

Tufala lanwis long tingting blong yumi, mo tufala lanwis long rialiti: Lukluk blong risej long tufala skul / Bilinguisme symbolique et fonctionnel: Le point de vue d'une école anglophone et d'une école francophone / Symbolic and functional bilingualism: Insights from an anglophone school and a francophone school

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This paper distinguishes between two versions of English-French bilingualism in Vanuatu. I will refer to the first as a symbolic kind of bilingualism, which we can see in the ideas that people express about the importance of knowing both English and French. This kind of bilingualism is like any other kind of symbol, such as a national emblem or flag. It helps us define who we are, and it guides our understanding of our identity. The second version of English-French bilingualism is a functional one, capturing the extent to which people actually use both English and French in practice. By looking at both versions of bilingualism in English and French, we can begin to answer two questions with reference to plans for a new national university in Vanuatu: Do people want both English and French to be part of such an institution? And do school leavers have the proficiency in both languages to receive a quality education through these languages?

The data presented here comes from two rural secondary schools, one Anglophone and the other Francophone. I focus on rural schools for two reasons. Firstly, my own experience in Vanuatu has not been at the policy level, but as a teacher and a researcher at rural secondary schools. And, from this experience, I can say that I have heard neither English nor French spoken outside school in these areas, I have heard no consternation about this version of 'bilingualism', and I have heard no complaints about an imbalance between the two former colonial languages of the sort that are sometimes raised in political discussions amongst the urban elite. This is despite living for several years at an Anglophone secondary school a few kilometres away from a Francophone secondary school in one direction, and a few kilometres away from a bilingual primary school in the other direction. Secondly, the rural experience is important. If a policy is put in place, or an institution is established, that is guided by the experience of this urban elite, it may not fit the reality of the majority. We all know prominent figures in Port Vila who were educated in the Francophone system and who now have a high proficiency in English as well as French, but we should be careful about assuming that they represent the norm. Moreover, if a policy or institution is seen to provide better chances for those in urban areas, this will only increase the number of people leaving their home islands in search of these opportunities. Such urban drift in response to a drive for English-French bilingualism will only jeopardise the multilingualism that exists throughout the rest of the country, as vernaculars will give way to Bislama in many domains.

The data was collected in 2011, as part of my doctoral research into the use of languages within the Anglophone and Francophone streams of education. I spent the first school term of that year moving backwards and forwards between the Anglophone school and the Francophone school, observing which languages were used, how they were used, and how they were talked about. I also tested the English and French proficiency of students at both schools. I then returned later in the school year to conduct follow-up interviews with teachers and students at both schools.

A united desire for both English and French

I will begin by discussing some of the attitudes expressed about English and French. One question I asked teachers at both schools was whether they felt that the 'other' school language was important for them. The Francophone teachers unanimously told me that English would provide new opportunities for them. One referred to the greater number of opportunities provided for Anglophones to go to other countries for work and study, while Francophones only really had New Caledonia:

"Plante Anglofon oli aot oli go long defren kaontri. Plante. Be long saed blong Frankofon? Smol nomo. Yumi luk se Anglofon oli gat bigfala akses blong oli go long defren kaontri. Be olgeta long Frankofon hemia long Calédonie nomo."

Another explained that a number of his schoolmates had begun as Francophones but had then studied at the University of the South Pacific (an Anglophone institution), finding work as a result:

"Fulap blong mifala ol Frankofon hemia mifala i kick off long Frankofon finis? Fulap oli stap oli jes stap go mekem Foundation long USP ia. Naoia oli jes faenem ol wok."

These sentiments were perhaps unsurprising. However, the Anglophone teachers seemed to make similar arguments, insisting that French provided them with a double opportunity. One teacher, for example, argued that an English-French bilingual would have a better chance of finding a job than someone who spoke only English or only French:

"Sapos yumi talem se wan bilingual person? Bae hem nao bae hem i karem mo janis blong karem wan job? Compared to wan we hem i either Anglofon nomo o Frankofon nomo."

