Young children's language-based agency in multilingual contexts in Luxembourg and Israel

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Abstract

Drawing on two longitudinal case-studies, this study aimed to identify some salient characteristics of the agentic behaviour of two young emergent multilinguals in two different multilingual contexts: Luxembourg and Israel. Despite the fact that the studies were conducted independently, the two cases were analysed together owing to the similarities in the research methods such as video-recorded observations, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents. The data were analysed through thematic and conversational analyses. Findings showed that a boy who learned Luxembourgish in Luxembourg and a girl who learned Hebrew in Israel, were outgoing and active learners who influenced their learning environment. We identified ten types of agentic behaviour, including engaging in repetition after peers and the teacher, creatively producing language, translanguaging, and self-monitoring. Despite differences of the children's sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, and the language policies of their educational settings, we found a striking overlap in their language-based agentic behaviours. We suggest that the identified types can encourage further research in this field. Although our study with talkative children allowed us to observe many types of agentic behaviours, we cannot claim that less outgoing children or children who do not show the same behaviours do not have ways of expressing their agency.

1. Introduction

In our globalised world, most young children grow up bilingually or multilingually in a multilingual environment. Their process of language learning is social, active and dynamic and requires decision-making. Children thereby show agentic behaviour. Agency is a form of social engagement that refers to an individual's actions directed at achieving a certain goal (Emirbayer and Mische 1998). While there is substantive research on adults as agents, few scholars have investigated the agentic behaviour of young children learning a new language, that is, a language different from the home language (Schwartz and Gorbatt 2016). One of the exceptions is a study by Mård (2002) who showed that talkative and less talkative children showed different language behaviours when communicating in Swedish in a preschool in Finland. Studies in multilingual contexts are even more rare (Kirsch 2018).

Drawing on two longitudinal case-studies rooted in a sociocultural perspective to language learning, this paper investigates the agentic behaviour of two preschool children who learn a new language at school. Findings show that a four-year-old boy who learned Luxembourgish in Luxembourg and a three-and-half year-old girl who learned Hebrew in Israel were active learners who influenced their learning environment. We classified their agentic behaviour into ten types which may broaden our understanding of the phenomenon and contribute to further research in this domain.

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2. Main theoretical notions

2.1. Language learning in the early years

This paper draws on a sociocultural perspective on language, which conceptualizes language learning as a dynamic, social, cognitive, and emotional process embedded in a particular cultural context (Vygotsky 1978; Swain et al. 2011). Young children learn a first or novel language as they co-participate in cultural activities mediated by more experienced members of the community (e.g. relatives, teachers, peers) who adapt their language use to the child's needs during authentic and meaningful interactions (Lantolf and Poehner 2008). While this mediation is of utmost importance for language development, children do not acquire languages passively, rather, they actively and collaboratively shape this process. They carefully listen to interlocutors; imitate and repeat formulaic speech; apply non-verbal communication strategies such as gesturing and pointing; creatively reproduce and transform language (Corsaro 2005), and practise the novel language in private speech (Swain et al. 2011). They may also translanguage, that is, use their entire semiotic repertoire when interacting with bilingual speakers (García 2009). Children's active involvement in their learning process and the range of strategies deployed is a reminder that children are active and perceiving agents in their learning process (van Lier 2010).

The process of learning novel languages is influenced by a range of interconnecting factors, including learner characteristics such as personality, motivation, attitude, language learning strategies, and social skills. Strong (1988) and Wong Fillmore (1976) emphasized the need to examine social style, personality factors, and individual language strategies because these can affect the child's learning approach, learning progress and inclination to interact with people who speak the target language. The researchers found that children who showed a high degree of

participation in communication with native speakers had more access to language input and were faster learners. These children often wished to be a part of the target social group and, in turn, this motivation helped them overcome difficulties associated with initiating contact (ibid. 1976: 666). Furthermore, good language learners (Griffiths, 2015) have been found to have a highly social and outgoing personality and deploy a range of social language learning strategies, which keep them actively involved in classroom activities (e.g., Philp and Duchesne 2008). Moreover, living in increasingly linguistically and culturally diverse environments, these learners have been found to develop a plurilingual competence as well as be able to mediate language between children with no common language; switch from one language to another; bring their whole linguistic repertoire into play; use non-verbal communicative strategies for expression, and show signs of metalinguistic awareness (CEFR Companion Volume, 2018: 28). However, it is important to state that all language learners, whether talkative, outgoing, social or not, can learn languages well and can show agency in doing so. Apart from individual factors and educational ones (e.g. ibid), language learning is influenced by the interlocutors and the way they structure the language learning environment. At home, family language policies shape the language use (e.g., Kirsch 2012) and at school, this happens through the language-in-education policy (e.g., Spolsky 2009) and the teachers' pedagogy (e.g., Schwartz and Gorbatt 2016; Kirsch 2018).

