

To cite this output:

Myles, F, *et al* (2012) Learning French from ages 5,7, and 11: An Investigation into Starting Ages, Rates and Routes of Learning Amongst Early Foreign Language Learners  
ESRC End of Award Report, RES-062-23-1545. Swindon: ESRC



## ESRC End of Award Report

For awards ending on or after 1 November 2009

This End of Award Report should be completed and submitted using the **grant reference** as the email subject, to **reportsofficer@esrc.ac.uk** on or before the due date.

The final instalment of the grant will not be paid until an End of Award Report is completed in full and accepted by ESRC.

Grant holders whose End of Award Report is overdue or incomplete will not be eligible for further ESRC funding until the Report is accepted. We reserve the right to recover a sum of the expenditure incurred on the grant if the End of Award Report is overdue. (Please see Section 5 of the ESRC Research Funding Guide for details.)

Please refer to the Guidance notes when completing this End of Award Report.

<b>Grant Reference</b>	RES-062-23-1545		
<b>Grant Title</b>	Learning French from ages 5, 7 and 11: An investigation into starting ages, rates and routes of learning amongst early foreign language learners		
<b>Grant Start Date</b>	1 October 2009	<b>Total Amount</b>	£ 354,937.75
<b>Grant End Date</b>	30 September 2011	<b>Expended:</b>	
<b>Grant holding Institution</b>	Newcastle University		
<b>Grant Holder</b>	Professor Florence Myles		
<b>Grant Holder's Contact Details</b>	<b>Address</b>	<b>Email</b>	
	Dpt of Language and Linguistics, University of Essex, Wivenhoe Park, Colchester CO4 3SQ	fmyles@essex.ac.uk	
		<b>Telephone</b>	01206 872228
<b>Co-Investigators (as per project application):</b>		<b>Institution</b>	
Professor Rosamond Mitchell		University of Southampton	

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## 1. Non-technical summary

Please provide below a project summary written in non-technical language. The summary may be used by us to publicise your work and should explain the aims and findings of the project. *[Max 250 words]*

This project compared how children ages 5, 7 and 11 learn French in the classroom. The same French teacher provided similar teaching to Year 1, Year 3 and year 7 groups in two state schools. All lessons were video-recorded and children were tested on various linguistic measures mid project, at the end of the project and two months after the end. Children's English literacy scores were recorded and their working memory measured. Additionally, focus groups and one-to-one interviews took place, to document children's motivation for learning French and their language learning strategies.

The data was analysed for the development of vocabulary and grammar, the role of gestures in facilitating language learning, and children's attitudes, motivation and learning strategies, as well as links between linguistic development, working memory and English literacy.

In summary, the findings show:

- **Receptive vocabulary:** there is little difference between the groups, although how recently a word has been heard is more important for the younger children. Frequency in the input is the single most important factor for vocabulary learning.
- **Grammar:** older children have a clear advantage
- Good **working memory and good English literacy** support classroom language learning
- The older children make use of a wider range of **cognitive strategies** to aid learning
- The younger children are very **enthusiastic** and intrinsically **motivated** (learning French is fun)

The differences found in children's approach to learning at different ages have important implications for early foreign language learning curriculum development and policy.

## 2. Project overview

### a) Objectives

Please state the aims and objectives of your project as outlined in your proposal to us. *[Max 200 words]*

This project had four broad objectives:

- (a) document the development of linguistic competence among young classroom learners of French at three different starting ages (5, 7 and 11), and identify similarities and differences;
- (b) compare rates of development at different ages after the same amount of classroom exposure;
- (c) document and compare the children's learning strategies and attitudes at different ages;
- (d) through this evidence, contribute to theoretical understandings of second language acquisition among young learners, and consequently inform current primary language initiatives and educational practices in the UK and internationally.

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Full details of all aspects of this project can be found on the FLLOC website ([www.flloc.soton.ac.uk](http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk)), under 'Corpora', 'Young Learners':  
<http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk/primary/index.html>

## b) Project Changes

Please describe any changes made to the original aims and objectives, and confirm that these were agreed with us. Please also detail any changes to the grant holder's institutional affiliation, project staffing or funding. [*Max 200 words*]

No changes were made to the original aims and objectives.

The starting date of the project was delayed by one calendar year, to 1 October 2009, as agreed by the ESRC (email from Chiaki Hashimoto 18/02 2009); this was due to the late notification of award.

