

PROMOTING FAMILY BILINGUALISM:  
A CASE STUDY USING THE THOMSON METHOD

by

Yvonne Crawford

A Capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master  
of Arts in English as a Second Language

Hamline University

Saint Paul, Minnesota

May 2011

Committee:

Patsy Vinogradov, Primary Advisor

Feride Erku, Secondary Advisor

Brian Crawford, Peer Reviewer

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I am thankful for my husband and children and their support during this study. I dedicate this to my mother who helped me to explore my love of language at an early age. You are missed.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter One: Introduction .....	1
Researcher Background .....	1
Role of Researcher .....	4
Background of Thomson Method .....	5
Guiding Questions .....	7
Summary .....	7
Chapter Overviews.....	7
Chapter Two: Literature Review .....	9
Second Language Acquisition and the Thomson Method .....	10
Activities for the Thomson Method .....	24
Journal Studies .....	28
Second Language Acquisition in Children .....	29
Bilingualism in the Family.....	33
Chapter Three: Methods .....	35

Qualitative Research .....	35
Data Collection .....	37
Data Analysis .....	42
Ethics.....	43
Conclusions.....	44
Chapter Four: Results .....	45
Introduction.....	45
Goals of Study.....	45
The Six-week Plan .....	46
Pretest.....	47
Language Sessions .....	48
Observations from my Journal.....	52
Field Notes on my Children's Language Learning .....	56
Lesson Themes.....	58
Post Test.....	61
Discussion .....	64
Chapter Five: Conclusions.....	66
Reflections .....	66

Implications.....	67
Limitations of this Study.....	68
Ideas for Further Research.....	70
Concluding Remarks.....	71
Epilogue .....	73
References.....	74

## LIST OF TABLES

Figure 2.1: Building Comprehensible Texts

Figure 3.1: Data Collection Methods

Figure 3.2: Children's themes for French language learning

Figure 4.1: Children's French Language Themes

Figure 4.2: My French Language Themes

Figure 4.3: My French Language Learning Results Based on Themes

Figure 4.4: Cormac's French Language Learning Results Based on Themes

Figure 4.5: Adelaide's French Language Learning Results Based on Themes

## CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

### Researcher Background

When I was 14 years old I found my first French language book in a college library. My mother was in a class for her Master's Degree and I was in the library exploring with my sister. I found a section of language books and I sat there thumbing through them for hours. After my mother's class, I begged my mom to check out a French grammar book, as well as a few other books on different languages. I was utterly obsessed with those books. Later, since I had to return the books to the library, my mother bought me a cassette tape with phrases of French on them. I tried hard to memorize and practice the phrases, but it was difficult as I knew no one who spoke French and I could not verify I was speaking it correctly. It was merely a taste of what was to follow – my obsession to learn French as well as other languages.

In college, I took two years of French courses. I also studied in the French-speaking part of Switzerland for a few weeks after I finished my first Master's degree. It was a great program where I lived with a host family. A great learning environment, but my time there was much too short. Regardless of how much I studied French, it was not enough to gain fluency.

I took a long break from French and studied other languages including Latin, Russian, Chinese, Slovak, Czech, Malayalam, Japanese, Hungarian and Spanish, but my

heart always comes back to French. Now, I have three children and my greatest wish for them besides health and happiness, is for them to become fluent in French.

When thinking about a possible topic for this capstone, I thought about various aspects of language learning. Finally, I figured out that examining my family's language learning (French) would be an interesting topic. Not only would I complete my childhood dream, but I could also help my children to learn French. This is also very timely since we are moving to France in the upcoming year.

My husband is a Canadian and British citizen and at the time of data collection for this research project we were actively planning a move to continue to raise our family. My goal for my children is to get them to the level of French where they could enter French school and feel comfortable. Because we will be moving within 5 months, this increases our family's urgency and motivation to learn French.

I have tried different approaches for learning French in the past. Self-instruction, college classes, language school, tutoring, online classes and there has never been a time where I was completely satisfied with my progress. Furthermore, with my children, I hired a tutor, as well as I attempted to teach them myself.

The problem with the tutor, in both instances, was the fact that she was an untrained tutor and over corrected. She did not let any of us express our thoughts completely in French. She spent her time interrupting us and constantly correcting our pronunciation. Due to this, it really lowered my self-esteem and confidence in speaking French freely. Also, she was not engaging and I was not given the opportunity to practice the topics I wanted to, for example ordering food at a restaurant or other common daily

activities. After this attempt, I came to the conclusion that another approach was needed, one that focuses on the production of French in a fun and relaxing environment.

I have taught my children French in the past, but I am not confident in my own French enough to do too much. If I were fluent and could think in French, I feel like it would be easier for me to teach them. I also would rather have them learn from someone with a native accent so their pronunciation would be perfect. The great thing about my children, who are ages seven and five year old, is that they remember everything I have taught them in the past. They are little sponges soaking up a foreign language.

My husband has a good command of the French language. I believe that he is very close to fluency. However, with that said, he does not feel like his French is very good. I think a lot of this is because he does not have the opportunity to practice French. He feels as if he has lost a lot of his vocabulary and ability to converse freely.

His role in this study is not only to increase his level of French, but to help us practice French after our focused language time has ended for the day. I think that some form of commitment to only speaking French in the household for a few hours a day will increase all of our levels of French. He wants our family to be bilingual just as much as I do and he is fully committed to our family learning French. The reason why he is not even more involved in this study is because he works full time, while I home school the children. The language sessions will take place while he is at the office. However, he will still be involved with the process in however way he is able. Even after our proposed study time for this capstone, he wants to continue with becoming and maintaining a bilingual family. Perhaps in the future we will even become a trilingual family.

When thinking in the past to my other language learning experiences, the one I smile upon the most is when I learned Hungarian. I taught English as a Foreign Language in Hungary and I wanted to learn the language. Being an English teacher, it is not easy to just immerse yourself as everyone wants to speak English with you. I hired an elderly woman to help me learn Hungarian. We became very close friends and enjoyed each others' company. She would cook me desserts because she wanted me to experience the culture as well as the language. We talked about anything and everything. I would like for my French language learning to be as enjoyable as this by hopefully finding person who can help me learn while having and enjoying her company.

Even though we are not currently living in a French speaking, after reading Heidi Caasi's capstone (2005) I started to wonder if the Thomson method would work for my family to learn French together. Caasi used the Thomson method to study Indonesian while in the United States. She studied the language for 4 weeks with the help of a language resource person (LRP). This person helped her practice her target language regularly, and she obtained good results. The Thomson Method and the role of the language resource person will be explored in greater depth in the next chapter.