2.2. The concept of agency

The concept of agency has gained much interest over the last few decades and has undergone a fundamental paradigm shift. It was initially defined as an attribute or characteristic of an isolated individual, void of the cultural, historical, and institutional

context (Biesta and Tedder, 2006; Jones and Norris, 2005). The concept has proven to be much more complex and layered, which led Emirbayer and Mische (1998) to redefine agency as 'a temporally embedded process of social engagement' informed by the individual's past experiences, future orientations and current practices (p. 963). The authors stress the dynamic interplay between different dimensions of agency, such as routinized practices, purpose and judgment which vary within different structural contexts of action. Other scholars similarly argued for the need to consider social interactions, institutional structures, and time and space (Wertsch, Tulviste, and Hagstrom 1993). Analysing teacher agency in language policy-enactments, Priestly, Biesta and Robinson (2013) found that the teachers were 'agents of change' who can support or subvert language policies based on their professional knowledge and skills, beliefs and values (e.g., Kirsch 2018).

2.3. Child agency

In the research field of early childhood education, scholars have begun to investigate the concept of child agency in relation to language policies and the learning of novel languages (e.g., Boyd and Huss 2017). Almér (2017) built upon van Nijnatten's (2013) concept of interactive agency and defined it as 'the performative capacity to act with a certain degree of autonomy and to take position in relation to other people' (p. 33). Bergroth and Palviainen (2017: 379) added that this capacity is mediated through language. In contrast to individual agency (having a voice), this interactive agency (having the capacity to make this voice heard) results in interaction with significant others, such as relatives, peers or teachers (Almér 2017).

Several scholars have investigated agency of bilinguals. Children in preschools in Sweden, Finland, and Israel have been seen to discuss and evaluate their own and

others' language use (Boyd and Huss 2017; Schwartz and Gorbatt 2016, 2018). The children also had some understanding of language learning and of their interlocutor's needs. As was reported by Almér (2017) and Schwartz and Palviainen (2016), four-to-six-year-olds had strong beliefs regarding the benefits of bilingualism and expressed their sense of superiority as bilinguals. Working in Swedish-medium early childhood education, Bergroth and Palviainen (2017) showed that three-to-four-year olds had a good understanding of whom to speak what language to. Based on their understanding of learning processes and their metalinguistic awareness, children as young as three to six expressed their bilingual agency either by supporting each other linguistically (Schwartz and Gorbatt 2018) or excluding others from conversations (e.g., Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017).

Several studies investigated young children's bilingual agency in relation to language policies. Bergroth and Palviainen (2016) showed that children co-constructed monolingual as well as bilingual policies with the adults in their preschool in Finland and that the children's preferences for monolingual or bilingual policies reflected their individual communicative interests and actions. Other children were shown to create, modify and maintain the language policy-in-practice in monolingual preschools in Sweden (Boyd, Huss and Ottesjö 2017) and in a bilingual preschool in Serbia (Prošić-Santovac and Radović 2018). Further support for the children's ability to influence settings comes from Fogle (2012) in the US, who examined agency in the home context. She distinguished between a complicit and controlling agency. The first dimension refers to participation and denotes situations where children participate in activities structured by somebody else, for instance by asking questions. The second one, also called agency of power, goes beyond the mere active involvement and refers to interactional situations where children influence, shape and may even change

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situations. For example, they may negotiate language use in the light of their own interests. Fogle reported that four-to-sixteen-year-olds expressed their agency through resistance and negotiation, thereby changing family language practices.

The above-mentioned studies mainly focused on children in monolingual or bilingual preschools and bilingual homes. Albeit not focusing on agency, research on translanguaging is relevant for our context because children enact language choices and show agency while translanguaging (García and Kleifgen 2010). Some functions of translanguaging identified with young children are similar to those in the agency studies mentioned above. Preschool children have been found to translanguage to develop relationships and include or exclude others (e.g., García et al. 2011; Kirsch 2018).

In sum, this review has shown that young children are active language learners who have some awareness of their language proficiency and language use and are able to influence others. Furthermore, most studies have been carried out with bilingual preschools or contexts that encouraged the use of two languages. However, there is a research gap when it comes to children learning languages in multilingual contexts. This study addresses this gap by identifying characteristics of the agentic behaviour of two children in Luxembourg and Israel, thereby focusing on their verbal as well as non-verbal expression of their language-based agency.

3. The contexts

Given that child agency cannot be understood without being 'adequately contextualized in macro- and micro contexts' (Blommaert and Jie 2010: 19), we will expose some macro-contextual factors (e.g., demography), and micro-contextual factors (e.g., the language policy in the target institutional contexts). While language policies shape the language use, they are never implemented directly, rather, teachers and children

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negotiate polices, adapt and appropriate them (Palviainen and Mård-Miettinen 2015). The following sections provide an overview of the linguistic landscapes of Luxembourg and Israel.