Another described how French and English were all around them, even in this rural area, so knowing both languages was important:

"Mi lukum long tudei like you go anywhere? French mo Inglis nao hem i surround long ol erias o iven raon long ples ia yu luk."

A third explained that she wanted one of her children to be educated through French. Her reasoning was that she would then have somebody who could understand if a French-speaking visitor should come to the house.

"Mi mi talem se wan pikinini blong mi mas skul French. Sapos yumi gat wan visita we i kam long haos we i toktok French? At least mi gat somebody we i andastanem."

I did not find a single teacher, student or community member who expressed a belief that the other school language was unimportant for them. So I began to investigate other types of data to see how far their beliefs mapped my own observations of reality.

In search of English and French in reality

In terms of jobs, I counted all of the advertisements printed in the *Vanuatu Daily Post*, the *Independent*, and the *Vanuatu Times* throughout a two-month period of 2011. I found that approximately half of these advertisements mentioned language preferences: Only 14.1% asked for candidates who spoke both English and French, the majority of which were in government

departments; 11.3% asked for either English or French; 20.4% asked only for English; and 0.7% asked only for French. Although Francophones might gain an advantage by adding English to their repertoires, Anglophones did not appear to gain quite the same advantage by adding French.

It was rather easier to evaluate the assertion that English and French surrounded us in this rural area. I listened out for any instances of either language spoken outside school, and heard neither language spoken at all throughout the three-month period, with the exception of some interactions involving the handful of overseas volunteers. Conversations took place in either the vernacular or Bislama, depending on the repertoires of the speakers. I photographed every written text I saw outside either school and found that all permanent signs on buildings in the commercial centre (such as Air Vanuatu sales, Credit Union and Western Union) were written in English; professionally-produced posters (such as an NBV advertisement for savings products and an awareness campaign for the H1N1 vaccine) were typically in Bislama, although occasionally in English; typed and handwritten notices that were more temporary (such as announcements from the Public Works Department and warnings on store noticeboards about credit) were always in Bislama; graffiti etched into the concrete of the newly-laid road was in a mixture of Bislama and English. Away from the noticeboards of the Francophone school, I saw nothing written in French at all.

The third claim was about the need to have a French speaker in the family in case a French-speaking visitor arrived. As a broad indicator, I accessed international arrival statistics for the year under observation, and found that 74% of arrivals were from Australia or New Zealand (which we can take as a proxy measure for dominant English speakers), 11.6% from New Caledonia (a proxy for dominant French speakers), and the remaining 14.4% from elsewhere (potentially speaking either language). I also noted all visitors and temporary residents from other countries in that part of the island: two locally-contracted Indian teachers, one Japanese volunteer teacher, one Kenyan health volunteer, five US health or education volunteers, four New Zealand business or education volunteers, an Ethiopian advisor to the Public Works Department, and an Australian IT technician. None of these visitors spoke French but, with the exception of the Japanese teacher who preferred to speak Bislama, they all spoke English. The New Zealand couple working in tourism told me that they had not yet seen a tourist on the island in the five months they had been there! The chance of an overseas visitor actually coming to the island was slim, and the chance of such a visitor speaking French but no English was even less likely. The data did not support, in practical terms, the logic behind the teacher's reported desire to educate one child of her family in twelve or more years of French education.

So what was really behind these claims that French was so necessary for these rural Anglophones? As I probed further in my questioning, there were several mentions of the knowledge of both English and French being part of a national identity, such as the following from an Anglophone teacher:

“Hem i wan aedentiti blong yumi? Blong save tufala lanwis.”

Her colleague supported this with an observation based on her experience studying in Fiji, and her shame when she didn't fulfil people's expectations that she would know both English and French:

“Mi wis se mi save French not only for the purpose of communicating with French people? Be taem yu go aot saed long kaontri? Sapos ol man oli save se yu blong Vanuatu? Oli save se

Vanuatu is a bilingual country? Afta yu sud save both languages. And it's such a shame sapos yu save wan nomo. Mi rili wantem lanem French."

