

“Tu sais bien parler Maîtresse!”

Negotiating languages other than French in the primary classroom in France

Christine Hélot

Language policies in France

France is a country well known for its long history of language legislation and for its highly centralised administration and education system. Several researchers have analysed how French has been institutionalised as the common national language (Sanders, 1996; Ager, 1999; Le Nevez, 2006; etc.), and how in the process minority languages have been vitiated (Grillo, 1989; Williams, 1991; May, 2001). As recently as 1992 an amendment was added to the French constitution stating explicitly yet again that the language of the Republic is French (Journal Officiel, 1992) and in 1994 the Toubon law made the use of French obligatory in five domains: education, employment, the media, commerce and public meetings. More recently again (May 22, 2008), when the Parliament voted almost unanimously¹ for the inclusion of regional languages in the Constitution (France 3, 2008, 10/06), the Académie Française instantly asked (unanimously also) for the withdrawal of this amendment, using the traditional arguments of regional languages posing a threat to the unity of the nation and encouraging the development of “*communautarisme*” (L’Express: 2008, 24/07).

In the more specific domain of educational language policies, I have explained (Hélot, 2007) how despite the influence of European policies² promoting multilingualism, more efficient approaches for language learning and the valuing of linguistic and cultural diversity, “foreign” language teaching in France remains a major source of dissatisfaction, and European evaluations confirm the poor level of oral skills of a majority of French students (Bonnet & Levasseur, 2004). Yet the general inspector responsible for the teaching of foreign

languages (Goullier, 2006), argues that France is a model for Europe as far as valuing linguistic and cultural diversity because a wide choice of languages are offered in the curriculum³. However, as I have analysed elsewhere (Hélot & Young, 2005) promoting diversification is not synonymous with valuing diversity; offering many different languages in the curriculum is a good strategy to fight the hegemony of the English language but it does not guarantee that bilingualism or multilingualism is acknowledged or valued, and linguistic diversity supported. Since 2000, efforts on the part of the Ministry of Education to improve language education in France have focused mainly on dominant European languages and on developing bilingual education in some regional languages. Despite the strong incentive to use the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (Council of Europe, 2001a) and the European Language Portfolio (Council of Europe, 2001b), practice in the classroom has remained centred on written skills and based on the native speaker as the ideal model; when students start learning a second language, the teaching approaches are kept separate and language teaching is contained within the space of the classroom. In other words, languages are seen as school disciplines like maths or history and their teaching is not envisaged as a possibility to change language use in the school. Because of a long history of top-down educational policies it seems unimaginable in France to think in terms of a school developing a holistic approach to language policies as proposed for example by the European project *Ensemble* (Camilleri Grima, 2007; Young & Hélot, 2007).

Furthermore, as I have explained before (Hélot, 2003, 2007), the categorisation of languages into denominations such as *foreign*, *regional* and *languages of origin* has created a hierarchy which keeps the minority languages spoken by people of immigrant background very much in limbo. Other researchers (Zirotti, 2006) have pointed out the lack of political will to address the issue of immigration languages and have shown how bilingualism acquired in the home context is ignored by policy makers and stigmatised by many teachers. I have

tried to analyse the paradox of policies that put so much effort into making future citizens better speakers of second languages and at the same time ignore the rich linguistic and cultural competence of many bilingual pupils ([Hélot and Young, 2002](#); Hélot, 2006; Hélot et al 2006). It is somewhat ironical that some bilingual pupils become monolingual again through schooling, and are later expected to become bilingual again but in a language other than their own.

One should also add that marginalisation does not affect only immigration languages. The language varieties used nowadays by young French people in their everyday life is also stigmatised and seen as a threat to the supposed purity of the written standard. Two very successful films illustrate this point: *L'Esquive* (2004) and the recent winner at the Cannes film festival *Entre les murs* (2008). Both films portray the growing gap between the language of the street and the language of the school. In a sense, both films show that dedicated teachers of French can make their inarticulate students aware of the beauty of the French language. But they also give a stereotypical image of youth language and reinforce the idea that the classical standard written variety is the only legitimate form of speech. While this situation tends to be seen by politicians and the larger public as a major educational problem, what the two films uncover in my opinion is the power of ideologies in framing beliefs about language, in ways of conceptualising language and of understanding the complex relationship between language, identity and power.

Clearly, there is a reluctance to move away from ideological positions entrenched in the belief that the one language/one nation model is the only viable one for a country like France and French schools have remained bastions of linguistic norms, of beliefs in the universal value of the French language and culture, and of prejudice against any non standard variety. Nowhere more than in the education system have such ideologies been so pervasive and particularly difficult to debunk. As explained by Le Nevez (2006: 75) the language

ideology that informs language policy in France and popular opinion on the role and status of French in society, can broadly be described, following Pennycook (2004) as foundationalist “because of the way in which they reproduce beliefs about the systematicity, normativity and prior ontological status of languages as discrete, reified, pre-formed objects.” Le Nevez (2006: 67) identifies six significant features⁴ of a foundationalist ideology and his analysis clearly helps to understand why it is so difficult to shift the monolingual habitus of French schools and to make teachers aware of their attitudes and representations not only towards the French language, but also towards language learning and teaching and towards diversity, be it linguistic, cultural, ethnic, religious etc.