3.1 Luxembourg

The Grand Duchy of Luxembourg is a small country in Europe bordering France, Germany and Belgium. With the three official languages, Luxembourgish, French and German, and almost half the residents not having Luxembourgish citizenship, multilingualism is a reality in the everyday life of the country. The largest immigrant communities are the Portuguese, French, Italians and Belgians. About 188,000 daily commuters from the neighbouring countries add to this complex sociolinguistic situation (STATEC 2019).

By contrast, the language-in-education policies in the non-formal sector and the formal one reported on here, focused exclusively on Luxembourgish until 2017. The formal sector comprises the two-year-long compulsory preschool for four-to-six-year-olds and the *éducation précoce,* an optional year for three-year-olds. Part of the rationale behind the introduction of preschool education was the promotion of Luxembourgish, enshrined in the national curriculum as the common language of communication and integration. Over the last decade, the diversity of the school population has continued to increase. In the 2016/17 academic year, 64% of the four-year-olds did not speak Luxembourgish as their home language (MENJE 2018). To address the increasing heterogeneity, raise school achievement and promote social inclusion, the government implemented multilingual education in 2017. In addition to Luxembourgish, teachers and care-givers are now required to familiarize children with French and value their home languages.

The data for this paper stems from a preschool at the time when the national language policy still focused on Luxembourgish. This language policy discouraged the use of languages other than Luxembourgish in the classroom. Ms Vivian, the teacher we observed during the project 'Developing Multilingual Pedagogies in Early Childhood' (MuLiPEC) took part in our professional development on multilingual education and therefore, learned to plan multilingual activities and design a holistic language learning environment (Kirsch et al. forthcoming).

3.2 Israel

Israel, a country with a distinctive language situation, represents one of the more complex cases of a modern multilingual and multicultural society. This society includes the coexistence of two official languages, Hebrew and Arabic (the languages of the largest ethnic minorities, the Jews and Arabs in Israel), in addition to English as semi-official language widely used in numerous contexts especially in academia, economics and politics, and native languages of large groups of immigrants (e.g., Russian, Amharic, Spanish, French and scores of others).

The education system in Israel foresees Hebrew-speaking and Arabic-speaking schools and, therefore, Jewish and Arab children are generally separated. Bilingual schools may be the only opportunity for some children to interact with children of the counter group. This intergroup contact can potentially foster positive relations between two ethnic communities who live sometimes in tension and have a longstanding history of ethnic conflict. Parents who wish to help their (Arab and Jewish) children develop a high level of tolerance and respect, may therefore opt for bilingual education. This choice reflects their interest and determination in setting their children on a different path from the mainstream culture-specific education.

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Bilingual education began in 1991 in Neve Salom, Wahat al-Salam, an Arab-Jewish village near Jerusalem. In 1997, the Hand in Hand Center for Jewish-Arab Education initiated bilingual schools and preschools, including the target preschool. The teaching and management staff of these schools represents both ethnic groups, with each class having an Arab and a Jewish teacher. The teachers of each class share the educational tasks and responsibilities. These bilingual schools are supported by the Ministry of Education.

4. The methodology

The following section outlines the participants as well as the methods for data collection and analysis.

4.1 The case-studies

The two studies were conducted independently in Luxembourg and Israel. The Luxembourgish study was part of the longitudinal research project MuLiPEC, headed by Kirsch. While the researchers examined the influence of their professional development on multilingual education on the practitioners' attitudes, knowledge and practices (Kirsch et al. forthcoming), the PhD candidate Mortini investigated the interactions of the children among themselves and with the practitioners, thereby focusing on agency.

The present paper focuses on George who was four years old at the beginning of the data collection. He moved with his parents and his baby brother from Mallorca (Spain) to Luxembourg in November 2016. The family has Spanish citizenship and both parents speak Spanish, Mallorquí and English. They began to take French courses upon their arrival in Luxembourg but did not understand Luxembourgish at the time of

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the data collection. In November 2016, George entered Ms. Vivian's class in the centre of Luxembourg. George was chosen on account of his interest in language learning and his rapid progress in learning Luxembourgish.

The Israeli study, led by Schwartz, was part of a larger two-year project which explored language socialization and phases in bilingual development in Hebrew and Arabic in a bilingual Arabic–Hebrew preschool in the Northern part of Israel. The study aimed to explore the ways in which children developed metalinguistic awareness and communicative competence in either Arabic or Hebrew and other languages (e.g., English) through interactions in the classroom and at home. The present paper concentrates on Rima, an Arabic-speaking girl, who was 2.9 at the beginning of the study and was observed for two years. Before entering the bilingual preschool, Rima was enrolled in a monolingual Arabic-speaking nursery school. Our interest in Rima's case was fuelled by the teachers' and the parents' testimonies about her remarkably fast progress in learning Hebrew and the fact that her skills in this novel language were more advanced than those of children who had entered the preschool two years earlier.

