Negotiating and appropriating the 'one person, one language' policy within the complex reality of a multilingual crèche in Strasbourg

Eloise Caporal-Ebersold[*] and Andrea Young
University of Strasbourg

The aim of this article is to analyse the early childhood education and care (ECEC) language policy in the city of Strasbourg, focusing on an ethnographic case study of a newly established bilingual English–French crèche in the city. In France, establishing an early childhood education structure – more specifically, a day care centre catering to young children – involves close coordination with national, departmental, and local government entities. Associations that embark on this process go through a long administrative process.

Taking this fact into consideration, we maintain that to understand the language policy in ECEC, it is imperative to examine the overlapping participation of different government entities and services from the national, regional, departmental, city, and local levels. Our data reveal that the conceptualization of the language policy at a newly created bilingual crèche structure was highly influenced by top-down language policies and pervading language ideologies. Yet, the crèche personnel needed to interpret, negotiate, and appropriate this policy in order to consider its feasibility and to take into account the children's interests and welfare within the normal functioning of this early years structure.

Keywords: early childhood education and care (ECEC); language policy; bilingual education; France; one person one language (OPOL); language acquisition

Introduction

This paper will present and analyse the overt and covert language policies for early childhood education and care (ECEC) in the city of Strasbourg by looking into the case of the first bilingual English–French parental crèche established in the city, which is located in Alsace, close to the border with Germany. It will highlight the overlapping influences that contribute to the enactment of its language policy. The multi-layered dimension (Johnson, 2009) of the crèche's language policy planning can be more fully understood by examining the basic principles of its operation within the French setting. Thus, to establish the context of the case study, we will provide pertinent information about the organization of ECEC services in France in general, and the services provided by the city of Strasbourg in particular.

Multilingualism and multiculturalism are two realities that confront and challenge different sectors in the city of Strasbourg: education, public and private spheres, economic life, and urban spaces (Hélot *et al.*, 2015). In the education sector, policymakers appear to be struggling to reconcile republican values enshrined in the constitution with accommodating and embracing linguistic diversity. This is clearly evident in the ECEC sector, where the evolving linguistic discourses regarding language practices in the city are influenced not only by national, regional,

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* Corresponding author – email: eloisecaporal2003@yahoo.com

departmental, and city level authorities, but also by associations and private individuals. Although the multilingual reality of Strasbourg is partially acknowledged in documents and in the public discourse of officials, the city's overt and covert language policies in ECEC at times reveal conflicting and divergent messages.

Persisting monolingual stance of the French education system

According to the French Constitution, 'la langue de la République est le français' (Article 2 of the Constitution, National Assembly, 1958). Although the official language of the state is French, this should not, according to the National Education Inspectors' annual report of 2009 (published by the Ministry for Education, MEN, in 2010), prevent educators from taking into account – or from working with – the languages spoken by the children in their charge:

> In France, plurilingualism has not taken effect. According to the Constitution, throughout the whole of France, the sole official language is French. This steadfast principle of the French Republic does not forbid, however, the development of pedagogical practices which value home languages and cultures.
>
> (MEN, 2010: 135, our translation)

This statement makes it clear that the ministry is aware that the top-down policies endorsing plurilingual and intercultural education, as promoted by the Council of Europe (e.g. see Cavalli *et al.*, 2009), are rarely enacted by educators working in multilingual contexts in France. The authors also point to the possible reasons for this reluctance to acknowledge and embrace multilingualism: a latent fear that to acknowledge and work with the children's home languages is in some way to undermine the status of the national unifying language.

