

The brotherhood of French and English- a mythic unit à la mode!

By:

Colleen Howard Waldegger

1. Locating importance- The 'je ne sais quoi' of French and English

Being a second language learner myself, I understand the connections that students make between their mother tongue, English (for the most part), and French and the 'wow' that comes with those moments of connections. I also believe that from a Vygotskian standpoint, the mother tongue, English, acts as the mediator in a primary French Immersion classroom. As students make connections through similarities and differences between English and French they begin (at an 'embryonic stage') to understand the dual function of language as both a tool for speech and a tool for thought. They begin to become emotionally connected to language and to actually 'think' and 'feel' and 'perceive' about the language they know and the language that they are just beginning to learn.

Such connections are a source of wonder for both the teacher and the learner and it is in the teacher's best interest, I believe, to draw upon these connections using the cognitive tools of story, humour, binary opposites, puzzles, games and mystery to help build this sense of wonder. The students become emotionally engaged in learning a second language to which they can connect something they already know- English. As such, this unit will highlight the story or history that connects the languages of English and French. It will highlight differences and similarities that exist amongst the two languages. We will find the fun, the humour, the games, puzzles and mysteries that lie in the connections, as well as misconceptions of these languages.

"He who knows no foreign language does not truly know his own," (Vygotsky, 1986, p.160) according to Goethe and quoted by Vygotsky in his chapter on the development of scientific concepts in childhood. Vygotsky goes on to say, "that a child's understanding of his native language is enhanced by learning a foreign one. The child becomes more conscious and deliberate in using words as tools of his thought and expressive means for his ideas" (1986, p.160).

Sources of wonder:

- **Similarities and differences between 2 distinct languages**
- **How silly both languages can be- silly expressions**
- **Les Faux Amis (fake friends or false cognates)- words that look and sound the same in both English and French but their meanings are not the same**
- **The connected history- a brotherhood**

Sources of emotional engagement:

- How clever that two distinct languages can be so related historically as well as presently- borrowed words and expressions
- What you know (English) can help you with what you don't know or are learning (French)
- How mysterious and wonderful language is

2. Shaping the lesson or unit

2.1. Finding the story:

What's "the story" on the relationship between French and English? What's the emotional significance?

Sketch of the story structure of the lesson/unit:

#1- The 'true' story- the history of the brotherhood of French and English.

French is a Latin language with German and English influence, while English is a Germanic language with Latin and French influence. So how did they get this way?

'En bref,' France and England have a long history together- a history of conquests and 'shared' territories and wars but if we look 'recently' to the Norman conquest of 1066 we learn of how the 2 languages and cultures existed side-by-side for 300 years. After this conquest in England, French became the language of the court, administration and culture (Capitol 'c', Culture☺). French and English became the two 'brothers' of England. Moreover, we don't have to look very far to see this 'brotherhood' today. In Canada, the two brothers live side-by-side in our bi-lingual country sharing, again, a history, as well as the present and future.

(*Resources: 'The Mother Tongue: English and How it Got That Way' Bill Bryson.
'French Inside Out: The French Language Past and Present'
Henriette Walter.

'Honni soit qui mal y pense: L'incroyable histoire d'amour entre le français et l'anglais' Henriette Walter.)

#2- 'Les trois petits cochons'- the story of 3 pig brothers; one who is French, one who is English and one who is an Anglophone in French Immersion.

As my French Immersion primary students have limited exposure to French when they reach me (in Grades 1 or 2), I like to draw on familiar stories to help create images and metaphor. I often use English storybooks which the students know and just retell the story in my own words in French. Fairy Tales, however, offer something great. The students 'know' the story by heart and so the students can 'relax' a bit as they listen to the French, rather than trying desperately to figure out what's going on. As such, I want to use a very familiar story and add my own 'twists' to introduce the 'brotherhood' between French and English, as

well as the special insight a pig or a child with two languages, English and French, to fool the wolf.

*IDEA- to recreate this story using as many true cognates as I can and have the students keep a tally of words they know or think they know while I present the story a second or third time. For instance, one pig may play 'badminton,' while the other liked 'ballet' and the third liked 'hockey.' Other true cognates to use in this story: date, encouragement, absence, fiasco, excellent, explosion, estimation, question, fragile, idiot, camouflage, imagination, mission, parent, sandwich, etc.

#3- A brief look at Canada's history/creation to see the interconnectedness between these two cultures and languages right here at home.

2.2. Finding binary opposites:

What abstract and affective binary concepts best capture the wonder and emotion of the brotherhood between French and English? What are the opposing forces?

