

I found the section on Vocabulary and Socioeconomic Status to be interesting. It mentioned bilingual students in particular as having difficulty with vocabulary and semantics. While I think the book meant English Language Learning students by bilingual, it is interesting to look at from the perspective of my language development because I was a bilingual student. For me, it was English at home and French in school. This actually seemed to have the opposite effect as what is described in the book. Taking socioeconomic status out of the equation and looking just at the bilingual piece I would say that our entire class was at a significant advantage in terms of vocabulary. We were all quite proficient in spelling, vocabulary, and sentence creation by the time we joined our English peers. English teachers could often identify the French immersion students based on their writing. Obviously this wasn't the case for 100% of the students, but it was certainly true for many of us.

Another piece that stuck out to me was the part about word construction. Learning two languages helped significantly in that area. We learned how to apply suffixes and prefixes much earlier because some were similar from French to English and we could use "Franglais" (French and English smooshed together) to create words that were actually correct in both languages. For example, once we had discovered the pattern that adverbs usually ended in -ly, we identified that the French equivalent was -ement. If we wanted to say "probably", we just translated the French, "probablement" using the formula and actually came out with the right word.

Additionally, particularly with prefixes, we came to understand the meaning behind the prefixes pretty early on because they are much more standardized in French. There are much fewer exceptions to when you would use a prefix for negation for example. And so we simply attached un- or in- to the beginning of an English word to negate it. Again, not 100% accurate, but still a much more educated word formation than most at our age.

One area where we struggled as it relates to semantics is understanding that translation is not always the same. On occasion, particularly in elementary school we would translate from our English thoughts to French without an understanding of what we were saying in French. We had the semantics down in English, but there was little understanding of the words and their roles in the sentence once translated. Similarly, if we learned a sentence in French such as for a research project, or book report, and tried to translate it to English we would often mistranslate because we were simply going word by word and not by sentence meaning.