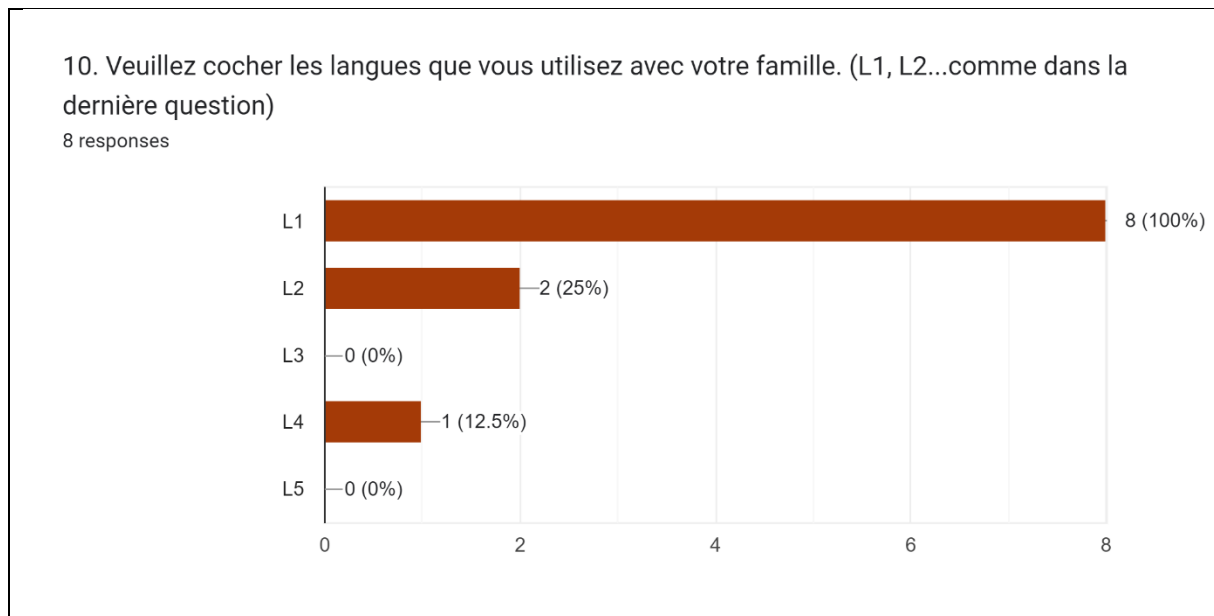


1 français 0 ans 2 anglais 10 ans 3 allemand 13 ans

L1 Français Maternelle L2 Anglais 12 ans L3 Espagnol 14 ans

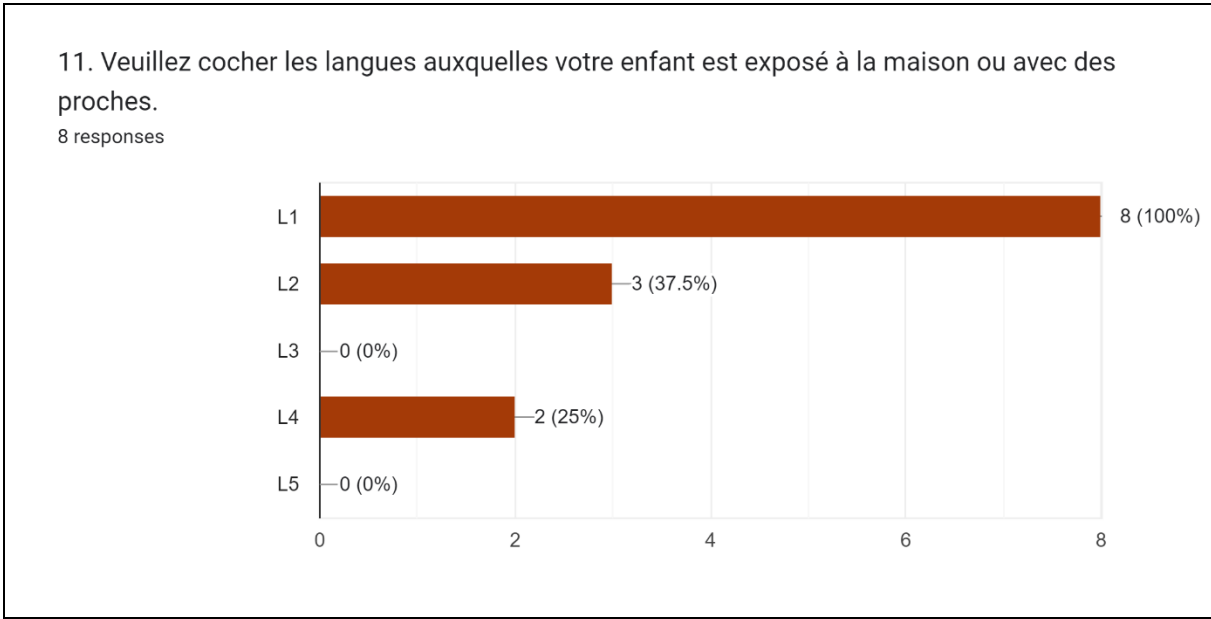
For the parents' first language (L1), six respondents started learning at birth, one in preschool and one in primary school. Out of six people who mentioned L2, five started learning it in secondary school whereas only one person started it in primary school. When it comes to L3, all six respondents started it in secondary school at 13-14 years. The same respondent started learning L4 in secondary school as well. One person mentioned that they learnt all languages between the ages of 12 and 25.

Graph 7

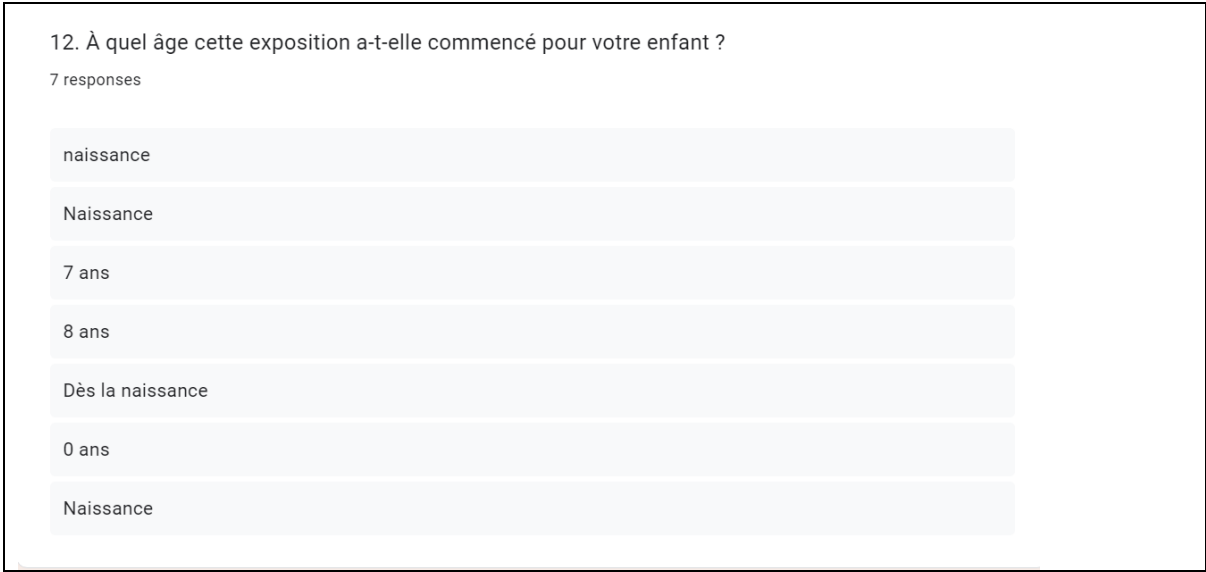


One-third of the participants use more than one language with their families. Two people confirm the usage of their second language and one person ticked L4. Which means that five respondents use only their L1 at home.