4.2 Methods for data collection and analysis

Despite our independent research design and data collection, the two case studies could be analysed together due to the following similarities. Both studies applied a similar methodology through collecting and documenting data by means of ethnographic methods such as fieldnotes, video-recorded observations, and semi-structured interviews with teachers and parents. In Luxembourg, Mortini observed George interacting with peers and his teacher over 17 days from October 2016 to July 2017. Apart from taking fieldnotes, she video-recorded 156 interactions ranging in length from one to 40 minutes.

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In Israel, Rima was observed in the preschool from November 2015 to August 2017. The researchers took fieldnotes and video-recorded activities. From the corpus of 166 hours of video-recordings and 21 hours of fieldnotes, the researchers selected and transcribed 56 interactions between Rima and the Hebrew model teacher, the Arabic model teacher and her peers. The videos lasted between one and 15 minutes. In both studies, a number of semi-structures interviews with teachers and parents have been conducted during the research period.

The methods for data analysis were similar as well. The video-recorded activities were selectively transcribed and details for mime, gesture and actions were added. Next, the selected data of the video-recordings and the fieldnotes were examined in the light of the children's verbal and non-verbal behaviour reflecting their agency in language learning (Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017). This was done through a thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke 2006) combined with a 'sociocultural theory approach to conversation analysis' (Seedhouse 2005). Finally, to enhance the credibility of our analysis, both research teams triangulated the findings from the observations and fieldnotes with the interviews and compared the findings across the studies. We thereby identified ten types of agentic behaviour, coded, for instance, as active engagement, creative production of language, shaping language activities, and managing language use.

5. Findings: Exemplifications of children's agentic behaviour in the case-studies

We identified ten types of agentic behaviour in our data on outgoing children. The children were:

a. Engaging through non-verbal communication strategies and using home languages;

b. Engaging in repetition after peers and teacher;

c. Creatively producing language, including translanguaging;

d. Self-monitoring and self-correcting;

e. Providing corrective feedback to others;

f. Using self-talk in a novel language;

g. Talking about language use and asking questions about language;

h. Taking a leading role in shaping activities in a novel language;

i. Managing language use in the classroom;

j. Showing reluctance to use a (novel) language.

Given that children's agency is embedded in social and cultural contexts, we will briefly present the children's language learning environment at home and at school before exemplifying the types of agentic behaviours.

5.1 Luxembourg

To contextualise George's agentic behaviour, we will provide some background information on his home and school environment.

George's language use at home

George's parents have spoken Spanish with George and his brother at home, both when they lived in Mallorca and since their arrival in Luxembourg in 2016. They were open towards languages and always wished to familiarize George with several languages. For instance, they hired an English and Galician-speaking babysitter for George at the age of seven months, who looked after him until the age of two. Furthermore, they decided to speak some Mallorquí to the children to 'create a reference for the local language' (interview with George's parents, 24th July 2017) and, to some extent, help them learn this local language. This may explain why they enrolled George in a

Montessori crèche where he began to learn Mallorquí. Furthermore, he continued to develop his skills in Spanish and learned some English. Although George had little contact with the English teacher, according to the parents, he was nevertheless able to understand his cousins when they spoke English to him.

During the time of the data collection in Luxembourg, George spoke mainly Spanish but sometimes English to his parents who continued to encourage the use of multiple languages through their flexible family language policy. They bought him videos and games in English and replied in English if he wished them to do so. However, they did not introduce George to French and German, the other official languages of the country. George took advantage of this flexible language management. He mainly communicated in Spanish and more rarely in Luxembourgish with his little brother and watched videos and played games in English on his iPad.

Language policy in the preschool

The preschool was located in the Southern part of Luxembourg and, in 2016, catered for sixteen four-to-five-year-old children coming mainly from middle- or high-income families. The language diversity of the children was high. Twelve children were developing Luxembourgish at school, as well as one or more of the following languages at home: French, Portuguese, Arabic, German, Albanian, Chinese, Finnish, Czech and English. Two children spoke Spanish, including George. Only two children spoke Luxembourgish at home.

The teacher, Ms Vivian, had a Master's degree in the 'Teaching/ Learning of Foreign Languages', was multilingual and spoke Spanish with her partner. She implemented a multilingual child-centred and holistic pedagogy with a focus on Luxembourgish (Kirsch et al. forthcoming). Her translanguaging pedagogy ran counter

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the official monolingual policy but prepared her for the programme of multilingual education to be implemented from Autumn 2017. Drawing on her skills in Luxembourgish, French, German, English and Spanish, she designed language learning activities in the three languages of the country and created translanguaging spaces where she and the children could use their languages flexibly. To support children's comprehension during daily interactions and in activities such as storytelling, she provided differentiated input and scaffolded the children's language use through modelling, contextualized speech, paralinguistic cues and explanations. Furthermore, Ms Vivian encouraged children to draw on their home languages either to express themselves more freely or tell stories on the iPad app iTEO (Kirsch 2018). According to her, there were always opportunities to acknowledge and value children's home languages which let the children feel 'welcome with [their] language' (interview, 5th May 2017).