Another Anglophone teacher made a very similar point that you really feel like you are from Vanuatu when you know both languages:

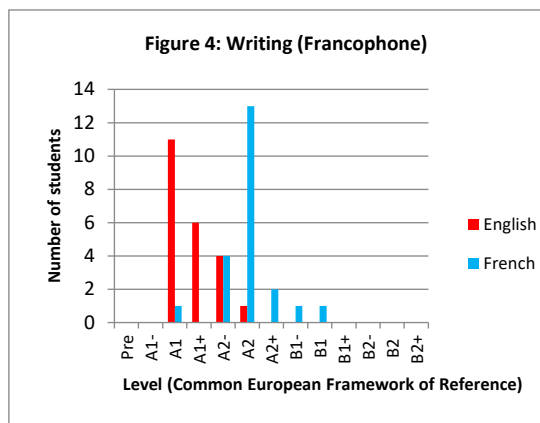
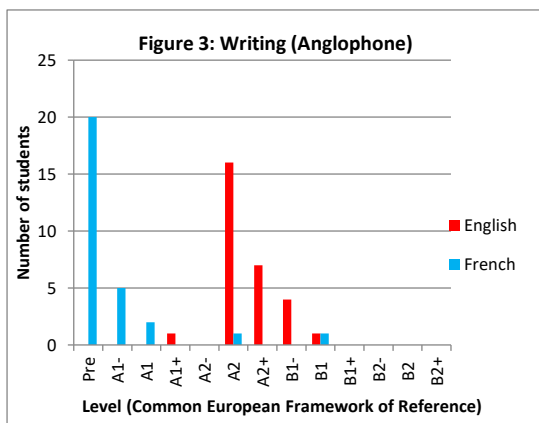
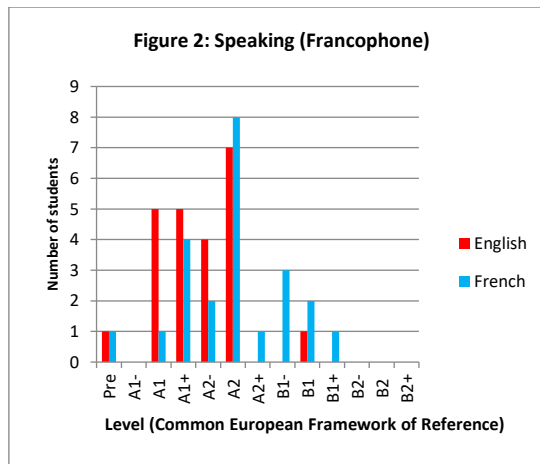
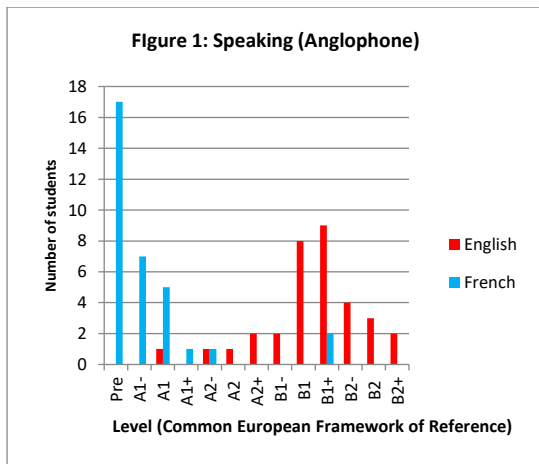
"Hem i wan sort of an identity as well. Taem you get to know both languages? Then yu go aot yu fil se yes yu blong Vanuatu nao."