Graph 8

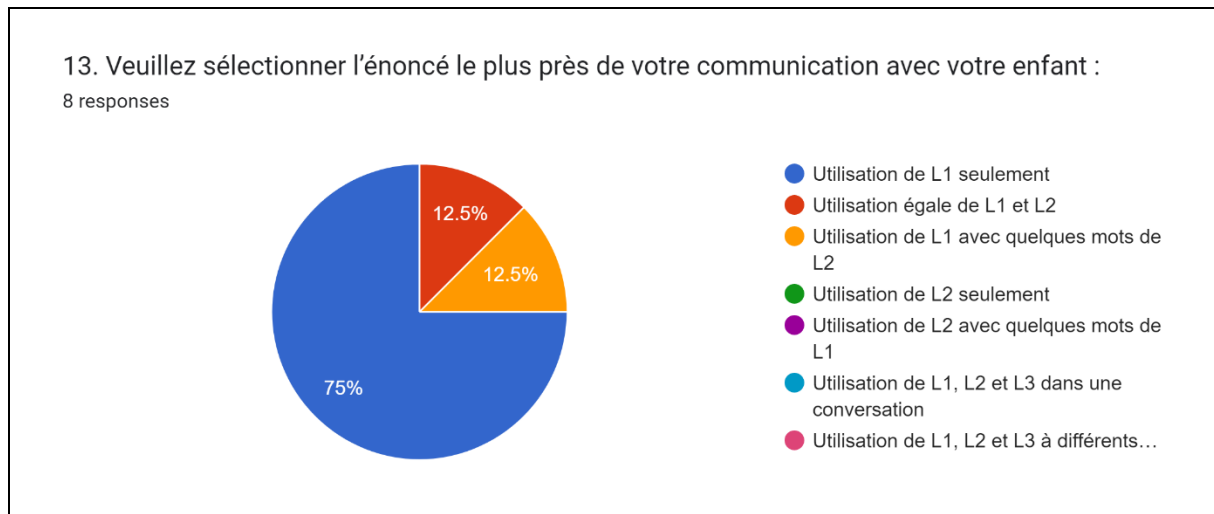


More than 60% of the respondents verify that their children are exposed to more than one language. The remaining students are limited to the exposure of one language at home.



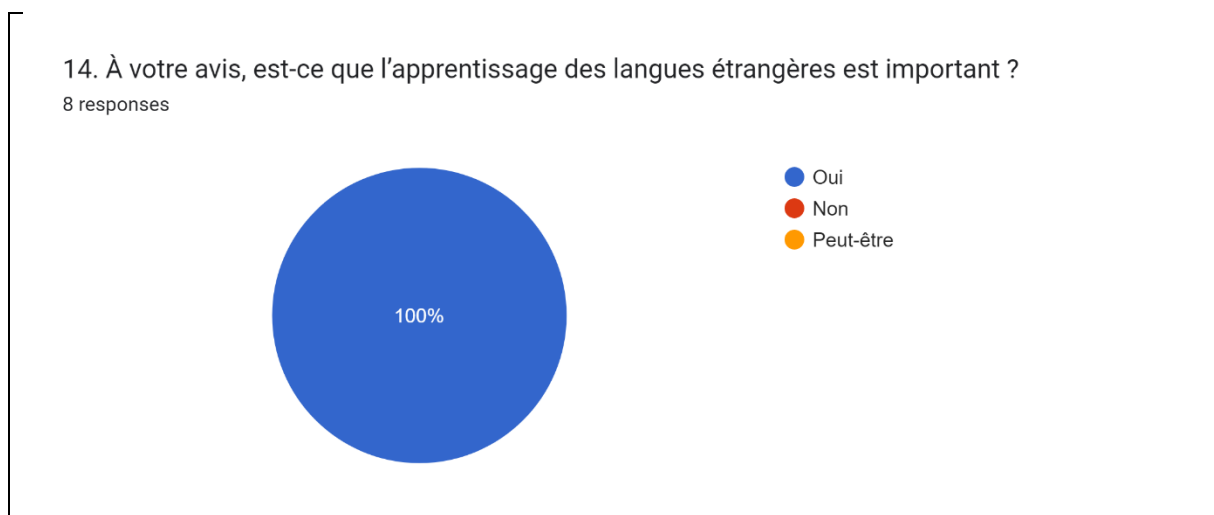
Five parents wrote that this exposure to language(s) began at the birth of their child. However, two parents mentioned 7 and 8 years respectively. It is to be noted that only seven responses were received for this question.

Graph 9



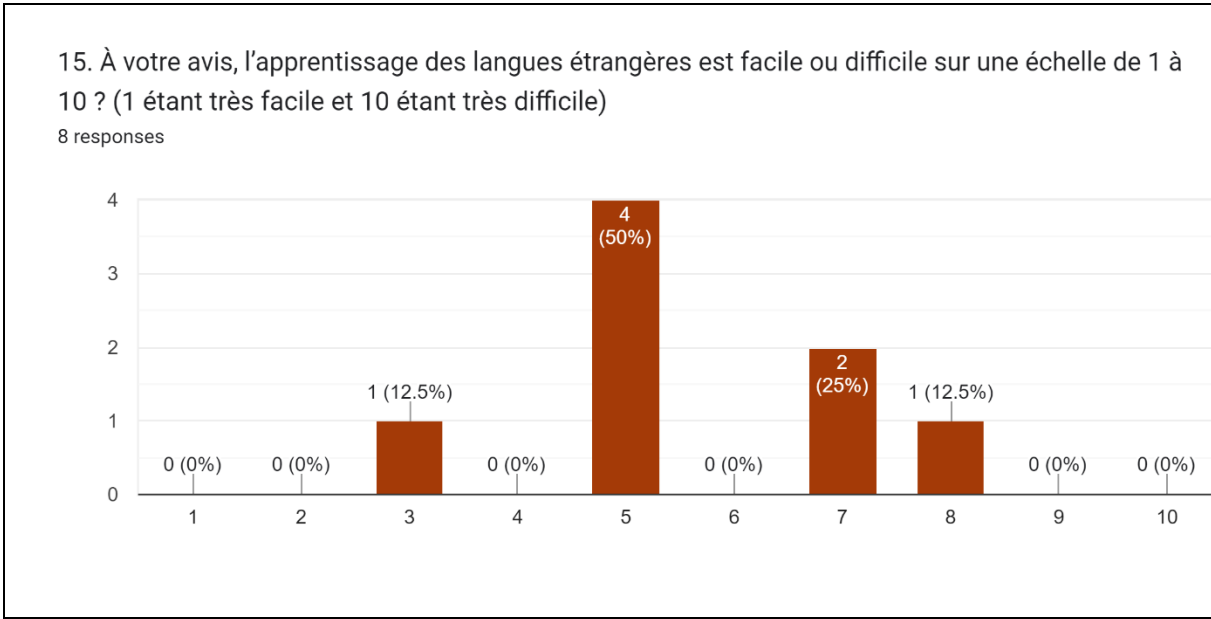
Three quarters of the participants selected the option which says that they only use L1 with their child. Slightly over 12% of the participants say that they equally use L1 and L2. One person selected the option 'Usage of L1 with some words of L2'.

Graph 10



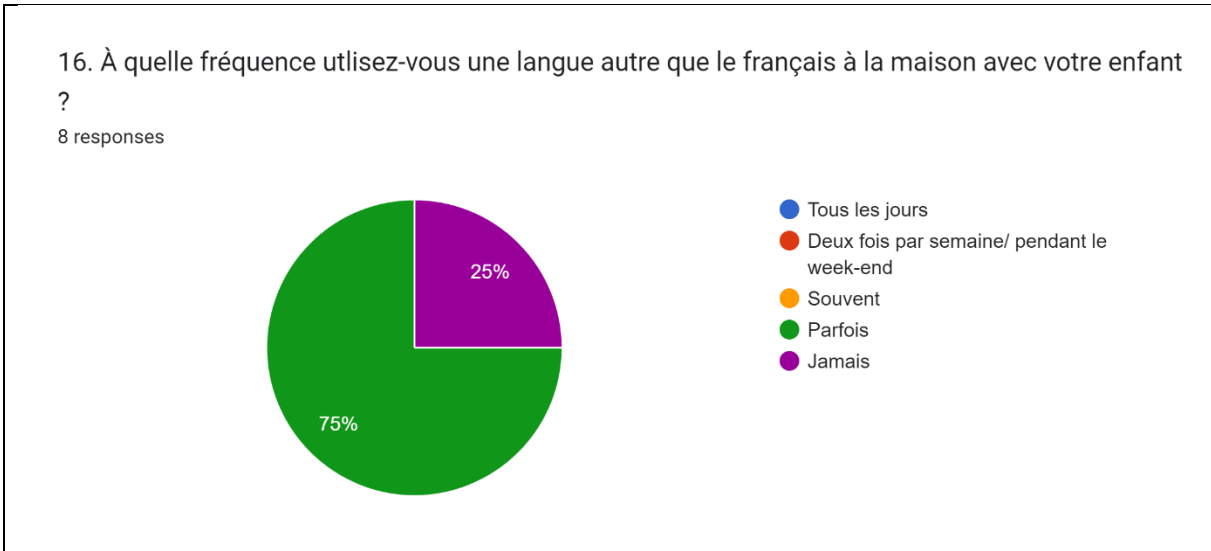
All parents agree that language learning is important.

