CHILD HEALTH AND EDUCATION, 2011, *3*(2), 91-105
Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, Canada
ISSN : 1911-7558

Should Young (Bilingual) Children Learn a New Language at School?

Emmanuelle Le Pichon Vorstman
Universiteit Utrecht, the Netherlands
and Université François Rabelais, Tours, France

Abstract

This research has been carried out to explore the extent to which the learning of a new language in a formal context of primary school may influence children's perceptions of and reactions to extreme exolingual situations of communication situations characterized by the absence of shared languages. It was hypothesized that children would perceive the situations and react differently depending on their language learning background. Results of this research contribute to the understanding of the effect of learning a new language on some aspects of the metacognitive awareness in children at different levels of the process of problem solving. The findings support the notion that learning a new language at an age and in a context in which children may be conscious about their language learning may provide plurilingual children with a positive identity construction.

Olivia and Joy

Olivia and Joy are both 6 years old. At the moment of the enquiry, they were schooled in the same establishment, in the same classroom, and in the same languages. The effect of the learning of a new language (from now referred to as Language Learning Experience, abbreviated LLE) on the metacognitive awareness of children is most adequately illustrated by these two girls' answers to the question: "You are in a park and you want to play with a girl that does not speak any of your languages. What are you going to do?"

The situation whereby interlocutors do not share the same languages is qualified as exolingual (see for instance, Alber & Py, 1985).

Joy

Joy answered to this question: "I speak the other way that they speak. Spanish, Italian, je ne sais pas."

Joy accepts to participate from the moment she is confronted with the exolingual situation of communication. She identifies the problem (she is unable to communicate in the language of the girl with whom she wants to play). Consequently,

I would like to thank the reviewers for their very constructive and detailed comments that helped improve the manuscript.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Dr. Emmanuelle Le Pichon-Vorstman, Utrecht University, Trans 12, 3512JK Utrecht, The Netherlands.
Email: E.M.M.Le-Pichon@uu.nl

she proposes a solution, that is, to speak "the other way that they speak". So doing, she gives her own definition of language. It is equally remarkable that she answers with *they* instead of with *she*. One would expect her to use the pronoun *she* since it would refer to her potential friend. Her use of *they* instead of *she* may be interpreted as her more or less conscious idea that a language belongs to a community of speakers. From her words, it seems that she views learning a language as a process of entering a community. Then, she defines the language as a way to speak. According to her, a language is thus just one way to express one's thoughts, thoughts that she conveys through Italian and Spanish, two languages that she has not yet mastered. Her positive self-esteem with respect to multiple language use is underlined by the fact that she does not even doubt that she will be able to learn the language of her potential friend. *The language which is foreign to her does not constitute an a priori barrier to communication. It is just an unknown language that like all other languages can be learned.*

Olivia

To the same question, Olivia answered: "Si mes parents est pas là, si ils sont partis, je vais pleurer [If my parents is not present, if they are away, I am going to cry.]"

Olivia shows fears when confronted to the imaginary exolingual situation of communication. She does not even think about speaking in languages that are foreign to her. She appears to fear to be left alone to communicate with the girl and seems to be panicked by the idea that she could be confronted to what she identifies as a scary situation of communication. She does not propose any strategy to solve the problem except crying which as an avoidance strategy may not facilitate the exchange, nor does she show any willingness to communicate with the girl described in the scenario.

The Language Learning Experience

One notable difference between these two girls is that in contrast to Olivia, Joy is learning a new language at an age and in a context that allowed her to be conscious about her language learning. Joy is a 6-year-old, English-speaking child who was enrolled in French language classes at the age of 5 years. Joy was thus at the moment of the enquiry in the process of learning the French language through formalized instruction. In contrast, Olivia had been exposed to French and English since she was born. She has thus acquired two languages in a less formal way, i.e., from birth onwards in a natural (home) environment. The difference between the two girls is the conscious Language Learning Experience (LLE) that is present in Joy but not in Olivia.

In part 1, I will raise the subject of the plurilingualism of young children and challenges that children may face when exposed to exolingual situations of communication.

In part 2, I will present results of the current study and draw on important outcomes related to findings of my research concerning the Language Learning Experience.

In part 3, I will elaborate on some theoretical implications of the results. I will explore the possibility that LLE may act as a factor that allows a positive identity construction in children. Then, I will discuss the construction of the metacognitive advantages identified in my research.

I will conclude by presenting the potential role of context and guidance as identified by the LLE effect.

Part 1: Plurilingual or Bilingual?

Challenges Brought by Exolingual Situations of Communication

Young bilingual children are regularly confronted with exolingual situations of communication. In fact, they are likely to have experienced situations in which they lacked proficiency, which may have been associated with negative effects with respect to the interpersonal aspect of communication. Observing the reactions of children when confronted to exolingual situations of communication provides a unique insight into how strategic competence emerges, and to what extent it may positively or negatively affect the enhancement of strategic competence.

In 2003, Oxford defined a strategy as "a plan that is consciously aimed at meeting a goal" (p. 274). Oxford underlined the importance of the concepts of consciousness, control, goal targeted, and intention. In order to solve a communication problem one has to be aware of a range of available strategies. According to Goldstein and Levin (1987), problem solving occurs when a goal cannot be reached using solely automated processes, thus requiring strategic competence .