Studies have revealed that many professionals working in education in France do not feel comfortable with the idea of practising policies of linguistic and cultural inclusion for a variety of reasons (see Young, 2014a, for a fuller discussion). The reasons which lie behind this stance are embedded in widely shared ideologies (Young, 2014b), rooted in the historical and political development of the French nation state (see Kremnitz, 2013), and nourished by a series of what Grosjean (2010) terms 'bilingual myths'. Normative, standard French is viewed as the cement of the nation and its mastery as an act of citizenship. Partial linguistic competence in French and mastery of a language other than French can sometimes be interpreted as a refusal to adhere to French values and as a step towards 'communautarisme' (i.e. the splitting of society into communities, perceived as a threat to national unity; see Sistare, 2010). This negative judgement of speakers of other languages is fuelled by fear, misinformation, and a lack of knowledge about bilingualism and language acquisition. Children and families are often labelled as 'non-francophone' (see Young, 2014c, for a discussion of the terminology used in France), whereas their home languages are rarely registered and their linguistic skills in languages other than French are ignored by many professionals. Such visions and practices of exclusion expose a monolingual mindset, anchored in a republican education ideology that has, since its inception, sought to unify citizens through the refusal to acknowledge any language other than the national language and those languages taught as school subjects.

The recently published ministerial curriculum documents for pre-school education (MEN, 2015) timidly attempt to bring about change through championing an '[a]wareness of linguistic diversity' under the heading 'Éveil à la diversité linguistique', stating that children should be able to:

> discover the existence of languages, some of which may be very different from those with which they are familiar. Through playful activities (games, rhymes …) or media through which

they can make meaning (DVDs of well-known stories, for example), they become aware that communication can take place in languages other than French.

<div align="right">(MEN, 2015: 8, our translation)</div>

It remains to be seen if and how attitudes and ideologies will evolve in order for education professionals to be in a position to enact these policies.

The French ECEC system: An overview

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Directorate for Education (2004) reports that France is among those European countries with a long tradition of ECEC services, which dates back to the 1800s. As the fertility rate in France – along with Ireland – is the highest in Europe, with 820,000 babies born in 2014 (Observatoire Nationale de la Petite Enfance, 2015), ECEC is at the core of French family policy. In support of its services, France allocated 1 per cent of its gross domestic product, which amounts to €15.1 billion, in 2013. An extensive and well-defined allowance system for families with children, and diversified childcare services for children below 6 years, provide parents with a wide array of care options to choose from.

Table 1: ECEC workforce qualifications

Type of provision	Staff title	Pre-service education required	Qualification level
Childminding	Assistante maternelle (child carer)	120 hours of training	CAP Petite Enfance (Certificate)
Crèche	Puéricultrice (child nurse)	Nurse or midwife diploma (*Bac + 3) + one-year specialization *The baccalauréat or bac is a national diploma certifying the completion of secondary education	Diplôme d'Etat d'infirmier or DEI (State diploma)
Crèche (and other structures of children 0–7)	Éducateur de jeunes enfants (educator)	Three years in post-Bac in special training centres	Le diplôme d'Etat d'éducateur de jeunes enfants or DEEJE (State diploma)
Crèche	Auxiliaire de puériculture (auxiliary staff)	A one-year formation with on-the-job training	
Ecole maternelle (pre-school, 3–5 years old)	Professeur des écoles (teacher)	Three-year university degree + two years professional education, two-thirds of which will be a practicum and one-third tertiary-level (training college) education	Masters degree
Ecole maternelle (pre-school, 3–5 years old)	agents territoriaux spécialisés des écoles maternelles ou ATSEM (classroom assistants)	Secondary vocational level certificate in early childhood studies	Certificat d'aptitude professionnelle (CAP) Petite Enfance (Certificate)

<div align="right">Moss and Bennett (2010)</div>

It has to be clarified that in France, ECEC covers services directed at children aged from 0 to 6 years, outside the compulsory age of schooling. Similar to a majority of countries in Europe, France practises the 'split system', in which different government ministries and agencies are responsible for the governance, regulation, funding, and services of two age groups. More precisely, for the age group 3 to 6, the Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, MEN) is

responsible for the educational programme, preparation, training, and licensing of the teachers; whereas local government is responsible for logistics, canteen services, and the personnel (*agents territoriaux spécialisés des écoles maternelles*, ATSEM) who support the teacher during class time and look after the children after school hours. For the younger age group, which covers children from 0 to 3 years of age, the Ministry for Families, Childhood and Women's Rights (*le Ministère des Familles, de l'Enfance et des Droits des femmes*), the national family allowances fund (*la Caisse nationale des allocations familiales*), together with local family allowance funds (*Caisses d'allocations familiales*), are responsible for the services and allowances. The child and maternal health services (*protéction maternelle et infantile*, PMI) are responsible for licensing and monitoring services, meaning that before an ECEC structure is allowed to operate, the PMI must ascertain that it conforms to their prescribed standards.