While recent work on language ideologies (Blommaert 2006, Jaffe 1999, Watts 1999) and post-structuralist research⁵ propose different approaches to the framing and contextualisation of linguistic diversity, the question remains of how to “translate” this body of knowledge for teacher education. How can one make teachers aware of the fact that seeing languages as “*finite, stable, standardised, rule governed instruments of communication*” (Ricento, 2006: 14) is a constructed belief, that thinking that monolingualism is normal also reflects a conceptualisation of language being linked to one people and one territory which was constructed politically. In other words, how can one make teachers aware of the power of ideologies because as expressed by Garcia et al (2006: 37): “*Attitudes values and beliefs about language are always ideological, and involved in systems of domination and subordination of different groups. Schools are, in their work of teaching the standard national languages, responsible for one of the most prevalent linguistic ideologies – constructing a unidirectional link between language and ethnicity. And so, language ideologies are responsible for the closing of spaces for multilingual practices in schools*”.

The context of the study

This chapter focuses on two French student teachers, MGR and DB⁶ working in a pre-primary school one day a week as part of their teaching placements. It should be made clear here, that in France pre-primary education is widespread for children aged 3 till 6 and takes place in « *école maternelle* »; *école maternelle* as its name indicates, works very much like a school and cannot be compared to a playgroup or a kindergarten. The national curriculum (MEN, 2008) sets very clear teaching and learning objectives from the beginning of schooling and the Ministry of Education encourages parents to school their children as early as possible. This education is free in public schools and in 2006/2007, 23.4% of children aged 2 to 3 attended pre-primary school, the percentage becoming 100% for children aged 3 to 4 (RERS, 2007).

Pre-primary teachers are educated together with primary teachers in university institutes of education called IUFM⁷ where they are taught a common curriculum for all levels. At the time of study, the two trainee teachers concerned had completed a first university degree and had successfully passed a very competitive state exam called a “concour”. They were attending an obligatory professional one-year course at the IUFM and at the end of that year were confirmed as certified teachers. As part of their final certification they were required to write up a short research project related to their pedagogical experience during their weekly placement.

Because a major part of their studies is very academic in nature⁸ and their initial professional education so short, so crammed and so weighed down by constant evaluations and because on the whole, student teachers are learning their profession on the job during their teaching placements, some researchers have argued for the development of an approach based on reflective practice (Perrenoud, 2001). The approach chosen at IUFM of Alsace consists in asking trainees to reflect in writing on one or two pedagogical questions they

would like to investigate, in relation to their practice during their one day a week placement in a school.

As a professor of English at IUFM, one of my responsibilities is to supervise several student teachers for their writing project. This supervision is linked to several visits in schools with feedback discussions and I have always considered this structure as one of the spaces where it is possible to adopt a more critical approach to teacher education and to encourage students to understand the value of research. Because at the time of study trainees were allocated a tutor on a random basis, I was MGR's referent tutor and had a lot of opportunities to discuss her work with her, but in the case of DB, he was assigned another tutor. I agreed however to meet him on several occasions and to answer his questions relating to bilingualism (orally and through e. mail).

Although the format of supervision of research projects is set out clearly in the curriculum, obviously the process can vary according to different supervisor's research interests. Therefore, the purpose of this study is not to compare the two students' research projects, but rather to analyse how they each reflected upon their teaching practice in relation to very young pupils who started school without any knowledge of the school language (French). The analysis is based on a series of interviews carried out by myself during the year 2007/2008, and on their respective research projects, which dealt in both cases with the pedagogical strategies necessary to implement with very young emergent bilinguals.

The learning situation for both these student teachers during their one day a week placement was constrained by many factors: although they had very little pedagogical experience aside from having observed experienced teachers for one week, like their peers, they were on their own in charge of a class of almost 30 children from 8am till 4pm, and from the very beginning of the year. Another constraint came from the fact that this system has been devised to give a free day to head teachers who have administrative duties; thus, the

student teachers were replacing an experienced teacher, had to comply with a set time-table, and their teaching approaches should not be too different from those of the regular teacher. Moreover they had to implement the very ambitious objectives set out in the national curriculum in view of their evaluation upon which their final qualification also depended. These constraints meant that the spaces for innovation, for creativity and the development of an alternative approach to teaching and learning were rather limited. However, most trainees say they like being in a classroom and feel that it is where they are learning their future profession most efficiently.