#### Role of Researcher

My role in this study is multi-faceted. One of my roles will be to learn French using the Thomson method. I sense that my level of French has fossilized and I am no longer increasing with my self-study. This is due, in my opinion, to my lack of being able to have someone to converse with in French. At the end of the day my husband can speak French, but he does not want to be the one who is solely responsible for teaching our children and me French. Thus, the language resource person can help me to attain a

better level of French so that I can carry on solid conversations with my husband and other French speakers for practicing purposes.

Also, I will change the different aspects of the methods so that they will fit my family's learning style and needs. I will do this by creating lesson themes for each week that we have lessons. Furthermore, after lessons I will try to guide my children, with the help of my husband, and myself to practice the things we learned in the lessons. In addition, I will write journal entries and take field notes about my children and their French learning experience. Lastly, I will be take a pretest before starting the study and I will take a post-test afterwards in order to evaluate how I improved during the course of this study. My children will be evaluated by myself and our Language Resource Person in order to see how much they excelled.

#### Background of Thomson Method

While there are many ways to learn a foreign language like using Rosetta Stone, taking a class and others, I feel that the Thomson method is a good fit for my family. I've always thought that being fully immersed in a language is the best way to learn a language; however at this time I do not have the ability to do this. According to Thomson one way to increase language learning is to mimic the environment of a child. A child learns language through being completely surrounded by the language. By having a language resource person, this could be possible to a certain degree. The LRP is the person who will help us with the language learning and learning their culture (Thomson, 1993a).

Greg Thomson began studying Blackfoot, a North American Indian Language, and after several years of studying he felt like he was stuck. He had learned some

expressions and some intransitive verb paradigms, but he felt like he did not have good comprehension skills. Some of his strategies were: memorize useful expressions and say them to various people who understood Blackfoot, memorize dialogs, only speak Blackfoot to people who spoke Blackfoot. The last strategy worked fairly well because he had stockpiled so many phrases he learned from the previous strategy of memorizing dialogs (Thomson, 2000b).

Throughout this time in Thomson's life he was searching for a way in which people can learn a foreign language especially in an environment where there are limited numbers of people who speak the target language. This method is used more so for languages like Malayalam or other less commonly taught languages.

I am using his method for my study because of my unique situation. I want all of us to learn French together. It is not possible to have a language class where my children, my husband and I can all go together. Also, in a class there is a risk of less comprehensible input, fewer opportunities for lasting friendships and less informal social interaction than you have with a LRP.

Thomson often discusses the point about how important it is to speak in the foreign language. A person cannot become a good foreign language speaker by merely listening to a person speak in that foreign language. They need to do it themselves. The LRP is a great way to be able to do this.

Thomson also talks about language learning for mothers and working together at it as a family. He stresses the fact that the father should make sure to give the mother a little extra time in case the language lesson was interrupted by a screaming baby. The great thing about the Thomson method is that you are recording the lessons, thus the busy

mom can review the part she missed later. Also, he states that doing the language learning with your children is a good way to force moms to stay focused on the language (Thomson, 1999).

### Guiding Questions

I am studying the acquisition of the French language for my family (consisting of my husband, myself, my son (7) and my daughter (4)). I want to find out how the Thomson method will work in a family setting in order to help promote bilingualism in families. My research question is: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism? I am referring to it as modified because I will only be using the method for six weeks and my study will focus on my family, not one individual learner.

### Summary

This chapter described my family's desire to learn the French language. I also explained our history and previous experiences with learning the French language, as well as the roles we will all take in this study. Furthermore, I introduced the Thomson method and briefly explained how it can be utilized in our family environment. Following this section is a brief outline of the remaining chapters.

### Chapter Overviews

Chapter two consists of an overview of the literature that is relevant to this topic. I will focus on the Thomson method, as well as, second language acquisition in adults and children and journal studies. Chapter three explains and expands upon the methods used in this capstone in addition to a detailed explanation of the Thomson method. Chapter four presents the results of my study, including results of our French language learning

progress and discoveries and revelations that we made through keeping our journals.

Lastly, Chapter five discusses the benefits of the research and possible research that could be conducted to gain more information about family bilingualism.

## CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

For many people, including myself, learning a foreign language can be tiring, emotionally draining and cumbersome. The student can take classes where the target language is learned, become fully immersed in the country where the target language is spoken, hire a language tutor, use self-study methods and use other various avenues. Some of these methods, like hiring a language tutor did not work well for me in the past, thus, I researched the Thomson Method of learning a foreign language. Specifically, I am studying how this method will work for my family to learn to speak French together becoming a bilingual family. My research question is: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism? I am referring to it as modified because I will only be using the method for six weeks and my study will focus on my family, not one individual learner as Thomas describes.

In this chapter literature is reviewed about the Thomson Method, the approach to language learning that my family is using. Since Thomson had similar language learning experiences to mine, it will be useful to analyze his progress as well as activities that he found useful in learning a foreign language. Also, I explore various journal studies which will enable me to explain what value journal studies can contribute to the language field. In addition, I will review literature about second language acquisition and second language acquisition in children.

Briefly, I will look at third language acquisition and how it differs from second language acquisition. Lastly, I will attempt to look at literature on bilingualism in the family. This will round out my literature review in order to clearly articulate the background of my study.

### Second Language Acquisition and the Thomson Method

Second Language Acquisition has been its own field of applied linguistics for several decades, with a broad array of theories and advice for teachers and learners. To examine all of them is out of the scope of this project; however, there are theories and methodologies that are closely related to the Thomson Method which I would like to explore through this literature review. For example, Stephen Krashen has developed many concepts and hypotheses in this field. Thus, this review of literature examines many of his contributions to second language acquisition, along with other notable ones.

#### The Comprehension Hypothesis

The Comprehension Hypothesis (or often called the Input Hypothesis) states that most of the language we learn is acquired and stored subconsciously and not learned consciously. Krashen feels that a crucial element needed to learn a language successfully is to have comprehensible input. As the student listens to this input, they will inevitably learn their target language. The input should be relevant and not organized in a grammatical sequence (Krashen, 1997).

The input hypothesis that gained momentum in the 1980's gave way to a new way of looking at language. Due to this and generative linguistics, language learning was no longer was it a set of items to memorize and skills to drill, but language was regarded as a means to communication. As a result, approaches such as the communicative approach

gained popularity. This is opposite of the Comprehension Approach as it focuses on the output where as the Comprehension Approach focuses on the input (Krashen, 2008).

Krashen and others believe that teachers should focus on comprehensive input in the forms of books of all types and kinds. He believes this is the key to learning a language and to literacy (2008). One important factor with the input is that the input must be one step beyond the student's current level of the foreign language. Krashen calls this the I+1, a theory about input that ensures that the target language is accessible to learners. When you have a class of students and all of the students are on slightly different levels, natural communicative input will ensure that each student will gain some appropriate input for their level of learning (Hong, 2008).