Professionals who work with the younger group of children are required to complete relevant diplomas or certifications, training, and specified hours of internships. Table 1 shows the educational level of professionals, which consequently determines their salary. Although these professionals are trained to handle the education and care components in dealing with young children, their training does not prepare them to deal with the realities and challenges of multilingualism and multiculturalism in the workplace (Hélot *et al.*, 2015), especially with children and parents from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

Understanding the multilingual situation of the city of Strasbourg

Examining Strasbourg from the point of view of language policy is interesting and needs to be investigated on several levels. Its linguistic diversity can be attributed to a number of endogenous and exogenous factors (Hélot *et al.*, 2015). Historically, the Alsace region had been annexed by Germany twice before being officially returned to France as a symbol of reconciliation between the two countries after World War II. The historical legacy of the Alsace region, which shares many cultural traditions with neighbouring Germany, sets it apart from the rest of the country. The Alsatian language, which is a regional variant of the German language, is still present in the city and is taught in some schools.

At present, the city hosts a number of European institutions, embassies, consulates, and international companies. It has the second largest university in France, which offers opportunities for economically advantaged immigrants and migrants. As immigration levels have grown in the country throughout the years, the city has received immigrants from the Maghreb, African, and Asian countries. At the time of writing, with the ongoing conflict in Syria, the city has received Syrians as well. Recently, Strasbourg University opened a French language class for refugees, including Syrians, free of charge (*L'Actu*, 2015).

In addressing the multilingual situation of Strasbourg, the LUCIDE city report (Languages in Urban Communities – Integration and Diversity for Europe; Hélot *et al.*, 2015) highlighted the following findings: (1) multilingualism is perceived in different ways; (2) respondents show high preference for the German and English languages, with the preference for these languages clearly demonstrating that bilingualism is still envisaged differently according to the social status of the languages concerned (Hélot, 2003); (3) there is a very high expectation that foreigners and immigrants learn French, the country's official language; (4) multilingualism can be a sensitive issue in the city and is marked by strong resistance at times, especially when languages of immigrants are concerned; and (5) multilingualism poses a challenge to the local administration.

The director of one of the municipal crèches believes that local government employees, especially those who deal with immigrants and foreigners, should be given training and access to interpretation tools to better serve the clientele, with an emphasis on those who are unable

to communicate and understand French. In other words, there is a real need for a policy on managing multilingualism. The findings of the LUCIDE city report, on the multilingual situation of Strasbourg, also reveal that there is a certain level of awareness of the lack of policy and solutions for addressing issues pertaining to the presence of multiple languages in the city, and in French society as a whole (see Hélot *et al.*, 2015).

Examining the language policy of the city in ECEC

Municipalities play a key role in managing the ECEC sector and are also responsible for employing staff members (i.e. ATSEM). In 2008, municipalities managed 61 per cent of collective day care structures, which accommodate children from 0 to 4. The city administration of Strasbourg has made ECEC one of its priorities and, following demand for more places in recent years, it has taken steps towards improving the ECEC system and building new structures to provide more places and care options for parents. In 2014, there were 66 collective establishments managed by the city and 25 private establishments managed by associations with a total of 3,100 places available. However, this is still insufficient to meet demands. As a result, the current policy in Strasbourg with regard to ECEC prioritizes children from socioeconomically disadvantaged families, which make the publicly managed crèches more likely to welcome children from migration backgrounds.

To ensure quality ECEC services in the city, the municipal council adopted a *charte qualité* (Ville et Eurométropole de Strasbourg, 2011), a quality framework drafted by a multi-disciplinary group of professionals and parent-representatives. Although it is important to note that the quality framework for ECEC structures in the city is innovative and indicative of the commitment of the city towards providing quality service to its young citizens, there is a very important aspect, which is not explicitly mentioned – that is, the issue of language. This is quite perplexing, as the children attending childcare structures are at a crucial stage of language development and the realities of multilingualism are too complex not to be addressed. Whereas the city does not have a clear-cut statement on language in its quality charter, there are concrete efforts being made with regard to language use and language management, and clear principles and ideologies on which these actions and efforts are based.