The main reason for this lies in the content of the curriculum they must follow and the format through which it tends to be delivered. Apart from their one-day a week placement, student teachers attend three-hour courses at IUFM from 9 till 5 every day leaving them very little time for reading or research. On the whole, these courses deal with the didactics of the school subjects they have to teach (French, mathematics, social sciences, science, technology, arts, music, PE and a foreign language). The approach favoured by most teacher educators tends to focus on the didactics of each school subject and very little cross-disciplinary work is proposed apart from the insistence on the French language. A 24-hour course on the didactics of a “foreign” language is also obligatory and students in Alsace only have a choice between English and German. Again, wider issues of language education including an ecological approach to all the languages taught in a school and spoken by pupils is not easy to impart because of this rather disciplinary approach. However during the year 2006/2007, with another colleague professor of English⁹ at IUFM of Alsace, we managed to offer a six-hour course on linguistic and cultural diversity, which dealt with bilingualism and the support of second language acquisition in school.

Finally, before describing the research, the sociolinguistic landscape of the region in which it took place should be briefly sketched. As a border region with Germany, Alsace has

had a long and troubled history: part of Germany between 1870 and 1918, it was annexed again during the Second World War. Now a French region, Alsace can be said to be part of a Germanic sphere of influence because of its linguistic and cultural heritage. This is clearly visible in the use of Alsatian, the local language, spoken by a small minority of older people living mostly in rural areas. Alsatian is one of the many varieties of standard German and is part of the identity of the region even if fewer and fewer people speak it. As distinct from HochDeutsch, Alsatian has been recognised as one of the regional languages of France in the same way as Breton, Catalan, Corsican and others (Cerquiglini, 2003). However, as I have explained elsewhere (Hélot, 2007), the notion of “regional” language in Alsace is ambiguous, because in 1982 local educational authorities decided that standard German and not Alsatian should be the language taught in schools (Huck, 1999). This has meant that as distinct from the rest of France, German is taught as a second language in most primary schools in Alsace (from age 7) and is the only language which can be offered in bilingual education provision in the region.

Furthermore, Alsace has always been the site of much language contact and, as the seat of several European institutions, Strasbourg, its main city, has become very cosmopolitan. The city also counts a high level of immigrants (12,9%, INSEE 2001¹⁰) who come mainly from North Africa (25%), Turkey (13%), and Germany (10%). More recently, most migrants to Alsace came from Turkey, Morocco and Germany. Thus, it is not surprising to find in most classrooms throughout the city and its surroundings pupils who speak many languages other than French. It is not uncommon either for German parents who live in France or near the border to school their children in France in the hope that they will become bilingual.

The research

This research is part of a wider project looking at ways of including intercultural education and the issue of linguistic and cultural diversity in the curriculum for initial teacher education at primary level (Hélot & Benert, 2006; Hélot et al, 2006; Hélot, forthcoming). I am particularly concerned with developing a culture of plurilingualism and pluriculturalism among future primary teachers and in addressing issues of discrimination and institutional racism, which tend to remain marginalised in a curriculum based on content knowledge. Former publications have analysed educational language policies (Hélot, 2003; Hélot & Young, 2006) and the ideology of bilingual education in France (Hélot, 2007, 2008). Analysis of a three-year school project using the language awareness approach has shown how teachers working collaboratively with parents can transform their monolingual classrooms into a multilingual and multicultural space where bilingual children who speak minority languages can find their own voice (Hélot & Young 2003, 2006; Young & Hélot 2003, 2007). Ongoing work on children's literature and multilingual authors with student teachers involved in a bilingual programme (French/German) investigates further the monolingual ideology prevalent in bilingual education and analyses the relationship between language mixing, translation, languaging (García, 2009) and identity (Benert & Hélot 2008, forthcoming).

Here I propose to analyse the way the two student teachers have recreated their own language policies in their classrooms during the year 2007/2008 at the very beginning of their teaching experience. My analysis is based on their description of the way they negotiated the use of French and of the first language of their pupils, i.e.; on their analysis of their choice of language strategies with very young pupils entering school. It should be made clear at the outset that these two student teachers were not aware of the notion of language policies, but they both knew of the clear agenda in the national curriculum to start teaching a foreign language from age 7 and that as explained above, there is no choice in Alsace but German. Both saw the priority given to the French language as "*normal*" and part of their main

teaching objectives, along with building some early competence for the acquisition of numeracy. Both were confronted with multilingualism in their classroom by the presence of pupils who spoke languages other than French and both had a personal experience of bilingualism and language learning. The formal teaching input they received on these issues during the year was minimal, a 3 hour module in the case of DB, on how to include the notion of linguistic diversity in the teaching of French, and in the case of MGR, some input on the didactics of German as a foreign language.

Student teacher MGR was female and French, a good linguist who spoke Alsatian, fluent German and had a good command of English. She writes in her essay that she is passionate about foreign languages thus, she chose to participate in the student exchange programme organised between IUFM Alsace and the University of Southampton (UK). She explains: *“This destination interested me specifically because of the importance of immigration in that country”* (MGR, 2008: 12). During her three weeks teaching in a primary school in Southampton, she explored the various policy documents and pedagogical strategies used to support second language learners and she noticed that teachers in the UK spend a lot of time teaching about different cultures and encourage pupils to speak about their family and home cultures.