Graph 11



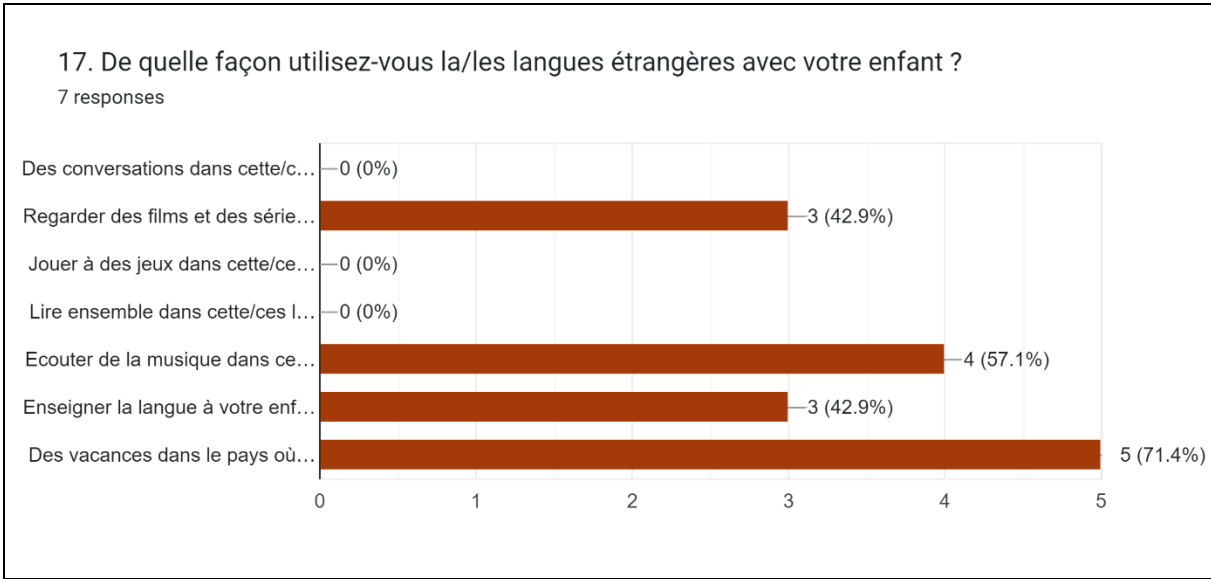
The majority situates themselves at 4 on a scale from 1 to 10 in terms of difficulty in language learning. The rest of the respondents are divided between 3, 7 and 8 on the scale of difficulty.

Graph 12



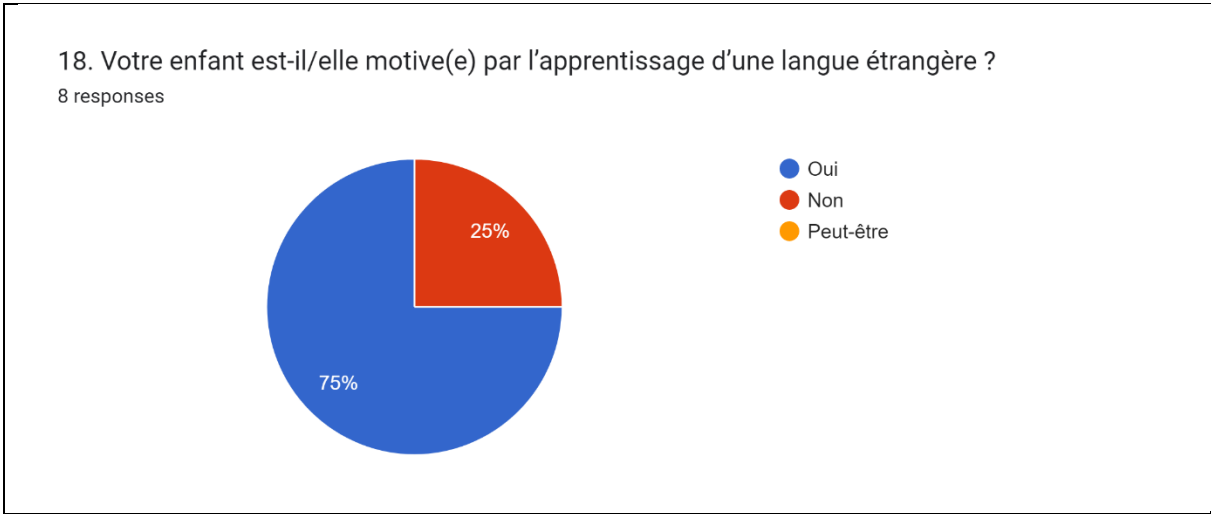
One fourth of the parents state that they never use any other language apart from French at home and 75% state that they use another language from time to time.

Graph 13



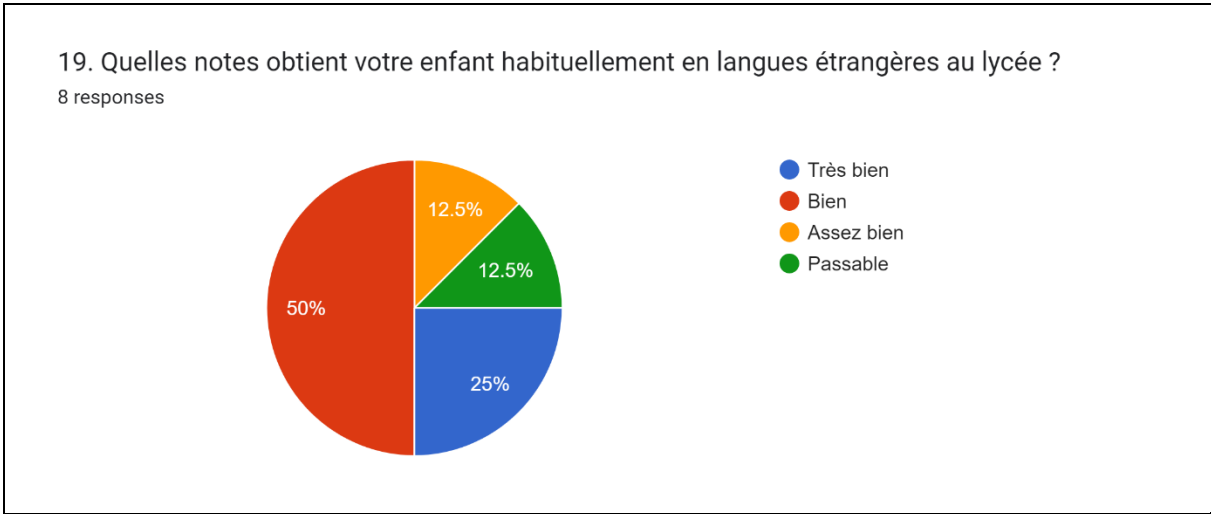
Most of the people use a language (other than French) by spending time in the country where it is spoken. The second most common way is by listening to music in this language with four people selecting this option. At the bottom of the list is a tie between watching movies and series in this language and teaching it to their children.

Graph 14



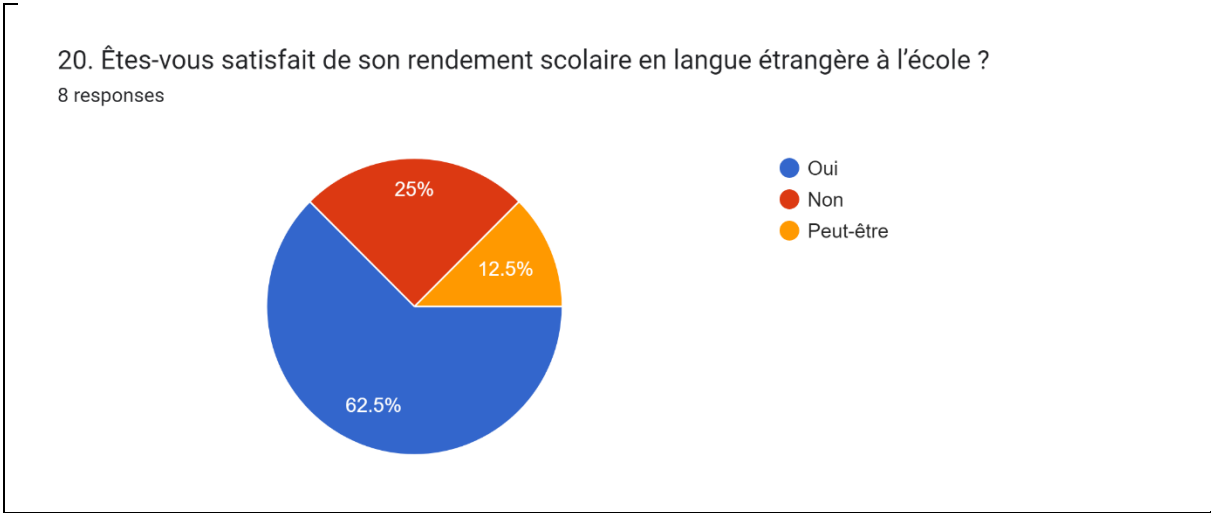
The majority agreed that their child was motivated to learn languages. However, a minority of 25% disagreed.