The chief of the ECEC services of the city clearly stated in an interview that the city does not provide any mandate for language use in the publicly managed crèches: 'Ma réponse est clairement non, il n'y a pas de directives sur l'utilisation des langues' (Interview 5, January 2014). We argue that having no clear-cut statement on how languages are managed in the ECEC structures of the city has profound implications on how languages in general are dealt with, or not. In a more optimistic stance, the city seems to have given the local ECEC centres a blanket authority on how to deal with languages in their respective structures. This can encourage creativity and, to a certain extent, more tailor-made treatment of language needs based on the specificities of each day care centre. But this can also be deemed ineffective for staff members who do not have the necessary tools and understanding in dealing with parents who speak languages other than French. As of the time of writing, there are unofficial discussions about modifying the quality charter to include a statement on language. However, it is still uncertain if this statement on language will address concerns on effective language use during the crucial period of children's language development, or if it will specify guidelines on how to manage language or languages to accommodate multilingualism in the crèche.

In recent years, the city administration, through its 'service famille et petite enfance' (family and young children service) has sponsored conferences and workshops aimed at educating professionals working with young children about bilingualism. Local and international experts

have been invited to talk about the benefits of bilingualism, the myths surrounding bilingualism and concrete methods, tools, and approaches to use in dealing with children and parents from diverse language backgrounds. We view these initiatives as genuine efforts to legitimize all languages spoken by children and parents in the ECEC structures. However, we also recognize that, with the monolingual ideology deeply ingrained in French society, these efforts should be supported by policies and can only be sustained by providing concrete examples of what can be – and should be – done in ECEC settings.

Case study of the first English–French bilingual crèche in Strasbourg

The data presented in this article were collected during a nine-month ethnographic study conducted at the first parental English–French bilingual crèche in the city during the first year of its operation. Employing the participant-observation method, the researcher visited the site two to three times a week for a total of more than 110 hours. The crèche catered for 13 children aged from 3 months to 3 years; five children between 3 and 4 years old; and it involved 27 parents and employed eight professionals. Data gathered included: 24 audio-recorded interviews of city officials, the association president, the professionals working at the crèche, and parents; 45 audio-recorded sessions of activities with the children and professionals, lasting at least 20 minutes each; field notes; and photos.

Although run by a parent association, the involvement of the city administration was fundamental to the crèche's establishment, as the association president explained:

> So there are several levels – you had to write letters back and forth to the city to explain, and I did write a project that says that it is going to be multilingual, that it is going to be parental, that it is going to be that … That is the exchange with the city.
>
> (Interview 3, 26 June 2014)

It is important to mention in the context of this article that the representative of the city mayor, who is responsible for ECEC, met with the crèche parent-representatives to ascertain that the structure, although highlighting the English and French languages, would not be selective, exclusive, or favourable only to English-speaking people.

It should also be clarified that there are other bilingual (exclusively German–French) day care structures in the city. In 2014, an innovative bilingual (French–German) crèche, jointly financed and managed by the city of Strasbourg and its German sister town, Kehl, was opened in Strasbourg approximately 2 kilometres from the German border. However, most of these structures are parent-initiated and following this trend, a British-Canadian parent, married to a French national, conceptualized this English–French bilingual crèche. The entire process of setting up the crèche took around seven years and included conceptualization, project writing, coordination with government agencies, back-and-forth paper processing, location hunting, hiring of staff, and the preparation of the premises to make it suitable for children.

One of the main components of this project was the concept of promoting early bilingualism. Yet, it should be noted that although French and English were used in the daily functioning of the crèche, in reality the crèche was multilingual and multicultural with at least 13 declared languages spoken by the parents and professionals. This seems to be consistent with how this structure was originally envisioned, adhering to the principles of 'openness to languages and different cultures' (Interview 1, 25 August 2013).