She spent every Monday in a pre-primary school in a village in the vicinity of Strasbourg. Her class consisted of 25 children aged between 2 and 3. She had a teaching assistant (untrained) for part of the morning when the children were regrouped for more formal learning sessions. Two young boys not yet 3 were the subject of her essay, neither having a word of French upon starting their schooling. There was a German boy whose parents had just moved to Alsace and spoke only German, and the second boy had a Thai mother and an Alsatian father who spoke English together.

Student teacher DB was male, of dual nationality (Turkish and French), bilingual and a rare example of what one would consider a success story in the French education system. Very few student teachers come from ethnic minority background, even fewer from the Turkish community. DB shared with me on several occasions his personal experiences of discrimination both at primary and secondary school. As a young Turkish boy whose mother wore a hijab and did not speak a word of French, he felt torn between his home values and school where he sensed the negative attitudes of some of his teachers towards the fact that he spoke Turkish at home. Before deciding to become a teacher, DB had held an administrative post and he was the president of the Turkish association in his hometown in Alsace. He had inside knowledge of the Turkish community in Alsace, of their very precarious living conditions previous to immigration and an understanding of their attitudes towards education and the learning of French. Paradoxically, this type of knowledge is not specifically valued for teacher education, when it is precisely the very lack of such information about immigrant communities, which prevent teachers from being sensitive to the needs of their pupils. In 2003, DB founded a new Franco-Turkish association for young Turkish people born in France and having difficulties negotiating their two cultures¹¹. He still works as a school mediator and translator for the schools in his hometown.

Every Monday, DB was in charge of a pre-school class of 23 children aged 3 to 5 in a school in the vicinity of Strasbourg. This school was part of a number of schools in Alsace that offer bilingual education in German and French. DB's class however was not a bilingual class, which means that the pupils' parents did not make the choice of bilingual education for their children. DB decided to write his essay about two Turkish speaking pupils, one girl of 3 in his class whose parents didn't speak French, and a girl of 7 in a colleague's classroom. This older pupil was repeating first grade and neither spoke nor participated in any activities in

class. Her teacher and the pedagogical team had been unsuccessful in making contact with the girl's parents.

DB also participated in an international programme organised by the IUFM of Alsace. He spent a week in a prestigious French school in Turkey attended by Turkish-speaking and French-speaking children residing in Ankara. DB was keen to find out about the strategies used by the French teachers in Ankara to develop the oral skills of the Turkish-speaking children in their L2.

Both student teachers had a similar problematic for their reflective piece of writing, that is how could they help their very young bilingual¹² pupils to participate in school activities and to start “*appropriating knowledge and competences in order to successfully acquire the basic skills required in their first year of elementary education*” (MEN, 2008: 12). Their questioning was directly linked to the curriculum which insists that even at this very young age children should be placed in learning situations, and stresses the importance of the acquisition of the French language: “*the essential objective of pre-primary schooling is the acquisition of a rich and structured oral language, comprehensible to others*” (MEN, 2008:12). While DB was more focused on this point and the need to develop the school language with children speaking Turkish at home, MGR framed her reflection within the notions of plurilingualism and interculturalism. Influenced by her theoretical readings (Kramsch, 2002), she had a more socio-cultural approach and stressed the notion of socialisation. In other words, she was well aware that the schooling of children at age 2 poses specific problems for all children irrespective of their home language.

This said, both student teachers were very sensitive to the special needs of their non French- speaking pupils (as they saw them), and their linguistic as well as affective needs. They both saw the relationship with parents as central to the pupils' integration. Both reported a marked difference in the behaviour of their pupils after they had taken the time to talk to

their parents. Both were keen to offer parents some support in relation to their understanding of the French school system. In other words both these beginner teachers showed a great sense of responsibility as well as a highly ethical approach to their pupils and their parents. What they lacked and had to learn on the job was the pedagogical knowledge relating to second language acquisition by young learners, and the theoretical knowledge about bilingualism and language education in general.

Negotiating different languages in the classroom

Although the two student teachers were faced with a language situation for which they were not prepared, they felt obliged to break the rule of using only French in their classroom. It should be said that the long standing policy of using French and only French in the classroom is not inscribed into strict rules sent to schools; it is no longer necessary because such a rule has become part of the collective unconscious. This is why MGR and DB had not planned at first to use languages other than French. On their first Monday in class, when they discovered that some of the children did not know French, they both assumed that these pupils being immersed in the school language would acquire French more or less automatically. The myth of learning a second language through being immersed in that language still prevails in France, in particular where early learners are concerned, and this is reinforced by the National Programmes for Pre-school ([MEN, 2007: 88](#)): *“With very young children, it is not necessary to provide specific teaching in French as a second language. The communicative situations linked to life in the classroom are in most cases quite sufficient as long as they happen in a context where plurilingualism is not denigrated and the child is called upon to express himself”*. The inherent contradiction of such a statement always has to be pointed out to student teachers. Young children who do not speak the school language cannot express themselves even if called upon because they do not have the linguistic means to understand what is wanted of them, and even less to speak back. The silencing of bilingual pupils in

normative monolingual classrooms is a well-known fact and both trainees did notice it and were concerned enough to do something about it.