The exolingual situation of communication, which is defined as a situation in which one is required to interact without sufficient knowledge of the target language, constitutes a major challenge in our globalizing world. The exolingual situation of communication is particularly challenging because the self confidence that one has in his/her own capacities to bring forth the exchange is challenged by the absence of, or lack of, linguistic expertise.

This implies that means of communications, other than the purely linguistic ones, must be considered in order to carry out an exchange that is characterized by the absence of a common language between the interlocutors. The awareness of strategies in this research is referred to as strategic competence and summarized in the concept of communicative competence.

Are Bilingual Children More Aware of Communication than Monolingual Children?

In many publications bilingualism is reported to positively affect, amongst other aspects, communicative awareness in children (see Cenoz & Jessner, 2000, p. 48, Genesee, Tucker & Lambert, 1975; Hoffmann, 2001; Jessner, 1997; Jorda, 2005). Communicative awareness refers here to children's sensitivity to communication needs (e.g., Comeau & Genesee, 2001; Comeau, Genesee & Lapaquette, 2003; Genesee & Nicoladis, 2006; Kasuya, 1998; Lanza, 2001; Nicoladis & Genesee, 1998). Their communicative awareness is measured through an increased ability to switch between the codes promoting an overall better communicative competence in multilingual children naturally exposed to two or more languages. Bilingual children are reported to develop an enhanced interactional competence (Cenoz & Jessner, 2000, p. 48, Genesee, Tucker & Lambert, 1975; Jessner, 1997; Jorda, 2005). More specifically, the results seemed to indicate that bilingualism per se may lead to a greater ability to deal with communication problems, ability which would remain unaffected in bilinguals exposed to new situations, environments and perceptions (Hoffmann, 2001). This implicitly means that the bilingualism of a child would allow him / her to develop intrinsic cognitive and linguistic advantages.

To identify cognitive and linguistic advantages of bilingualism, most scholars compared monolingual groups of children to bilingual groups of children, thereby assuming a sufficient degree of homogeneity between the groups. However, some

researchers, such as Bialystok (2001) and Bialystok, Majumder & Martin (2003), reported no difference between the bilingual and monolingual groups or even monolingual advantages. For instance, Bialystok, Majumder and Martin reported similarities and differences between monolinguals and bilinguals in the metalinguistic performances, not always to the advantage of bilinguals.

This research raises the question whether bilingualism per se or, rather, variables included in or associated with bilingualism, positively influence the metacognitive awareness of the plurilingual child. Such variables may include the timing or order of acquisition of the language(s), the social context of language acquisition, the people with whom the languages are spoken, the amount of exposure to each language, the nature of the family language related history, and the perception that the child has of his / her languages (Castellotti & Moore, 2006; Franceschini, Zappatore, Lüdi, Radü, Wattendorf & Nitsch, 2001; Lüdi, 2005; Molinié, 2006; Porquier & Py, 2004). As a result of differences in these variables that define the nature of bilingualism, one can easily imagine that while to some children, bilingualism does indeed represent mainly benefits, to others it may rather be something they struggle with.

Therefore, even though several studies comparing monolingual to bilingual children have reported an on average advantage of the latter with regard to interactional competence, the conclusion that bilingualism per se is the defining factor may be precarious.

To increase our insight into the various factors that cause the heterogeneity within mono- and multilingual populations should allow future studies to take into account these factors improving the accuracy of research findings in the field of multilingualism. In this research, the extent to which one of these possible factors, namely the learning of an additional language at an age when the child is potentially conscious of this learning process, may influence the course of exolingual interpersonal communication, was explored.

Part 2: The Conscious Experience of Learning a New Language

Plurilingualism and Language Learning Experience

As a potential variable disrupting the assumed homogeneity of the multilingual groups of children, it was hypothesized that learning a language later in life, i.e., after the age of four, is likely to differ from simultaneous bilingualism. Later in life, the learning of a new language is more likely to occur in a context and at a developmental stage during which the child can be aware of the fact that he or she is learning a new language. In contrast, simultaneous bilingual children, i.e., those that have learned two languages from birth onwards are less likely to have this awareness about their language learning.

This conscious experience of learning a new language was termed Language Learning Experience (LLE). It was thus hypothesized that the presence or absence of LLE in children is relevant and may explain some of the advantages that are attributed to multilingualism.

More specifically, it was hypothesized that the LLE may be a factor of importance for the development of certain aspects of metacognitive awareness in young children and particularly for the development of different communicative

abilities. These abilities were all considered in the context of an extreme exolingual situation of communication.

The Study

Participants

My research includes groups of plurilingual children that differ in age, country of schooling, sex, language repertoire and linguistic background (including monolingual children in the process of learning a new language, bilingual children and bilingual children in the process of learning a third language). This variety and a precise description of the language biography of each child at the moment of the test allowed for a comparison of the children's answers by taking each of these variables into account (see Table 1).

The data collection between September 2004 and September 2006 was limited to three French (International) schools in three different countries, namely The Netherlands, Switzerland and the United States of America. Children who were described as LLE were children who were learning a new language (for instance French or English). Children who were characterized as nLLE had exposure to and experience communicating in the school languages prior to enrollment in the French language educational program. In each school, LLE and nLLE children came from the same classrooms. This allowed me to assume that the LLE children (i.e., children with a Language Learning Experience) and the nLLE children (i.e., children without a Language Learning Experience) were benefiting from comparable educational approaches. Importantly, LLE is not restricted to the bilingual child. For instance, a monolingual, English-speaking child who has learned or is in the process of learning French as a new language at school would not be considered simultaneous bilingual but would be considered LLE. Conversely, a simultaneous bilingual English-French child may not have experienced the learning of French as a *new* language and, thus, he or she would be considered nLLE. Furthermore, some simultaneous bilingual children were at the moment of the enquiry in the process of learning (one of) the school language(s). They were considered LLE. In other words categorizing the child as LLE or nLLE is independent of whether or not the child is bilingual.