Characteristics of George's agentic behaviour

From the moment of his enrolment in the new school, George demonstrated his willingness to communicate with the teacher and his peers, participated in the planned activities and showed interest in learning Luxembourgish and other languages. He actively engaged in conversations and activities through non-verbal communication strategies such as mime, gesture, pointing, and doing actions. In order to verbalize more complex thoughts when communicating with the teacher or when interacting with a Spanish-speaking peer, he also drew on Spanish.

Eager to learn Luxembourgish and French, he actively repeated words after his peers and Ms Vivian. This active participation, observed during circle time and activities, enabled him to acquire some French words and Luxembourgish formulaic

expressions. He creatively communicated, using these utterances with the teacher and his non-Spanish speaking peers. George made rapid progress in Luxembourgish and by the end of the academic year, mainly used this language with the teacher, even when she offered help in Spanish. This progress may be related to his interest in languages, his outgoing persona, his metalinguistic awareness and metacognitive learning strategies. He monitored his language use and talked about language. For instance, he would ask the teacher in Spanish for Luxembourgish expressions and compared words across languages. While this description has so far illustrated the first five types of agentic behaviour listed above, we would like to give one concrete example of an interaction which provides details of George's agency. The example illustrates the ways in which he translanguaged, thus used his entire repertoire creatively and flexibly, to actively engage and demonstrate knowledge. In the excerpt, Ms Vivian and the sixteen children discussed the food of lions in Luxembourgish. Pictures of lions and a big green poster lay in front of them on the floor.

Turn	Actor (non-verbal communication)	English translation (in normal script if the original utterance was in Luxembourgish, in *italics* if the original was in *Spanish*)
1	George (raises his arms and makes a gesture as if he would catch something)	Tschhhk
2	George (puts his hand up)	Teacher, teacher.
3	Ms Vivian	Yes, George?
4	George	*The lions can walk on the water that isn't so deep.*
5	Ms Vivian (then addresses the entire class)	Okay, George says lions walk in the water when the water isn't so deep. Mmhmh, very correct.

(Observation, 27th February 2017)

In this excerpt, George showed his ability to participate in the discussion by using non-verbal communication strategies and sounds. As he was not yet able to contribute to the discussion in Luxembourgish, he communicated his idea with a gesture and a sound (turn 1), probably to show how a lion catches its prey. Next, he communicated his wish to speak by raising his hand and uttering the Luxembourgish word for teacher (turn 2). When asked to contribute (turn 3), he explained in Spanish that lions can walk across water (turn 4). This translanguaging between Luxembourgish, non-verbal communication and his home language allowed him to participate and demonstrate knowledge. Ms Vivian legitimized his contribution in Spanish by replying 'okay' and translating it to Luxembourgish for his peers (turn 5). In doing so, she legitimized the translanguaging space opened by George, and encouraged the children's use of home languages. Through her translation, she rendered George's message accessible to all children. Such inclusive spaces may afford children's agentic behaviour of using different features of their repertoires as a strategy to participate. These data thus also show that George went beyond mere participation. He took an active role in shaping activities in non-institutional or new languages, managed the language use in the classroom and expressed choices relating to his language use. These behaviours (referred to above as h, i and j), are also illustrated in the following observation. On 12th June 2017, Ms Vivian tried to scaffold his comprehension by switching to Spanish. The excerpt illustrates how George encouraged Ms Vivian to use English in a daily ritual, thus ignoring Spanish.

Turn	Actor	English (in normal script if the original utterance was in Luxembourgish and in *italics* if the original was in *English*)
1	Ms Vivian	Two plus one equals?
2	George	Teacher you know I know *English.*

3	Ms Vivian	That is great, well then tell me *in English* how much *five and four* is.
4	George	*Eight.*
5	Ms Vivian	No *five and four is.*
6	George	Nine. *Another one.*

(Observation 12th June 2017)

Before the children took their break, Ms Vivian always fired questions in Luxembourgish at the children. As can be seen, this time, she chose mathematics and asked George to add two numbers. The boy reminded her in Luxembourgish that he knew English, thereby uttering the word English in English (turn 2). His language switch and statement led the teacher to switch to English as well (turns 3 and 5). George answered incorrectly in English. Ms Vivian pointed out in Luxembourgish that the answer was wrong and mentioned the numbers once again in English (turn 4). George replied correctly in Luxembourgish before requesting another addition in English (turn 6). This brief example illustrates George's language awareness and indicates a language preference. George replied in Luxembourgish first, thereby showing a willingness to learn the target language. He then continued in English and, in this way, encouraged the teacher to translanguage as well. This activity is representative of others where he also influenced the language use in activities. For instance, he repeatedly asked the teacher to sing Spanish songs in December 2016 and April 2017.

