

# An Ethnographic Narrative of a Family Case Study to Rear Biliterate/Bilingual Children in Two Monolingual Cultures

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Rearing children to be biliterate/bilinguals in a monolingual environment is a big challenge. We know this first hand. My wife Suzanne and I have successfully completed an eighteen year family research project to rear our three children to be perfectly fluent French-English bilinguals who are functionally biliterate. What we have done is not at all unusual. Literally millions of families have reared bilingual and even trilingual children. What makes our experience unusual is that we artificially orchestrated both the strategies, and to some extent even the children's environments to ensure the success of our project. Additionally, we carefully documented our progress using a variety of research instruments and methodologies, including audio and videotape recordings, author constructed teacher and child French competency surveys, interviews with teachers, fieldnotes, psychological and diagnostic testing, and standardized assessment instruments. This narrative draws from all of these sources, relying on our detailed ethnographic fieldnotes to help reconstruct the historical development of our project.

The vast majority of the world's multilinguals speak more than one language because of the circumstances of their lives. Most learned their languages effortlessly. However, had we made no efforts to ensure that our children learned to read, write, and speak two languages, they would be monolinguals like most American children. What we would like to do in this paper is describe and document our family project so that others might benefit from our experience. Though our project is research based, we try to present our findings in a manner comprehensible to both the linguist and non-linguist alike.

Based on our scientifically documented experience, we are convinced that a carefully planned and faithfully executed strategy to rear biliterate/bilingual children in the context of a monolingual society can be successful. This does not mean that such an endeavor would be easy. There are costs and sacrifices associated with carrying out a project such as we have. Indeed, depending upon the environment, some costs to ensure that children become fluent biliterate/bilinguals could be very high indeed. However, the fruit of such an effort is priceless. To paraphrase a French saying: "*Une personne qui parle deux langues vaut deux personnes*" (A person who speaks two languages is worth two persons).

## 1. In the beginning . . .

I was twenty-one years old and eager to learn a new language. The new language I intended to learn, however, was not French—but Spanish. In my bilingual quest, I had volunteered to have a Spanish-speaking roommate assigned to my dorm room. It just seemed to make sense that the way to learn a language was to have to speak it. Ofilio from Panama became my new friend and roommate. Ofilio spoke little English, so my plan was to try to communicate with him using the little Spanish I had picked up in high school. In return, I was going to help Ofilio learn English. Though my mother was a Cajun whose parents spoke fluent French, I did not have as intense a desire to learn my ancestors' tongue as I did to learn America's second language. In fact, apart from taking French in the ninth grade, I'd never considered furthering my knowledge of Louisiana's second language, and I'm sorry to say, I was fairly ignorant of my French roots.

Since I had a car and my roommate didn't, Ofilio and I spent many hours together visiting various sites and places around LSU's campus in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. He would ask me how to say

something in English, and then I would ask him to tell me the same word or expression in Spanish. He seemed to love sharing with me his beautiful language, while also describing to me his beautiful country of Panama, to which he would be returning to his wife and children after the sweltering summer semester at LSU learning English. For my part, I felt my knowledge of Spanish was advancing nicely, and I was even making plans to take a course in Spanish before I graduated from the university.

Then *it* happened (the best laid plans . . .). After about three weeks together, Ofilio and I tromped into the dormitory cafeteria one evening for supper. We served ourselves in the cafeteria line and plopped down to eat our meal and continue our bilingual discussions. We'd no sooner begun eating than a large group of French speaking students exited the food line and began walking amongst the tables looking for places to eat in the crowded cafeteria. Two young ladies approached the only vacant spots at our table—across from Ofilio and I—and asked in heavily accented English if they could sit there. We graciously gestured that they could. They took their seats, and though I spoke little French, I knew enough to recognize which language they were speaking. So I ventured to break the ice and spoke about the only French I remembered to the girl sitting across from me on whose name tag was written “Suzanne.”

“Parlez-vous français?” I dumbly asked the long-haired, pretty girl with the large brown eyes.

“Mais oui, je parle français, et toi?” she answered happily.

“Non, je ne parle pas le français.” I exhausted my limited French.

Suzanne laughed. Her friend and roommate sitting next to her laughed. Ofilio just shook his head. And thus was born a new friendship which would develop in ways I could have never foreseen. In broken English and hand signals the two young ladies explained that they, like Ofilio, had come to Louisiana from Québec, Canada to learn English at an LSU summer program.

The four of us sat together the next night as well. I boldly asked Suzanne out to eat on the weekend. She said “oui”—and the rest is history. My plans to learn Spanish came to a quick and screeching halt, and would not be undertaken again for 24 years.

I spent much of the next three weeks with this enchanting Québécoise reducing her French-English dictionary to tatters as we walked around the expansive university campus passing it back and forth between us in our clumsy, increasingly romantic efforts at communication. My French vocabulary began to grow, as did Suzanne's English. After an intense three weeks, Suzanne had to return to Québec where she taught physical education. We continued to communicate via letters (in English) for the next five months during which time our relationship grew in absentia. During Christmastime break I just had to see her again, so I flew to Québec where I spent three weeks together with her and her family, totally immersed in only French—and the politics of separation. It was 1979, only months away from a provincial referendum on the independence of Québec from Canada.

Québec's independence movement sensitized me, for the first time, to the plight of the French language on the North American continent. My eyes were opened to the preciousness and precariousness of Louisiana's French. The Québécois were trying to preserve their vibrant tongue from the onslaught of English, and a grim future not unlike what had happened in my own home state, where English had virtually crushed Louisiana's first colonial tongue. Spending three weeks with no recourse to English also taught me another important lesson: there is no better way to learn another language than to be immersed in it. My French-speaking advanced by leaps and bounds during this short period of time, as I had to interact with Suzanne's parents and six brothers in only French. Her family was very indulgent of my fledgling efforts, and slowly repeated words for me, allowing me time to process what I was hearing.

My three weeks in the white winter wonderland of Québec quickly came to an end, and I dreaded the prospect of another long and uncertain separation from the wonderful French-speaking woman I had grown so attached to. In the very early morning hours of my last night in Canada, I proposed to my beloved—and she accepted. Five hours later I was on a Louisiana-bound jet with no idea how we'd ever realize our plans of a life together. We continued in earnest our correspondence once I was back in school at LSU, but with a slight twist. We agreed to write to each other in only French. To help me in my letter writing in particular, and my acquisition of French in general, I enrolled in a five hour

French course at LSU.

Suzanne and I were determined to get together permanently, although we didn't know whether it would be in the United States or Canada. We explored both the possibility of her moving to my state, and my moving to Québec. The prospect of moving to French-speaking Canada stoked the fires of my enthusiasm for the French language, and gave me the best possible impetus to learn the language. For her part, Suzanne was reading and teaching English in Canada in the event fate would send her South—which is precisely what it did.

Suzanne returned to LSU in the summer of 1980 for a repeat of the English language program she had attended the previous year. She also landed a teaching position with CODOFIL—the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana—teaching elementary school French as a second language to Louisiana students. We were married in August, and except for summers, have lived in the Bayou State ever since. From the beginning, we both very much wanted to become biliterate and bilingual, a feat which was going to be easier for Suzanne since she was effectively immersed in her second language. Thus, to help me in my efforts to acquire French, we agreed to speak it in our home as much as possible. We also returned to Québec for Christmas and summer vacations, which gave me periodic immersion in French. Additionally, I began taking graduate level French courses as a minor toward my Master's degree.