This is how DB (2008: 4) describes the moment he decided to use Turkish with his pupil LH: *“I began to explain to group after group the work to be done and I asked one child in each group to repeat the instructions. Once the children were settled, I checked that all was going well and I moved to the group where LH was sitting in order to observe her. Having understood nothing neither the work to be done nor the instructions, I asked another pupil to repeat the instructions for her. He did, then two other children repeated them again, but LH still did not understand. In this precise case the non-mastery of French is beginning to cause problems in terms of comprehension and of participation in learning activities. It is difficult to ask a pupil to do school work if she does not have any knowledge of the French language. Therefore it is normal for the teacher to find strategies for the child to understand. Perhaps the child can make a special effort to understand if the teacher stays close by and gives her personal support, but it is not easy for the teacher who also has to look after all the other pupils. And then LH is at a loss, and she is excluded from her group and sometimes her friends make remarks because she does not understand, and she gets even angrier. At that moment, being bilingual myself, I decided to intervene and to use Turkish, since I shared this language with the pupil. I wanted to know whether she was capable of doing her school work if I gave her the instructions in Turkish.”*¹³

I shall not analyse this testimony in detail but I would like to make several points: firstly DB believes that repetition or rephrasing will eventually lead to understanding, which might eventually work with a young L1 speaker but not with an L2 learner. Secondly, he feels he has to justify himself for using his native language with his pupil, when to an outsider it would seem the most normal thing to do, particularly in this case when DB not only shares a language but a common experience with this little girl. When I asked him why he did not use

Turkish with her from the outset, my question took him by surprise. He had not been aware he had internalised a covert policy forbidding the use of the home language. The last sentence of the quote also reveals his doubt towards the child's capabilities, as if he needed to have some tangible proof that language is the barrier to her understanding, not some other reasons.

I think DB's position towards Turkish in his professional space is an example of how the French education system reproduces a monolingual ideology. DB is married and has a child and his home language is Turkish. As a primary teacher in France, he functions like a monolingual French teacher and only when asked specifically to help Turkish-speaking children will he use his bilingual bicultural skills. In the case of the second pupil he analysed in his essay, the 7 year-old-child is in serious danger of what is referred to in France as "échec scolaire". Repeating the first year of schooling is only imposed on children supposed to perform very poorly and whose parents are not vocal enough to prevent it. It has been shown to have disastrous consequences for the subsequent schooling of pupils, but many teachers still believe in this practice.

DB's encounter with the parents through Turkish, made a meeting possible between them and the regular teacher, helped the teacher to understand the pupil's silence in class, and totally transformed the situation. The little girl started speaking in French at school, although in a very low voice, but it was enough of an event for all the other pupils to rush to DB in the schoolyard and inform him. DB's mediating skills were recognised by the teacher who then made some efforts at giving extra exercises for the child to do at home with her parents, although these were exercises in French, and no special support in her home language was offered. In other words, the very valuable Turkish-speaking skills DB brought to the school were left as a once off resource and nothing was changed as far as helping bilingual children maintain their home language.

Far from blaming DB here, I would like to stress the importance of making young teachers aware of the importance of maintenance and support of the home language(s) of bilingual pupils. To this effect the TESSLA¹⁴ project and website were developed (Hancock et al, 2006) by IUFM Alsace and the University of Edinburg in Scotland. And because all minority language-speaking pupils cannot avail of specialised classes in their L1¹⁵, having a bilingual teacher in the school could make all the difference for many pupils who struggle with their acquisition of the school language. But again, it is not enough to have one bilingual teacher in a school to change attitudes towards minority languages. The whole school team needs to be informed about bilingual language acquisition, and more importantly needs to go beyond their prejudice towards immigration languages and the beliefs that using the first language will harm the acquisition of the school language.

DB himself is the very example that it is possible to succeed in the French education system, while growing up with two languages, one of them Turkish. But it is difficult for him to feel legitimate when he uses Turkish in the classroom because he does not yet have the necessary understanding of the workings of language ideologies, while he has real experience of language discrimination. Even if his knowledge of Turkish is a definite asset, and he really did transform the learning situation of two pupils, it does not empower him to change the attitudes of his colleagues towards bilingualism. He remained as someone who solved a “problem,” he modelled a successful mediation with Turkish parents but he was powerless to change the school policy towards a minority language spoken by an immigrant community.

The situation of MGR is totally different. The languages she used in her class, German and Alsatian, are spoken by many people in the community and on the other side of the border a few kilometres away. As explained above, Alsatian is not taught in schools and is felt to be a low prestige variety, but German is highly regarded and strongly supported in education from very early on. Thus, even though her pupils are younger than the required age for the

teaching of German (7), proposing activities in this language would be considered legitimate by the school authorities and favourably looked upon by most parents.