5.2 Israel

Rima's language use at home

In light of their family language policy, Rima's parents viewed their daughter's bilingual development in Arabic and Hebrew as a desirable target. The interview with them revealed that a primary reason for sending their daughter to a bilingual preschool was her early exposure to Hebrew and an opportunity for her to experience an early

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bicultural learning environment. The parents knew that their child's competence in Hebrew would potentially further her academic success because Hebrew is the language used in higher education. They themselves had gained their academic education in Israel. In addition, they were aware of Rima's curiosity in languages. As a result, the parents searched for a bilingual educational setting to enable their daughter to realise her linguistic potential. Furthermore, as two people who reported having a feeling of belonging, not only to their Arab Christian culture, but also to a 'global culture', the parents were aware of the role of English language in preparing Rima for life in Israel and in the modern world. As a result, like George's parents, they took some steps towards Rima's early exposure to English believing that English could play an important language in her future multilingual and multicultural environment: they provided her with an English series of videos from the Israeli television.

Language policy in the preschool

During our longitudinal engagement in the bilingual preschool, the researchers found that the dominant language model of the two teachers consisted of dual language input. Each teacher spoke mostly in her native language, Ms Aviv in Hebrew and Ms Inas in Arabic. They modelled language use, provided plentiful input in both languages, used 'responsible code-switching' (García 2009: 299), and gradually developed the children's receptive and productive skills in a new language. The teachers of this linguistically and culturally diverse context were highly tuned into the children's individual differences and needs. Many children came from diverse linguistic backgrounds and were used to one parent-one language policy at home. Therefore, the teachers created a supportive atmosphere by acknowledging a unique classroom

language mosaic and offering language mediation such as teacher and peer modelling, ritual repetitions, and multisensory activation for novice learners as in the case of Rima.

Characteristics of Rima's agentic behaviour

After a brief silent period of a couple of weeks, Rima developed her skills in L2 at an accelerated rate and by the end of her first year in preschool, she had developed all the building blocks necessary for productive L2 use and continued acquiring vocabulary and complex grammatical forms. The testimonies of the parents and teachers were in line with our observations. Both teachers and parents stressed Rima's interest in languages in general and her curiosity towards Hebrew. She communicated with enthusiasm independently of her skills and picked up words and phrases with ease through occasional interactions.

Apart from her interest, her personality and a possible aptitude for language learning, Rima's proactive behaviour is likely to have facilitated her striking learning progress. Being self-confident, talkative and outgoing, she socialised with peers from both ethnic groups. For instance, she established a friendship with Hind, an Arabic-speaking girl, who spoke Hebrew well. Hind helped Rima to understand the Hebrew teacher's instructions by translating them, and in this way, supported Rima's language socialization. Rima wished to be an active interactant in the classroom and, therefore, repeatedly used the formulaic utterance 'me too' in Hebrew to highlight her central position in social interactions.

Furthermore, her agentic behaviour was evident in her free-play activities in Hebrew, both at home and at school. As reported by the parents and the teachers, she productively reproduced her Hebrew teacher's intonation, frequent repetitions and slow

speech rate, when addressing her dolls/students in her self-talk (agentic behaviour type f identified above). Ms Aviv explained:

> Her parents told me that she plays on her own in Hebrew only, she doesn't play in Arabic at home, she plays in Hebrew! They tell me that they feel that I'm in their home with them, she imitates me, I can see it in (…) I can see in her attitude, I can see the (…) her body language, it amazes me that, it's like a mini me at preschool, it's funny! (Interview, July 21st, 2016).

At school, she initiated and led free-play activities in Hebrew with the native-speaking peers and Ms Aviv, merely three months after entering preschool. She thereby communicated confidently, drawing on limited telegraphic and formulaic phrases (e.g., 'let's go', 'yes?'). She made salient grammatical mistakes in Hebrew and spoke Hebrew words very quickly, initially in a non-comprehensive and non-coherent way.

Furthermore, Rima showed agentic behaviour by participating in interactions with peers and teachers, in particular during the morning circle, which provided her memorable input in Hebrew through songs, rhymes and non-verbal cues such as pictures, picture books and objects. In these interactions, Rima communicated by creatively combining the full range of communicative skills, from non-verbal cues (e.g., body language and gestures) to constructing varied utterances. Like George, she used gestures and sounds that imitate word meaning whenever she had a difficulty to convey her message verbally. In addition, she frequently repeated after Hebrew native-speaking children, counting on the help of her peers. She also made good use of telegraphic and formulaic speech and, after four months of learning Hebrew, was able to produce sentences, largely by building on these blocks.