Graph 15



Half of the students received good marks as per their parents. One fourth of the students got excellent marks. Although some parents think that their children secure average or just enough marks to get through the class.

Graph 16



Slightly over 60% of the respondents are satisfied with their child's performance in terms of language learning. About 2 parents were not happy. One respondent was not sure if they were satisfied or not.

## Questionnaire conclusions

Based on the responses to this questionnaire it is possible to state that for the pupils in this study, **parents were generally very supportive of their children learning languages (see graphs 10 and 13)**. It can also be noted that the parents' profiles were indicative of the fact that they themselves had a plurilingual background (see graph 6 and table 6.1). Despite this plurilingual background, most of the parents do not tend to use many languages at home with their family (see graphs 7, 9 and 12). However, some of the students are still exposed to more than one language at home (see graph 8) the extent of which has not been identified in the questionnaire. **Parents' language behaviour at home reflects the fact that they make efforts to expose their children to other languages in leisure activities (see graph 13)**, despite mainly using French at home. Lastly, we learn that most of the students are motivated to learn foreign languages (see graph 14).

## **6.2 Study of the Language Biography Activity**

Below are the four questions which were addressed to each pupil in order to understand their relationship with languages:

- Question 1: What is a language?
- Question 2: What languages do you speak?
- Question 3: How did you learn these languages?
- Question 4: What is a language biography?

Following these introductory questions, I continued to interact with the pupils and to ask them to elaborate on their answers in order to learn more about their language biographies. Some of their responses for the first question included 'a means of communication', 'to exchange with others'. In total the group mentioned eight different languages: French, English, Spanish, Tahitian, Chinese, German, Turkish and Arabic. For question number 3 "How did you learn

these languages?”, some of the various means of language acquisition mentioned by the pupils were: school, family, films, comic books, applications (duolingo, quizlet, etc.).

During the interview the pupils were shown an example of a language biography. This was posted by Lycée Français de Tananarive on Youtube and entitled “Le Mai des Langues 2021 | Biographie langagière des CM2b de l'EPFD”<sup>14</sup>. The purpose of showing them this language biography was to present them a model that would inspire them to produce their own creation. The intention was that through the act of writing, drawing and expressing verbally their language biography, the students would come to have a better understanding of their relationship with languages and how they acquired them. They had three days to prepare their presentation.

Most of the students (12 out of 14) had a visual support with them. They used their respective documents as an aid to elaborate their oral presentations in front of the class, one by one.

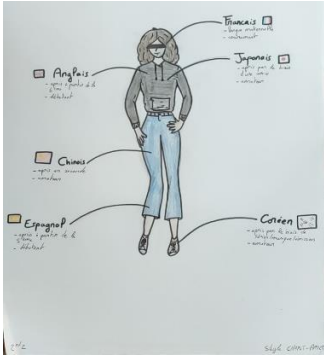

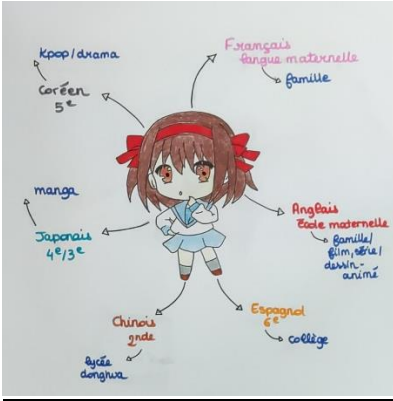
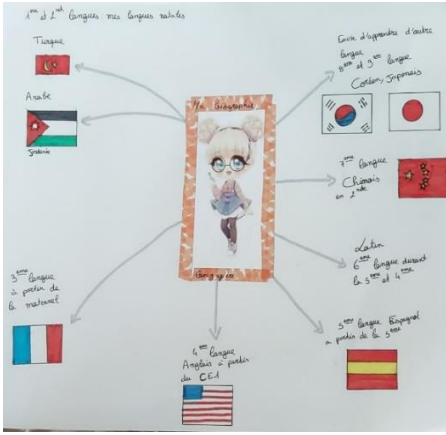
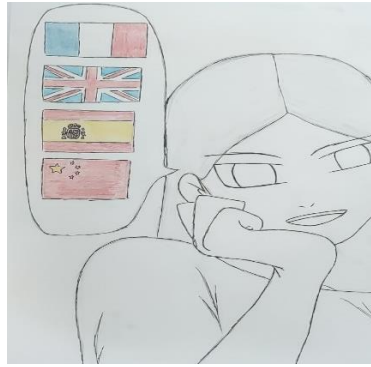
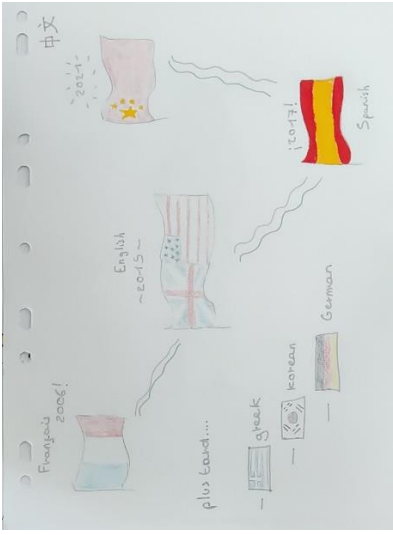
Three students presented themselves in the middle of the page and using arrows, wrote the languages they had acquired with additional details answering when and how they acquired these languages (language biographies 1, 2, 3, 4 and 11). Three students used flags to depict their language journey (language biographies 6, 7 and 8). Another student used a schema to depict her language biography (language biography 9). A colour-coded timeline was also used by a student to portray her relationship with languages (language biography 10).

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<sup>14</sup> [https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gDC\\_PlJc5o&t=137s](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-gDC_PlJc5o&t=137s)

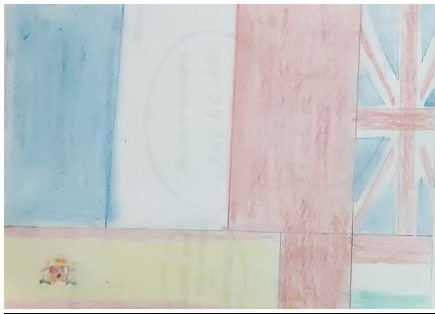


To protect the privacy of all pupils, their names have been changed throughout the research.

<p>Language biography 1 by pupil Silvia</p> 	<p>Language biography 2 by pupil Louane</p> 	<p>Language biography 3 by pupil Marie</p> 
<p>Language biography 4 by pupil Léonie</p> 	<p>Language biography 5 by pupil Léa</p> 	<p>Language biography 6 by pupil Stella</p> 