## **2. The inspiration**

Attuned as we were to the difficulties and challenges of learning a second language, and considering the prospect of having our own children and rearing them to be biliterate/bilinguals, two seminal events occurred which helped shape the strategy we would employ for rearing our own yet-to-be-born children. The first was an incident we witnessed when crossing the English channel in 1982. Sitting on a British ferry, we observed with interest a three year old's interaction with his French-speaking father and English-speaking mother who were seated across from us during the hour-long crossing. The father and son communicated with each other in French, while the mother and son spoke to each other only in English. The boy seemed to understand both languages equally well, and spoke French and English without accent. We were inspired at the possibilities!

The second experience which would shape our family plan was Suzanne's teaching in an elementary French immersion program in Baton Rouge. Her second grade students, with whom she spoke only French, were fluent enough after only a few months to hold a conversation in French. Therefore, by the time Suzanne was pregnant with our first born in 1984, we had devised our strategy: I would speak to the newborn child in only English, and Suzanne would communicate with him in only French. And so it was, when John was born in May 1985, he heard both French and English from day one.

## **3. John**

During John's first summer on Earth, he probably heard more French than English, as he was with his mother during all his waking hours. I was either teaching, studying French at a university in France, or taking classes at LSU. So my son was receiving less English input during his crucial early months. However, beginning in August when Suzanne returned to teaching, John would be immersed for eight hours a day, five days a week, in English speaking day care. Thus, except for summers, he remained in day care until he was four, at which time we enrolled him in pre-school. We became increasingly aware that Suzanne's French communications with John was only a fraction of the much greater amount of English with which he was bombarded. In addition to day care, he was immersed in English through TV, neighbors, his American relatives, etc. So when John was eighteen months old we reassessed our family project and made an important change. I, too, would begin to speak to John only in French to more equally balance his exposure to the two languages. Moreover, given that the communication between Suzanne and I had grown increasingly sloppy during the preceding eighteen months, with our speaking to each other in a mixture of French and English, or "Franglais", we resolved to be more disciplined and try to speak to each other in only French. Thus, we contrived to

create an all French-speaking home environment—accept for the TV (more on television later).

Though John clearly understood both languages equally well, and we didn't sense any developmental delay in his language comprehension, he had only barely begun to speak by the time he was twenty-one months old. From other research, we were aware that bilingual children might begin speaking later than monolingual children (Saunders, 1984), so we hoped that this was the case with our son. Indeed it was. About the time John turned two, he suddenly exploded in language (and hasn't stopped since). At first, he code-switched, saying things like "I'm *chaud*." (I'm hot) or "Can I have some *biscuits*." (Can I have some cookies), a common phenomenon among infant bilinguals (Lanza, 1992). However, after a few months he had sorted out his two languages, and rarely ever code-switched after that.

#### **4. and then there were two more . . .**

Valerie and Stephanie, identical twins, were added to our growing family two years after John, in May 1987. We continued what seemed a successful strategy of speaking only French between ourselves and with the girls, and of course, with John. Thus, in theory anyway, the girls were exposed to even more French from their parents than was John during their first year and half, since I spoke to them in French during this most formative linguistic period (something I didn't do with John). However, unlike John, the twins were exposed to an important additional English influence during their first two years. The twins could communicate with each other and with John, which meant that in essence the twins had two live-in peers which John did not have during his first two years. Though hard to gauge, perhaps the linguist influence of siblings is as important as the linguistic influence of parents.

Like John, the girls entered all English speaking day care at four months old, when Suzanne returned to her teaching post after the summer. Thus, they were with John almost all the time. At four years of age, the girls would also eventually attend the same English speaking university pre-school as their brother did. They even had the same teacher! So, in many ways, John and the twins lived in quite similar environments from the very beginning. The two major differences were that John had no siblings for his first two years, and I didn't speak French to John until he was eighteen months old.

After John turned 2, his French and English vocabulary began to expand quickly, though he had a decided preference for speaking English. This was somewhat troubling for us, because we had expected him to respond to us in French. This confirmed our suspicions that English was the more predominant force in John's environment, and that our combined French-speaking was not enough to counteract the otherwise monolingual English world John lived in. As we discussed the situation, we realized that John perceived his environment as essentially an English one—much like we did. Indeed, had we made no effort to speak French, we would have been speaking English as well. This was the crux of the issue—essentially all the environmental forces surrounding our family validated, encouraged, and rewarded English-speaking. Suzanne and I were the only mouthpieces for French, and this was only because we made a concerted and continued effort to speak it. Had we been around John all the time, the influence of French would have undoubtedly been greater. But with both of us away from home much of the day, English reigned during the children's waking hours.

We did the best we could at home, reading to the children from French as well as English story books. They seemed equally happy hearing a story in either language. When John was three years old, we created flash cards containing both English and French words, which we showed him separately. He seemed to learn them easily and quickly built a vocabulary over 20 sight words in each language. Still, in spite of our best efforts, French speaking, hearing, and reading represented only a relatively small part of the children's day.

Since we knew the environment was the all-important factor in determining which language someone spoke, we decided to conduct a little experiment. During the summer when John was three years old, he and Suzanne flew to Québec for a two week stay with relatives. John spent the entire time surrounded by only French speakers. Upon his return to Louisiana, he was speaking much more French. He continued to speak predominantly in French for a couple of months until he returned to English speaking day care, at which time he shifted back into his predominantly English speaking

mode at home. Thereafter, he spoke mostly in English to his sisters and us.

As for the twins, as they approached two years old, they understood our French and everyone else's English, just like their brother had when he was the same age. However, they were even slower to verbalize than John had been. We knew that twins, on average, speak later than do singletons (Savic, 1980). Thus, they had in essence two strikes against them: they had two languages to assimilate while being part of a twinship which researchers noted inhibited speech. When the twins did begin to utter their first sentences sometime around age two, they imitated their brother's English. So it seemed that once again our French speaking was not enough to counter their otherwise monolingual English environment. Indeed, the twins had the added inducement to speak English of having an older English speaking sibling—an English speaking influence John didn't have at their age. Even more, the twins could also communicate with one another in English. We concluded as parents that we were in a sense "out gunned." What we now knew beyond the shadow of any doubt was that more trips to French speaking Canada were in order.

Thus, in 1989 when John was 4;2 and the twins were 2;2 we set off for a two week vacation to Québec. John's aunt volunteered to keep him with her and his nine year old nephew. He had no recourse to English for two entire weeks. When we picked him up for our return to Louisiana we could hardly believe the transformation in John's speaking: he would only speak French for the next several months, even after re-immersion into an all English-speaking environment.

The twins, too, stopped speaking what little English they were capable of, and began to speak only French at home (which we dutifully recorded on videotape). When they re-entered daycare at 2;3, however, they would speak only English to each other, and of course to their day care providers and the other children. However, at home French became their language of choice in conversing with each other. We felt that our trip to Québec in 1989 was a watershed event in our bilingual family experiment, and the point at which we could truly point to the success of our combined strategies. We never again missed taking a summer vacation in Québec through the end of our project, gradually extending our stays until the children were spending two months in Québec.