However, an interesting episode occurred the night before I first visited the Francophone school, which made me question exactly what they meant by "knowing" both languages. I said goodnight to two friends at the Anglophone school, using the local vernacular. One immediately responded, saying that I should say "*bonne nuit*" instead now, as I was a "French gal". The other joined in, saying she was jealous because I knew French. When I responded, saying that they were jealous of a very small amount of French, and that I wasn't sure whether I would cope at the Francophone school with my level of French, this friend responded: "*Nah be yu save Franis. Yu intres long hem. Yu fit.*" In other words, my interest in French was valued as 'knowing French', despite my protestations that I did not really speak the language very well.

Another example from an interview gave the same impression. I had asked the Anglophone teachers why it was important to know French, to which one told a very long anecdote about a woman from New Caledonia who was checking in at Pekoa airport. She didn't speak English or Bislama, and the Air Vanuatu agent was Anglophone. When the woman had put her luggage on the scale, the agent asked "*C'est tout?*" and the woman replied "*Oui*". The Anglophone teacher concluded that this showed how important it is to know French, even though the amount of French that had actually been used in the story was very minimal. His story certainly supported the value of a willingness to use a little French, in other words a positive disposition towards knowing both languages, but it did not appear that a high level of proficiency was required to fulfil this symbolic version of bilingualism.

Proficiency in English and French

To put this data into context, I also investigated how much English and French was actually known by the Year 10 students at each school. For the speaking assessment, students were asked to select cards containing simple vocabulary items such as 'family' or 'sport', and speak for as long as they could on that topic without preparation. They did this first in their dominant school language, and then in the other school language. For the writing assessment, they were asked to write a few paragraphs in answer to the questions, 'In your opinion, is English important for Vanuatu? Why?' and 'A ton avis, est-ce que le français est important pour le Vanuatu? Pourquoi?'. They answered each question in the language in which it was posed. Both speaking and writing assessments were scored using marking criteria based on the Common European Framework of Reference, which assigns levels divided into Basic (A1, A2), Independent (B1, B2) and Proficient (C1, C2) use of a language. The results are summarised in Figures 1 to 4.



In summary, we see that this particular group of Anglophone students are able to speak independently in English (averaging B1 or B1+), but have only a basic level of written English (averaging A2 or A2+). They have almost zero competence in either spoken or written French (averaging what we could refer to as Pre-level or A1-). Meanwhile, we see that this group of Francophone students have a basic level of spoken and written French (averaging A2- or A2), and also a basic level of spoken and written English (averaging A1+). In other words, while the Anglophones can speak reasonably comfortably in only one of the school languages, and say almost nothing in the other, the Francophones have a more equal - but more limited - spoken competence across the two languages. Both groups display only basic written competence in their dominant language of schooling, and only the Francophones have any written competence at all in the second school language. The more balanced competence among the Francophone students might give the impression that they can cope 'bilingually', but when students are struggling to speak or write independently on such simple topics, the level of this 'bilingualism' is too low to be meaningful.

The data lends support to the frequently-repeated belief that it is easier for Francophones to pick up English than for Anglophones to pick up French. Whether this is due to the lexical similarities between Bislama and English or to a greater level of exposure to English is not important here. What is of a great concern is the fact that it does indeed seem that the students are left to 'pick up' these languages rather than being taught them. These students have been learning their dominant school language for ten years, and the second school language for at least four years, and yet the assessment results are not what one would expect from a syllabus that is designed to teach English or French as a second or foreign language. Instead, they indicate that students are simply being exposed to these languages and expected to absorb them.

How rich is the English and French in the classroom?

The data from the language proficiency assessment brings us back to the classroom, where it is worth looking at the type of language actually being used. Two extracts from typical lessons serve to illustrate how language is being used across the curriculum at each school. Extract 1 comes from a Year 10 Agriculture lesson at the Anglophone school. Extract 2 comes from a Year 10 Social Science lesson at the Francophone school. T refers to the teacher, S refers to an individual student, and Ss refers to a group of students together. A number in brackets indicates a pause, measured in the number of seconds.