Among the three schools, two were primarily French-speaking schools and one divided its time between two languages, English and French. This meant that, in each school, some of the children involved were already speakers of the target languages (monolingual or bilingual children), whereas others were not [monolingual or bilingual children in other language(s)]. In the Netherlands, in Switzerland and in the United States of America, the three schools offered courses in other languages (respectively Dutch, German, and Spanish) from grade one and onwards.

Table 1
Language Biographical Approach

Child	Gender	Type of bilingualism 0 = Monolingual LLE 1 = Bilingual nLLE 2 = Bilingual LLE	Country of schooling 1 = Netherlands 2 = United States 3 = Switzerland	Languages acquired before age 4	Language learning experience	Age
1.	M	0	2	English	French	6
2.	M	0	2	English	French	6
3.	F	0	2	English	French	6
4.	F	0	2	English	French	6
5.	F	0	3	French	German	6
6.	F	0	3	French	German	5,6
7.	F	0	3	French	German	6
8.	M	0	3	French	German	5
9.	M	0	3	French	German	6
10.	F	0	3	French	German	6
11.	M	0	3	French	German	6,6
12.	M	1	1	French, Dutch		9
13.	F	1	1	Dutch, French		10
14.	M	1	1	French, English		9
15.	F	1	1	French Russian		10
16.	M	1	2	French, English		6
17.	M	1	2	French, English		6
18.	F	1	2	French, English		5

Note. In this table, examples of the classification according to language biographies of the children are reported. For each child information was gathered about his/her linguistic repertoire, the age of exposure and the context of acquisition of each language (where, with whom, and at what age). In addition data are reported about gender, country of schooling and age of each child at the moment of the enquiry.

The protocol used is a semi-standardized interview constituted of open questions. In the present paper, only analyses of the answers to the question exemplified above are reported. As proposed by Hurd and Lewis (2008), answering

open questions and solving problems while thinking aloud offer new opportunities to raise innovative data with regard to communication strategies. Each child was interviewed by the same researcher in an independent room of the school. Interviews were digitally recorded and did not exceed 13 minutes.

LLE versus nLLE

Considering LLE as a differentiating variable, a cohort of 101 children aged four to eleven years *(N* = 101, mean age = 6.7; *SD* = 1.9; girls 46%) was studied (see Figure 1). The reactions of children with the experience of learning a new language (*n* = 72, mean age = 6.9, *SD* = 2.0, 47% girls) were compared to the reactions of children without the experience of learning a new language (*n* = 29, mean age = 6.07, *SD* = 1.6, 45% girls) i.e., LLE versus nLLE children.

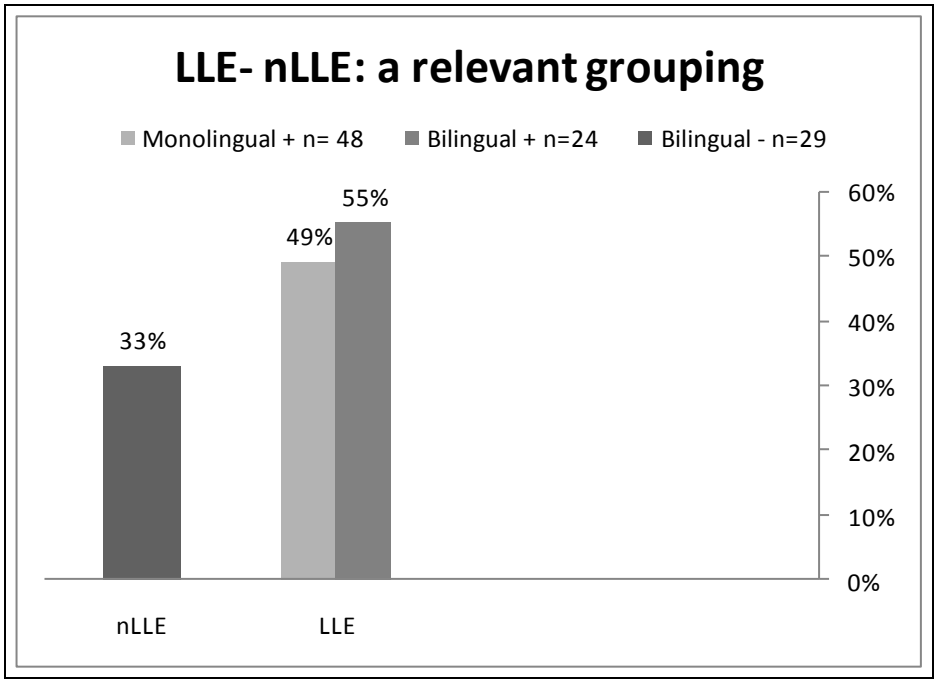

Figure 2. Homogeneity of the LLE group. The LLE group is composed of monolingual and bilingual children with an LLE. The graph illustrates that the average use of the strategies in the LLE group is not driven by the results of one of its subgroups alone. Monolingual +: monolingual children in the process of or having an experience of learning a new language at an age and in a context in which they may be conscious about their learning. These children are considered LLE; Bilingual +: simultaneous bilingual children in the process of or having an experience of learning a new language at an age and in a context in which they may be conscious about their learning. These children are considered LLE; Bilingual: simultaneous bilingual children without this specific experience. These children are considered nLLE.