Main opposition: same/ different or related/ unrelated

Possible alternatives: friends/ enemies, sound/meaning

2.3. Finding images:

What parts of the topic most dramatically embody the binary concepts? What image best captures that dramatic contrast?

Image that captures abstract binary opposition: The metaphor that I am using throughout the unit is of course that of a 'brotherhood.' In all families, members share features, characteristics, behaviors, values and even expressions. Family members are also each unique and therefore strikingly different. The image of the family helps the students 'feel' the drama, the binary, between English and French. English and French are members of the same family through a shared history while they also have their own stories and unique features. We want to explore many of these similarities and differences through a number of activities.

Content that reflects abstract binary opposition:

- **Shared history**
- **True cognates**
- **Les Faux Amis (false cognates- lots of fun here!)**
- **Other language comparisons- use of accents, agreements, articles, capitalization, contractions, gender, liaisons, negation, prepositions, rhythm, subjunctive, punctuation. (Sounds pretty dry but I think this could become a game of some sort or 'personify' these parts of language, making them fun characters)**

2.4. Employing additional cognitive tools of Mythic understanding:

- **Puzzles and mystery:** *How could students explore some aspects of the mystery attached to the brotherhood of French and English? What puzzles might they wonder about?*

Teaching strategy: The Mystery- how the same sounding (sometimes, not always) and spelled words can have different meanings. Les faux-amis/ False Cognates.

In this activity, the teacher will be introducing words that sound the same in French as they do in English, with most spellings being the same as well. The students will be asked to guess what the words mean by listening and looking at the images provided.

After an initial introduction on false cognates, the teacher will introduce a puzzle to be solved in teams following clues that may sound like something else in English but mean something different in French.

Student activity: Guess the French meaning- a game of discovery, which doesn't make sense with what we know in English! Solving the clues, will lead to solving the puzzle. This could also be done as a whole class (since I will have non-readers in Grade One) in a 'Game Show' format.

Ex:

- 1) 'fraiche'- meaning both fresh and cool, however, the expression given will be 'boisson fraiche' meaning 'cool drinks' and not 'fresh drinks.'
- 2) 'assister'- meaning 'to attend' and not 'to help'
- 3) 'attend'- meaning 'to wait' and not to 'be present at'
- 4) 'avertissement'- often misinterpreted as 'advertisement' but meaning 'a warning.'
- 5) 'caractère'- can mean 'personality' as is the same in English, however, there are NOT characters in a story, there are 'personnages.'
- 6) 'cent'- a good one for Grade One as we learn numbers and money. 'Cent' means 100 in French and 1/100th in English. Hmmm? This could be fun!
- 7) 'chance'- meaning 'luck' in French and opportunity in English. As an early French learner, I remember misusing this one. 'Occasion' is the correct word for 'opportunity'- J'ai l'occasion d'aller à Hawaïi.
- 8) 'coin'- meaning 'corner' in French, not a piece of money.

*Note: this activity may require the teacher to 'read' the examples in both English and French, as some pronunciations are quite different- ie: coin. For the most

part, my learners are not readers in either language so there will be a great deal of direct teaching.

- **Metaphor:** *How might students employ metaphor in deepening their understanding of the topic?*

Teaching strategy: The metaphor of family and brotherhood is used throughout the unit- language ties humans together, like family.

Student activity: In this activity, the students will be creating a ‘new’ language and one that is quite simple. In groups, they will come up with sounds and meanings that indicate simple directions, like ‘left/right,’ ‘above/below,’ ‘in/out,’ etc. They will challenge each other to find a hidden object in the classroom following ONLY the directions of their new language. A discussion of what worked and what didn’t will follow. Only those who ‘know’ the language are able to find the hidden object. A shared language creates a connection-like family.

*Note- We will draw upon Somatic learning in this activity. Before the students create their own languages, we will do the following Somatic exercise. The teacher will introduce body rhythms and sounds- ‘ba ba’ or ‘ti ti ta’ or ‘long ba’ etc.- while tapping our heads, clapping hands, stomping feet etc. and attach directions to these. A connection to musical notes will be made and the ‘language’ of music.

*Resources- In his article, ‘Man: A Course of Study,’ (in Flinders, D. and Thornton, S, ‘The Curriculum Studies Reader,’ 2009, 78-92) Jerome S. Bruner sites the von Frisch film, a documentary on the language of bees. This might be an interesting resource to share with the students.