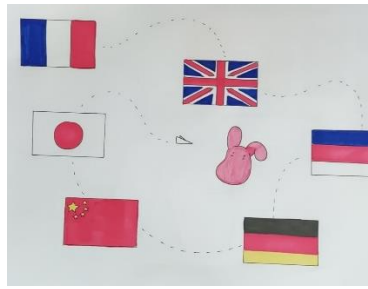
Language biography 7 by pupil

Pierre



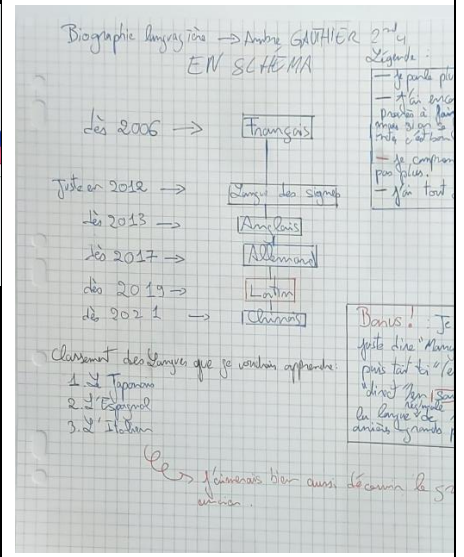
Language biography 8 by

pupil Suzanne



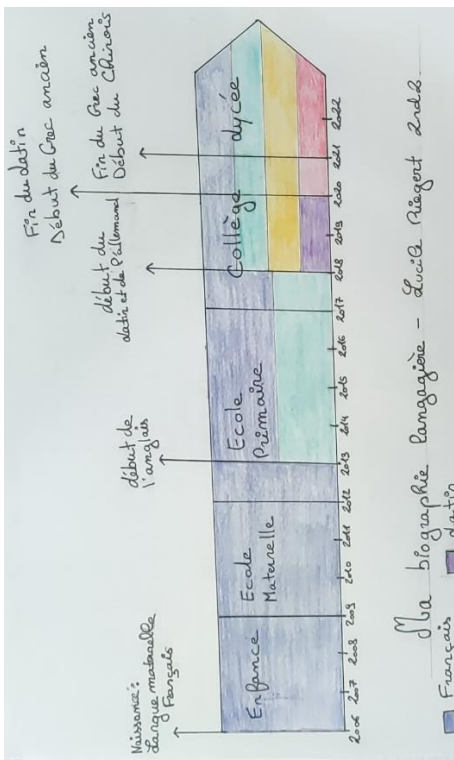
Language biography 9 by pupil

Alice



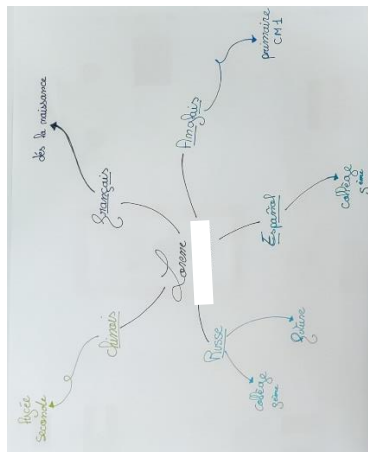
Language biography 10 by pupil

Liliane



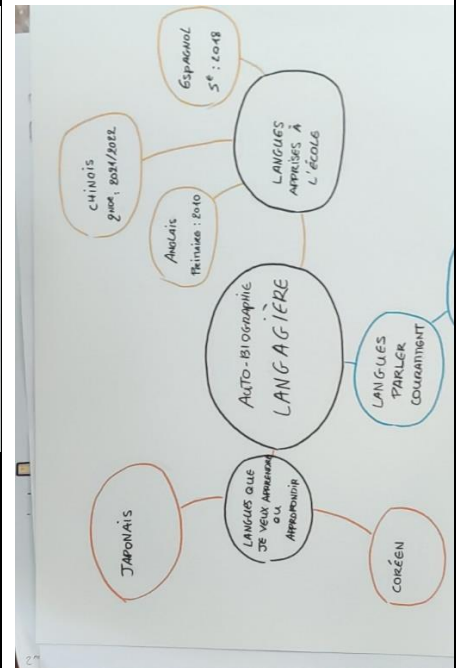
Language biography 11 by

pupil Laura



Language biography 12 by pupil

Sophie



## General analysis of the activity



The varied visual representations show how the pupils personally associate with languages, either through the medium of a timeline, schema, flags, or using a self-portrait to establish their language journey. These language biographies are a visual expression of the perception of the plurilingual identity of all the students that took part in this activity. According to their representations, three to seven languages have been used (or learned) by each student at some point in their lives. Two students did not use any document. One of them gave an oral presentation while drawing a web on a whiteboard.

Most students were enthusiastic about this activity. They listened to all the presentations carefully. They then asked me and Mr. B (the Chinese teacher who let me conduct this research activity) about our language journeys.

### 6.2.1 Fine-grained analysis: Extracts from a transcription of the activity

In order to examine more closely clues as to the students' relationship with language during this activity, extracts from a transcription of the activity are presented below.

#### Extract 1: Liliane

<u>Liliane</u>	<u>Images</u>
<p>(Elle montre sa frise chronologique)</p> <p>1. Liliane : Alors moi j'ai fait une frise chronologique pour l'apprentissage de langue. Alors je suis née en 2006 et à ma naissance bah j'ai appris progressivement le français. C'est ma langue maternelle.</p> <p>Ensuite à l'école primaire en 2013 en CE1 j'ai commencé à apprendre l'anglais..les bases.</p> <p>Ensuite je suis arrivée au collège. Collège en 5<sup>ième</sup>, j'ai commencé j'ai choisi de commencer l'allemand.</p> <p>Ensuite j'ai aussi également choisi de commencer le latin en langue ancienne. Et ensuite j'ai arrêté le latin en troisième pour commencer le grec...euh ..qui me paraissait intéressant puis je suis arrivée au lycée j'ai arrêté le grec ancien puisqu'il y avait plus de cours de grec et j'ai commencé le chinois. Voilà et du coup c'est là où je suis aujourd'hui.</p> <p>2. Trainee teacher : Et l'allemand tu pratiques toujours ?</p> <p>3. Liliane : oui</p> <p>Trainee teacher : Oui, un peu ?</p> <p>4. Liliane : Bah si, un peu, au lycée...bah j'ai allemand.</p> <p>5. Trainee teacher: ah d'accord, okay, okay, okay</p> <p>6. Liliane : Et ma maman elle parle allemand couramment donc des fois</p> <p>7. Trainee teacher : ah d'accord alors chez toi...</p> <p>8. Liliane : quand je suis obligée...</p> <p>9. Trainee teacher : Ah quand t'es obligée...okay, alors ce n'est pas par choix ?</p> <p>10. Liliane : Non.</p> <p>11. Trainee teacher : Le français par choix ?</p> <p>12. Liliane : Oui, français, des fois avec papa l'anglais mais voilà !</p> <p>13. Trainee teacher : Okay, merci !</p>	 

Liliane presents her language biography orally with the support of her color-coded timeline.

Her plurilingual repertoire comprises French, English, German, Latin, Greek and Mandarin.

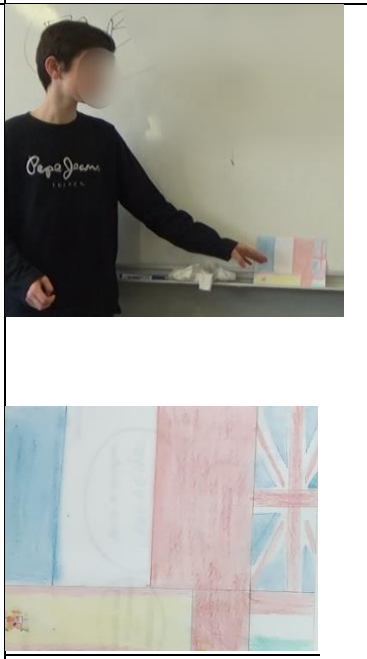
She repeatedly uses the word '*choisi*' (speech turn 1) which means chosen in French. This

reflects her voluntary decision to learn languages. Moreover, her parents use multiple

languages at home: she talks about her mother forcing her to use German (speech turns 6 and

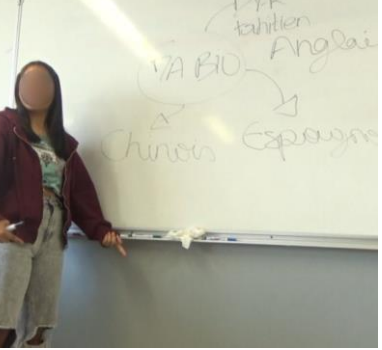
8) and sometimes using English with her father (speech turn 12). Liliane is very scholarly and values languages, and her biography story reveals that her parents value languages as well. Although languages interest her, she is forced to use German at home with her mother. Foreign languages play an important role in Liliane's family even though they are not used all the time.

**Extract 2: Pierre**

Pierre	Images
<p>14. Pierre : Donc, tout d'abord, j'ai appris le français par mes parents um donc je l'ai fait en plus gros parce que c'est celui que je parle mieux fin la langue que je parle le mieux. J'ai appris l'anglais en CE1, l'espagnol à partir de la sixième, j'ai appris le chinois en seconde et l'italien je suis parti 2-3 fois en Italie.</p> <p>15. Trainee teacher : D'accord, alors c'est que par les voyages que t'as appris l'italien ?</p> <p>16. Pierre : oui</p> <p>17. Trainee teacher : Et t'es capable de communiquer, d'échanger ?</p> <p>18. Pierre : Non..</p> <p>19. Trainee teacher : Un peu ?</p> <p>20. Pierre : non</p> <p>21. Trainee teacher : D'accord ! Et t'aimerais bien apprendre quelles langues dans le futur ?</p> <p>22. Pierre : C'est déjà bien.</p> <p>23. Trainee teacher : Okay, merci !</p>	

Pierre is a plurilingual pupil (speech turn 14) who is not very interested in learning any more languages (speech turns 21 and 22). What is interesting here is the way he perceives language acquisition. He said that he learnt Italian (speech turn 14). However, when asked if he can communicate in the language, he refuses (speech turns 17 and 18). This is one of the limitations of the study as measuring language proficiency was not a part of the research question or protocol. This study is concerned with participants own representations to identify the influences of plurilingualism. This is reflected in the definition given by Piccardo and Capron (2015) as seen in section 2.3.