Extract 1

T: *What is rumination. ((2)) What is rumination?*

S: *Chewing [food for once]*

Ss: *[Chewing food] twice*

T: *Again?*

S: *Animals that chew the food once.*

Ss: *Twice ((laughter))*

T: *Rumination? ((3)) What are ruminant animals?*

Ss: *Animals that chew the food twice.*

T: *Ruminant animals are animals that chew the food?*

Ss: *Twice.*

T: *Twice. Okay? Examples of ruminant animals are?*

Ss: *Cattles.*

T: *Cattle?*

Ss: *Goats.*

T: *Goats and?*

Ss: *Sheep.*

T: *Sheep. Okay? So? Cattle is one of the ruminant animals? And? ((2)) When its stomach is full of grass this animal will find a shade somewhere and start to?*

Ss: *Chew the cud.*

T: *Okay. Chew the cud again. Which is known as?*

Ss: *Rumination.*

T: *Rumination.*

Extract 2

T: *Pour calculer la croissance de la population. Alors pour faire le calcul sur la croissance de la population? Il s'agit plutôt ici de deux facteurs. Donc le premier facteur était plutôt? ((3)) C'est quoi. ((2)) Oui?*

S: *Croisement*

T: *Le croisement naturel. Et nous avons le deuxième facteur qui est plutôt le?*

Ss: *Migration*

T: *La migration. Alors qu'est ce qu'il y a ici comme la différence entre le croisement naturel et la migration. Que veut dire à croisement naturel? ((1)) Ça veut dire quoi pour vous. Comme [xx] à croisement naturel. ((4)) A quoi? ((2)) C'est quoi le uh le croisement naturel? On parle ici de quoi ici exactement dans ce? Ce que c'est le croisement naturel. ((1)) Il s'agit de quoi.*

Ss: *Naissances.*

T: *Il s'agit plutôt de changement eu à?*

Ss: *Naissances.*

T: *Le chiffre du plutôt aux naissances et au?*

Ss: *Décès.*

T: *Au décès.*

Leaving aside any non-standard features or errors, we can examine certain similarities between the two lessons. In both cases, the teachers are doing most of the work, while the burden on the students is relatively low. In Extract 1, we see several pauses and reformulated questions as the teacher tries to elicit answers. We see unfinished sentences that end with rising intonation, indicating to the students that they must complete the information. The students, for their part, supply answers that have clearly been memorised or are being read aloud from notes. We know this because they answer in chorus to provide a definition of 'ruminant', and they all list the three animals in exactly the same order. If they were simply recalling examples from a previous lesson, we would expect some students to call out 'cattle' first, while others would call out 'goats' or 'sheep', but this does not happen. In Extract 2, we see a similar pattern of pauses, reformulated questions and unfinished sentences with rising intonation. The teacher speaks at length in order to help students to produce their very limited contributions. In both classrooms, the teachers are doing the language work, while the students simply fill in the content. The lessons proceed successfully in the sense that the activities are covered without any obvious breakdown, and the students do appear to be following the content. But simply being able to get to the end of a lesson is not the same as ensuring engagement with learning.

To illustrate the issue in a different way, consider the following sentence:

"The blozz plimped haggily to the wembong."

The sentence is complete nonsense but, if asked to consider where the blozz plimped to, it is easy to provide the answer 'the wembong'. If asked how the blozz plimped, it is easy to provide the answer 'haggily'. We can all survive activities and get the right answer, simply by following the cues provided for us. We do not necessarily have to understand everything that we encounter.