There were several concrete attempts to tap into parents' linguistic resources at the crèche. As part of the linguistic project, parents were encouraged to share songs from their home culture during the daily group activity. As the association president expressed, this opportunity was presented to the parents because:

> It would really be nice if parents brought a little more of their homeland. It's like a little more Greek, a little more Finnish, a little more Hebrew, a little bit more Punjabi. I think that would really be more fun to have, more in the crèche.
>
> (Interview 1, 25 August 2013)

Three important aspects can be deduced from this discourse: first, the multilingual and multicultural aspects of the crèche were acknowledged; second, the association president was aware of the cultural assets these languages represented; and third, by using the term 'homeland', she was also aware that languages were associated with people's identities.

Choosing the linguistic strategy: One person, one language

The official languages and language policy of the parental crèche were the personal choices of the association president. As she explained, 'English–French, because that is my household. English–French at home, and my heart language or my mother language is English' (Interview 1, 26 August 2013). This statement clearly shows how the crèche was conceptualized to serve as an extended place to reinforce the association president's own home language practices and policies. In fact, the desire to create a bilingual English–French structure was conceived during the time when her first child was acquiring language:

> There's a lot of mumbo jumbo so we worried if what we were doing was right, was it OK is he going to be OK? So, I felt, I wish he could be in a structure where he is getting both [English and French languages], it would have comforted me.
>
> (Interview 1, 25 August 2013)

She explained that she was mainly the English referent of her child in an environment of mostly French speakers. However, since she needed to switch to French when addressing other people around her in the presence of her child, she worried that this practice would have negative effects on her child's language acquisition – thus the use of the term 'mumbo jumbo'. For her, the ideal scenario was to have another place where there were constant and stable references to speakers of both languages. This meant separating languages, in which each speaker maintained his/her assigned language and avoided switching or mixing. Other founding members who participated in the conceptualization and planning stages of the project shared the vision of the association president. Because most of them allegedly used the one person, one language (OPOL) policy at home, they were receptive to the idea of employing OPOL in the crèche's structure:

> I mean the project in itself is … definitely very strong with me … as you know … so I put this idea forth to the other members, founding members, and the other founding members who are bilingual with their own families use the same practice.
>
> (Interview 3, 16 June 2014)

From this statement, we can deduce that the experiences, expectations, and desires of the bilingual families in this crèche were similar, which possibly led them to create a structure, outside their homes, which they believed would help ensure effective bilingual language acquisition for their children.

Other than the pervading ideologies of the parents, the influence of other bilingual early years structures in the city could also have contributed to the chosen linguistic strategy for this crèche. These other bilingual structures in the city, which were also parent-initiated projects, were generally oriented towards the use of partial immersion with OPOL as their linguistic strategy. The association president was in touch with the personnel of these structures, had worked with them on various occasions, and had also served as association officer in another Anglo-French pre-school for children aged 3 to 6. The initial temporary site of the crèche had even been previously used by a bilingual German–French crèche. As the association president

said, 'so I was more following the examples of what had already been done and as we put into place' (Interview 3, 16 June 2014).

Implementing the OPOL principle

OPOL as a language practice in bilingual homes and in formal learning structures was based on the belief in the Ronjat principle: that children should refer clearly to one person for one language. This principle served as the basis for bilingual education in Alsace (Hélot and Fialais, 2014). Although there are common elements to how OPOL is implemented in different education and care settings, each structure seems to come up with its own interpretation on how to make this language policy work.

The association president explained how she interpreted and implemented the OPOL policy:

> only that one adult, one language. In this structure, I never say a word of French. It is almost a game that we play because, for instance, we have a delivery at the door, and then I say, hello, how are you? And then, they'll say une livraison, and blah …blah … blah. And then, I'll say thank you, thank you very much. They look at me and sometimes I say, yeah. We are an English-speaking crèche. Most of the people, even the deliverer has a little bit of English. They might find it odd. Otherwise, I go outside of the door. Otherwise, I invite them in the kitchen, and then I shut the door. So this kitchen space, when there are no children in it, is the space where the professional or the team members can speak French.
>
> (Interview 1, 26 August 2013)

The use of the term 'never' indicates that there was rigidity in the implementation of this language policy. Since the association president was identified as an English speaker in the crèche, she restricted herself to speaking only in her assigned language, even though she was comfortable speaking in French. In the second line of the quote she says, 'It is almost a game that we play.' We could conclude that as a bilingual speaker under ordinary circumstances she would usually adjust her language to accommodate the other speaker. However, in this specific case, she did not because she had a language assignment that she had to maintain, especially in the presence of young children. In reading the reaction of the deliveryman, she felt obliged to justify her choice of English: 'We are an English-speaking crèche.'