However, it should be made clear here, that the use of German was brought upon by the presence of a German-speaking pupil in the class. MGR did not teach a specific class of German as a foreign language during a specific slot one hour a week, she used German as an authentic medium of communication, and included the language in everyday activities like greetings and story telling¹⁶. Thus German had a real space and function in her class. With her Thai-speaking pupil the situation was more difficult because she did not have any language she could share with him. Like DB, she looked for strategies for her pupils to feel included, focussing on the affective dimension in learning¹⁷ and on developing comprehension skills. She wrote: *“I did not want this difference of language to become a difficulty for them, at the very moment they discover what it is like to be at school”* (MGR, 2008: 18).

Like DB she approached the parents and even made the effort to learn a few words of Thai from her pupil’s mother, so that she could include the Thai language in the multilingual greetings she used every morning. She also designed two special vocabulary booklets¹⁸ with pictures and the corresponding words in French for the parents to help their children learn classroom language. She clearly saw bilingualism as an asset – she quotes some of the work of Cummins (2001) - and advised the Thai mother to keep speaking her language with her child, despite the contradictory advice of the Alsatian grandmother. In fact, what she did was to create a multilingual space, where the home languages of two pupils entered the space of the classroom and became part of the linguistic experience of all the pupils. She explained in her conclusion that: *“whereas this linguistic difference could have been a hindrance to the socialisation of the children, I have the impression it has helped to build it faster. Now the children themselves teach me beautiful lessons about learning to live together. Now some of*

them ask me spontaneously how to say this or that in T's language (German)" (MGR, 2008: 21).

This last point shows that from a very young age and even in a schooling situation, children are aware of linguistic differences and curious about language and languages. As reported by both student teachers, their pupils asked a lot of questions once it had been explained that some children in the class did not know French, and they changed attitudes towards their peers, becoming more open and tolerant. They were also very impressed by their teachers using different languages in class, hence the remark quoted in the title by a little girl in MGR's class when she heard her switching to German to explain something the German pupil had not understood: "*Teacher, you can speak so well!*" the 3 year old exclaimed spontaneously her eyes full of admiration. As to DB, he relates how the story of his using Turkish in his class went round the school, and how at break time in the playground several Muslim boys would gather around wanting to befriend him.

These two case studies argue for the importance of developing language awareness activities from the start of schooling and even with very young learners. Many researchers have shown that addressing questions relating to language use and to the multiplicity of language systems through pedagogical activities enable children to make sense of their linguistic environment. (Hélot & Young 2003, 2006; Candelier, 2003; Perregaux, 1998, Moore, 1995). As I have analysed elsewhere, such an approach also prevents pupils from being confined into one language only, as happens within the early foreign language-learning model, which tends to always favour English at the expense of other languages. Furthermore, the language awareness model can help to transform the monolingual classroom into a multilingual space where all the languages in the class - as well as the school language - are explored, shared, and given a chance to thrive. Both DB and MGR described in their essays how their (emergent) bilingual pupils found their voice once they felt reassured their teacher

shared their language, and once they had seen their teacher addressing their parents in their home language.

The case of the Thai pupil is interesting from the point of view of language choice and to a certain extent of language policy. MGR explained: *"M's parents have decided to choose French as the first language for their little boy as his mother is also learning French. I advised them all the same not to abandon Thai. The school will look after the development of his competence in French, but it won't be able to do anything for his competence in Thai, a language which is part of his family history. Thus I wanted to give a place in class to the language of this little boy's mother. So I started to ask his mother to translate a few simple words for me, which could find their place in the everyday life of the class: thank you, hello, enjoy your meal etc., and surprise, she brought me a small conversation guide in Thai! Then she taught me the pronunciation (difficult!) of these few words, in front of the admiring look of several children, M. included."* (MGR, 2008:14)

It is not surprising that M's family have decided that French should be the first language of their child even though his mother's French is limited and she has always spoken Thai with her son. M. lives in a plurilingual family: he hears English at home when his parents speak together, and Alsatian at his grandparents'. MGR felt from her discussions with M's mother and grandmother that the grandmother presided over her Thai daughter-in-law and was intent on her grandchild learning French. It was also important for her to tell the school authorities his first language would be French! The main reason for this could be fear of school failure lest the child's French was not up to a supposed standard, and a wish to reassure the teacher that the family was aware of the importance of the school language.

Interestingly, our young student teacher departed from a long tradition in the French teaching profession of advising bi-or multilingual parents not to use their first language with their children and to concentrate on the acquisition of French. Relying on the theoretical

readings I had given her and my supervision of her work, she felt confident enough to give advice on retaining the use of the mother's language, Thai, at home. What should be stressed here is that she backed her advice by using Thai with her whole class, thus giving more legitimacy to this language. She was also very clear about the fact that it is sufficient to acquire French in the school context and that it would be a great loss for the child to lose a language that was part of his heritage.