### Extract 3: Kelly

Kelly	Images
<p>24.Kelly : Bonjour, vous allez bien ? J'espère que vous allez bien. (Les étudiants rigolent) Alors aujourd'hui je vous présente ma biographie langagière. D'abord tout d'abord ma langue maternelle c'est le français ainsi que le tahitien que je pratique depuis que je suis petite parce que mes parents, ma famille me parlaient beaucoup en français et en tahitien donc le français je parle couramment, je comprends, logique. Et le tahitien je comprends mais j'ai encore du mal à parler encore.</p> <p>25.Trainee teacher : TU peux nous rappeler comment dire hello ?</p> <p>26.Kelly : yaorana</p> <p>27.Trainee teacher : okay je vais retenir yaorana merci !</p> <p>28.S : Ensuite, j'ai aussi commencé à apprendre avant l'école l'anglais.</p> <p>29.Trainee teacher : Avant l'école chez toi ?</p> <p>30.Kelly: oui, parce que on apprenait des bases, les objets, les couleurs, des animaux. Ensuite, j'ai commencé à apprendre l'espagnol au...j'ai appris l'espagnol depuis le collège en cinquième mais bon j'aime pas trop l'espagnol. (Tout le monde rigole) Et depuis la seconde j'apprends le chinois. Voila ! Et plus tard j'aimerais apprendre aucune d'autre langue c'est déjà beaucoup à retenir</p> <p>31.Trainee teacher : alors chez toi tu pratiques l'anglais, le français et le tahitien ?</p> <p>32.Kelly : Chez moi je pratique beaucoup le français et le tahitien.</p> <p>33.Trainee teacher : Okay, merci beaucoup !</p>	

Kelly<sup>15</sup> presented her language biography on a whiteboard, using a mind map. Her languages repertoire includes French, Tahitian, English, Spanish and Mandarin. She uses French and Tahitian daily with her family (speech turns 24 and 32) which is a part of her family's culture and heritage. However, she is not completely at ease with Tahitian (speech turn 24). Another interesting aspect in her presentation was the fact that she started learning English at home, before starting her schooling (speech turn 28).

This can be associated with the theoretical term 'Inheritance,' which refers to having a familial connection to a language. Such a connection can take the form of actual linguistic

<sup>15</sup> It is possible that Kelly's parents did not answer the questionnaire as in table 6.1, there is no mention of Tahitian.

expertise in families that still speak the language but can also be found in the linguistic identities of children who have had stories or aspects of culture passed down to them that link their family to the language.’ (Dressler, 2014). The practice of such languages is a part of their ‘habitus’ (Le Sens Pratique, 1980 Bourdieu), which probably means that her family highly values cultural capital and her academic performance.

With these language biographies, we learn that all the pupils who participated in the activity have a plurilingual profile. They acquired languages other than their mother tongue either through structured learning at school, at home or through travelling.

### **6.3 Second Part of the Study: Interviews with Pupils**

The second part of this study took place in a separate environment. The school is in the public sector in an economically poorer environment and the pupils were younger, aged between 12 and 14. The transcribed interviews of the pupils (Annexe Table 5) at the secondary school were analysed in detail in order to identify the language profile of each pupil as well as their relationship with the different languages in their repertoire.

Based on the transcriptions (see annexe Table 5), it was possible to determine that all the pupils had a rich plurilingual identity and that according to their own testimonies, used between two and five languages daily.

What is striking in the interviews is that the pupils did not always share the same mother tongue as their parents. As the extract below shows, one pupil ( Lana) said that she would like to learn to speak Algerian to communicate better with her father (speech turns 35 and 37).

Similarly, Anas and his siblings do not speak Chadian Arabic, the language his parents use to communicate amongst themselves (speech turns 75, 81, 82 and 83).

Lina expresses her feeling that she finds it an advantage that her parents do not understand French well (speech turn 73) which helps her keep secrets from her parents while discussing things with her siblings who use French (speech turns 69 and 71).

Another interesting finding is revealed in the interviews: the parents do not always use the same language to communicate with their children. In Lana’s case, only her father uses Algerian (speech turn 37), in the case of Ayan, he uses Arabic with his mother and French with the rest of his family (speech turn 87).

The following table represents the valorisation of plurilingualism by the pupils who were interviewed based on their answers in the interview.

**Table 6**

*Valorisation of plurilingualism*

S.no.	Name	Valorises plurilingual skills	Does not valorise plurilingual skills	Not possible to determine
1.	Lana	Even though she does not mention Algerian as a language used by her, she gives it importance (speech turns 35, 37) in order to communicate better with her father.		
2.	Yaqub	He is aware of his plurilingualism as he mentions all the languages he uses (Annexe x speech turn 41).		
3.	Saba	Saba, whose father is a French teacher <sup>16</sup> at CLA (speech turn 47), values languages greatly on an academic level (speech turn 45) but is also exposed to multiple languages at home (she is originally from Sudan, where the language spoken is Sudanese Arabic).		
4.	Yaasmin	Yaasmin’s plurilingualism is heightened through her incorporated cultural capital. She acquired not only her <i>langues d’origines</i> (Chechen and Russian) but also the languages required to be incorporated in French society while learning new languages at school (speech turn 49).		
5.	Nawaz	He is aware of his plurilingualism as he mentions all the languages he uses (speech turn 59).		

<sup>16</sup> Apart from her parents’ mother tongue being Arabic, there was no more information given out by Saba about her family’s journey from Sudan to France.



6.	Lina	She is aware of her plurilingualism (speech turn 61) and considers it as an advantage to speak multiple languages (speech turns 67, 69 and 71).		
7.	Anas		Despite his parents' bilingualism (French and Chadian Arabic speech turn 81), he says he is monolingual (speech turn 75). The use of Chadian Arabic is limited to his parents, and it is not transferred to their children. This represents the value they give to their mother tongue compared to French; Anas's mother tongue is the language spoken in the country to which they have migrated.	
8.	Ayan	He is aware of his plurilingualism as he mentions all the languages he uses (speech turns 85 and 87).		
9.	Ava		She does not count English and Spanish as languages used by her despite having great score in both the subjects (speech turns 91, 93, 95 and 97)	
10.	Aurora			She mentions that she speaks French and in school she learns English and Spanish (speech turn 99). However, it is difficult to determine whether she values her plurilingualism or not as she does not consider English and Spanish as the languages used by her.
11.	Melissa			She is aware of her plurilingualism (speech turn 103). However, she does not consider English and Spanish as languages used by her (speech turn 105) as she mentions them on being asked which languages she learns in school (speech turn 104).

## Interview findings

Based on the analysis presented in this table, it was possible to determine that, as most of the pupils mentioned their mother tongue (i.e., the language spoken in the home environment. Greaves, 2020) when asked what languages they used, they valued the acquisition of that particular language. A total of 63.6% (seven pupils) seemed to value their mother tongue. However, two pupils do not seem to give much value to some of the languages, either due to their own perception or due to parental behaviour and attitudes. For instance, pupil 9 does not mention English and Spanish as languages acquired by her, despite having a great score in both subjects at school. Another example is pupil 7, whose parents did not feel the need to transfer their mother tongue (Chadian Arabic) to their children as they moved to France.

## Study Conclusions

### 7.1 Hypothesis 1: Plurilingualism

The first hypothesis explored in this study was that plurilingualism is a common phenomenon.

Following the language biography presentations in a private lycée and pupil interviews in a secondary school in the public sector, a number of conclusions can be reached.

First, in both studies all pupils involved considered themselves as having a plurilingual background. Both groups, with very different social backgrounds, talked about their diverse linguistic repertoires. This is summarised in the table below, showing the different languages used by pupils in secondary and high schools.