From the time the children were in the first grade, we enrolled them in a day-long all French-speaking summer camp while in Québec. Additionally, when John was in first and third grades, we enrolled him in the residential camp program for one week and three weeks, respectively. Thus, John was exposed to more French than his sisters in the early elementary grades. We noticed after his camp sojourns that he picked up many Québécois idioms from his fellow campers, some completely new to us. Until the twins were about 9;2 and John was 11;2, we expressly solicited the informed opinions of Suzanne's family—four of whom were teachers—about our children's French speaking. They informed us that John spoke better French than the twins. The grandmother noted that the girls spoke haltingly, at least during the first few weeks of the summer vacation, but thereafter improved in their fluency. The Québec family members also noted the presence of an American accent when the children spoke French in their early elementary years, but that their accents diminished somewhat as they grew older. John's would eventually disappear completely, but only in adolescence.

## 5. Formal schooling

At 4;3 John entered a sectarian pre-school located on LSU's campus. Given that he was only speaking French at home following his return from Québec, we were sure that his pre-school teacher knew of his bilingualism, either because he told her or because French words occasionally slipped out during his classroom communications. During a parent-teacher conference I attended in November, I casually mentioned John's French speaking at home, as a sort of apology for any language problems John might have been having. His teacher was surprised—John had never mentioned his bilingualism. She said that John spoke English as well as any other child in the class.

At the end of John's pre-school year, when he turned 5;0, his teacher administered the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program Readiness to him. This test is used to determine a student's readiness for kindergarten. John scored above the readiness level in all 10 subtests. Obviously, our speaking only French to him in the home was not negatively affecting his academic performance in English. John performed well in every academic subject and grade from that time forward.

At this same time, when the girls turned 3;0, we took them for a speech screening test offered by our local school district. Both girls were individually screened by a speech pathologist who informed us that except for the uvular "R", the twins' speech was developing normally for their age. We

speculated that the twins constant exposure at home to the French uvular “R” may have been the reason for their pronunciation in English. No matter, within a short time this ceased to be problem. The girls entered the same pre-school program as John did, and were as successful as he was. At the end of the school year, when they were 5;0, they also took the Houghton Mifflin Reading Program Readiness test. Valerie scored above the readiness level in all 10 subtests, while Stephanie scored above the readiness level in all but 1 subtest (sequencing), where she scored at the readiness level.

In several videotapings I made during the early years, the interactions are telling. In one of the first episodes when John was 3;4, the interactions between the father and son were all in English. Two years later, in a long videotaping when the twins were 3;6 and John was 5;6, virtually all the interactions between all 5 family members, at several different times of the same day, were in French. This included interactions solely between the children, with no prompts from the parents, and included interactions between just the girls, and each girl and John.

A year later, when the twins were 4;8 and John was 6;8 (and in first grade), we made two recordings in two days. In one, most of the communications between the father and son were in English. The next day, most of the communications between the twins, the twins and the mother, and the twins and the father were in French. Approximately half the communications between John and the father were in English, but almost all the communications between John and his sisters were in French. In one episode, John was reading to the twins from an English book (his first grade reading assignment), while the father behind the camera is addressing John in French. John is speaking to his sisters in English and French, while they are answering him in French. The mother then enters the scene, admonishing John in French to take his English reading seriously. He complains to her in French.

I made a roughly half hour videotape of the children playing outside when the twins were 6;6 and John was 8;6 (in the first and third grades, respectively). The large majority of their communications with me and each other were in French, though they occasionally uttered a phrase in English.

## **6. French Louisiana, French Canada and quantitative analysis**

Until the fall of 1994, we lived in an almost entirely Anglophone part of south Louisiana, though we never felt uncomfortable speaking French publically with our children, as much of the population had at least some French ancestry. Typical of the kind of reaction we received to our speaking French in public was during a trip to Baton Rouge when the whole family went to Kinko's Printing so the children could have their passport pictures taken. When the two ladies working there learned that the children—ages 9;4 and 7;4— spoke French, they began to compliment them on this and asked the children to give them a demonstration.

Still, the only French the children were exposed to came either directly from us, or from videocassettes of the French versions of several feature-length Disney films (which we played constantly), and French books—of which we built a fairly sizable library. In August 1994, I secured a teaching position at the University of Southwestern Louisiana (now the University of Louisiana) in Lafayette—located in the heart of French-speaking Louisiana. All of my fieldnotes indicated the children were speaking almost only French during the month of August and into September, but also that I was also worried it would not last long after they re-entered school. I noted on 9-19-94 that this was the first time I heard any extended English conversation between my children since we returned from Quebec six weeks earlier. I worried about the encroachment of English as a result of all of the activities we were then required to do in this language. In October 1994, I taped the girls [7;5] playing in the living room for about 10 minutes. They only spoke English.

### *6.1 Vive La Télévision Française!*

In November, when the twins were 7;6 and John was 9;6, the rest of the family moved in with me in our new home in Acadiana. According the 1990 census, 50% of the community in which we lived spoke French, including many of our neighbors. Also, the house we bought had a parabolic antenna capable of receiving French Canadian stations. We were overjoyed with our new tool. On August 30, right after we signed for our new house, I recorded in my notes that . . .

Suzanne made the comment the other day that she thinks that due to the antenna, we are now over the hump in terms of ensuring that French will remain the dominant language of our family. I hope so. I must admit, the two of us have slipped up occasionally lately, when talking business. However whenever I notice we've switched to English, I immediately switch back to French and implore Suzanne to "Parle Français!"

We seized this golden opportunity to further the goals of our project. We tuned the satellite TV to a French Canadian station, and left it there for a couple of years, not even hooking up an ariel antenna to receive local programming for a full year. We got essentially all our TV entertainment and news from Québec. In addition, we either rented, bought, or checked out from the library a steady stream of French videocassettes, several of which the children watched as many as 10 to 15 times. Indeed, the children were watching so much French TV programming that I was worried that perhaps they were watching too much. I also made the following notation which underscored the power of French media to reinforce French speaking in the home:

This morning while waiting for the bus, Stephanie [7;11] used one of the new French words she apparently learned very well the other night watching "Karate Kid" [on Québec TV]. She referred to a "party" as a "boom" in French, just like a young adolescent in the film.

When John was 10;4, I recorded the following:

Yesterday John said, "C'est genial papa." [That's cool.] He learned the expression from the "Richie Rich" we have in French, and which he has already watched three times . . .

It wasn't until the spring of 1996, after 1 year and a half in our new home, that the children began to watch English TV programming on a regular basis. By then, our son [10;10] was complaining that if he didn't watch shows like the "Fresh Prince of Belaire," then he couldn't talk about it at school with his friends, and would feel "left out."

We felt it was a big setback to our project in 1997 when the Canadian TV stations went digital and we could no longer receive their signals.