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Rima interacted in Hebrew even if she did not understand everything. In these cases, she also made informed guesses. For example, whenever Ms Inas asked the Arabic-speaking children to give the Hebrew meaning of an Arabic word, the girl tried to guess the answer. This pattern of Rima's agentic behaviour was observed during the small group activity in April 2016, when Ms Inas was sitting with Rima and Dana, a Hebrew-speaking girl, at the art table and held scissors in her hand asking the girls to provide the Hebrew equivalent to the Arabic word:

Turn	Actor	English translation (in normal script if the original utterance was in Arabic, in *italics* if the original was in Hebrew)
1	Inas (to Dana and Rima)	How do you say scissors, how do you say scissors, who knows?
2	Rima (in a self-confident tone)	I.
3	Inas (to Rima)	How do you say scissors, what is scissors, do you know?
4	Rima	*Yellow.*
5	Inas (to Rima and shows her scissors)	What are *scissors*, do you know?

(Observation April 2016)

The above example illustrates how Rima used her knowledge of Hebrew even if she still did not know the correct answer. In turn 4, she labelled the colour instead of providing the name of the object, that is, scissors. In summary, these above-mentioned examples have illustrated the first three types of agentic behaviour found in our data: active engagement through non-verbal communication, repetition, and creatively producing language.

Similar to George, one of the distinctive features of Rima's agentic behaviour was her keen interest in Hebrew as L2 specifically and in languages in general as was addressed in the following testimonies of Ms Inas and Rima's parents:

Rima is the star, she continues to develop, she is *excited* about it (the Hebrew

language), it is evident that *languages excite* her.

(Interview with Inas, April 24th, 2016).

… we get enthusiastic and ask her things in Hebrew because we are *excited*

about what she is saying.

(Interview with Baha, Rima's mother, June 12th, 2016).

As noted above, Rima had been exposed to songs in Hebrew and English before
entering the bilingual preschool and, as reported by her father, she 'loved singing them'.
Interestingly, the parents stressed that when they spent one month in the United States
in February 2016, Rima had no barrier or any fear of encountering people who spoke
an unknown language, in this case English, even when she did not understand them.

Furthermore, like George, Rima paid close attention to her own speech and that of
others and provided corrective feedback. She also managed the language use in the
classroom to some extent (agentic behaviour type d, e and i identified above). Her
sensitivity to the Hebrew grammar has been expressed in explicit critical comments on
gender marking and agreements of her more experienced Arabic-speaking peers. When
her peers made a mistake or got confused, she made comments in the form of
categorical remarks such as 'It is wrong!' or recasted the utterance, as was observed
and documented by Ms Aviv (Interview, March 17th, 2016) and Ms Inas (April 21st,
2016).

Rima was also aware of Ms Aviv's lack of competence in Arabic. In her
communication with Ms Aviv, she frequently used non-verbal cues to convey meanings
and to avoid code-switching into Arabic. In the second year of Rima's enrolment in
preschool, she was observed several times taking the role of L2 mediator and translating

the Hebrew-model teacher's explanations into Arabic. In this way, she helped her Arabic-speaking peers understand the communication. In addition, she was glad to play the role of language expert for new language learners.

Just as George and Rima showed great willingness and interest in learning languages, they also expressed language choices. While George told his parents back in Spain not to use 'the language of the teacher with him' (i.e. Mallorquí) but speak Spanish, Rima did not accept whenever her parents tried to communicate in Hebrew with her at home. She resisted this switch and demanded the use of Arabic.

Tell me in Arabic, I don't understand what you are saying to me (Interview with Rima's parents, June 12th, 2016).

These examples indicate that both children showed, at times, a certain reluctance in communicating in a language other than the home language with their parents. Mallorquí and Hebrew were used at school and the parents' use of an institutional language was not ordinary. As a result, the children objected to their parents' language choice and demanded a language switch (category of behaviour j).

Discussion

Despite differences in George's and Rima's sociocultural and linguistic backgrounds, their educational contexts and the language policies, our cases present *salient features* of the same phenomenon. We found a significant overlap in the ten observed social behaviours such as drawing on non-verbal communication, counting on peers by repeating after them, and using language creatively. Both children monitored language use, corrected expressions and talked about languages in their multilingual context. Both were also observed shaping activities in a new language and even managing the

language use in the classroom. Finally, they both expressed linguistic choices at school and at home. They thereby showed a willingness to demonstrate knowledge, participate, and maintain relationships, and a desire to communicate in a language of their choice.