- **Jokes and humor:** *Could students learn – and create their own - jokes about the connections that exist between English and French? They may also want to explore the ‘ridiculous’ that exists in BOTH languages*

Teaching strategy: Confusion can lead to a lot of fun and jokes and it is easy to be confused when learning a new language. Blending two different languages, which also happens when learning a new one, can be lots of fun. Languages are patterned systems that provide meaning but lots of these meanings, such as in idiomatic expressions, are quite ‘idiotic’ and nonsensical and SO MUCH FUN! We will have

fun with confusions, language-blending and silly expressions in both English and French

Student activity:

#1- Jokes using 'les faux-amis.' Once students have learned several examples of false cognates in our mystery game, we will create our own jokes 'playing the Anglophone in Paris'!

Ex: An English-speaker from Vancouver is searching for Notre-Dame Cathedral on his trip to Paris. He stops to ask a local for some help.

Mr. Vancouver: 'Pardonnez-moi, je cherche Notre-Dame. Je veux me blesser.'
(Wants to say: Excuse-me. I am looking for Notre-Dame Cathedral. I would like to be blessed and to say my prayers.)

Mme Paris: 'Oh mon dieu. Vous etes blesser? Suivez-moi à l'hopital Notre-Dame.'
(Means: Oh dear God. You are hurt? Follow me to Notre-Dame hospital.)

Faux-amis: Blesser (F)/Bless (E). To bless in French is 'Bénir.'

Ha! Ha! See the fun!!!

#2- Blending Brothers! French Immersion students blend English and French all the time (we call it 'Franglais') to get their meanings across and sometimes it becomes quite the humourous game. For instance, when I was in elementary FI, my name became a part of this 'blending' game since 'colline', in French, means hill. While in English it also sounds like the verb, 'calling.' The blend: 'Calling Colleen sur la colline.' The students will be able to come up with all sorts of fun examples of blending the two 'brothers' together.

#3- Idiot brothers, homonyms and tongue twisters!

There are so many fun ways to play with language and we will play with both English and French in these activities.

a) Idiomatic expressions

English- 'I'm in a real pickle' or 'I'm stuck in bottleneck traffic'

French- 'Ah! La vache'- literal: 'oh! The cow,' figurative: 'good grief'

- 'Les carottes sont cuites'- literal: 'the carrots are cooked,' figurative: 'I've had it'
- 'Arrete ton char'- literal: 'stop your chariot,' figurative: 'stop bluffing'

*Perhaps this activity will involve parent participation. I may ask students to ask their parents to come up with some expressions in English, which we will look at and translate in class. Looking up the history of such expressions can also be fun. I will, of course, provide the French examples.

b) Fun with homonyms

Making jokes using homonyms highlights the humour in language, as well as the binary of same/different- words can sound the same but have very different meanings.

English- Kieran Egan's mythic unit on homonyms on the 'ierg' website is a great resource for this activity as well as www.taupecat.com/homophones
French- 'Je suis ce que je suis, mais je ne suis pas ce que je suis, si j'étais ce que je suis...'- using the verbs 'suivre' and 'etre' in a playful way.

c) Tongue twisters in English and French

English- I'm sure the students will be able to come up with examples in English ('she sells sea shells...')

French- 'Natacha n'attacha pas son chat qui s'échappa'
'La pipe au papa du Pape Pie pue'

*'Le fabuleux destin d'Amélie Poulain' is a great resource for fun with French tongue twisters and is a great movie too!

- **Rhyme, rhythm, and pattern:** *Are there patterns in the topic students could play with? What activities might draw attention to rhyme, rhythm, and pattern?*

Teaching strategy: Looking at some similarities in the patterns/rules/grammar between English and French. Languages are all about patterns and they all have a particular rhythm. We will do some comparing and contrasting and perhaps even some Venn diagrams to look at the similarities and differences between the patterns of the 'brothers.'

As well, there is more fun to come with nonsensical rhymes! The teacher will introduce such rhymes in French through rhythm games and we will explore their meanings together.

Student activity:- students come up with things they've noticed as differences (those funny accents on 'e's, articles- never say the word by itself- English baby book vs French baby book, punctuation, silent letters...). We will create a list of differences and then a list of similarities (using images always for my 'early' readers).

After brainstorming ideas together, I will give each student an image that represents some comparisons between the two languages and we will take turns placing them in the correct spot on the Venn diagram.