Another aspect of input is in the form of stories. In a study by Mason and Krashen, it was shown that students learned and retained more vocabulary when they heard the vocabulary words used in the context of stories. This is true for both first and second language acquisition. The amount of new vocabulary that is spoken in stories is what is needed to build a growing vocabulary (2004).

#### The Skill-Building Hypothesis

The Skill-Building Hypothesis (or Grammar Hypothesis) is just that, a language is learned through acquiring skills and building upon those skills (Krashen, 2008). Many language classes are built upon this premise. The teacher teaches grammar and ultimately builds the students' language.

#### Affective Filter Hypothesis

Another hypothesis that Krashen (1997) spoke about was the Affective Filter Hypothesis. This hypothesis explains that there are certain barriers that can affect a

student's ability to learn and process comprehensible input. Some of these barriers are self-confidence, motivation, and emotions, in particular anxiety. In order to achieve success in language learning, input must be low-anxiety environments in order to receive more input and be able to learn more successfully.

### The Communicative Approach

The communicative approach to learning a language focuses on social interaction, sharing of language. The act of communication interaction is not only the goal, but the means in which to arrive at the goal. This method focuses on making meaningful interactions, not simply learning grammar or trying to attain perfect pronunciation. Another aspect of the communicative approach is its focus on authentic or real-life situations since students' motivation can be the desire to communicate in daily situations (Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

### Interactionism

Interactionists took Krashen's theories a step further. In addition to using linguistic tools to aid in comprehension like pictures and contextual clues which are found in Krashen's Input Hypothesis, they used other modifications of speech in order to help students learn a foreign language such as gestures, simplification and other means (Lightbown & Spada, 1999). Interactionists believe in the importance of comprehensible input; however, this hypothesis also focuses on the role of interactive input as opposed to non-interactive input. Michael Long (1991), a linguist who writes extensively about interactionism, also highlights the importance of negotiation of meaning when there are communication problems within a conversation. He feels that is these adjustments in communication which help to make the input more comprehensible, thus helping the

student to learn a foreign language. The focus of the hypothesis also centers on the fact that there is two-way conversations being carried out, not just one-way conversations (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

Also, the importance of one-on-one interaction is seen in language learning. This type of interaction can benefit the learner because the other speaker can adjust their level of speaking to the learner. This will enable the learner to have comprehensible input which they understand. This is a type of modified speech that will enable the learner to communicate and progress in their language learning (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

#### Innatism and Universal Grammar

According to Chomsky (1976), children can master many complex grammatical aspects of language because they have an innate knowledge of these aspects. All languages conform to a universal grammar. It is this universal grammar that is within the human brain. When a baby is born, his/her mind already has some information in it; the mind is not entirely blank as others believe. Language learning is not habit forming, but already there inside the human brain.

#### Stages of Language Development

In addition to acquisition hypotheses, some of which have been summarized above, there are stages of development one goes thru when acquiring a second language. As my family and I venture into learning a foreign language together, we will travel through these various stages. The first stage is referred to as the preproduction stage. The length of this stage can vary greatly. For some it is as little as 10 hours. For others it can be as long as six months. Regardless of the amount of time spent in this stage, it is a stage that learners must go through. In this stage the students have roughly 500

vocabulary words, but they do not feel comfortable with using these words. There can also be a silent period where the student does not want to speak. During this time students should be allowed to be quiet. Eventually they will open up and begin to speak (Hong, 2008).

The second stage is called the early production stage. This usually lasts about 6 months and the students can speak in 1 and 2 word phrases using their 1,000 word vocabulary. The student can begin to speak short sentences and they can also comprehend basic questions.

The third stage is called the speech emergence stage and might last up to an additional year past the second stage. They can produce simple questions and have a vocabulary of about 3000 words. The intermediate language proficiency stage is the fourth stage. During this stage the students can make more complex sentences and questions using their 6,000 word vocabulary. They can speak a greater length as well.

The last stage is the fifth stage which is the advanced language proficiency stage. They can take between 5 to 7 years to attain. Also, students probably have developed some specialized vocabulary depending on their interests during this stage (Hong, 2008).

It is also important to note that there are many different variables when a student learns a foreign language which can affect the outcome of how they learn. Personality, their level of knowledge of their native language, anxiety level, self-esteem, motivation, consequences of passing or failing a second language class, being self-conscious about speaking a foreign language, comfort zone in general, as well as many other issues (Hong, 2008; Richards & Rodgers, 1986; Nunan, 1992).

No matter how many language theories there are, some people leave their language learning in the hands of their teacher. Wilson (2000) states that although there are bad and good language teachers, having a bad language teacher is not a good excuse to not learn the language. There are so many resources available today on the internet and elsewhere that anyone can access what they need in order to excel in a language. The student is ultimately responsible for their language learning. The student must be in control of her own destiny of language learning. It is taking one's own destiny of language learning which leads the way to The Thomson Method.

### The Thomson Method

The Thomson Method was designed by Greg Thomson and it is a method where the student is control of her learning a foreign language. His theory is based on various second language acquisition theories such as Krashen's Input Hypothesis and Affect Filter Hypothesis and also on the Interactionist view. He developed it after he had several failed attempts to learn the Blackfoot language. In 1967 Thomson was determined to learn this language using an audio-lingual approach. The audio-lingual approach was based on a language approach during World War II. The Army used small-classes with high exposure to oral input of the target foreign language. The results were very positive during this period of time. Later, based on the army's language training, the audio-lingual approach was developed because there were growing needs in the foreign language programs in high schools and colleges. The other influences were psychological behaviorism, and structural linguistics (Richards & Rodgers, 1986). This method focused heavily on drills where the students and teachers were focused on the

input and output (De Bot, 2005). After five months of using this approach, he had limited success only knowing a less than 100 survival phrases and some grammar.

Later, after five years, he attempted to learn it again, again having the same fate – not learning enough Blackfoot where he would be happy with the success he was gaining. He still continued, even though he was frustrated with his audio-lingual approach.

He also memorized several dialogues in the hope that it would help him to remember useful scenarios. These dialogues did not give him much headway in his language learning either. He felt that he could not have even gotten this far had he not learned some vocabulary up front. But, he still had the same fate as before and he did not learn enough to be successful at speaking Blackfoot.