We spoke French to our adult neighbors, who in turn spoke French with us and our children. John and the twins were even occasionally speaking French to our then 14 year old neighbor, who understood the language perfectly, but struggled a bit trying to speak it. We listened to a local radio station that broadcast in French on the weekend. We spoke with local shopkeepers and bank tellers in French. We drilled into our children their linguistic heritage in a fairly melodramatic, perhaps even somewhat exaggerated fashion, trying to construct our family identity as French-Canadian-American. I recorded the following in my fieldnotes on August 30, 1994:

we went to eat in a local restaurant called Poché's, located only a mile from our house. On entering the restaurant one is greeted with a sign that says "Ici on parle français." Suzanne and I made a point of speaking with the elderly people seated at our table, all of whom spoke French. We were happy that our kids could see it, and made the point of explaining to them that in this part of Louisiana, most people could still speak French.

At the end of 1994 (12-4), after fully moving into our new house in Acadiana, Suzanne summed up her feelings about the children's French speaking:

Last night before sleeping, Suzanne commented that she thought the kids were speaking much more French this year than at the same time last year. She attributed this to the two months in Quebec. I believe that it's as much a function of the fact that we now watch more French than English programming on TV, and live in a Francophone area of Louisiana.

## 6.2 *The Trojan Horse*

Even though we felt very good about the prospects of furthering our children's French speaking in Acadiana, there was a Trojan Horse of English which entered the equation, and it wasn't just English schooling. On December 7, 1994 I recorded the following:

Last night, I loaded Word Perfect 6.0 on my computer, with John at my side. As we talked about the new software and its capabilities, I was conscious that almost all of our communication was in English. It's unfortunate, but almost all of the technical language of computers is in English.

A week later (12-16) the enemy re-appeared:

Again, while working with John on the computer, I found myself explaining computer related technology to him in English. There are so many English words (hard drive, tape backup, curser, load, etc.) which I don't know in French, that apparently it's just easier to speak in English than switch back and forth in both languages.

And yet again on 1-12-1995:

Again, I noted that when I spoke with him about the computer both last night and the night before, I spoke more English than French. There are so many technical English words, like "modem", "hard-drive", "baud", "parity", "disk-drive", "bytes", "logon" , "password", "on-line" that I either don't know the French equivalents for, or don't have French equivalents, or have bad French equivalents, that it is so much easier to say these terms in English, which apparently triggers a switch to English. I try to speak in French sometimes, but am conscious that it is much more difficult, and end up switching back to English.

Three additional hobbies which John and I would pursue together, entirely in English, were coin collecting, stamp collecting, and building/flying airplanes. I had the same concern as with computers, that whenever we'd talk about coins, stamps, or airplanes, we tended to do it in English.

It worked both ways, though, as John told me on 12-20-95 that he taught our new Cajun neighbors the French word for computer: "ordinateur." The children also knew several words and expressions in French, like swimming strokes, which they had to latter learn in English. Once, Valerie [9;10] even corrected me when I told her about a weekly television show filmed in Malibu called "Baywatch." She told me I meant "Alerte à Malibu"—a show she'd only ever seen translated in French in Canada.

In general, the children seemed much more at ease speaking French in our new Cajun community. When John was 9;8 I asked him if he felt more comfortable speaking French in the Lafayette area than where we had previously lived. He said "yes." Then he said [of his friends who heard me speaking French to him one day] that they all asked him what we had said to each other. He said he was proud that he was able to show them that he spoke another language.

When John was 10;4 I recorded that, "when in public together, John always speaks to me in French: he has absolutely no qualms at all about it." A year later, just before John entered adolescence, I recorded the following in my fieldnotes which indicated John's indifference to my speaking French to him around his peers:

I [the father] pointedly spoke with him in French as I dropped him off [at school], asking him to do something for me. He responded to me in French, in full hearing of several of his comrades. He apparently is not ashamed to speak French in front of his peers (aged 10;7).

### 6.3 School French immersion

To make a great linguistic situation even greater, the local elementary schools in our new community had a French immersion program. In January 1995, when the twins were 7;8 and John was 9;8, we enrolled the children in a partial French immersion school program where approximately 2 ½ hours of academic instruction per day was in French. The teachers were native French-speaking Belgian, French, and Québécois. Research conducted a few years later indicated that the students across the state who participated in the program performed better academically than their non-immersion peers (Caldas & Boudreaux, 1999).

A month earlier, we had begun the weekly audio taping of dinnertime conversations, a practice we kept up religiously for the next six years, in both Louisiana and Québec, until it was no longer feasible. In this way, we began systematically tracking our children's language preferences. We analyzed the tapes and created a French to English ratio which we termed the bilingual preference ratio (BPR) (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2000), and longitudinally tracked the proportion of French to English spoken by our children around the table. We combined the twin's utterances, since their voices were so difficult to distinguish from each other on tape. Moreover, both the genetic and environmental factors influencing their speech were identical.

Analyzing the children's BPR's in conjunction with seminal experiences in their lives like schooling and the home environment sheds light on the relative importance of each. During the first month of our recordings, after having just moved to Acadiana and significantly increased French cultural and linguistic input, only 11% of John's and 41% of the twins' utterances around our dinner table were in French. In January, after two months in Acadiana, with the beginning of partial school French immersion, the percent of John's French utterances jumped up to 50%, while the twins' fell to 18%. In February John's BPR moved up to 73%, while the twins fell a point to 17%. In March though, the girls' BPR jumped to a whopping 88%, while John's increased slightly, to 76%.

The degree to which French had infiltrated not only the twin's speaking, but also their thinking is evidenced by an episode in March, when Valerie was 7;10. She was in the process of reading "Alice in Wonderland", for her English-speaking teacher. While we were waiting for her bus one morning, I asked her to tell me what she had read so far (she was on chapter 6). She began to recount the story to me in French, and did not shift into English the whole time that she excitedly explained the details to me. The book had never even been discussed in her French class.

In April John's BPR fell to 33%, while the twins fell to 48%. They had spent a week with their English-speaking grandparents, and returned home speaking only English. In May, John almost stopped speaking French, with a BPR of 4%, while the girls' French speaking dipped to only 15% of all utterances. Thus, if school partial French immersion had any effect on the children's French speaking, its effect diminished somewhat. One trend evidenced in this first spring taping in Acadiana which would continue for several years would be a vast diminution of French-speaking of all three children by May. As a gauge of the children's overall academic functioning, in March, when the twins were 8;10 and John was 10;8 they took the California Achievement Test (in English, of course) in school. All had a composite score above the 90th percentile. All the children finished this school year with a perfect 4.0 average. So French immersion certainly didn't seem to be hurting the English academic side of the house.

Thus, though the children's French speaking waned by May, the two month trip to all French-speaking Canada in June 1995 effectively extinguished their English speaking for a time. Not only were they immersed in French culture, we enrolled the children in an all French-speaking elementary school for three weeks in June (the end of the school year is later in Québec than in Louisiana). They passed all their assignments and tests. The following entry shows how John's integration into a francophone peer group likely had much to do with his almost instantaneous switch from speaking predominantly English to speaking predominantly French in our home within weeks.

Suzanne and I stayed in the [school] parking lot after dropping him off for lunch, and watched him walk across the playground. Very quickly he [10;1] was surrounded by all 7 boys in his class, and was the center of attention for several minutes.