In keeping with the most frequently reported approach used so far, the reactions of monolingual children were also compared to the reactions of multilingual children who were enrolled in the same classrooms ~~(see Table 1)~~.

Measures

Further we examined whether an enhancement of some aspects of metacognitive awareness in children such as the strategic competence and willingness to communicate can be attributed to a conscious experience of learning a new language (LLE).

Different approaches were adopted to evaluate certain aspects of the child's metacognitive awareness that all shared one core characteristic, i.e., that the test person was confronted with an extreme exolingual situation of communication defined by the absence of a common language between the interlocutors. The children were confronted with the imaginary exolingual situation of communication described at the beginning of this paper.

> Imagine, you are in a park and you want to play with a child who does not speak any of your languages. What are you going to do?

This choice was based on the assumption that in an extreme exolingual situation, children, monolingual and bilingual alike, would be equally challenged.

The different perspectives ranged from a focus on the perception that children have of this particular communicative scenario to an analysis of their capacity to consider the outcome of the exchange (Le Pichon, Vorstman, De Swart, & Van Den Bergh, 2009; Le Pichon, De Swart, Vorstman, & Van Den Bergh, 2010).

The child's reactions to extreme exolingual situations of communication presented in the tests were tested, each time comparing nLLE children to LLE children, in accordance with the main hypothesis, that the LLE may be a relevant factor for the development of certain aspects of metacognitive awareness in young children and particularly for the development of different communicative abilities.

The willingness to communicate was evaluated through the outcome of the exchange, i.e., whether or not the child gave up the exchange. I considered the intentional processes involved in the monitoring of the exchange as an indication of the presence of the children's willingness to communicate. For instance, Joy accepted to play with the imaginary friend. Thus she was rated 1. Olivia refused; thus she obtained a score of 0. Reactions of monolingual children were compared to those of bilingual children and then, reactions of LLE children were compared to reactions of nLLE children.

While the willingness to communicate is a necessary requirement to carry out the exchange, communicative strategies are obviously an important prerequisite for a successful exchange in an exolingual situation. Almost 30 years ago, Tarone (1981) defined the strategic competence as "the ability to convey information to a listener and correctly interpret the information received. It includes the use of communication strategies to solve problems that arise in the process of conveying this information" (p. 123). The ability to solve the problem posed by the exolingual situation can thus be defined as the possibility to consider and use communicative strategies. Therefore, I also investigated the children's capacity to consider strategies to carry out the extreme exolingual exchange.

From Faerch and Kasper's (1983) first classification of communicative strategies, I retained nine strategies that I considered relevant to solve the problem posed by the extreme exolingual situation of communication. These nine strategies, namely directed attention, control of emotions, anticipation, mime, cooperation, code switching, imitation, clarification, and ask for assistance range from metacognitive, cognitive, and social to affective (O'Malley & Chamot, 1990; Oxford, 1990, 2008).

All strategies considered by the children were evaluated as an active part to the problem solving.

The effect of LLE on the diversification of strategic choices that children make to solve the imaginary exolingual situation of communication was examined and blindly analyzed. For this purpose, the answers of each participant were scored on the basis of access to (or absence of) the nine communicative strategies cited above. Each child's use of a strategy was coded dichotomously based on whether or not he / she used the strategy on at least one occasion: 1 (*used it*) or 0 (*did not use it*). The proportion of children in each subgroup that was found to have access to each strategy was subsequently calculated. Then, to test the differences between strategy use and type of children (LLE versus nLLE) a repeated measures Anova was carried out.

The number of different communicative strategies described in the next section that each group of children used on average to solve the exolingual communication problem was taken as a global measure of the extent to which LLE can influence the strategic competence of children[1] (Le Pichon, De Swart, Vorstman, & Van Den Bergh, 2010).

It is proposed that the presence or absence of a Language Learning Experience would be a relevant factor influencing the degree to which the strategic competence is developed and accessible.

Interrater Reliability

In order to increase the objectivity of the classification, responses of all children were categorized by two independent raters. The k statistic was calculated to assess the level of agreement between raters (interrater reliability). A high level of agreement (91% and 78% respectively) was observed between raters for the willingness to communicate (k = 0.83; SE = 0.09; $p < 0.001$) and for the classification of the strategies (k = 0.72; SE = 0.05; $p < 0.001$).

Results

Seventy-nine percent of the LLE children attempted to communicate in comparison with 52% of the nLLE children ($\chi 2 = 7.61$; $df = 1$; $p < 0.01$). LLE children also significantly outperformed their nLLE peers by displaying more strategies and diversifying their strategies more often. These differences are shown with and without taking into account differences due to age. The differences between LLE and nLLE are significant ($F = 8.06$; $df = 1.99$; $p < 0.01$), as well as the interaction between strategy and group (LLE versus nLLE; $F = 2.67$; $df = 8.792$; $p = 0.02$).