Eventually a friend gave him the supreme challenge to only speak Blackfoot when he spoke to people who could speak Blackfoot. This gave him the breakthrough that he needed to more success in this language. He felt this might be the key to his language experience. Thomson took the advice of his friend and he found a person he could practice the language with and use as a resource. Thomson later coined a new phrase to describe his tutor. He called this person his language resource person (LPR). The LPR was someone who could be his language helper. By using an LPR, Thomson ended up being successful in learning the Blackfoot language, as well as other languages. He also became good friends with his language resource person and learned a lot about the culture (Thomson, 1993c).

### The Language Resource Person

One of Thomson's (1993a) main premises to his method is that the learner should immerse themselves in the speech community and commune with people who speak the

language. The language resource person is the key to this premise and to the entire method. Thomson believes that the LRP should be a person who can mediate between the language learner and their native language, as well as their culture. The language resource person is not a trained language teacher, but they are excited to help the language learner learn their language. The language resource person should be willing to try various teaching methods that the learner wants to try regardless of how untraditional the method is. This person will also help open the door to the culture of her people as well and give the language learner an insight into it.

He also pointed out that the person who is chosen to be the language resource person should have positive views about English (the native language of the learner) and the target language (the native language of the language resource person). If the LRP has negative views of one of the languages or cultures, then it will be harder for the learner to develop and have a positive experience of learning the target language. If a LRP does not work out in the beginning, it is then necessary and fine to find a new LRP. The LRP is such a major part of the process that there needs to be a positive relationship all around for everyone involved.

Some people believe that they can simply hang around other people to learn a foreign language, but Thomson states that learners really need someone who will focus on them, the language learner. Their job is to help you to learn their native language on a regular basis, preferably every day. Thus, great care should be given when choosing the language resource person, because they play such a huge role in the language learning process (Thomson, 1993b)

It is also important that at some point (between one to four months) into the study program that the learner only speak in the target language with the LRP. Ideally the LRP at that point could be monolingual, but if not the learner could just speak the target language and not their native tongue. Thomson states that it is okay to speak some English (native language of the learner) at the beginning of the process because it can prevent the learner from being frustrated and the LRP could also take the opportunity to explain some of the differences of the languages.

Another important aspect to the LRP, is to record each lesson. Thomson suggests that the learners should tape the lessons and then later they can review and practice along repeating what was learned that day. The learner can even stop the LRP when they feel that they have covered an area sufficiently because the learner will know that they can go back to the language lesson tapes that evening and review again once is learned. This way the learner will be able to learn as much new material as possible when they spend time with their language resource person.

Furthermore, Thomson suggests having a second blank tape where the language learner can then tape snippets from each lesson and this tape can grow to be reviewed later. For example, if in the lesson is the phrase, "This is a man." and it is spoken 50 times, the language learner can just simply record to the blank tape, one of those instances. The language learner can do this for each new phrase learned. Then, they will have a single tape with all of the phrases so that they can practice everything learned on a single tape (Thomson, 1993a).

#### Record Keeping and Journaling

Record keeping is also an important aspect in this method. At the end of every day a small amount of time should be devoted to record keeping. First, a listing of new vocabulary words should be made. This list can be kept in a notebook with other relevant information. This will be useful to use as a review in the future. Also, the learner can write about grammatical structure that they see is coming to surface and jot down things that they notice about the language.

Lastly, as part of the record keeping, the learner should keep a journal of their experience for the day. This journal will help the learner to be aware of how they are feeling and see how they can change things along the way. The journal is a great way to introspectively look at the language process one is going through (Thomson, 1993a). Through this the learner will be able to see their strengths and weaknesses. Later in the literature I will go into a more in depth look at writing a language journal.

### Lesson Planning

Language lesson planning is something that must be done each day for the next day. Thomson suggests that 30 words are learned each day. Thus, the 30 words can be written down and 3 activities can be jotted down as well. The activities should vary as to give the learner practice in different aspects of the language using different techniques and methods. It will also help the learner and LRP to have greater variety and more fun. Thomson suggests that the learner spends approximately 1 hour per day to prepare their time with the language resource person. This is time well spent since the lesson for the next day will be well prepared and the valuable time with the LRP will be utilized to its fullest potential (Thomson, 1993a).

### Joining the Language Community

After studying with a LRP for a few months, Thomson states that at some point the learner will need to start to join the language community. It depends upon where the individual lives in relation to where the language is spoken, but, nonetheless, a social network will need to be created.

It can start with shopkeepers and expand to become a closely knit network which is the best kind of network to have. He suggests that a great way to create a network is to choose people who have some sort of relationship to one another, for example, your LRP's friend or relative. This social visiting will help strengthen the language skills.

Thomson finds the easiest and best way is to develop friendships is with the LRP's friends. Being able to say, "Hi, I'm Yvonne, I'm a friend of Laure," gives the language learner a quick and easy in with a new found language friend. The language learner would also have instant conversations that could be made around common interests that are shared between the language learner, the LRP and the new friend. This commonality will help the learner to ease into a new language relationship.

One way to take advantage of this social networking and new friendships is to brainstorm all of the communicative needs of the past or things you expect to encounter in the future. This can be done as part of the language journal or on its own. The learner can see which of these is most important and focus on these in their sessions with the LRP (Thomson, 1993a).

#### Thomson's Principles for Learning a Foreign Language

Thomson points out three main principles to use when learning a foreign language. The first one is concentrates on the amount of comprehensible input a student needs. The second principle requires the student to engage in speaking. The third

principle is that the learner must get to know the people of the target language that they are learning. Although these are not Thomson's inventions as noted above, Thomson developed a new take on communicative and interactionist theories.

The first one is that it is important for the learner to receive a massive amount of comprehensible input. Comprehensible input can be pictures, actions, and even free reading (Krashen, 1997). These various activities and others can aid the learner to receive a proper amount of comprehensible input. It is also important for the learner to receive the appropriate input for the specific stage of language learning they are in at that time. At the very beginning stages of learning a language, simple pictures which can support the oral language skills that are being learned are a good source of comprehensible input. As the language learner skills increase the type of input should be changed according to their level.

Thomson's second principle is to have lots of opportunities to partake in extemporaneous speaking. Although Thomson found Krashen's (2008) input hypothesis to be useful, Krashen felt that comprehensible input was very important when learning a second language. Thomson feels that there are other things besides comprehensible input that is required in order to achieve a successful level of language learning. He believes that the massive amount of comprehensible input can help you to understand the language, but the learner may not be able to speak effortlessly. Thomson stresses the fact that language learners need to engage in speaking (1993b; Lightbown & Spada, 1999; Krashen, 1997).

A native speaker and non-native speaker interacting together may cause learning to occur. This is the basis of interactionism. Interactionists concern themselves with

negotiation of meaning and how the two parties can make themselves understood. There are many ways to succeed in this: hand gestures, slow rate of speech, modeling, repetition, modeling, rephrasing, repetition and more (Lightbown and Spada, 1999).