It didn't hurt John's self-esteem that he scored a "100" on a spelling test (of French words, of course) in the same classroom as his French speaking peers. He studied very hard for this test, not wanting to

be embarrassed around his new friends.

The children's Québécois teachers completed surveys we created to measure the children's French proficiency, and all indicated that the children could function in a francophone school at their level, though in this first summer at the Québec school the girls' teacher indicated the twins might need some extra support in the first months of such an experience. The twins' second grade teacher in Québec also indicated that the twins did not read or write as well as a native French student of the same grade. John's teacher indicated that he did tend to confuse the gender of French nouns, something also noted by a friend of the family regarding the girls' spoken French.

During this summer we began the practice of going to the local public library as often as we could, which for several summers was as much as 2 to 3 times per week. The children would check out books they found interesting, and read them in our residence at night, weekends, or when the weather was too bad to go outside. For two summers we also enrolled all three children in the reading contests sponsored by the library, which gave awards to those students who read the most. The librarian would give a test on each book read. All three children read many books, and John won an award when he was 10;2 for the large number of books he read. Until the children were about aged 14 or 15, we also attended weekly mass in Québec. I made it a point to always hand them the missal, which was in French. I noted that the children were able to follow along with the readings from as early as when the twins were 8;2. Valerie often sang along with the French hymns, reading the lyrics from her missal.

During this summer of 1995, the children eventually quit speaking English around our Canadian dinner table—though they could have every well spoken English had they wanted to. This pattern, too, would continue for the next six years of our taping. The “norm” or expectation for the children while in Canada was to speak French. I recorded the following on July 13, 1995, just after I joined up with the family after 10 days in Louisiana:

Yesterday both Valerie [8;2] and John [10;2], at two different times, asked me to speak French when I had inadvertently addressed them in English.

Upon the children's return to Louisiana in the fall, the twins entered a new French-immersion program where 50% of their academic day was now in French. The program would never again be offered at John's grade level. Still, I felt that the family had reached an important milestone in our project following our summer of French immersion, and recorded the following in my fieldnotes on August 29:

. . . at least in our family, I feel that we've crossed a threshold in terms of French speaking: we're more comfortable in French at this point than English. I don't know how long it'll last though.

During the fall of 1995 and the spring of 1996, John's French speaking in Louisiana was falling off much faster than his sisters', who were still very gung ho about our family project. I recorded numerous incidences of Valerie, especially, demanding that her brother, and sometimes even her parents to “Parlez français!” John grew increasingly belligerent at these demands, sometimes screaming back at her “English! English! English!” In January, Valerie [8;8] was once so mad at John [10;8] for speaking English, that she threw a cushion at him while screaming “Parle français!” On another occasion a few weeks later, I heard the girls scream so violently at John to ‘Parle français!’ that I feared it would come to blows. The very next day I asked Valérie to do something for me, and said she would—if I first promised to speak French.

The girls' French speaking, though it decreased slightly, remained high throughout the fall, then dipped a bit by the spring of 1996, when they turned 9;0. John's French speaking remained high for a couple of months after his return from Québec, but then fell off dramatically in the spring of 1996, reaching almost zero French in May when he turned 11;0.

However, as evidence of the strong influence of environment on all three children, after we returned to Québec in the summer of 1996, where we re-enrolled the children for three weeks in an all French-speaking elementary school, their English speaking effectively ended yet again. The girls [9;1] even scored first and second best on a social studies test in their Québec school, validating the efficacy of their Louisiana school French immersion experience. John went from speaking almost no French around our dinner table in May, to speaking almost no English around our Canadian dinner table in

June, a pattern which continued for the next five years.

After the three-week stint in the Québec elementary school, I had the children's teachers complete the same survey on the children's French capabilities as their previous year's Québec teachers had done. This time, the teachers all gave the children [twins 9;1 and John, 11;1] higher marks in written, spoken, and oral comprehension, with the indication that all three children could function in a Francophone school on their grade level. John's teacher indicated the presence of a moderate English accent when John spoke French, but the twins' teachers noted a strong English accent in the girls' spoken French.

During this summer vacation, the children read French in their beds almost every night. Both Valerie and Stephanie, who threw themselves into the local library contest with gusto, read the maximum number of books which could be read for the competition. I found many of the books, which in the twins' category were written on as high as an 11-year old's level, challenging. Valerie and Stephanie finished ahead of most of their Québec peers [9;2].

I made mention in my fieldnotes of how fluent I found their speech after just one week in Québec, and how the children spoke the language without hesitation. I also noted how they did not confuse the gender of French nouns and adjectives as much as they had during our previous summer sojourn, writing in my notes an example of a sentence I heard Valerie [9;2] utter: "Regarde la belle lune, ça veut dire le jour va être beau demain." She got all of the genders of her articles and adjectives correct, like "le", "la", "beau" and "belle."

#### *6.4 The Stirring of adolescence*

Upon our return to Louisiana in the fall of 1996, John's [11;4] shift back into English was almost immediate. By September his French speaking had fallen from more than 90% to less than 10%. He was now in the seventh grade, and strongly identified with his decidedly all-English speaking American peer group at school. He commented to me that "Speaking French is not cool." The twins, who returned to their French-immersion school program, continued to speak more French than English around our dinner table through January 1997, in spite of John's English speaking around the table.

In November 1996, when the girls were 9;6 and John was 11;6 we went to Disney World and the Kennedy Space Center in Florida. As an example of how comfortable the girls were in French, when we sat down to watch an IMAX film at the space center, both girls requested the headsets which translated the English narration into French! John, however, preferred to listen to the show in English.

During the spring of 1997, when they turned 10;0, the twins' French speaking had fallen to only about 15% of their dinnertime utterances. Their brother, who turned 12;0 in May of 1997, did not speak even one word of French around our dinner table during this last month before the summer vacation.

Still, there were inspiring moments in the spring of 1997, like an event which occurred after John [11;10] had seen Ritchie Rich in French at least 10 times. He corrected my French when I called my tool sockets "un set de clé." John told me the correct expression was "les clés à douille"—which he'd learned from this film.

When we returned to Québec for two months in the summer of 1997 when the twins were 10;1 and John was 12;1, a big concern of John from the outset was his English accent when speaking French. When we were considering re-enrolling the children in the Québécois elementary school (which we did not do), John was reticent because he wasn't sure he'd "fit in" with his accent. A week after arriving he told me he'd ask a friend of one of his cousins if he had an accent, because he perceived that this boy would be more objective.

Accent or not, in June 1997, the children's French speaking shot up to more than 90% of all uttered words around our Canadian dinner table. The children did attend a daytime French speaking summer camp, but they did not return to the Québécois elementary school. It was obviously not necessary to prompt their French speaking in our Canadian home. As for furthering the children's French literacy during the summer of 1997 in Canada, when we discovered they adored reading any kind of comic books, we bought literally dozens for them, which they devoured, reading them each many times for hours on end. They also spent much of their free time in our house watching their favorite television programs in French (we had a household rule against listening to the one English station our TV could receive).

The children attended the summer day camp during the month of July, three weeks of which

sometimes involved activities that included reading and writing in French. The children had the same Québécoise counselor during this time, who completed our French survey on each of the children. She did note that all 3 children could function “très bien” in a French school at their level. However, she also noted that the girls not only wrote more grammatically correct French (immersion program?), but also that they had less of an English accent than John when they spoke French.