Another interesting point to highlight from this extract is the extension of the crèche's declared language policy to include the dimension of space. Although there was a sense of rigour in their language practices, 'a sort of' exception was made in the kitchen, their designated place where language switching or mixing could occur – with the added condition 'when there are no children'. During the early months of operation, staff found it necessary to have some form of flexibility owing to the varied English language levels of the French-speaking staff members.

Clearly, an effort was made in balancing the presence of the languages in the daily operation of the crèche. Whenever it was possible, at least one French speaker and one English speaker were present during collective activities. For instance, as part of their morning ritual, the children gathered to sing songs in both languages. Sometimes, when a translation was possible, a song would be sung in both languages and led by professionals assigned to each language.

Who were the professionals?

Although the multilingual aspect of the crèche was acknowledged and emphasized, the project concept focused mainly on the promotion and use of English and French. This was made feasible by equally distributing and identifying the English and French speakers from among the staff members. We observed eight professionals throughout the nine-month study of whom four

were assigned to speak English with the children, and the other four were assigned to French. Table 2 shows the language repertoires and the assigned languages of the staff.

The professionals assigned to English were all bilingual speakers. All of them had lived in France for quite some time. In fact, professionals A and B had been in the country for more than 20 years. In another interview, professional B had this to say: 'Culturally I'm more French. Obviously, I grew up in France' (Interview 4, 12 January 2014). Although her papers pointed to her being British, she had lived in France all her life, except for a year spent in a boarding school as a teenager. Before this job, she had worked in another childcare structure where she had functioned only in French. So when asked how she was managing with the language assignment, she admitted that it was challenging:

> I have always adapted my vocabulary to the people I am talking to, so if someone speaks to me in English, I speak back in English. Obviously, when they're French, I speak back in French … So it was really hard for me. English parents, fine. English kids, fine, but speaking English to French parents … I am still dealing with that. I should switch back to French especially … sometimes when I am dealing with quite important things.
>
> (Professional B, Interview 4, 12 January 2014)

Table 2: Languages spoken by staff

Professional	Nationality	Languages	Assigned language
A	British-Canadian	English, French	English
B	British	English, French	English
C	Polish	Polish, French, English	French
D	Algerian	French, Arabic, English	French
E	French-Algerian	French, Arabic	French
F	Canadian	English, French	English
G	French-Algerian	French, Arabic, English (A2 level)	French
H	Irish	English, French	English

In our super-diverse, highly mobile society, the case of this professional is not uncommon. Obviously, she was assigned as an English speaker because it was her 'native language' – or more appropriately, her home language, the language her parents spoke with her. However, since she had resided in France for most of her life, she was accustomed to switching back and forth between English and French, depending on the language used by her interlocutor. Her natural inclination was to respond in the same language as the one in which she was addressed. According to the declared language policy of the crèche, she had to alter this practice. Even when she was spoken to in French, she had to respond only in her assigned language.

The case of professional C, who was assigned to speak French with the children, was a different story. Originally from Poland, she had been living in France for less than ten years at the time of the interview. She came as a student and learned the language in the process. Although her French level was impressive, she spoke with an accent. This, however, did not affect the decision to hire her as one of the staff members. The association president explained that:

> the choice was more … based less on their native [language] and more on their comfortableness and energy for the project … Again, we're not worried about language. There is no perfection that we are looking for … we are not worried of accents … Her French is excellent.
>
> (Interview 2, 12 January 2014)

Generally, language-learning institutions prefer to hire teachers who are 'native speakers'. The cases of these two professionals have led us to reflect on the question 'Who is a native-speaker?' Although the proficiency of the professionals in the assigned languages was definitely one of the main criteria in the decision to hire them, the most important consideration was the strict compliance to the declared language policy. This is consistent with the language separation ideology expressed by Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (MEN) in their 2002 curriculum document: 'Plurilingualism is not a handicap per se particularly if the two languages are clearly identified with the different speakers or contexts' (MEN, 2002: 90).