On the level of policy, she can be said to have transformed the monolingual habitus of the school, and to offer new possibilities for the multilingual classroom. She showed that she was comfortable with languages other than French, those she knew, and more importantly those she did not know like Thai. She gave support to bilingual pupils and their parents, and she even designed pedagogical activities to educate her monolingual pupils to understand linguistic and cultural diversity. She was clearly acting as a change agent for her class and for her school because she showed her experienced colleagues it was possible to see bilingualism as an asset rather than as a problem. Despite being a beginner teacher, her academic qualifications and her scientific knowledge gave her a certain legitimacy, which was further backed by my position as tutor and university researcher.

DB's position within his school was far more difficult than MGR's because of the low status of the Turkish language and because of prevailing negative attitudes of teachers towards the Turkish community related specifically to the very issue of language maintenance. For many reasons we shall not develop here¹⁹, the rate of maintenance of the home language in Turkish families is very high. Contact between Turkish families and schools is made difficult by the lack of knowledge on the part of teachers of Turkish culture and little understanding of the experience of economic migration. Turkish parents tend to feel somewhat in awe of teachers and are shy to approach them, particularly when they don't speak French. Moreover, it is not usual in French schools to translate school rules or letters

for parents who do not know French, most teachers believing that if you live in France you should learn French, and some resenting Turkish women who survive without learning the language thanks to their close-knit community.

While DB has found his own way to help his community by doing militant work within an association, it is more difficult for him to feel confident about asserting the need to use Turkish in his class and at school in general. This is the reason why he used Turkish to help two Turkish-speaking pupils, but did not devise activities in this language for the rest of the class. He could, for example, have taught the whole class a short Turkish song or nursery rhyme, but he would have had to justify this activity on pedagogical grounds. He could also have exposed himself to criticism from parents suspecting him of teaching “his” language, i.e.; a language which is not part of the curriculum, and this could seriously undermine his chances of being evaluated positively.

However DB was also an agent of change in the sense that he helped two Turkish-speaking children to find their voice in class, and he showed concretely to an experienced teacher that it is essential and possible to communicate with Turkish parents. Through his choice to use Turkish in his class, he also became a role model for many children in the school. There are so few teachers in France²⁰ who come from immigrant communities that pupils of North African or Turkish background would be very sensitive to a teacher sharing their language and their identity. Indeed DB related to me how one young boy came to him in the school yard and asked if it were true he was Turkish, if it were true he spoke Turkish in the class, and whether he was a Muslim; on the positive replies of DB the boy added: “*Are you one of us, then?*”? DB was shocked by the question and felt very strongly that as a French teacher in “*l’école de la République*”, he should not encourage divisiveness. Through his ability to be in the middle, and because of his life experience as a bilingual, he was able to gain the confidence of this pupil and at the same time to offer him an alternative worldview,

illustrating Garcia & al's (2006: 10) statement: *“Those of us whose life experience - often not schools - has made us bilingual or multilingual also have multiple ways of using our languages, to voice an alternative worldview and a critical perspective. We have multiple associations, visions and voices, developed through our ability to be in the middle”*.

Conclusion

Through the analysis of the reflective process of the two trainees I hope to have shown that even in a very centralised hierarchical and monolingually biased education system, teachers can be key agents in the educational process from the beginning of their career. Both student teachers in this study decided their pupils had a right to have their home language acknowledged and valued. They understood that these children needed their mother tongue as well as the school language to build their future, and that they should not have to abandon one language at the expense of the other. Let us not forget that their pupils were very young and vulnerable - being schooled at age two or three in a language one has hardly ever heard before must be a very frightening experience. The two student teachers were well aware that this first experience of schooling and first encounter with a teacher could have a very powerful effect on children's whole school career, on their attitudes to learning, and their experience of socialisation.

The extent to which both trainees could negotiate language policies in everyday classroom activities and support the maintenance and development of languages other than French was limited by various constraints, but their pedagogical choices did have a tangible effect in the lives of the children concerned and their parents. The reason why it was easier for MGR than for DB to create ideological and implementational space for multilingual education lies in the remaining discriminatory attitudes towards a minority language like Turkish. In the educational sphere, the resistance to Turkish is linked to its high level of maintenance at home and the belief it is hindering the acquisition of the school language. While DB is the very

counterexample to this, he could not, on his own, dispel entrenched prejudice even when his pedagogical interventions solved learning difficulties. The institutional and ideological mechanisms of power prevented him from becoming an efficient agent of change at a larger level than the classroom. All the same, he is a social activist outside of the school context, and even if he is expected to keep these activities separate from his teaching profession, he will no doubt negotiate both professional responsibilities and make his mark.

I think both student teachers did “*exert educational effort*” and built further on the diversity of languages their pupils brought to the classroom and they went “*beyond acceptance or tolerance to cultivation of children’s diverse languages and culture resources*” (Garcia et al, 2006: 14). It is obvious much more needs to be done to support linguistically diverse students in the mainstream classroom through their whole schooling, but the choices of languages and language strategies the two trainees made for their pupils need to be understood within their wider socio-political environment.