Both John’s French comprehension and speech, however, were clearly better than my own. One incident that summer, highlights this fact. John was with me when I was having trouble trying to explain something technical to a Québec flight instructor. Finally, John took over and clarified for the man my point. A look of understanding spread across the man’s face. The instructor was apparently so impressed with John’s French that the next time I met him, he inquired after John and commented on his excellent language proficiency.

However, upon our return to Louisiana in August, John’s French speaking immediately fell off to near zero within two months. His adolescent opposition continued as well, typified by a comment he made to his mother while we were eating pizza around the dinner table and Suzanne got up to get forks. John [12;6] called out to her, “In America, we eat pizza with our hands!” Québécois eat pizza with a knife and fork. He did write in French, though he asked Stephanie to help him. As further evidence of John’s ambivalence towards his biliteracy, at the end of the school year John [13;1] seemed happy to tell me that he scored the highest on a French exit exam at his middle school.

The twins, who were now solidly pre-adolescents [10;4], also dramatically decreased their French speaking, going from 95% of their dinnertime speech in August, to only about 25% in September. This was in spite of their return to a French immersion school program where all of their peers could speak French if they so chose—something we never observed them doing even one time outside of the classroom.

I videotaped at least a half hour of Christmas morning interaction in 1997 when the twins were 10;7 and John was 12;7. There was much communication amongst all family members. Suzanne and I spoke some French, but the children spoke only English. The audiotapes confirmed the children’s overwhelming preference for English in December, with only about 1/4 of the girls’ utterances being in French. However, less than 1 % percent of John’s dinnertime utterances were in French. John was expressing concern over his accent again in February 1998, while we were watching the Olympics together and listening to a German speak accented English. John [12;9] turned to me and asked me if he spoke French with an accent as pronounced as the man. I, of course, said no.

Neither John [13;0] nor the twins [11;0] were speaking one word of French in May 1998. Though the twins’ friends and classmates could all speak French, they only communicated in English when not being supervised by their native French-speaking teachers. Given that the twins were in a French immersion program, yet followed a linguistic pattern very similar to their brother at the same age, suggests that the effects of immersion for approximately 3 hours of day in classroom French in Louisiana did not extend beyond the classroom. Otherwise, they would have spoken more French than John at the same age. We have concluded that the children’s peer environment during adolescence had a greater effect on their language choice than did either school or parents (Caldas & Caron-Caldas, 2002). The children were exhibiting parallel monolingualism more than classic bilingualism.

In addition to our quantitative evidence, we have other ample longitudinal evidence from our fieldnotes pointing to the strength of the children’s Louisiana and Québec peer groups on their language choice. Before they were adolescents, the children had few qualms about speaking French in public in Louisiana. However, when John was 11;10, he commented, “. . . if you speak French outside of school, your friends will think you’re a nerd because they don’t know how to speak French. If everyone speaks English, he commented, why would anyone want to speak French?” Three months later, when the twins were 10;1 and John was 12;1, John called his sisters “bilingual nerds” when they harassed him for not speaking more French. When John was 12;8, one can see from my following note a dramatic change in the importance which John’s peers took on:

. . . when I went to John’s middle school to pick him up after band practice, I ran into him with a group of his friends. When I addressed him in French, he said, kind of under his breath, “No, Dad!” I again addressed him in French and he said, more forcefully, “Dad, No!” When I did it a third time, he said almost in desperation, “Shut up Dad!” The message was clear: he didn’t want me speaking French to him around his friends. [OK, maybe I provoked him.]

Still, though they may not have preferred to speak French in Louisiana, all three children wrote it from fairly early on. The children communicated with their Québec friends in both written letters and e-mail, always in French. They also wrote their Québécois grandmother in French. Once, when Valerie and I were traveling to Chicago for an academic conference, Valerie [9;11] sat down at our hotel room table and wrote one set of grandparents a card in English, and her French-speaking grandmother a card in French.

Immediately upon crossing the border into Québec in June 1998, John [13;1] confided in me at a rest area that he didn't want to speak French. He said he didn't want everyone to hear his accent. Not 10 minutes later, Valerie [11;1] commented in the car (in French) that "Now we're all going to speak French all the time!"

What a difference 2 months can make. When John [13;3] returned from a two-week bicycling expedition with his French summer camp buddies at the end of July, we only heard French that day. In fact, when one of the girls spoke English, John admonished her to "Parle français!" to which both girls immediately taunted him with "English! English, English!" This same scenario played itself out the next day. It was the mirror image of what had been happening in Louisiana, except that the girls did immediately revert back to speaking French in both cases, as they probably spoke predominantly in French during the summer of 1998, like every previous summer spent in Canada. Though our tape recorder mal-functioned during the July tapings, and thus can't demonstrate empirically precisely what proportion of their utterances were in French, the majority of their conversation around the table only 9 days after arriving in Québec was in French. I did note that I seemed to be hearing more English than in previous summers, and this was a concern to me.

However, in July Valerie and Stephanie spent the majority of each day at the summer day camp, totally immersed in French. The twins even put on a play during their last week (with their counselor) which they jointly wrote—all in French. All three children were so obviously fluent in French that we felt a little guilty giving their various camp counselors our survey soliciting their input about the children's French competency.

Back in Louisiana, the children had shifted back to almost all English by September 1998. They were writing their Québécois friends in French, though. John [13;5] asked Valerie [11;5] to proof read a letter he had written in French to a Québécois friend, a sort of validation of the efficacy of the twin's French immersion school experience. During the rest of the fall 1998, and spring 1999 the children essentially spoke no French around our dinner table.

In the summer of 1999, John [14;2 to 14;3] began working full time at the French speaking summer camp, residing there full time from June 24 to the end of July. He lived in a hut with about 10 other Québécois teenagers, who all worked as a team in the camp kitchen. I spoke with John on several occasions on either the phone, or at the camp itself during one of his breaks. He never, as best I could tell, spoke any English during our conversations. Moreover, both Suzanne and I noted that he spoke with a strong Québec dialect, to the extent of saying Québec Galicized expressions borrowed from American English such as "cool man," with a French accent. We were absolutely amazed at his fluency.

An incident occurred at the camp which underscores John's linguistic transformation and identification with the Québec peer culture within which he was immersed. I had unconsciously shifted from French to English while talking to John [14;2] in his camp sleeping quarters. John stopped me in a hushed tone, as he pointed to a closed door, saying (in French), "Shhhh, papa, don't speak English. There's someone in that room." What made this all the more interesting was that several of John's co-workers were bilingual, and able to speak English. Nevertheless, French was the language of choice between these boys, and John wanted to fit in. On two occasions, while John was on break and visiting our residence, I had apparently slipped into English again. John chided me, asking me why I didn't speak French? I noted that during that particular summer I seemed to be speaking more English than anyone else in the family.

During this summer, when Valerie was 12;1, she was reading adult level novels in French, entirely of her own accord. For example, she read the translated John Grisham book, "*L'Associé*" (*The Partner*) as easily as if it had been in English. She seemed to have no particular preference for either French or English written material.