Similarly, Swain (1985) found that there were students in French immersion schools who were from English speaking schools. The teachers spoke only in French, but the students were not given a lot of opportunity to speak in French because of the normal student to teacher ratio of classrooms and the opportunities that students have to speak in class. When the students played on the playground, they spoke mostly in English. When the children went home they spoke in English, their native language, with their family members. Because they were never given the opportunity to use their new language, their level of French was not what was hoped one would achieve from a French immersion program.

As Thomson points out, the problem is a lack of interlocutors is solved by the use of an LRP. Since the LRP knows the level of the learner, she is able to carry on a conversation with the learner. Having a conversation is a great source of comprehensible input, in addition to the learning practicing the language at the same time. After time the learner will be more and more comfortable to speak their target language and then they can practice with others. Thomson sums up principle two quite nicely, “You might say that you learn how to talk by being exposed to massive comprehensible input, but ultimately you only learn to talk if you talk... Massive comprehensible input + extensive conversational practice = powerful language learning (Thomson, 1993b).”

Following this same principle it should be noted that it is natural for the learner to speak poorly in the beginning of learning a language. Thomson states that the learner can

learn from his errors. He also states that the learner is not branching off into new language territory if they are not making mistakes. The learner can invent sentences that are not what a native person would speak, but they do form a pattern. The language the student uses in these stages can be called an interlanguage (Selinker, 1991). After more and more learning the interlanguage sounds more like the target language. Thus, it is fine and actually preferred by Thomson to speak the language with errors as it is part of the language learning process which reflects Thomson's communicative stance on error correction.

Thomson's third and last principle is to get to know the people whose language you are studying. By getting to know the people of the target language the learner can understand what the people talk about and how they talk about it. By learning the language, in a basic level you can learn how to think like a person who speaks that language natively. This can be seen in idioms or simple vocabulary which has different meaning from the learner's target language. Also a single word can have more than one meaning and without knowing the people one would not know how to properly use the word (Thomson, 1993b). On this same wavelength a student can learn a lot about appropriateness of certain behaviors in different types of conversations and settings. In some cultures it is okay to discuss various aspects of money and salaries; however in other cultures it is not. Getting to know a person from the target language will enable the learning to learn what is appropriate and what is not.

Caasi (2005), conducted a four-week study on learning Indonesian while using the Thomson Method. For her the method worked quite nicely as she found through her journaling, increase in vocabulary and increase in grammar knowledge. She kept a log

for her vocabulary and grammar which showed how much she learned each day. Not only did she increase her knowledge of the Indonesian language, but she also became quite close to her language resource person and they became friends while Caasi learned more about culture of her target language.

Another inspirational aspect of Caasi's (2005) research was that she began to see her strengths and weaknesses as a language learner. She saw that she could see patterns of the Indonesian language, but she had greater difficulty in pronunciation and hearing the words. She was also able to figure out her perfect learning environment. All of these aspects are necessary for a language learner to achieve adequate language learning.

#### Activities for the Thomson Method

##### The Beginning of Language Learning

Many people start learning a second language by learning survival expressions like "hello", and "good-bye". Thomson states that you can learn them by memorizing them or you can learn them by role-playing. He finds that retention is better if you learn them by role-play because it gives you a context in which to learn them. Along with the LRP, the student can conduct countless role-plays in which these expressions can be learned.

There are also special survival expressions that are called power tools. These tools help you to learn more of the language. An example given is "How do you say X?" One way of learning these, he suggests, is to do a reverse role play where the LRP pretends to not know English and you answer her questions in English. Each of the power tools can be introduced one at a time in order for the learner to remember them and use them properly (Thomson, 1993a).

### Total Physical Response

To get started learning a language, Thomson suggests to use the Total Physical Response (TPR) method (Asher, 1977, 2000) at the beginning as well as throughout the language learning. At the beginner level, he states that your LRP can give you various commands like “jump”, “walk” and then gradually go to harder commands, “raise your right hand.” The key to TPR is to get the student to physically do whatever is spoken. The student can demonstrate their comprehension without having to verbally respond. It can allow the learner to focus on the effort of listening and understanding and not on the production of language. When using TPR you can build and build eventually until they can tell you all sorts of things that you can do, like “Find the orange in the basket of fruit and bring it to me (Thomson, 1993c).”

When TPR is used with adults and children, adults will pick up the language just as fast, except for pronunciation, where children outperform adults. Another factor about TPR is that it is stress-free. It is stress-free because it can be more seen as a game at time and quite relaxing to just open your mind and follow the commands. Lastly, TPR has success for long-term retention. The language learner will remember their actions after they heard a certain phrase and they will be able to remember the vocabulary longer because of the activity associated with the word (Asher, 1977; Richards & Rodgers, 1986). TPR is most successful when it is simple and easy to understand by the user.

### Other techniques for Language Learning used by the Thomson Method

Using pictures, according to Thomson, is another great way to start and continue learning a language. The learner can use a variation of these types of pictures: photos, line drawing, magazine pictures or video recordings. The student can also create a

picture book and accumulate pictures in which to use and study the target language (Thomson, 1993a).

Thomson feels that when the student focuses on these styles of comprehension, the progress of learning a language will be quick initially. At the end of a month the learner will be able to understand much more of the language over a student who just memorized some dialogues (Thomson, 1993c).

Another technique that Thomson suggests for learners is recording their LRP sessions for individual review later on. Also, the learner can record their voice by telling a story to their LRP and then together it can be reviewed. The LRP can point out any mistakes made in grammar, vocabulary or other aspects in the story.

A suggested activity by Thomson is to read children's books. He suggests to talk about the pictures and ask questions, point things out and to really dissect the books. There are some wordless books that serve this purpose because the learner can tell the story about how they see the pictures. Using the pictures in the books to tell stories is a great activity that a language learner and their LRP can do together. By doing this the learner can practice cause and effect and sequential ordering of events (Thomson, 1999).

Figure 2.1

*Building Comprehensible Texts*

<b>Stages of building a body of comprehensible text</b>	<b>Summary of activities to be used</b>
Stage 1 - early text	pictures and physical response activities
Stage 2 - upping the ante	children's stories
Stage 3 - getting serious	conversations – LRP – ethnographic interviewing
Stage 4 – scaling Mount Everest	monologues from additional resources

Thomson also discusses the notion of building a body of comprehensible text. He starts by explaining that native speakers have heard thousands and thousands of hours of speech. He believes a foreign language learner should be exposed to this massive amount of speech as well. He breaks down his thoughts about comprehensible texts into four stages. As stated above, this is where the language resource person will be there to walk with the learner through these stages, giving the learner the proper input at each stage.