The grant holder moved from Newcastle University to the University of Essex for the last month of the project (September 2011); other project staff and administration remained in Newcastle as agreed by both institutions and the ESRC (email from June McMahon 17/02/2011).

The full time Research Associate based in Newcastle (Dr David) went on maternity leave January – August 2010, and a temporary replacement was appointed for that period (Dr dos Santos), as agreed by the ESRC (email from Chiaki Hashimoto 17/02/2010).

The full time Research Associate (Dr David) relocated in March 2011 and consequently reduced her contract to 0.6. A 0.4 Research Assistant was appointed for the last 7 months of the project (K. McManus). This was agreed with the ESRC (email from Chiaki Beis 21/01/2011)

## c) Methodology

Please describe the methodology that you employed in the project. Please also note any ethical issues that arose during the course of the work, the effects of this and any action taken. [*Max 500 words*]

### 1. Fieldwork

#### a. Timeline

October 2009 - January 2010:

- Preparation of teaching materials and elicitation tasks
- Set up testing and teaching schedule in liaison with schools
- Piloting test procedures

February - July 2010:

- Data collection with 5 and 7 year olds (primary school)
- Data preparation (CHILDES transcription, anonymisation, tagging,

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	uploading of database, preparation of video materials)
	- Preliminary data analysis
September – March 2011:	
	- Data collection with 11 year olds (secondary school)
	- Data preparation
	- Data analysis
March-September 2011:	
	- Data preparation
	- Data analysis
	- Preparation of outputs
	- Project conference (July 2011)
b. Participants	
	- Primary school (Murton Community Primary School, County Durham)
	• Year 1: 27 (age 5/6)
	• Year 3: 26 (age 6/7)
	- Secondary school (Excelsior Academy, Newcastle)
	• Year 7: 18 (age 11/12)
c. Teaching intervention	
	- Part-time qualified teacher (project employee):
	• 38 hours French instruction for each group
	• 19 weeks (two weekly hours)
	• Followed currently recommended schemes of work at each level.
	• Common pedagogic principles delivered in age-appropriate way
d. Data collection	
	- Classroom data collection
	All classes video recorded and transcribed + selective observation notes, ensuring:
	• documentation of <b>all</b> the linguistic input received by the children
	• evidence of pedagogic and motivational strategies used by teacher
	• evidence of learning strategies used by children at different ages
	- Testing
	• Pre-test
	• Group interview about: previous knowledge of French; general awareness of France and French language
	• Receptive vocabulary test
	• Mid-project test (after 18 hours teaching)
	• Story retelling (discourse + syntax)
	• Elicited imitation (vocabulary, syntax)
	• Role play (discourse, vocabulary, syntax)
	• Input-based receptive vocabulary test (based on 14 hours teaching; controlled for frequency, recency, type of input etc)
	• End test (after 38 hours teaching)

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- As mid-project test, + working memory test
- Delayed post-test (2 months later)
  - As mid-project, plus short learner interviews about French learning (e.g. attitudes, strategies, motivation etc.)

Focus group interviews with all children during 2<sup>nd</sup> half of the teaching intervention explored learning strategies/attitudes/motivation  
All language assessment tasks developed and piloted with age-matched learners prior to data collection.

- Other data
  - Professional film (20mins; edited from one lesson)
  - Film of interview with teacher

## 2. Data storage/management and transcription

- All test data transcribed and anonymised; soundfiles, transcripts and tagged files available through French Learner Language Oral Corpora website (FLLOC) (<http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk/>).
- Focus group and interview data transcribed.
- All teacher classroom talk transcribed.
- Some videodata tagged for gestures (with additional funding from the British Academy).
- Professional film and teacher interview available from FLLOC website.

## 3. Data analysis

The following analyses were carried out, using CLAN programs as appropriate:

- Development of receptive vocabulary and links with input, working memory and literacy.
- Development of grammar (elicited imitation) and links with other measures
- Role of gestures: gestures tagged (e.g. iconic, deictic etc.) and their role analysed in promoting vocabulary learning.
- Attitudes, motivation and learning strategies (focus group data and interviews)

## d) Project Findings

Please summarise the findings of the project, referring where appropriate to outputs recorded on the ESRC website. Any future research plans should also be identified. *[Max 500 words]*

For full details of all tasks, see <http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk/primary/tasks.html>

### 1. Receptive vocabulary:

- **Task:** computer-based pre-, mid-, post-, delayed post-test. Participant hears French word and clicks on one of four images.
- **Results:**
  - Cross-group differences not significant; considerable individual variability. All groups improved mid to (delayed) post-test, but only year 1 significantly

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(starting from lower base at mid-test).