Table 7 *Languages used by the pupils*

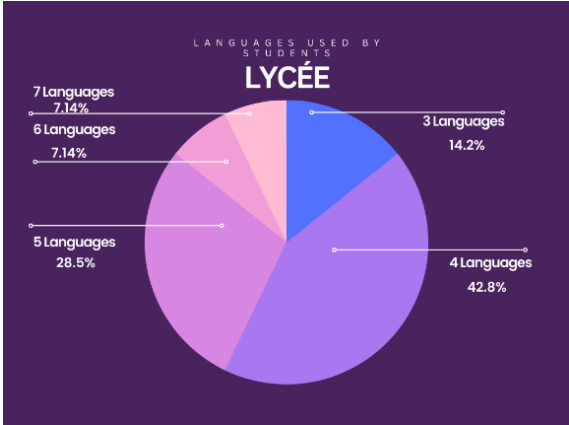
Secondary school (college) in the public sector

Name	Language 1	Language 2	Language 3	Language 4	Language 5	Language 6	Language 7
Secondary school (college) in the public sector							
Lana	French	Algerian	English	Arabic			
Yaqub	French	German	English				
Saba	French	Arabic	English	English	Arabic		
Yaasmin	French	Chechan	Russian				
Nawaz	French	Arabic	English				
Lina	French	Italian	Kosovar				
Anas	French	English					
Ayan	French	English	Arabic				
Ava	French	English	Spanish				
Aurora	French	English	Spanish	Spanish			
Melissa	French	Romanian	English				
High school (lycee) in the private sector							
Liliane	French	English	German	Latin	Greek	Mandarin	
Romain	French	English	Latin	Mandarin			
Stella	French	English	Spanish	Mandarin			
Leonie	French	English	Arabic	Turkish	Spanish	Latin	Mandarin
Laura	French	English	Spanish	Russian	Mandarin		
Louane	French	English	Spanish				
Sophie	French	English	Spanish	Mandarin			
Marie	French	English	Spanish	Mandarin			
Kelly	French	English	Tahitian	Spanish	Mandarin		
Pierre	French	English	Spanish	Mandarin	Italian		
Suzanne	French	English	Russian	German			
Silvia	French	English	Spanish				
Lea	French	English	Spanish	Mandarin			
Alice	French	English	German	Latin	Mandarin		

The three figures below (figures 2, 3 and 4) represent plurilingualism in both the schools respectively and collectively in the academic year 2022-2023, based on the findings of this study.

**Figure 2**

*Pie chart showing the number of languages used by pupils in the high school*

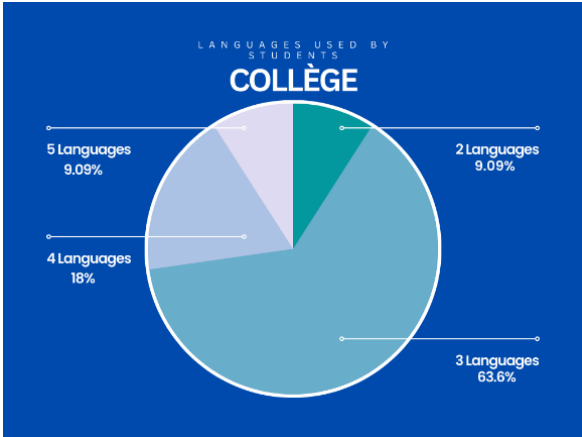


The pie chart shows the number of languages spoken by 14 students of *2de* studying in Lycée in 2022-23.

It is interesting to see that the minimum number of languages used by students is three. This is followed by four languages used by the majority of students. The second highest spot is taken by five languages which nearly a third of the students use. Usage of more than five languages is not that frequent with only one student each speaking six or seven languages.

**Figure 3**

*Pie chart showing the number of languages used by pupils in the secondary school*

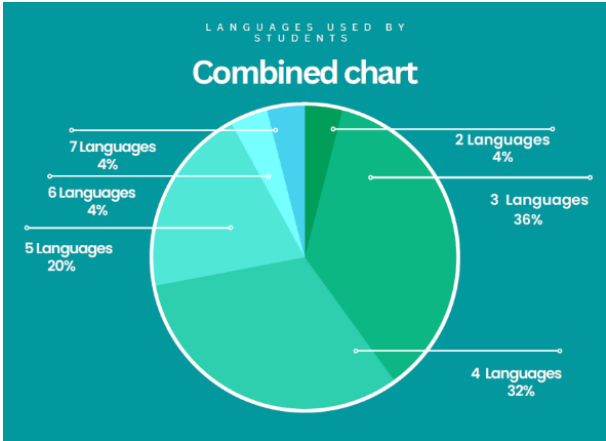


The pie chart shows the number of languages spoken by 10 students of *4eme* and 1 student of *3eme* studying in Collège in 2022-23.

Amongst the 10 students who answered, about two-thirds in this secondary school use a minimum of three languages. Four languages are used only by two students. More than four languages are used only by one student. Similarly, there is one individual who mentioned using two languages at most.

**Figure 4**

*Pie chart showing the combined number of languages used by pupils in both schools*



This pie chart is a combined version of the above shown charts. The largest portion of the diagram is occupied by three languages with nine students choosing this option. This is

followed by usage of four languages by almost a third of the 25 students. Five languages are used by five students. On the contrary, two, six or seven languages are only used by one student each.

The collective data shows that all students considered themselves to have plurilingual profiles and testified to using a range of languages. This would appear to confirm our first hypothesis. That is to say, that pupil plurilingualism is a common phenomenon. Further quantitative research is needed to determine if this conclusion is generally representative of schools in the region or if it is also valid nationally.

## **7.2 Hypothesis 2: Family influence in language acquisition**

The second hypothesis explored in this study was that family has a major influence on foreign language acquisition.

On examination of pupils' productions and oral presentations, this study was able to gain some insight into pupils' relationship with languages resulting from family influence.

After examining the transcriptions of the oral presentations in detail, it was possible to conclude that the language repertoires of the pupils were strongly determined by their family environment. Table 6 (pg. 47) showed that one of the factors contributing to students' plurilingualism was the language used at home. The acquisition of foreign languages is also exposed to the variables of social reproduction, cultural capital, and pupil 'habitus' (Bourdieu, 1972) of the families in relation to language. This influence can be discerned in Graph 13, where parents stated that they use vacation as a means of language exposure (71.4%).

These findings would therefore appear to confirm our hypothesis that family has a major influence on foreign language acquisition. In each of the methodological tools used in this study, the relationship between pupils and parents and their languages was consistently confirmed. In the didactic activity in class, all the pupils referred to their home environment

(speech turns 1, 14 and 24 pg. 43-45). This finding was confirmed by the parents questionnaire (see graph 6, graph 7 and graph 9). In the pupil interviews, parental and family influence was again very apparent (speech turns 37, 47, 53, 63, 79 and 87).

However, an interesting observation emanating from this study is that the language biographies and interviews showed not only the impact of families but also the French educational system on children's exposure to languages. Almost all students referred to English as their second language. Learning English at school plays a highly significant role in the French educational system.

### **7.3 Hypothesis 3: Valorization of plurilingualism**

The last hypothesis explored in the study was that certain populations might valorise their plurilingualism less than others. The two schools vary from each other on a sociological level. Past research has found that pupils from an immigrant background might not value their plurilingual heritage as much as the pupils from a non-immigrant background (Hélot and Young, 2002).

Cultural capital has a direct impact on the valorisation of language learning. This is the case with almost all the pupils I have had the chance to interact with in the context of my research. It can be said that if languages are valued at home, it will have a direct impact on a pupil's motivation to learn languages and, therefore, can be interpreted as incorporated cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1970). However, as we have seen in this study, in general all the students who took part in the study appeared to valorise their plurilingual skills and identity. As table 6 showed, of the 11 pupils participating, 7 placed a high value on plurilingualism, it was impossible to determine for 2 pupils whether they valued their plurilingualism or not. However, 2 students did not give much value to their plurilingualism. This study does not therefore confirm this third hypothesis.

## **Conclusion**

The purpose of this research was to explore and gain insight into the impact of family on children's attitudes to plurilingualism and by extension, their attitudes to foreign language learning. The study was carried out to identify any possible correlations between parental influence and motivation to learn foreign languages and to associate family behaviours or backgrounds with foreign language acquisition.

In the analysis of the results of this study, it was found that plurilingualism is a common phenomenon in the two social milieux (see figures 2, 3 and 4 pg. 50-51). It was noticed that those parents with higher cultural and economic capital, usually having a plurilingual background (see graph 6 and table 6.1 pg. 31), were generally very supportive of their children's foreign language learning (see graph 10, pg. 34 and graph 13, pg. 36).

However, it was also noted that school plays an important role, especially for English (speech turns 1, 14 in annex table 5). For the hypothesis about some populations valorising some languages more than others, the study did not identify any phenomena that would confirm this hypothesis. The interviews with the college pupils were intimate and pupils shared openly. Would they have been so forthcoming about their languages in a language biography activity? Unfortunately, it was not possible to investigate this question for practical reasons. Further research is necessary for a more convincing finding on this point which is beyond the scope of this study. Nevertheless, it was possible to identify the presence of plurilingualism as a common factor among all the pupils who participated in this study.