One could expect that the average use of communicative strategies in the LLE group is driven by one of its constituting subgroups, thereby skewing its overall average result. However, this is not the case. The average use of all nine strategies of the LLE group is 51% against 33% in the nLLE group. The average use of strategies in the two subgroups that are combined in the LLE group (monolingual children in the process of learning a new language and bilingual children with the same experience) do not differ significantly from each other (48% and 55% respectively). In addition, each subgroup taken separately differs significantly from the nLLE group. Thus, confirming the main hypothesis, compared to the nLLE group, children in the LLE group showed a greater willingness to communicate and displayed an enhanced

[1] For detailed information about the method, see Le Pichon, Vorstman, De Swart, & Van Den Bergh, 2009; Le Pichon, De Swart, Vorstman, & Van Den Bergh, 2010.

strategic awareness as shown by the number of different communicative strategies employed (see Figure 2). LLE children were more able to solve the communication problem posed by the exolingual situation of communication adequately.

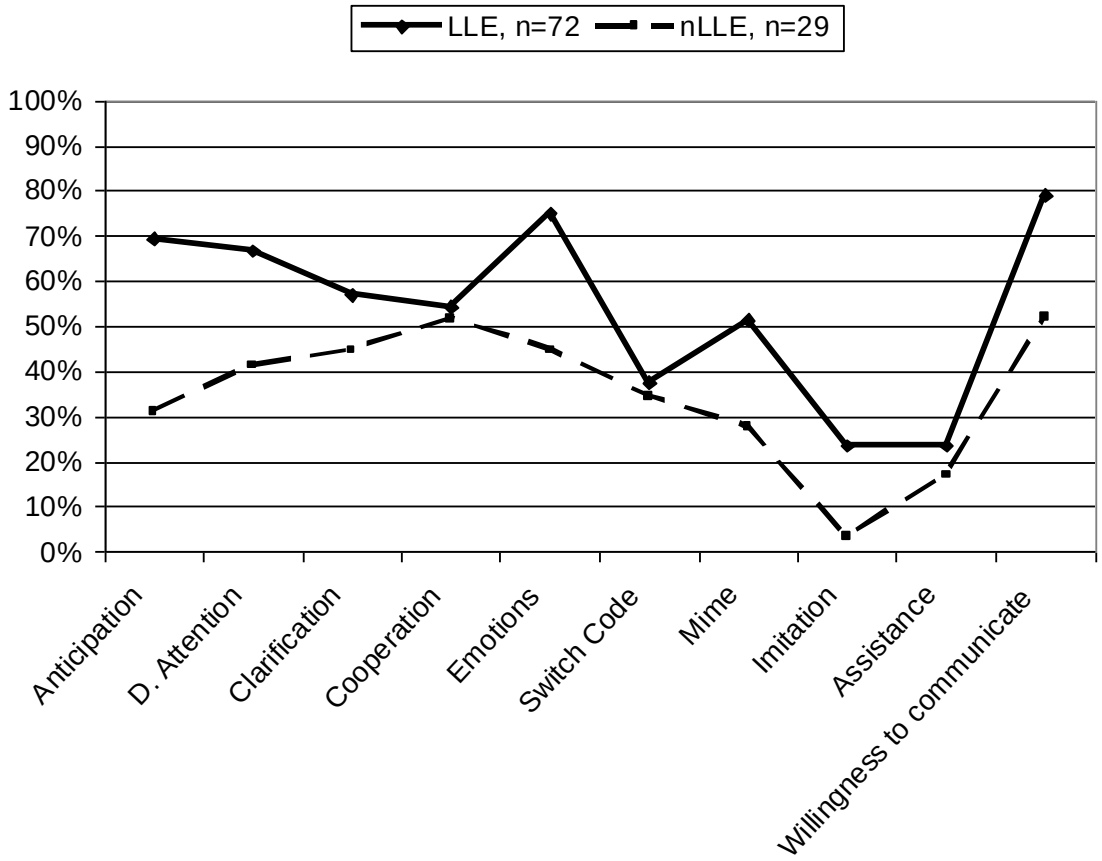

Figure 2. LLE children outperform nLLE children. on the X-axis are depicted the nine strategies, namely directed attention, control of emotions, anticipation, mime, cooperation, code switching, imitation, clarification and ask for assistance as well as the willingness to communicate. On the Y-axis is the proportion of children in each subgroup that uses the strategy and that attempts to communicate.

Thus, the results of this study suggest that LLE children develop on average a superior monitoring and control of exolingual situations of communication. These findings emphasize the idea that all children, not excepting simultaneous bilingual children, may benefit from a conscious Language Learning Experience through the learning of a new language in a school context from age four and onwards. All results firmly backed up the main hypothesis, which states that a Language Learning Experience has a significant and positive effect on the metacognitive awareness of children and that the LLE factor may be a more relevant factor than bilingualism per se. Indeed, the findings of this study strongly suggest that LLE is to be considered a major factor of influence on the metacognitive development of plurilingual children.

Part 3: Implications

LLE: A Factor that Enhances Metacognition in Children

As proposed by numerous researchers, identifying factors that enhance metacognition in children is important (Fisher, 1998). Metacognition is considered to play a key role

in the improvement of learning abilities. Defined as the ability to plan and monitor reflective processes, metacognition is thought to provide the child with self- reflection and to help the child gain control over the organization of his/her own learning. A better metacognition through the improvement of metalinguistic awareness, for instance, would distinguish the expert learner from the novice learner (Cook, 1993; Herdina & Jessner, 2002; Jessner, 1999; Malakoff, 1992; McLaughlin & Nayak, 1989). Results of my research strongly suggest that LLE is such a metacognition-enhancing factor. It confers a better metacommunicative awareness in plurilingual children as demonstrated by an enhanced willingness to communicate in exolingual situations of communication as well as a more developed strategic competence.