- Raw frequency of teacher input plays major role, especially for younger children.
- Frequency in number of lessons a word occurred in also significant for all groups, but more so for year 3.
- Recency (i.e. how close to testing word has been heard): only significant for year 1.
- No clear relationship overall between type of input and retention of vocabulary. Better retention for words phonologically close to English (e.g. *bébé, fleur*) but not if similarity orthographic only (e.g. *papier, table*). Further analysis on-going.
- No significant differences between boys and girls

Overall, vocabulary development facilitated most by frequency of input, as well as recency for younger children. Age differences minimal.

## 2. Grammar

### - Task

- Elicited imitation: learners repeat sentences (various controlled lengths; designed from classroom input).
- Mid-, post-, delayed post-test

### - Results

- Older children better: year 7 significantly better than year 3 ( $p < 0.05$ ) who are significantly better than year 1 ( $p < 0.01$ )

## 3. Role of gesture

### - Methodology

- Tagging and description of all teacher gestures
- Tracking of relationship between gesture types and vocabulary learning

### - Preliminary results

- Gesture can aid saliency and analysis/processing of input
- Redundant gesture can also distract from linguistic input

## 4. Attitudes, motivation and learner strategies

### - Methodology

- Focus groups with all children; one-to-one interview during post-test

### - Results (only year 1 and 3 analysed to-date)

- Attitudes
  - Main reason for liking French is that it is fun
  - Language highly prominent in perception of difference between selves and French children
  - Slightly less enthusiasm for learning French in Year 3
  - More sophisticated discussion of commonalities/differences in year 3
- Learning strategies
  - Repeating most common strategy for both groups
  - More awareness and wider range of strategies in year 3
- Motivation
  - Focus on communicative need e.g. on holidays
  - wider range of imagined situations in year 3
  - Intrinsic value of languages mentioned by some year 3 children
  - Most children want to continue learning French, but wider range of reasons in year 3

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- Little French outside class, but wider range of activities in year 3

#### 5. Link between L2 development, literacy and working memory

- Strong correlation literacy – vocabulary development (years 1 and 3)
- Strong correlation working memory – grammar development (all years)
- Correlation working memory – literacy (years 1 and 3)
- Correlation working memory – receptive vocabulary (year 3)
- No correlations year 7, but small group (n=14) completed all tests

#### 6. Conclusion

- Age advantage for grammar
- Older children use wider range of cognitive strategies
- Younger children very enthusiastic
- Working memory and literacy support language learning

### e) Contributions to wider ESRC initiatives (eg Research Programmes or Networks)

If your project was part of a wider ESRC initiative, please describe your contributions to the initiative's objectives and activities and note any effect on your project resulting from participation. [*Max. 200 words*]

n/a

## 3. Early and anticipated impacts

### a) Summary of Impacts to date

Please summarise any impacts of the project to date, referring where appropriate to associated outputs recorded on the Research Outcomes System (ROS). This should include both scientific impacts (relevant to the academic community) and economic and societal impacts (relevant to broader society). The impact can be relevant to any organisation, community or individual. [*Max. 400 words*]

#### Scientific impacts

Members of the project team gave 25 academic talks at the following institutions/conferences (for details, see <http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk/publications.html#presentations>):

David, A. (2010) Association of French language Studies (AFLS) Annual Conference, Nancy

Mitchell, R: (2010) University of Southampton

(2011) University of Cambridge

(2011) LangUE conference, University of Essex

(2011) Modern English Education Society Conference, Seoul (2 different talks)