Ongoing negotiation of the language policy

Based on our observations, the first few months were marked with rigid and rigorous adherence to the language policy. The professionals seemed to police each other's language practices. The presence of the researcher seemed to add to the pressure to use and maintain the assigned languages. At some point, there was a need to inform one of the professionals that it was not a 'transgression' to code switch.

Moreover, practical considerations and the children's welfare needed to be given priority. There were instances when the professionals had no choice but to address some of the children using the other language, not their assigned language. More specifically, this happened in cases where a monolingual child could not understand the assigned language of the staff. For instance, in the case of an anglophone child, the French speaker who had to welcome the child and facilitate his integration into the group felt obliged to speak to the child in English to comfort him and to ascertain that he understood her instructions. Although the ideal scenario at the crèche was for the two languages to be present at all times throughout the day, this was not possible. There were instances when professionals needed to adopt the role of bilingual speakers to accommodate the bilingual and monolingual children, especially when their safety was at risk.

Conclusion

In this article, we have explored how the language policy of the first bilingual English–French parental crèche in the city of Strasbourg was created, interpreted, implemented, and negotiated. Our findings reveal that while significant efforts were undertaken to break away from the traditional, monolingual mindset, the decision to adopt a strict OPOL policy reveals an underlying 'persistent monolingual ideology' (Siraj-Blatchford and Clarke, 2000), which permeates the entire French educational system. Even though the crèche is outside the traditional school setting, the pervasive notions of language purity, language separation, and the need for native speakers as language referents or educators succeed in influencing the crèche's language policy. Although the OPOL policy continues to be regarded as the ideal route towards language immersion for young children, with the goal of achieving bilingual language acquisition by compelling speakers to pursue paths of language separation, it effectively negates their bilingual competences – that is, the very competences that the crèche is aiming to develop in the children.

Even when professionals complement one another within a bilingual interaction, the restriction to maintain their assigned languages requires them to function in a monolingual mode. In reality, the decision to employ OPOL was an attempt to simplify the complex reality of a multilingual environment. However, during the implementation of this language policy, it became clearer to the professionals that it was impossible to abide by this policy at all times. With the young children's utmost interests considered, the professionals resorted to continued negotiation and appropriation of the OPOL policy – processes that will hopefully pave the way

to a more realistic and fuller vision of bilingualism, but one which can only be supported by high quality staff training on how to work in structures where multiple languages are involved.

Acknowledgements

Notes on the contributors

Eloise Caporal-Ebersold is a doctoral student in Linguistics at the University of Strasbourg. An experienced educator, she previously taught in the Philippines and in the United States before permanently migrating to France where she teaches English at the University of Strasbourg's *École Supérieure du Professoriat et de l'Éducation* (ESPE). Her research interests include multilingualism, bilingual education, and language policy in ECEC.

Andrea Young is currently a senior lecturer in Language Education at the ESPE at the University of Strasbourg. Her research and teaching interests include teacher education for the support of second language acquisition, home–school educational partnerships, teacher language awareness, and plurilingual and intercultural education.

Andrea and Eloise are both members of the LILPA/EA 1339 (*Linguistique, langue, parole*) research group at the University of Strasbourg.

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Ellyson, C., Andrew, C., and Clément, R. (2016) 'Language planning and education of adult immigrants in Canada: Contrasting the provinces of Quebec and British Columbia, and the cities of Montreal and Vancouver'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 134–56.

Mehmedbegovic, D. (2016) Editorial: 'Multilingualism in education in cosmopolitan cities: Insights into LUCIDE network research'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 119–21.

Menghini, M. (2016) 'Multilingualism and language learning: The Rome city report'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 157–73.

Nicolaou, A., Parmaxi, A., Papadima-Sophocleous, S., and Boglou, D. (2016) 'Language education in a multilingual city: The case of Limassol'. *London Review of Education*, 14 (2), 174–85.