The concept of LLE was conceived based on the hypothesized role of a conscious experience of learning a new language as opposed to the simultaneous acquisition of one or more languages. I demonstrated that when the exposure to a new language occurs in a time and context in which the child can be aware of the language learning, it may enhance the metacognitive awareness of the child. This effect of LLE is associated with increased confidence and a more positive attitude towards the situation. In contrast, nLLE children are less likely to develop a positive experience in exolingual situations. They are more inclined to give up the exchange, and are less self-confident with regard to their potential to deal with the communication problem as shown by Joy's reaction in the introduction.

Given these observations I propose that LLE contributes to a positive identity construction, identity being understood as an "interactional accomplishment produced and negotiated in discourse" (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004, p. 13).

In the next sections, I will first draw upon the term *positive* in the expression *positive identity construction* and then on the term *construction*.

LLE: A Factor Contributing to the Construction of a Positive Identity

Results of this research stress the fact that natural exposure to languages alone may not be sufficient to develop a positive approach to exolingual interaction. Indeed, as shown by Olivia's reaction, the decision not to carry out the exchange was often accompanied by negative feelings ("I am going to cry," "I feel sad," "I feel angry," "I don't play with him / her"). The findings showed that nLLE children were significantly more inclined to give up this exchange and thus to show feelings of frustration. In contrast, LLE children had a positive attitude toward the exolingual situation of communication.

Therefore, one can even go so far as to speculate that LLE may be beneficial to all children, including bilingual children who have acquired their languages from birth onwards (simultaneous bilingualism). Through the enhancement of their metacognitive awareness, LLE is likely to provide children with appropriate tools to handle the exolingual exchange more effectively, which can lead to more positive exolingual experiences, and through those experiences to a better self confidence. The metacognitive awareness allows children to be conscious of the existence of the communicative problem associated with this situation. According to the literature, metacognitive awareness would provide the individual with "both self reflection and self direction" (Vandergrift, Goh, Mareschal, & Tafaghodtar, 2006, p. 435). This corresponds well with the findings reported here. The difference between LLE children and nLLE children may be the less efficient processes of self-reflection (awareness) and self-direction (use of strategies) in nLLE children, leading to a more negative outcome of the exchange.

In contrast, the more positive and confident perception of LLE children to the exolingual situation allows them to direct their strategic competence toward their interlocutor. Against this background, LLE can thus be viewed as one factor that stimulates a positive perception of challenging communicative situations, by providing the child both self-reflective as well as self-directive skills to bring the exchange to a positive end. In turn, these positive communicative experiences can, progressively, contribute to the self confidence of the child.

The Construction of a Positive Identity

What children understand of communication has always been a concern to researchers attempting to model developmental aspects of language behavior (e.g., Gombert, 1992; Hamers & Blanc, 2000, Tomasello, 2008). Results of my research show that the enhancement of metacognitive awareness is, at least in part, founded on previous experiences of success and failure in exolingual situations of communication. Thus metacognitive awareness can be considered a dynamic construct that, under the influence of social experiences, can evolve in either positive or negative directions.

Following this way of thinking, one can reason that the exolingual experiences associated with bilingualism may not always contribute to a positive plurilingual identity construction. As proposed by Véronique (1994), all exolingual situations of communication are comprised of interactive negotiations that may lead to cooperation and / or conflicts. Young bilingual children, because of their bilingualism, are likely to be regularly confronted with such exolingual situations of communication. As a consequence, they are also likely to have experienced situations in which they lacked proficiency, which may have negatively affected the interpersonal aspect of communication (see for instance, Cummins, 2009; Miller, 2004). Against this background it may be worthwhile to explore the optimal context and guidance that allows for positive exolingual experiences to occur in bilingual children.

Conclusion

The Children's Need for Strategic Competence

Nowadays, as a result of immigration, multilingualism is present in the majority of primary schools across European countries (see for instance Dewaele & van Oudenhoven, 2009; Hanson, Boogaard & Herrlitz, 2003; Lasagabaster, 2008; Moore, 2006; Tuijl, Leseman & Rispens, 2001)). One consequence of the omnipresence of multilingualism is the appearance of more and more situations where the languages spoken by subgroups of school-going children are not included in the educational curriculum (Castellotti & Moore, 2006; Miller, 2004).

It seems reasonable to assume that this particular group of children is likely to benefit from some kind of strategic competence in order to communicate, particularly in the school environment. They are continuously challenged to display communication strategies to express their thoughts or incomprehension during recess as well as during formal teaching. However, it may be quite challenging for a child that does not understand a text, an expression, a sentence, or even a word to manifest his or her incomprehension. In such a situation, the child will have to interrupt the course of an ongoing communication, for instance, to ask for assistance and / or for clarification, otherwise he / she will quickly lose track of what is being taught. Ultimately, such events may become a pattern that is likely to influence ideas about the cognitive development of the child. Strategic competence as a component of

communicative competence is thus necessary in order to prevent this negative outcome.

The Role of the Context and of Guidance in the Language Classroom

As shown by the results of my research, the foreign language classroom potentially enhancing metacognition in children may play an important role in the construction of a positive identity in plurilingual children. In fact, foreign language courses embody the creation of artificial situations of communication in which learners are asked to communicate in languages that they do not yet master. Vygotsky (1962) already noted that confrontation with new languages may facilitate the emergence of the awareness of language itself and the control over its development in the individual. Learning becomes, in his words, a conscious process, particularly developed by explicit and formal instruction.