To return to the issue of students' low levels of proficiency in English and French, we see that they are spending their time in the classroom surrounded by one or other of these languages. We also see that they have mastered this language sufficiently to survive relatively undemanding classroom rituals such as answering closed questions or finishing the teacher's answers in chorus with their classmates. They demonstrate a reasonably good passive knowledge of the language, but they have very limited opportunities to use it actively themselves. We know from research that listening to input in a second language is not sufficient to acquire competence in that language, as learners need opportunities to use it themselves (referred to as 'pushed output', Swain, 1985) and to participate in genuine interactions (Long, 1996; Ortega, 2009). They also need opportunities to focus their attention on the form of a second language, having the chance to notice consciously the way it works (Ellis & Shintani, 2014; Schmidt, 1995). Moreover, if using a second language to learn content subjects across the curriculum, students also need to be supported to develop the kind of cognitive academic language proficiency that is more abstract than the type of language used in everyday conversation (Cummins, 1979; Gibbons, 1993). These are not the conditions we see in the classrooms of this study, in which the teachers have plenty of chances to practise their English and French, but the students do very little. This goes some way to explaining why students have such low levels of proficiency in either language, levels which are far too low to ensure academic success in subjects that are taught through English or French.

Implications for a national university

The data presented here has a number of implications for discussions around the question of English-French bilingualism at a new national university. Firstly, it is clear from the way that participants talk about English and French that both languages are considered extremely important. Even in a rural area where the two languages are rarely heard or seen outside school, there is clearly a feeling that both languages are valuable. In reality, few participants from the study displayed any actual usage of either language outside school, let alone both languages, thereby posing no threat to the vernaculars and Bislama that serve a more functional purpose in daily life. But the symbolic ties to this version of 'bilingualism' are clear. A positive disposition towards both English and French within a context of wider multilingualism is an essential part of a new national identity, perhaps enabling the younger generation to move beyond the polarisation between 'Anglophones' and 'Francophones' that was inherited from the Condominium period. A university that is truly a national institution must therefore acknowledge this aspect of identity.

This symbolic construction of 'bilingualism' must also extend to ensuring equal opportunities for all, regardless of the school system one has attended. A national university must enable school leavers from both systems equal chances to be admitted to programmes, and it must provide them equal chances to succeed. A university that appears to favour graduates of certain schools over those from others will likely not be accepted as a genuinely national institution.

However, the data also points to an obvious challenge to the use of both English and French as languages of instruction at such a university. While I make no claim that the school-based data presented here is representative of all Year 10 students in Vanuatu, it provides a reminder that we must look beyond the most well-known urban schools to consider how much English and French is really being acquired by the majority. There are already concerns about the challenges faced by Anglophone students studying in English at the University of the South Pacific and by Francophone students studying in French at the University of New Caledonia and, while poor academic performance cannot solely be attributed to the medium of instruction, it is certainly a factor. Any new tertiary institution must plan carefully how it will manage the academic language proficiency of incoming students in whichever language or languages it plans to teach. It is unlikely that very many school leavers will have the proficiency in both English and French to cope equally well in either language, and it is not clear how many really have the proficiency in even one of these languages. It would seem logical to tackle the way languages are currently being taught throughout the school system before focusing too much attention on extending their use as tertiary media of instruction.

Logistical decisions, however, may be less complex than some fear. With advances in technology, it is not hard to imagine blended courses that provide resources in multiple languages. Students who wish to access course content in more than one language can do so through multilingual reading lists and online or print resources, while others may prefer to access the same content through one language only. Face to face interaction in classroom sessions can also proceed multilingually, just as it does in all domains of life outside the education system. It is likely that Bislama would take a prominent role, with a flexible use of English and French and potentially also one or more vernaculars, depending on the linguistic repertoires of students and staff. Oral and written assessments could similarly be submitted at least in any of the three official languages. Twenty-first century institutions are no longer limited by physical teaching spaces, rigid timetables, static resources or monolingual mindsets, and it is exciting to imagine the multiplicity of pedagogies that

might emerge under a more flexible visioning of tertiary education. I only hope that the politically-charged arguments about which language to use, or how to achieve a 'balance' between languages, are not allowed to close down this type of vision.

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