Questions for Teachers

1. Why should bi-multilingual children be able to use their home language(s) at school?
2. How can mainstream teachers support the L1 of their bilingual pupils in class?
3. Is it possible for teachers to include languages they do not know in their pedagogical activities? How and where can they find help?
4. Should the L1 of bilingual pupils be taught in separate spaces or included in the everyday activities of the mainstream classroom?
5. How can one integrate linguistic and cultural diversity within the teaching of the school language? Within the teaching of other school subjects?

6. How can one develop an integrated or holistic approach to language education, i.e.; make links between the school language, second languages, home languages, and develop in pupils an awareness of the way language (s) work in society?
7. Is it enough to change attitudes towards minority languages and cultures in your class?

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Notes

¹ This amendment is part of a more general reform of French institutions, and was passed on July 24, 2008. The clause that Regional languages are part of France's heritage was included in Article 75 of the Constitution. However, this does not mean that the government intends to ratify the European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages of the Council of Europe:

http://www.coe.int/T/E/Legal_Affairs/Local_and_regional_Democracy/Regional_or_Minority_languages/

² For the European Commission see <http://europa.eu/languages/en/home> and http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/newprog/index_en.html
For the Council of Europe: <http://www.coe.int/t/dg4/linguistic/>

³ Thirteen foreign languages and thirteen regional languages are offered but the average per school is a choice of four. See Goullier (2006): media.education.gouv.fr/file/37/4/3374.pdf accessed on July 17, 2008

⁴ They can be summarized as follows: the belief that 1) languages are finite, stable, standardised, rule governed instruments of communication, 2) that they express a privileged link between a people and a territory and a sense of national identity and that monolingualism is the norm, 3) that some languages are endangered because of a hierarchy in languages, 4) that one can promote or protect minority languages, 5) that languages exist in relation to one another and can influence one another, 6) that language theory is universal and exists beyond ideology, thus that sociolinguistics is a neutral science.

⁵ See Pennycook, 2004 and Le Nevez, 2006 for a summary and analysis of this research

⁶ These two student teachers cannot be considered as representative of their cohort since few of their colleagues would be interested in second language education, fewer would be bilingual and very rare are those who come from an ethnic minority background, particularly Turkish. However, most student teachers would be in the same pedagogical situation with one or several emergent bilingual children in their classrooms. I wish to thank most sincerely Mado Grundler-Reck (MGR) and Dinger Budus (DB) who agreed to answer my questions and who gave me permission to quote from their research project for this study.

⁷ IUFM: “Institut Universitaire de Formation des Maîtres”. Created in 1989 to improve teacher education, these institutes have been very polemical. In October 2008, some of them became fully integrated in universities, as is the case for the IUFM of Alsace (in the East of France) described here. From September 2010, students wishing to become teachers will need to have a master’s degree and a state certification exam, which can be prepared either at an IUFM or in another university department or in both. (see: www.alsace.iufm.fr)

⁸ As explained above teachers have studied at university for three years, any subject they may choose. Then they usually study for one year for a very competitive exam, which gives them a first teaching certification. Curriculum for this state exam is very academic and includes all subjects taught at primary school and some didactics. It is only during the following year that the approach becomes more professional and directly linked to pedagogical questions and the management of a classroom. The two student teachers in this study have followed this educational path, which is the only one possible if one wants to be a certified teacher.

⁹ Andrea Young: andrea.young@alsace.iufm.fr

¹⁰ This is much higher than the national figure of 5,6% (INSEE, 2001)

¹¹ The main problems related by DB concern schooling difficulties, arranged marriages and girls being discouraged from studying after the age of 16.

¹² I am using the term *bilingual* here because I consider these children as “emergent bilinguals” (Garcia et al, 2008). The way they would be referred to in French tends to always have negative connotations, for example: *non-French speakers, of foreign origin, migrants, alloglots, allophones* etc. I use the term “bilingual” purposefully with student teachers, in order to make them attentive to the notion of emergent bilingualism and thus induce a more positive outlook towards these pupils.

¹³ Translated from French into English by author of this chapter.

¹⁴ See www.tessla.org, a website dedicated to Teacher Education for the Support of Second Language Acquisition.

¹⁵ See Hélot (2007) for more information on the provision of mother tongue classes at primary level in France.

¹⁶ For example she read the children the story of Hansel and Gretel in French, then asked the German mother to come and tell the story in German.

¹⁷ One part of her essay is entitled “*Welcoming the child along with his personal history*” (Grundler-Reck, 2008: 12)

¹⁸ Both booklets were designed specifically for each bilingual pupil and had a bilingual title page as in: “Petit dictionnaire pour T/Kleines Wörterbuch für T.

¹⁹ See the excellent thesis of Gonac'h, J. (2008) Bilinguisme et Bilittéracie chez les jeunes de la 2ème generation de migrants. Le cas de lycéens et d'étudiants d'origine turque en France et en Angleterre. Université de Rouen, France, unpublished

²⁰ It is impossible to give statistics because using ethnic criteria in France is illegal.