Our findings resemble those of former studies. Regarding sociocultural theories of language learning, Lantolf and Poehner (2008) and Swain et al. (2011), to name some scholars, demonstrated that children carefully listen to others, memorise chunks and repeat words after interlocutors. They make use of formulaic speech, use language creatively and may use all features of their linguistic and non-linguistic repertoire to express themselves (García 2009; García and Kleifgen 2010; Kirsch 2018). The dialogue with peers and teachers is essential to help learners progress. In our case, George and Rima had opportunities to imitate their interlocutors' speech, intonation, and gestures. They creatively reproduced speech patterns (Corsaro 2005), transformed them, internalised and appropriated them (Lantolf and Poehner 2008). Rima's role-play with her dolls at home, which reflected her classroom daily experience, enabled her to reproduce her Hebrew teacher's verbal and non-verbal behavioural patterns and internalise language. At the same time, her private speech during socio-dramatic play may have helped her overcome her feeling of incompetence in Hebrew and raise her confidence in using this new language. The use of private speech (Vygotsky 1987) which testifies to the children's engagement, can further the learning process and help children self-regulate their learning. Furthermore, the dialogue allowed the children to compare their output to what they heard and elicit language input and feedback. This, in turn, contributed to their developing language awareness. George and Rima showed some understanding of their own and their interlocutors' language use and needs (Almér 2017; Bergroth and Palviainen 2017; Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017; Schwartz and

Palviainen 2016) and adapted their language use or recasted utterances of others in the light of this understanding.

Our findings go beyond those reported in the research on language learning and child agency. While children have been found to modify, resist or change the language use at preschool and at home, most of these studies focused on language policies (e.g., Boyd et al. 2017, Fogle 2012). Our data show that children demonstrate agentic behaviour through shaping the language use in learning activities and managing the class. George and Rima enacted their agency during activities with peers and teachers in teacher-led activities to achieve interactional goals in contrast to studies were children expressed their agency as a preference for a language or demonstrated bilingual knowledge during free-play (Boyd et al. 2017). The emergent multilinguals in our study showed many similarities to other monolingual or bilingual children, independently of the type of preschool (i.e. monolingual, bilingual), type of programme (i.e. plurilingual education) and language policy of the setting (e.g. strict language separation). However, the children in our case-studies differed in that they were developing a plurilingual competence by using several languages in a multilingual context. George, for instance, used four languages at the time of the data collection and did so strategically to achieve communicative goals. He expressed a language-based agency within translanguaging practices (Mortini 2021).

As shown throughout the paper, the children's agentic behaviour has to be seen in relation both to the children's personality, interest and social skills and the learning setting. These points will be discussed in turn. Our finding of the relationship between the children's interest in learning languages and their involvement is in line with Van Lier (2010) who argues that children's openness towards novel languages is reflected in their active participation. Furthermore, children who wish to communicate and learn,

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deploy social strategies such as trying to communicate independently of their language competence or counting on friends who can play the role of language experts and support them linguistically (Kirsch 2017; Bergroth and Palviainen 2017; Philp and Duchesne 2008; Schwartz and Palviainen 2016). As for the learning environment, a common thread in the preschools studied in this paper, as well as in previous studies conducted in Israel (Schwartz and Gorbatt 2016), Finland (Almér 2017; Bergroth and Palviainen 2017), Sweden (Boyd et al. 2017; Cekaite and Evaldsson 2017) and Luxembourg (Kirsch et al. forthcoming) was the teachers' openness towards the children's dynamic language use. Both teachers acknowledged the diversity of the children's linguistic backgrounds and viewed these as a resource for their development. Both implemented a multilingual child-centred pedagogy and engaged in dynamic plurilingual practices. The learning contexts allowed for flexibility and, directly or indirectly, encouraged children to make choices which could then impact on their learning environment (García and Kleifgen 2010).

Conclusions and further research directions

This article described salient features of children's agentic behaviour in Luxembourg and Israel by exemplifying these through two case-studies. The same behaviours were found amongst other children who participated in the research studies by Mortini (2021) and Schwartz (2017). Some children were talkative, others less so. Acknowledging our focus on only two cases in this paper, we suggest viewing the aforementioned agentic behaviours of children in multilingual environments as possible but not obligatory. Our study with talkative children allowed us to observe many types of behaviours. However, we cannot say that less outgoing children or children who do not show the same behaviours do not have agency. We hope that the types of behaviour identified will be

useful to other researchers and encourage further research in this field. For instance, scholars could further elaborate on the behaviours and explore the phenomenon of child language-based agency within the school context.

Drawing on a sociocultural perspective, we expect the cultural context to play a significant role in the way in which the child's agency emerges. In this article, we could only briefly describe the language policies at school and at home because the focus was on the enactment of agency in preschool. Nevertheless, the relevance of the policies in both contexts became clear in that it affords children's agency. Further research studies could connect the learning environments at home and at school more strongly and show how the same children enact their agency across different environments. Finally, future research studies could address other intriguing questions not under the scope of our studies such as the nature of the relationship between agency and age; agency and competence or aptitude to lean a language; and agency and school type, classroom culture and teachers' and peers' agency. This on-going research will help us understand how we can support children's agency and language learning in ever more complex learning environments.

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