Teachers may take advantage of this conscious process of the foreign language classroom to adapt their didactic approach. They should encourage children to deal resourcefully with exolingual situations of communication. With active guidance these experiences can be colored positively. This guidance should help the children to generate reflections on the situation of learning itself, on one's own linguistic repertoire and, on the exolingual situation of communication allowing for a better control of their emotions and for a better use of communication strategies.

In particular, this guidance may be based on the promotion of communication strategies. Teachers may help the children to make use of the communication strategies identified in this research (Le Pichon, De Swart, Vorstman, & Van Den Bergh, 2010), such as, to focus their attention to identify the problem and to get back on track (strategy of directed attention), to elaborate a plan of action (strategy of anticipation), to control positively their emotions and to not be afraid to manifest their willingness to communicate (strategy of control of emotions), to propose explicit actions to communicate (strategy of cooperation) despite the lack of words, to mime what they wish to express (strategy of mime), to propose another language (strategy of language switch), to appeal to someone for help (strategy of ask for assistance), to imitate the other interlocutor (strategy of imitation), or to reassess the information source by asking for further explanation (strategy of clarification) (Le Pichon, De Swart, Vorstman, & Van Den Bergh, 2010).

This way, just like Joy, whose reaction was presented at the beginning of this article, children who have sufficient positive exolingual experiences may gradually become more inclined to reflect on the arbitrary nature of a language. Progressively, these positive experiences are likely to contribute to the children's confidence in their communicative abilities.

References

Alber, J. L., & Py, B. (1985). *Interlangue et conversation exolingue*. *Cahiers du Département des Sciences du Langage de l'Université de Lausanne*, 1, 30–48.

Bialystok, E. (2001). Metalinguistic aspects of bilingual processing. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, *21*, 169–181.

Bialystok, E., Majumder, S., & Martin, M. (2003). Developing phonological awareness: Is there a bilingual advantage? *Applied Psycholinguistics*, *24*, 27–44.

Castellotti, V., & Moore, D. (2006). Parcours d'expériences plurilingues et conscience réflexive. Le portfolio européen des langues pour le collège. *Le Français dans le Monde, Recherches et Applications : Biographie Langagière et Apprentissage Plurilingue, 39*, 54–68.

Cenoz, J., & Jessner, U. (Eds.). (2000). *English in Europe: The acquisition of a third language*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Comeau, L., & Genesee, F. (2001). Bilingual children's repair strategies during dyadic communication. In J. Cenoz & F. Genesee (Eds.), *Trends in bilingual acquisition* (pp. 231–256). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Comeau, L., Genesee, F., & Lapaquette, L. (2003). The modeling hypothesis and child bilingual code-mixing. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 7*, 113–126.

Cook, V. (1993). *Linguistics and second language acquisition*. New York: St. Martin's Press.

Cummins, J. (2009). Fundamental psychological and sociological principles underlying educational success for linguistic minority students. In T. Skutnabb-Kangas, R. Phillipson, A. K. Mohanty, & M. Panda (Eds.), *Social justice through multilingual education* (pp. 19–35). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Dewaele, J.-M., & van Oudenhoven, J.-P. (2009). The effect of multilingualism / multiculturalism on personality: No gain without pain for Third Culture Kids? *International Journal of Multilingualism, 6*(4), 443–459.

Faerch, C., & Kasper, G. (Eds.). (1983). *Strategies in interlanguage communication*. London: Longman.

Fisher, R. (1998). Thinking about thinking: Developing metacognition in children. *Early Child Development and Care, 141*, 1–15. Retrieved from http://www.teachingthinking.net/thinking/web%20resources/robert_fisher_thinkingaboutthinking.htm

Franceschini, R., Zappatore, D., Lüdi, G., Radü, E.-W., Wattendorf, E., & Nitsch, C. (2001, September). *Learner acquisition strategies (LAS) in the course of life: A language biographic approach.* Paper presented at the Second International Conference on Third Language Acquisition and Trilingualism, Fryske Akademy, Ljouwert, The Netherlands.

Genesee, F., & Nicoladis, E. (2006). Bilingual acquisition. In E. Hoff & M. Shatz (Eds.), *Blackwell handbook of language development* (pp. 324–342). Oxford, UK: Blackwell.

Genesee, F., Tucker, R., & Lambert, W. (1975). Communication skills in bilingual children. *Child Development*, 46, 1010–1014.

Goldstein, F. C., & Levin, H. S. (1987). Disorders of reasoning and problem-solving ability. In M. J. Meier, A. Benton, & L. Diller (Eds.), *Neuropsychological rehabilitation* (pp. 327–354). New York: Guilford Press.

Gombert, J.-E. (1992). *Metalinguistic development*. Illinois: University of Chicago Press.

Hamers, J., & Blanc, M. (2000). *Bilinguality and bilingualism* (2nd ed.). UK: Cambridge University Press.

Hanson, M., Boogaard, M., & Herrlitz, W. (2003). "Sometimes Dutch and sometimes Somali" children's participation in multicultural interactions in Dutch primary schools. *Linguistics and Education, 14*, 27–50.

Herdina, P., & Jessner, U. (2002). *A dynamic model of multilingualism: Changing the psycholinguistic perspective.* Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Hoffmann, C. (2001). Toward a description of trilingual competence. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 5*, 1–17.