This study has identified strong links between family and parental environments and pupil language repertoires. Further research could help clarify what kinds of parental attitudes and behaviour might influence pupils' attitudes to foreign language learning: a study

fundamentally assessing pupils' language levels, as well as the context of parental attitudes is to be carried out in 2025 by PISA<sup>17</sup>. This is the first study of its kind on language learning in France and this national, quantitative study should throw light on this interesting question. To conclude, some interesting questions arise given the prevalence of pupils with a rich plurilingual repertoire in the French education system. Should this linguistic diversity be embraced in a classroom situation, especially when introducing students to a new language, to induce students' well-being through meaningful plurilingual interactions? This is the point of view advocated by Sara Greaves (2013, 2022), or Piccardo (2021) for example. Greaves argues that such practices help 'break down barriers between languages' (Greaves 2013, pg. 139).

Such research is perhaps a sign of future educational developments and the development of the plurilingual classroom.

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<sup>17</sup> PISA 2025 Foreign Language Assessment Framework <https://www.oecd.org/pisa/foreign-language/PISA-2025-FLA-Framework.pdf>



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## Annexe

The transcriptions that were used for the analysis are presented below.

**Table 5**

*Transcription of Interviews (Extracts)*

<p><b>Pupil 1: Lana</b></p>
<p><u>(Father-algerian)</u></p> <p>34. <b>Trainee teacher</b> : Est-ce qu'il y a d'autres langues que t'aimerais bien apprendre ?</p> <p>35. <b>Lena</b>: L'algérien, j'aimerais bien apprendre un peu plus.</p> <p>36. <b>Trainee teacher</b>: Et pourquoi t'aimerais bien approfondir ton algérien ?</p> <p>37. <b>Lena</b>: Bah, parce que souvent il y a des mots que mon père dit que je ne comprends pas...</p> <p>J'aimerais bien savoir parler, dire des phrases et tout.</p> <p>38. <b>Trainee teacher</b>: Oui, pour plus communiquer avec ton père et peut-être comprendre sa culture un peu plus?</p> <p>39. <b>Lena</b> : Oui c'est ça.</p>
<p><b>Pupil 2: Yaqub</b></p>
<p><u>(Parents: arabs)</u></p> <p>40. <b>Trainee teacher</b> : Combien de langues parles-tu ?</p> <p>41. <b>Yaqub</b> : Allemand et anglais et je parle aussi arabe et français.</p>
<p><b>Pupil 3: Saba</b></p>
<p><u>(née en Sudan, parents : Sudan- parle arabe, français chez elle)</u></p> <p>42. <b>Trainee teacher</b> : tu apprends quelles langues au collège ?</p> <p>43. <b>Saba</b> : arabe et anglais</p> <p>44. <b>Trainee teacher</b> : T'as quelles notes en langues ?</p> <p>45. <b>Saba</b> : Bah en arabe, mon moyen c'est 20, en français on n'a pas encore fait des évaluations et en anglais ma moyenne c'est 14.</p> <p>46. <b>Trainee teacher</b> : Wow, c'est super. Et en français tu te sens comment ?</p>

47. Saba : Je me sens bien, mon père est prof de français. (au CLA)

#### **Pupil 4: Yaasmin**

(Langue maternelle de parents est tchéchène, venue en France en 2012)

48. Trainee teacher : Tu sais parler combien de langues ?

49. Yaasmin : Je sais parler tchéchène, le français et le russe.

50. Trainee teacher : Et au collège tu apprends quelles langues ?

51. Yaasmin : Anglais et arabe

52. Trainee teacher : Tu utilises quelles langues chez toi ?

53. Yaasmin : Le tchéchène, le russe et le français.

**(Motivation)**

54. Trainee teacher : Est-ce que t'es motivé pour apprendre des langues ?

55. Yaasmin : Oui

56. Trainee teacher : Sur une échelle de 1-10, comment est ta motivation ?

57. Yaasmin : 100 !

#### **Pupil 5: Nawaz**

(parle arabe, français chez lui, parents viennent d'Algérie)

58. Trainee teacher : Tu parles quelles langues ?

59. Nesar : Anglais, arabe, français, espagnol très peu

#### **Pupil 6: Lina**

(Née en Italie, restée en Italie pour quelques années, parents viennent de Kosovo)

60. Trainee teacher : Tu parles quelles langues ?

61. Lina : Je parle italien, kosovar et le français.

...

62. Trainee teacher : Quelle langue utilises-tu chez toi ?

63. Lina : Avec mes frères, le français, avec ma mère et mon père, le kosovar et des fois l'italien mais très rarement.

64. Trainee teacher : Tes parents étaient nés en Italie ?

65. Lina : à Kosovo.

- 66. Trainee teacher :** Selon toi, est-ce que c'est un avantage d'utiliser plusieurs langues ou pas ?
- 67. Lina :** Oui, parce qu'avec mes parents on parle souvent mais très rarement car je suis à l'école ou des fois ils sont pas à la maison, ils font des courses et tout mais je trouve ça bien car je me confond pas, car avec mes parents, ma grand-mère, j'utilise une langue et avec mes frères une autre langue et je confond pas.
- 68. Trainee teacher :** D'accord et pourquoi tu trouves que c'est un avantage ?
- 69. Lina :** Comme ça ou cas ou quand on parle entre frères bah ils (ses parents) comprennent pas trop c'est ça qui est bien.
- 70. Trainee teacher :** Comment ça ?
- 71. Lina :** Genre, des fois on va parler des truc exemple quand si ma sœur a fait des bêtises à l'école, bah elle me dit mais mon père et ma mère comprennent pas et on sait qu'on va pas se poucave entre frères.
- 72. Trainee teacher :** Ah d'accord. Tes parents ne comprennent pas du tout le français ?
- 73. Lina :** Oui mais un tout petit peu.

### **Pupil 7: Anas**

**(Parents- tchadien)**

- 74. Trainee teacher :** Tu parles combien de langue ?
- 75. Anas :** Que français.
- ...
- 76. Trainee teacher :** Tes parents sont français ?
- 77. Anas :** Ils sont tchadiens.
- 78. Trainee teacher :** Chez toi, tu ne parles pas tchadien ?
- 79. Anas :** Non, que le français.
- 80. Trainee teacher :** Et tes parents ?
- 81. Anas :** Ils parlent tchadien entre eux.
- 82. Trainee teacher :** Et tes frères utilisent quelle langue ?
- 83. Anas :** Français aussi.

### **Pupil 8: Ayan**

**(Né en Algérie, mère est algérienne)**

- 84. Trainee teacher :** Tu parles combien de langues ?
- 85. Abd :** Je parle anglais, arabe et français.



**86. Trainee teacher :** Tu utilises quelle langue chez toi ?

**87. Abd :** Si je parle avec ma mère, l'arabe, Avec mon père, mes sœurs et mes frères, le français.

### **Pupil 9: Ava**

**88. Trainee teacher :** Combien de langues parles tu ?

**89. Ava :** Le français.

**90. Trainee teacher :** Anglais aussi ?

**91. Ava :** Oui, anglais et espagnol aussi si on compte

**92. Trainee teacher :** Tu as quelles notes en espagnol ?

**93. Ava :** L'année dernière par exemple ma moyenne ça devait être 17.

**94. Trainee teacher :** C'est bien ! Et en anglais ?

**95. Ava :** À peine plus, je crois, 18.

**96. Trainee teacher :** Ah oui ! C'est trop bien et en français ?

**97. Ava :** En français ça devait être 16.

### **Pupil 10: Aurora**

**98. Trainee teacher :** Combien de langues parles-tu ?

**99. Aurora :** Je parle très bien le français sinon en cours on apprend l'anglais et l'espagnol.

**100. Trainee teacher :** Tu dirais tu as quelles notes en langues ?

**101. Aurora :** Français bien, anglais bien et espagnol bien aussi.

### **Pupil 11: Melissa**

**102. Trainee teacher :** Combien de langues parles tu ?

**103. Melissa :** Je parle français et roumain.

**104. Trainee teacher :** Et au collège tu apprends quelles langues ?

**105. Melissa :** Anglais et espagnol.

**Table 8**

*Greetings in different languages*

**ACTIVITY 2 Greetings!**

	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24
PL	Dzien dobry											Dobry wieczór			Dobranoc		
CZ	Dobré jitro				Dobrý den						Dobrý vecer			Dobrou noc			
R	Доброе утро			Добрый день						Добрый вечер			Спокойной ночи				
D	Guten Morgen			Guten Tag						Guten Abend			Gute Nacht				
E	Good morning				Good afternoon						Good evening			Good night			
I	Buon giorno						Buona sera						Buona notte				
F	Bonjour						Bonsoir						Bonne nuit				
Sp	Buenos días				Buenas tardes						Buenas noches						
H	Jó reggelt		Jó napot						Jó estét			Jó éjszakát					
Jap	Ohayo			Konnichiwa						Konbanwa			Oyasumi				

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