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Mitchell, R, David, A, and Myles, F (2011) AFLS Conference, Nancy  
Mitchell, R and Myles, F (2011) AILA 16<sup>th</sup> World Congress of Applied Linguistics, Beijing  
Mitchell, R, Myles, F and Dos Santos, C (2010) BAAL LLT SIG Conference  
Mitchell, R, Rule, S, Myles, F and David, A (2011) American Association of Applied Linguistics, Annual conference, Chicago  
Myles, F: (2010). The Fifth Inter-Varietal Applied Corpus Studies (IVACS), Edinburgh  
(2010). University of Cambridge  
(2010). Université de Neuchâtel, Switzerland  
(2011). Birkbeck College, University of London  
(2011). EUROSLA (European Second Language Association) annual conference, Stockholm (plenary)  
(2011). UCLR2011, Louvain-la-Neuve, Belgium (keynote)  
(2012). University of Thessaloniki, Greece  
(2012). University of Essex  
Rule, S.: (2010). EUROSLA conference, Reggio Emilia, Italy  
(2010). ESRC Centre for Research on Bilingualism

In addition, David, McManus, Mitchell, Myles and Rule all gave talks on different aspects of the project at the project conference (July 2011; see <http://www.flloc.soton.ac.uk/events.html> for details)

### **Economic and societal impacts**

1. The first day of the project two-day conference (Newcastle, July 2011) targeted Modern Foreign Languages teachers, teacher trainers, policy makers and education professionals. Findings from the project were presented and discussed during a round table. The second day was primarily aimed at researchers (see above), but many teachers/education professionals stayed for both days.

The conference attracted 47 delegates: 30 academics; 17 professionals, and feedback was very positive (average score 4.72 out of 5; n=18).

2. Newcastle University AVS were hired to produce a film of one of the classes. One class in year 1 and in year 3 were filmed, and a 20 minutes edited version of the year 3 class was produced for dissemination to teachers and teacher trainers.
3. F. Myles gave a talk for teachers in Murton Community Primary School in County Durham (1 November 2011).
4. F. Myles was invited to a live interview on BBC Radio Essex (4 November 2011), as part of the ESRC's Festival of Social Science.
5. R Mitchell presented and discussed the classroom film with a public audience at a University of Southampton Public Engagement Day (12 September 2011).

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### **b) Anticipated/Potential Future Impacts**

Please outline any anticipated or potential impacts (scientific or economic and societal) that you believe your project might have in future. *[Max. 200 words]*

R Mitchell will run a workshop for teachers on classroom interaction and the use of gesture using the classroom film + research findings, at the Primary Languages Show, University of Westminster, 3 March 2012.

F. Myles will give the keynote lecture on 22 September 2012 at the yearly Essex Language Conference for Teachers.

R Mitchell and S Rule will write an academic paper on the role of gesture in language learning in summer 2012 for submission to a research journal in autumn 2012.

F. Myles will write an academic paper on the role of age in early foreign language learning for submission to a leading international journal in summer 2012

F. Myles and K. MacManus will write an academic paper contrasting attitudes, motivation and learning strategies in the context of foreign language learning in children of different ages in summer 2012

A. David will write an academic paper on factors influencing receptive vocabulary learning in different age groups to be submitted in July 2012

F. Myles and S. Rule will write an academic paper on the relationship between working memory and grammar development in different age groups

F. Myles and R. Mitchell will investigate the possibility of obtaining funding for the development of a website dedicated for teachers and language professionals, based on the findings of the project and related materials

You will be asked to complete an ESRC Impact Report 12 months after the end date of your award. The Impact Report will ask for details of any impacts that have arisen since the completion of the End of Award Report.

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#### 4. Declarations

Please ensure that sections A, B and C below are completed and signed by the appropriate individuals. The End of Award Report will not be accepted unless all sections are signed.

Please note hard copies are **not** required; electronic signatures are accepted and should be used.

##### A: To be completed by Grant Holder

Please read the following statements. Tick **one** statement under ii) and iii), then sign with an electronic signature at the end of the section (this should be an image of your actual signature).

##### i) The Project

This Report is an accurate overview of the project, its findings and impacts. All co-investigators named in the proposal to ESRC or appointed subsequently have seen and approved the Report.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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##### ii) Submissions to the Research Outcomes System (ROS)

Output and impact information has been submitted to the Research Outcomes System. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted as soon as they become available.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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**or**

This grant has not yet produced any outputs or impacts. Details of any future outputs and impacts will be submitted to the Research Outcomes System as soon as they become available.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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##### iii) Submission of Datasets

Datasets arising from this grant have been offered for deposit with the Economic and Social Data Service.	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
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**or**

Datasets that were anticipated in the grant proposal have not been produced and the Economic and Social Data Service has been notified.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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**or**

No datasets were proposed or produced from this grant.	<input type="checkbox"/>
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