Stage one he calls the early texts stage. For input to be comprehensible he states that pictures or the like be used in order for this to occur. Physical response activities also aids in this. If the learner cannot understand the input, then it is not comprehensible. This is why visual aids and hands on activities can help, because they help the learner to know what is being said. If the learner cannot understand what is being said, then the input is not comprehensible.

For stage two he refers to as upping the ante. Using children's stories is a great source of input in this stage. At this stage the learner can still use some visuals, but by having the LRP tell a common children's story, then the need for visuals decrease since the learner already knows the story. They will be able to pick out certain words that they know or they can figure out the meaning of some new words in context. At this stage the learner can also increase the amount of time they have with their LRP.

Getting Serious is the stage he calls stage three. During this stage Thomson thinks that having conversations in various situations is the most useful. The learner can ask questions to the LRP about how things occur in their homeland for these social settings. He defines this technique as ethnographic interviewing.

Scaling Everest is his verbiage for stage four. In this stage Thomson suggests that the language learner can tape other people and not just the LRP for this part of capturing a body of comprehensible texts that can be used to study. This stage should focus on authentic input even though it will be difficult to attain. He states that the language learner can try to get ten hours of high quality monologues and then ten additional hours of quality discourse between people having a conversation. Thomson feels that having these tapes to refer back to and to study will help the students become more native-like since the amount of comprehensible input is so high. He also notes that it is obviously difficult to attain native-like comprehension, but with this method it will be much easier (Thomson, 2000).

#### Journal Studies

Many studies use journals as a way to explore their topics. In this study journaling will be used as one of the data collection methods which will be described more completely in chapter three. In this section, I will explore past journal studies to show how they can be used in language learning studies.

Reflective journals or journals can be used in an insightful manner in which the individual can look upon a topic. In some studies the participants write in their journals and the researcher will read the journals on a weekly basis. Many journal studies are based on classroom language learning, but there are some which focus on individuals living fully immersed in the target language or given one on one language instruction (Campbell, 2008; Carson, 2002; Caasi, 2005).

The researcher decides which factors are significant within the journal while the researchers are analyzing the data. The main strength of a journal study for second

language acquisition is that the researcher can discover things that cannot be discovered by outside observation. For example, a journal study can be a great way to account for personality differences when it is reflected within the journal entries.

Another strength of journal studies lies in the fact that the learner can analyze over time which learning strategies and methods worked for them. For example, Jones (1994) learned Hungarian and wrote his thoughts about his 11-month self-study program. He analyzed different aspects of learning and parts that were lacking in his study.

Journal studies are limited in the fact that they are subjective (Bailey, 1991) and as such they do not lend themselves easily to qualitative measurement. That said, there are some studies which do use statistics to evaluate the study. Standardized surveys are one way to measure aspects of language learning, and a researcher can use descriptive statistics for analysis of certain data, such as color coding entries (Carson, 2002).

### Second Language Acquisition in Children

My study involves of my family learning French, including my children; therefore, research on child second language acquisition and how children may experience learning a foreign language differently than an adult will be included in this literature review. It is important to include this research in order to better understand how children experience second language learning. Oftentimes applied linguists discuss the difference in children learning a foreign language versus adults learning a foreign language. When children go to a preschool where they are only taught in a foreign language they may be able to gain fluency in that target language by the time they enter kindergarten. One complicating factor is the fact that many elementary schools in the

United States do not have foreign language programs so they cannot continue with their studies. Since the education reform act “No Child Left Behind” emphasizes basic skills in reading, writing and math, it is possible that schools have been discouraged from including foreign language programs in their curricula (Jacobson, 2004).

According to Chomsky and the acquisition theories proposed based on innateness of language, most people start to lose their ability to learn native pronunciation of a foreign language when they hit puberty. Chomsky states that there are a few adults who learn languages like children in the sense that they have native-like pronunciation, but for the majority of people it is harder to learn a foreign language once they reach puberty (Jack, 2006). The Critical Period Hypothesis explains that during a specific point in time the brain can more easily learn a foreign language. This theory states that after puberty our brains are not as efficient or effective in learning a language. However, there are disputes about when exactly the cut-off is for this period of child-like learning (Lightbown & Spada, 1999).

There are some who question the Critical Period Hypothesis, pointing to adults who do indeed gain native like fluency in a foreign language (De Bot, 2005). This could raise the question if it is environment or the brain as to why children on average can gain native-like fluency more so than adults; maybe it a combination of both. In general, though, it can be concluded that for most people there is a critical age, optimal for acquiring a second language.

The critical period where children effectively learn a foreign language with native like accuracy and pronunciation is often disputed as well. Abrahamsson and Hyltenstam (2009) found that with their subjects that the majority of early language learners were

perceived to be native speakers while only a few of the late learners were viewed with the same perception. When the same subjects were scrutinized and given tests, only a few of the early learners were tested as native-like and none of the late-learners were in this category.

Krashen (2008) states that young children learn a foreign language in their subconscious and not through the effort of learning; however, tools to aid in learning have their place as well. Haworth's (2006) research opposed this belief as they studied a kindergarten and how the children learned a foreign language. They found that the teachers in the program provided tools that helped the students learn and this environment enhanced their language learning.

Another aspect of second language learning in children that has been studied is whether or not it is can be detrimental to a child's cognitive development. One study initially found that bilingual children were disadvantages in relation to monolingual children. The monolingual children outperformed them in various tests. However, they further investigated the differences between the background of the children and as well as their socioeconomic background. It was also thought that perhaps the bilingual children were from a background where they were at a risk for an achievement gap and the second language did not actually come into play when considering their achievement level (Carlson, 2008). The majority of studies; however, have shown that children who were bilingual were not slower or cognitively delayed. Furthermore, they were not disadvantaged when learning their native language. This means that a child whose first language is English and who learns French as a Second language will not lose their

ability later on to fully command the English language (Abrahamsson, 2009; Jacobson, 2004).

Mackey and King point out the many benefits for children becoming bilingual. One reason is that the children tend to be more creative with their thought process. When bilingual kids are asked a question about something, their answers tend to be more creative and their thoughts are more out of the box and flexible. Another benefit is that bilingual children have more metalinguistical awareness. They understand that a language can be played with to create jokes and puns. Metalinguistical awareness also has been linked to higher academic skills, as well as the ability to learn how to read (2007).

The role of parents is a vital factor in children learning a second language because the parent is the one that must seek out classes or an immersion program for their children to enter into. They must also seek out an environment for their children to practice if it is necessary. A study by Kung (2009) found that amongst Americans there was a correlation between education above university level and a yearly income over \$20,000 and the desire to have one's children learn a foreign language. She also found that Americans who live in a multicultural community can affect how they view their children learning a second language.