Ideas of comparisons:

1- use of accents F-Y, E-N (F=French, Y=yes, E=English, N=no)

2- agreement F=Y, E=N

3- articles F=more common, E=less common

4- capitalization F=less common, E=more common

5- contractions F=required, E=optional and informal (ex: le+abricot= l'abricot, ce+est= c'est)

6- gender F=all nouns and most pronouns, E=only for personal pronouns
7- liaisons F=Y, E=N
8- negation F=2 words, E=1 word (ex: F=ne pas, E=no)
9-rhythm F=stress at the end of each rhythmic group, E=stressed syllable in each word and stress on important word
10- punctuation- comparing the period, comma, parentheses, etc.
11- silent letters- *both languages have them but they are different. We could have lots of fun with these.

- **Games, drama, and play:** *How can students engage in games, drama, and play in learning about the topic?*

Teaching strategy: We will turn our faux-amis jokes of the Anglophone in Paris into a role-playing activity.

Student activity: Students take their ‘faux-amis’ jokes and create a drama with it- add more to the story. If this is Grade One, this activity would be most appropriate near the end of the year when language fluency is really developing. However, if there is ‘language blending,’ using English words to make up for the lack of knowledge of the French words, then the humour intensifies.

- **Embryonic tools of romantic understanding:**

Teaching Strategy: Drawing upon history and the heroic tales of conquering lands as well as humbling defeats. Throughout history, there were times when England and France each took their turns conquering new lands and their language/culture ‘winning’?

Heroic quality- Collaboration and Friendship- two languages working together, collaborating and taking on aspects of the other to become even ‘greater’. We will look at Canadian history and how English and French became brothers here at home.

Student Activity: Begin with a ‘what you find wonderful’ about Canadian history, in terms of the English (British, Scottish, Irish, etc.) and the French. This will require parent participation and some ‘dinner talk’ at home. We could do a week of ‘montre et raconte’ (show and tell) about what you have learned about the history of the French and English. Ex: the ‘fleur de lys’ (fleurdelisé), a cereal box showing both French and English, the Nova Scotian flag (also with the ‘fleur de lys’), a Laura Secord box of chocolates, a poppy (symbol from Flanders field), etc.

2.5. Drawing on tools of previous kinds of understanding:

Teaching Strategy: Exploring music and dances that illustrate the brotherhood between French and English and what better way to do this than with 'la musique et danse franco-canadien.' We will also listen to some contemporary Canadian folk music that is song in both French and English and that employs some of the 'fun' that exists between the two languages that we have been learning about. Ex: 'De Temps Antan' and 'les cowboys fringants'

Student Activity: Students will learn songs following the franco-canadian tradition (with much Celtic and British Isle influence) and the dances they are meant to accompany.

Examples of songs/dances

- 'les violins d'acadie'
- "La petite boiteuse"
- "L'omelette au lard"
- "La vieille Bastringue"

3. Resources

List of resources:

'The Mother Tongue: English and How It Got That Way' by Bill Bryson

'French Inside Out: The French Language Past and Present' by Henriette Walter

'Honni soit qui mal y pense: L'incroyable histoire d'amour entre le francais et l'anglais' by Henriette Walter

English Homophones websites:

www.taupecat.com/homophones

www.ezschool.com/Games/Homophones

www.bifroest.demon.co.uk/misc./homophones

French Homophones websites:

www.french.about.com

www.tolearnfrench.com

Social Studies textbooks and other books on Canada from the school library

Kayak- Canada's History Magazine for Kids

Government websites ex: www.collectionscanada.gc.ca/settlement/kids

‘Danse, mon Coeur danse’ - France Bourque-Moreau (a CD collection of tradition franco-canadian music and dances)

Story books- more research to do here

4. Conclusion

Concluding activity: The students will create characters that represent the brothers, French and English. They will choose some way of presenting their characters and telling their family story of connection and misconnection.

Some example activities:

Students may choose to do a comic strip or a series of drawings that shows how the brothers sometimes get along while at other times they don't. However, no matter what, they are family.

Students may choose to make a family tree, showing some significant historical events that shaped the two brothers.

Students may choose to ‘re-write’ (using images and I would transcribe the text) the initial story of the ‘Three Little Pigs’, adding their own twists that show what they have learned about the brothers and highlighting how the bilingual pig represents a sort of ‘resolution’ between differences.

Students may choose to create a ‘timeline’ project representing some important ‘family events’ between the brothers, French and English. (This could have a Canadian focus as well as a Global focus). *Another idea is to incorporate technology and make a Facebook Timeline page for a brother and highlighting family connections (idea inspired by Bavan's Comp.)

Students may create a ‘family portrait’ that displays the relationship of the brothers.