Back in Louisiana during the fall of 1999, the children uttered not one recorded word of French around our dinner table. The few times I noticed John speaking in French was when he was speaking

about something that happened in Québec that summer, but he would shift immediately back into English. The transformation back to monolingual Americans was abrupt and complete. One morning in September I dropped the twins off at their middle school, where they were taking French immersion French, Social Studies and Science courses. As they climbed from the car I read aloud the French phrase written on a new, large sign in front of the school proudly proclaiming that the French immersion program was here. Stephanie [12;4] said, “Shhhhhh!!!”—she didn’t want me reading aloud in French around her French immersion peers.

Though his shift back to English was immediate, John, now in ninth grade, commented to me that he really liked the required novel in his English class (*Les Misérables*, translated into English) because “I can read French and every other word is in French”. Nevertheless, about this same time (ninth grade) he was studying for an English test that involved conjugating verbs and pronouns, and I tried to show John how to do this using what he had learned in French. But he stopped me fast, not wanting to hear anything in French, and vowing never to take another foreign language class if he could avoid it. A couple of days later while discussing his English class, he complained how hard the study of English was for him in general, compared to his other classmates who seemed to get some of the grammatical rules, etc, quicker than him. He concluded by exclaiming, “I blame it on being bilingual.” I asked why, and he answered something like, “I have twice as much stuff in my head as everyone else. I have to remember twice as much as everyone else. Jeez, it isn’t fair!” [14;4].

About this same time, Valerie [12;4] complained to me that being taught classes in French immersion, like social studies, was going to hurt her test scores when they take the ACT, because she wasn’t being taught the terms in English like they’ll appear on the test. Indeed, I had actively observed Valerie and Stephanie studying their homework together over a two day period in September 1999, remarking that when they were studying for courses in English, they spoke English, but as soon as they shifted to a course administered in French (i.e., French, Science, or Social Studies) they immediately shifted into French, and pretty much stayed in French while discussing that subject. An example of something I heard one night involved the shift to social studies. They were reviewing the great European explorers, and referred to the Portugese Henry the Navigator as “Henri le Navigateur” and his explorations of the “Côte d’Afrique, en cherchant une route vers les épices de l’est.” [12;4] I was tempted to ask them if they knew how to say these things in English, and myself wondered if they’d recognize this material on a standardized test in English.

A month later, as I drove the girls to a football game where we were to sit by one of their French immersion classmates, Stephanie [12;6] implored me not to speak French with her friend. I ignored her, and as we were walking up the bleachers and I raised my hand to greet their friend, Stephanie grabbed my arm and hissed “Don’t speak French to her.” But I said “Bonjour, comment ça va?” anyway, and the friend answered something like “ça va bien.” That was the last French word spoken by any of the three girls the rest of the game.

Suzanne and I were still speaking more French than English around our table, but it was apparently not increasing our children’s preference for French. Once in October, the girls were explaining to me in English what their various teachers were teaching. In describing one of their French teachers (who teaches social studies) they quoted something that he said to the class, repeating the quote in English. I asked if he had said it in English or French, and they told me it was in French. What a change from a few years earlier when they would recount to me in French what a teacher had said to them in English.

In December 1999 when John was 14;8 and the twins were 12;8 we spent two weeks at our Québec residence to celebrate the arrival of the year 2000. Though we had some interaction with Suzanne’s family, we spent most of our time together as a family. We also made two tape recordings during this period. More than 90% of John’s utterances were in English, whereas almost 99% of the twin’s recorded words were in English. It appeared that with no Québécois peer group influence, English prevailed. So just physically being in Québec was not enough to trigger their French speaking.

During the spring of 2000, essentially all communication by the children around the dinner table was in English, though over half of the parents’ speech was in French. We seemed to have less and less linguistic influence on our children.

During the summer of 2000 I traveled with Stephanie [13;2] outside of Canada for three weeks, and John [15;2] once again lived and worked at the French speaking summer camp. Valerie attended a two week horse camp associated with the French speaking camp. Thus, we could only make two tapings during the entire summer, during breakfast and supper on July 28, 2000. John had just returned

from more than a month of total immersion with his French speaking peers. He spoke not one word of English at breakfast, while over 90% of his supper time conversation was in French. By contrast, the girls (mostly Stephanie) spoke about half French/English during those two audiotapings. Stephanie had been exposed to the least French that summer, and had not been immersed in the Québécois peer group of the residential summer camp.

The shift back to all English in August 2000 was absolute and complete—the children uttered not one word of recorded French around our dinner table during August—or the rest of the fall for that matter. I shot a brief, less than 10 minute videotape when the twins were 13;4 and John was 15;4—there was not one word of French uttered by the cameraman (me), John, or the twins.

We took a two week vacation to Québec during this winter break, and I made two tape recordings at meals shared between the five of us at our Canadian residence. Though well over 90 percent of the words uttered by Suzanne and I were in French, the children did not speak even one word of French. We had apparently lost what little linguistic influence we may still have had. Moreover, we had additional evidence that it took more than geography to spark French-speaking—it took French-speaking peers.

We suspended our tapings after December 2000 when John was 15;8 and the twins were 13;8. At this point we decided there seemed no good reason to make recordings of conversations which in Louisiana were all in English. Suzanne and I sensed that an important phase in our family project had in a sense come to an end. We had succeeded. Our children spoke French and English fluently, but they had demarcated spaces where either the one or the other language was appropriate for them. At this point in their adolescent development, French was essentially a language only to be used in a French speaking environment, and English was only to be spoken in an English dominant environment like south Louisiana. We knew at this point that any suggestion to the contrary would be counter productive, and useless. They were approaching young adulthood when they would make their own decisions, including what to speak and when to speak it.

As was our custom, we returned to Québec for two months in June and July 2001. Once again, John lived and worked full time at the French speaking summer camp. Suzanne and I dropped by the camp to talk with John [16;2] just outside the camp kitchen where he supervised a staff of teenaged kitchen help. We chatted with him for perhaps 10 minutes just out of earshot of his colleagues. I did not hear even one word in English, except maybe if you count “steam cooker”—which was apparently only referred to by its English name. Also this summer, John, whose only formal French instruction was a half year of French immersion in fourth grade and 1 year in a French course in the seventh grade, was reading Tolkein’s *Lord of the Rings* trilogy in French.

We noted that Valerie and Stephanie seemed to be speaking a lot of English around our residence in June. I noted, for example, that one day when I went cycling with the twins, Suzanne, and an aunt who didn’t speak English, I spoke with the girls almost exclusively in English. The aunt also noticed, and politely pointed this out to us. The twins took a two week bicycle trip in New Brunswick with about 15 mostly French speaking campers. Upon their return, we noted much more French-speaking.

Back in Louisiana in August the children essentially dropped French like a hot potato—with a few rare exceptions. When Valerie [14;3] began explaining to us in the car something that happened on her bike trip in New Brunswick, she immediately shifted into French, and perhaps for 3 to 5 minutes uttered not ONE word in English. Suzanne and I both looked at each other in acknowledgment of her shift into French. Moreover, she spoke very fast. When Valerie began taking French IV in ninth grade [14;3] she told us she wanted to get out because it was too easy for her. In fact, she said rather immodestly “there’s nothing left for me to learn. I’ve learned it all already.” In August she put together a scrapbook of her two week summer bicycle trip around New Brunswick with her French speaking camp mates. She chose, with no prompting from us (as if we had any influence at this point anyway) to write all of the captions in French.