An important thing to consider when trying to raise kids bilingually is that code switching, or the mixing of languages, is perfectly normal in multilingual settings and it is not a sign of low proficiency. One thing that is not recommended is attempting to teach a foreign language when parents cannot provide the type of environment that is necessary to foster foreign language learning. One example would be if one parent has a

short-term job opportunity in a foreign country. Children need consistency in their language learning and acquisition. Young children may react poorly if there is not a consistent language environment (Genesee, 2007).

Cummins (2000), a noted researcher in the field of childhood second language acquisition and bilingualism in general, stated that children who already know what a word means in English has an easy time to learn the word in the target language. However, when they have to learn not only the label for the word, but the actual meaning and concept of a word, it is much more difficult for children.

#### Bilingualism in the Family

Although I could not find articles related specifically to families entering bilingual environments together, I found some articles related to this subheading. Hirst (2010) describes a program in the United Kingdom where families were given help and activities to help their children who were in preschool to become literate. The interesting part of the study is that they did not push the children to learn English. They allowed the children to pick their language. The key was that they were trying to help the children to become literate in both languages. They used the parents and family members to reinforce what was being taught in the preschool. The parents were very positive in their feedback with the program. They liked having someone help them help their children.

Another interesting facet of bilingualism in families is the role of siblings. Siblings have the ability to shape the language of the family. Older siblings can help to mediate and support a younger sibling's learning of a foreign language. However, in one study it was suggested that the older siblings be taught how to facilitate language learning

in the family. It should not be expected that the children will do it naturally, as it is not a natural skill for children to have (Obied, 2009).

Learning a foreign language together as a family is the one aspect of my study where I did not find a lot of useful research. This is the gap in the literature where my study can provide helpful information to a family who would like to learn a foreign language together. There is information about second language acquisition in adults and children, but not combining the two and having a family learning together, eventually hoping to become a bilingual family. It is my hope that this research will help other families to try to use the Thomson method for their own language study.

In Chapter two, I discussed some of the various hypotheses of Second Language Acquisition, with a special focus on those closely related to the Thomson Method. In addition I examined the Thomson Method, detailing the different aspects of the method. Journal studies *constituted* the next subject that I explored in this chapter, followed by second language acquisition in children and bilingualism in the family.

In the following Methodology chapter, the research methods for my study are described in detail. I will also explain my analysis technique and the way I will be testing my family's progress learning French. In chapter four I will discuss my goals and hopes for this study and my plan for studying with my family. I will also analyze the results of my study. In chapter five I will explain the implications and conclusions of my findings.

## CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

The focus of this research study is an exploration of the Thomson Method in the researcher's family as a way to acquire French. The emphasis will be given to the speaking and listening skills of French. I will use this study to show how the Thomson Method works in a family environment used on both adults and children at the same time. Also, I want to see how effective the method is in this same family environment. My research question is: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism? I am referring to it as modified because I will only be using the method for six weeks and my study will focus on my family, not one individual learner.

### Qualitative Research

Qualitative research relies on robust descriptions rather than quantitative data. The research mainly takes place in the natural environment of the subjects. They can take the form of case studies, journal studies, interviews, observations or ethnographies (Mackey & Gass, 2005). My study will be a case study. I will use several tools within the case study in order to gain a deeper insight into my family's language learning. A case study concentrates on a single unit. In this case the single unit will be my family (Nunan, 1992). Even though this is a qualitative study, there will be some quantitative data. I will be taking a pre-test and post-test in order to measure my level of French at

the beginning of the study and the amount of content I retained at the end of the study. The test scores are somewhat anecdotal because the goal of my study is not to improve my test score, rather to intentionally and thoughtfully experience language learning as a family. I will not be administering a pretest to my children due to the fact that they are in the beginning of their French language learning. The post-test for my children will consist of my language resource person and myself evaluating how my children are able to speak French in a number of themes. This will be discussed in more detail below.

Furthermore, I will write a daily journal entry about my language learning experience. In addition to journal entries, I will also write field notes about my children's language learning. I will also collect observations from my LRP about my family's challenges and strengths before and after the study.

Chapter three, the current chapter, focuses on the methodology which was utilized in this study. First, I will outline the Thomson Method. Then, I will explore my rationale behind the research design I decided to implement. Next, I will follow with the quantitative and qualitative procedures I used to gather the data. Finally, I will focus on the ethics of my study.

The Thomson method is a method in which a person uses a language resource person as their guide to learning a foreign language. This person will introduce the learner to the language and to the culture. The learner will meet with their LRP at regular times, ideally daily. During the lessons, the learner will tape the lessons and afterwards they will be able to study the tapes and review the lessons (Thomson, 1993a).

Journals are a major component of the Thomson method. The learner will write

in their journal on a daily basis focusing on specific questions they want to write about. Also, the learner will keep a grammar log and vocabulary log as well.

Furthermore, Thomson states that the learner must create a type of lesson plan at the end of each day for the next day. This will help the language learner to be prepared and fully utilize their time with their language resource person (Thomson, 1993b).

### Data Collection

#### Participants

The participants of this study consist of four of the members of my family. The first participant is myself. I am a 38 year old, Caucasian woman of French decent. English has been my family's only language for two generations. My opinion of my French proficiency is at the intermediate level of French.

My husband, Brian, is a 38 year old, Caucasian and Asian male who is a Canadian and British citizen. His ancestry is Irish and Burmese. English is his native language. He began to learn French as a child at the age of eight. My opinion of my husband's level of French is advanced to superior.

Although I have three children, only two will participate in the study because my youngest is only 2 years old. My oldest son is seven years old. He is home schooled in English and is in the third grade. My daughter is five years old, also home schooled in English, and is in the first grade. Both of my children do know some French like numbers, colors, and names of some objects; however, they are both beginners.

The language resource person in my study is a 32 year old woman from France. She has just moved to the United States to be together with her boyfriend who is a permanent residence in the United States. She does not yet have a job and is excited to

have some communications with someone in French. She has consented to participate in this study as my language resource person. She has a bachelor's degree in biology, and she does not have any teaching experience. She will be paid on a weekly basis for her time. This study will take place in my home. The French lessons, studying, and journal writing will all take place in my house. The city I live in is a medium-sized city on the East coast of the United States where French is not commonly spoken or taught in schools.