Jessner, U. (1997). Towards a dynamic view of multilingualism. In M. Putz (Volume ed.), Impact: Studies in Language and Society: Vol 1. *Language choices: Conditions, constraints and consequences* (pp. 17–30). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Jessner, U. (1999). Metalinguistic awareness in multilinguals: Cognitive aspects of third language learning. *Language Awareness, 8*, 201–209.

Jorda, M. P. S. (2005). Pragmatic production of third language learners of English: A focus on request acts modifiers. *International Journal of Multilingualism, 2*, 84–104.

Kasuya, H. (1998). Determinants of language choice in bilingual children: The role of input. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 2*, 327–346.

Lanza, E. (2001). Bilingual first language acquisition: A discourse perspective on language contact in parent- child interaction. In J. Cenoz & F. Genesee (Eds.), *Trends in bilingual acquisition* (pp. 201–30). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: John Benjamins.

Lasagabaster, D. (2008). Foreign language competence in content and language integrated courses. *The Open Applied Linguistics Journal, 1*, 31–42. Retrieved from http://www.factworld.info/basque/Lasagabaster_TOALJ.pdf

Le Pichon, E., De Swart H., Vorstman, J., & Van Den Bergh, H. (2010). Influence of the context of learning a language on the strategic competence of children. *The International Journal of Bilingualism*, 14(4), 447-465.

Le Pichon, E., Vorstman, J. A. S., De Swart, H., & Van Den Bergh, H. (2009). Effect of learning a new language on the willingness to communicate. *Toegepaste Taalwetenschap in Artikelen*, *81*, 31–40.

Lüdi, G. (2005). Intérêt épistémologique de l'autobiographie linguistique pour l'acquisition/enseignement des langues. In M.-A. Mochet, M.-J. Barbot, V. Castellotti, J.-L. Chiss, C. Develotte, & D. Moore. *Plurilinguisme et apprentissage–Mélanges Daniel Coste* (pp. 143–154). Lynon, France : ENS (École normale supérieures) éditions (Lettres et science humaines).

Malakoff, M. (1992). Translation ability: A natural bilingual and metalinguistic skill. In R. J. Harris (Ed.), *Cognitive processing in bilinguals* (pp. 515–530). Amsterdam, The Netherlands: Elsevier Science.

McLaughlin, B., & Nayak, N. (1989). Processing a new language: Does knowing other languages make a difference? In H. Dechert & M. Raupach (Eds.), *Interlingual processes* (pp. 5–4). Tübingen, Germany: Gunter Narr Verlag.

Miller, J. (2004). Identity and language use: The politics of speaking ESL in schools. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in Multilingual Contexts* (pp. 290–315). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Molinié, M. (2006). Activité biographique et développement du sujet plurilingue : Des acquis méthodologiques aux questions de formation. *Le Français dans le Monde, Recherches et Applications : Biographie Langagière et Apprentissage Plurilingue, 39*, 171–189.

Moore, D. (2006). *Collection LAL: Plurilinguismes et école*. Paris: Didier.

Nicoladis, E., & Genesee, F. (1998). Parental discourse and code-mixing in bilingual children. *International Journal of Bilingualism, 2*, 85–100.

O'Malley, M., & Chamot, A. (1990). *Learning strategies in second language acquisition*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

Oxford, R. (1990). *Language learning strategies: What every teacher should know*. New York: Newbury House.

Oxford, R. (2008). Hero with a thousand faces: Learner autonomy, learning strategies and learning tactics in independent language learning. In S. Hurd & T. Lewis (Eds.), *Language learning in independent settings* (pp. 41–66). Bristol, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Oxford, R. L. (2003). Language learning styles and strategies: Concepts and relationships. *International Review of Applied Linguistics in Language Teaching, 41*, 271–278.

Patterson, J., & Rodríguez, B. (2005). Designing assessments for multilingual children. In M. J. Ball (Ed.), *Clinical Sociolinguistics* (pp. 230–241). Malden, MA: Blackwell.

Pavlenko, A., & Blackledge, A. (2004). Introduction: New theoretical approaches to the study of negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts. In A. Pavlenko & A. Blackledge (Eds.), *Negotiation of identities in multilingual contexts* (pp. 1–33). Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters.

Porquier, R., & Py, B. (2004). *Apprentissage d'une langue étrangère : Contexte et discours*. Paris : Didier/CREDIF.

Tarone, E. (1981). Some thoughts on the notion of communication strategy. *TESOL Quarterly, 15*, 285–295.

Tomasello, M. (2008). *Origins of human communication*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press.

van Tuijl, C, Leseman, P., & Rispens, J. (2001). Efficacy of an intensive home-based educational intervention programme for 4- to 6-year-old ethnic minority children in the Netherlands. *International Journal of Behavioral Development*, *25*, 148-159.

Vandergrift, L., Goh, C. C., Mareschal, C. J., & Tafaghodtar, M. H. (2006). The Metacognitive Awareness Listening Questionnaire: Development and validation. *Language Learning, 56*, 431–462.

Véronique, D. (1994). Quel profil d'apprenant ? Réflexions méthodologiques. *Acquisition et Interaction en Langue Étrangère* [*AILE*], *4*, 109–129. Disponible à http://aile.revues.org/document1256.html

Vygotsky, L. S. (1962). *Thought and language*. Boston, MA: MIT Press.