At this time John [16;4] didn’t exhibit the same degree of confidence in his French literacy skills as his sisters did. He was now attending a residential school in Louisiana for advanced students, and e-mailed us that his French teacher didn’t like the way he conjugated verbs. Still, he was apparently able to keep all this “stuff” in his head, because when John was 16;0, he took a French placement test at this same residential school for advanced students, and scored higher than any other entering student who had ever taken this assessment.

During the summer of 2002 John [17;2] lived and worked at the camp for most of the summer, and the girls [15;2] attended a full time, 5 week, live-in counselor training program at the all French

speaking camp. After their training session, they then worked at the camp for another two weeks. As in the previous three years, John spoke French with us and others with no noticeable English accent. It seemed that the twins' French speaking acquired a fluency it never had before during this summer, though it also seemed that both girls had a slight accent when they spoke the language. However, we noticed they used Québécois idioms which we never heard in the past. There was no hesitation in their speech either. Upon returning from Québec, Stephanie [15;3] stated that her goal next year at the French summer camp was to learn to speak unaccented French. Both Stephanie and Valerie expressed admiration for a fellow camper who had a francophone mother and Korean father. They said that he spoke perfectly unaccented French and English, which is what they were striving for.

## 7. New phase

At around this time our project may have been entering a new phase, as our children were all past early adolescence, and indeed, John was moving toward young adulthood. With fairly healthy self-images and self-confidence in the kinds of individuals they were becoming, there appeared once again occasional—though still rare—spontaneous French communication with the children in public places in Louisiana. One such incident took place when I was at the Cingular telephone store with Stephanie [14;4], and told her something in French that I did not want the salesman to understand. In what I felt was remarkable at the time, she answered me completely in French, and with none of the reticence or self-consciousness I would have expected the year before. On another occasion, the twins, Suzanne and I visited Old Mexico during our Christmas break in 2002. Suzanne suggested that while in Mexico, we speak only French, to distinguish us from American tourists. The girls [15;8] not only didn't protest, and went along with the plan, they actually chided me for MY English speaking on several occasions. They spoke French without self-consciousness. Additionally, they tried their best to speak Spanish with the various vendors, though their command of the language was very limited (they know a few words and phrases learned in Spanish I at their high school).

Another very telling experience occurred when John [17;1] called us from his American girlfriend's house just before leaving for Québec (and thus after 9 months immersed in Louisiana English). His entire conversation with Suzanne was in French in the presence of this English speaking friend. This would have been unimaginable a year earlier. Yet another example of John's increasingly confident self-image as a bilingual occurred in the hallway of his American high school in a three way discussion between me, John [17;8], and his Belgian calculus teacher. She was a native French speaker, so I initiated the conversation with her in French. She then spoke only French with John and I, and John spoke with both of us in French—in the middle of the hallway. At this writing, John is seriously considering attending McGill University in Montreal—because Montreal is a bilingual city. What a contrast with his attitude of five years earlier.

## 8. Conclusion

As of this writing the twins were 16;0 and John is 18;0. We consider our project largely completed. We have reared fluent French/English bilingual children who are also largely bi-literate, though perhaps not quite as literate as native French-speakers their age. In the case of John, who was able to live and work at a French summer camp for four consecutive summers beginning when he was aged 14;2, he speaks both languages without accent. The twins, who probably write in French better than their brother as a result of 5 ½ years of school French immersion, appeared to have somewhat of an accent in French at age 16;0. Their accents may be in part a result of taking 5 ½ years of French immersion with peers who all spoke French with an English accent. However, they were recently hired to work full time at the same summer camp which extinguished John's English accent, and they could conceivably work there for the next three summers. The power of the peer group is undeniable and extremely well documented (Bankston & Caldas, 1996; Caldas & Bankston, 1997; Bankston, Caldas, & Zhou, 1997). During the coming summers the twins will be completely immersed with their Québécois peers, with almost no recourse to English—and no peers who speak French with an English accent. Thus, they too could lose what little accent in French they currently have. This is to be seen.

Our experience of rearing three bilingual children who speak, read, and write two languages has been a challenge, and at times has required a great deal of discipline, effort, and expense. We had a

plan, which we implemented and largely adhered to over an 18 year period. We modified the plan where necessary. For example, we realized after the first year and a half that both adults in the family would have to speak French in the home. We realized at about year three that we would have to make frequent trips to an all French speaking environment—Québec. When the children were old enough to stay full time at a summer camp, we sensed that this was probably the optimal (though very expensive) strategy to insure fluency in French. At about this same time we began to realize the importance of media, and began buying and renting French videocassettes, buying and checking out French books, buying French comic books, tuning our Louisiana radio to French Cajun stations, and ultimately, acquiring French TV via a satellite hookup. Moreover, we diligently and in some measure, probably fanatically employed these various media, to the extent of denying English TV in our home in the U.S. for more than a year. We also made every effort to link French in our family with our shared French heritage.

We splurged and bought a summer cottage in Québec, as a base which would allow us to spend entire summers immersed in the French language. As the children approached and entered adolescence, we had to modify our plan yet again in the face of perfectly normal adolescent opposition. We could no longer control the children's media as before. We even had to discontinue speaking French to them while they were around their friends—even though their friends were French-English bilinguals! However, fortunately, at this same time the children adopted the same attitude with their French-speaking peers in Québec. They not only didn't want us speaking English around their Québécois peers, they didn't want us speaking English within the confines of our cottage far from the ears of their peers. Thus, after approximately age 11, it was the children's peer groups, and not us, that furthered and perfected our family project.

What we have accomplished proves the viability of our plan. One can indeed raise bilingual/biliterate children, though the children may spend much of their time in a monolingual environment (e.g., the U.S.). Much other research documents children successfully acquiring two languages at the same time, even though they may have only limited exposure to one of the two languages outside of the home (De Houwer, 1991; Fantini, 1985; Saunders, 1982, 1988). However, in our case we had to perhaps work harder artificially creating a conducive home environment for learning the minority language. We then incurred considerable expense to transport our children to an all French-speaking culture (Québec). In short, our project took planning, discipline, diligence, sacrifice, enthusiasm, research, family stability, money, some luck, and quite a few years. Obviously, not every family who desires to rear bilingual children will have all of these resources. However, we believe that our project certainly proves that the venture is doable, and the outcome well worth the effort. Those Americans wishing to rear bilingual English/Spanish speaking children, and living within reasonable traveling distance of the Mexican border, do not need to travel nearly as far as we did to find total linguistic/cultural immersion in the minority language. Indeed, many of these interested parents do not even need to leave the U.S, making the task of rearing Spanish/English bilinguals a considerably easier task. Still, rearing fluent, competent biliterate/ bilingual children will require a good deal of effort for most parents. However, if the experience of our project is generalizable at all, we can attest that in retrospect our efforts now seem small in relation to the payoff. Now, we're looking to the future and hoping for bilingual grandchildren.

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