Figure 3.1

*Data Collection Methods*

Data Collection Method	Subjects	Summary
pre and post tests	myself	ACTFL – an oral French proficiency test
journaling	myself	self-reflection with lexical and grammar log
field notes	myself observing my children	observations of my children's learning
lesson themes	myself and my children	weekly themes used to guide the lessons

The first data collection method I will use will be the pre-test and post-test for myself to gauge my French oral proficiency. It will be used at the beginning of the study in order to see my current level of French and then at the end of the study in order to see how much I have progressed (Mackey & Gass, 2005). The test is administrated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The test can be taken over the phone or in person at a testing center. The test is verified by two additional testers to ensure the proper score is given. It is a structured interview that takes about 20 or 30 minutes. It is an adaptive test and will change according to how the

interviewee answers. It will change based on the interviewee's ability and answers that are given. I will be the only one taking this test because my children are just beginning to learn French and the test is designed for adults. They are very young and I do not want to put them through the stress of taking an extensive oral test like this.

The second data collection method, journaling, is the main method that will be used to gather data. I chose this to be my main data collection due to insight I could attain from it as well because it is what the Thomson method calls for (Thomson, 1993b). For myself, I will have daily entries. I will discuss what I learned during that day, my progress learning French, my observations about my children and their progress and my thoughts about the whole process. I will also note any questions or frustrations that I am having during that day. My journal will give me complete freedom in expressing my thoughts without judgment (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Bailey (1991) explains that journal studies can provide an enormous amount of information about learning languages. This is a good method of data collection for my study because it will allow me to reflect on our language learning as an individual, as well as a family. I will be able to show the struggles and triumphs that we encountered along our journey. Furthermore, I will be able to find reoccurring themes within my journal by counting how many times I discuss certain topics.

I will be using thick description which explains the context of the observations and not just the behaviors. This will bring the descriptions more meaningful for me as I analyze them and for the audience of my paper (Geertz, 1973). Case studies and Journaling allow for this thick description where as other methods do not.

Within my journal, I will also maintain a lexical and grammar log. The lexical log is a list of words that I learned during the course of a language session. The grammar log is a list of key grammar points that I learned on a specific day. This is a component of the Thomson method that I intend on using. It will help me to look back and reflect on what I have learned. It will also act as a good resource to practice and review (Thomson, 1993b).

The third data collection method will be in the form of field notes. Field notes are a type of descriptive writing in which the observer explains their observations of a particular case (Mackey & Gass, 2005). Because my children are young and my youngest is not yet a strong writer, I will observe them during the language lessons. I will be looking for their impressions, frustrations and how they are progressing with learning French. Furthermore, at the end I will rate how my children do with communicative confidence in this study. Hymes defined communicative confidence as a phrase that describes a learner's knowledge of syntax, morphology, phonology, as well as the learner's ability to use the language in correct social contexts (1966). I will be using a rubric to see how they progress. The themes of the rubrics will consist of several themes including: greetings, food, family members, colors, numbers, basic objects, playgrounds, children's activities, animals, describing people and objects, and the neighborhood. These themes were chose by myself and my husband. We felt these themes would engage the children and also would be useful to the children when they first entered school in France. The ranking for the themes will be "with ease," "with effort," and "with difficulty." "With ease" is defined as the children having little or no hesitation to their speaking about these topics. "With effort" is defined as the children have some pauses

and hesitating when speaking about the topics. They will have some vocabulary words in the area, but are able to use some vocabulary when communicating. “With difficulty” is defined as the children being unable to discuss the topics. They may say a few French words, but resort to speaking English for the most part.

The last data collection method will be in the form of my lesson themes that I will be creating. These themes will help to show how our family learned French in a particular week. The themes provide a frame for the complex business of language learning. Furthermore, the themes give the LRP support since they provide interesting, engaging topics that the family has had a voice in deciding, they provide a context for the language to be used in the house. Together with input from our LRP, I will be creating a lesson theme for each week for both my children’s lessons and my own. I will write out goals and objectives for each themed week. The themes will also consist of specific language-related world tasks that I would like for us to be able to do. Two examples are going to the post office or buying tickets at the train station.

Figure 3.2

*Children’s Themes for French Language Learning*

Theme			
Greetings	with ease	with effort	with difficulty
Food	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
family members	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
colors	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
numbers	With ease	With effort	With difficulty

basic objects	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
Playgrounds	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
children's activities	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
animals	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
describing people and objects	With ease	With effort	With difficulty
the neighborhood	With ease	With effort	With difficulty

### Data Analysis

The pre-test and post test will consist of an oral language test administered by American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The assessment is called the Oral Proficiency Interview (OPI). It is a 20-30 minute interview over the phone or in person. I am choosing to take my assessment over the phone. I will be the only one taking this assessment because my children are beginners and the test is geared towards adults. There are four main levels of assessments: superior, advanced, intermediate and novice. The entire breakdown of the levels are: superior, advanced high, advanced mid, advanced low, intermediate high, intermediate mid, intermediate low, novice high, novice mid, and novice low. The interview is double rated to ensure that the correct level of aptitude has been assigned. Having a pre and post test, will give me a more complete picture of how I have advanced over the course of the study (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

To analyze the journal, I will highlight key parts in the texts which show interesting observations, moments of challenge and achievement and I will also look to find patterns that further reveal how our family experienced this language learning

experiment in our home. I will color code these sections in order to see how many of each type I experienced during the study. Also, I will quote the journals in order to show how the participants progressed in the lessons (Mackey & Gass, 2005).

For the field notes, I will take notes in a note book. I will then analyze the information here like the same that I did for the journal studies. By reviewing, sorting, and categorizing the entries, I will be able to identify key themes that emerge in the data that can reveal patterns of our language development.

Lesson themes will be written before each week, but because the Thomson method is so malleable, I will be able to tweak the lesson plans as needed (Thomson, 1993a). The lesson themes will focus on a specific theme for each week. I will select certain vocabulary and tasks that we will practice during the week. I will be able to evaluate the usefulness and success of my lesson themes through the journal entries, field notes and ultimately the post-test.

#### Ethics

While performing this study I followed certain procedures to protect my participants' rights. I went through the human subjects review in order to ensure that my subjects were well informed by my informed consent letter. Afterwards, I gave each participant the informed consent letter and they signed it giving me the privilege to use any information I learned in my capstone and to ensure that they understood what would take place in the study. Since two of the participants are my children and minors, my husband gave parental consent to use them as subjects.

## Conclusions

Within this chapter I discussed the various methods that I used in my study about my family learning French using the Thomson method. I touched upon the specific methods being used: pre-test, post-test, journal entries, interviews, videotaping language use, and lesson plans. These various data collection measures helped to achieve triangulation and reliability within my study. They helped to peel away as many layers as possible of the family language learning experience. These methods will help to deeply explore how one family experienced a language learning endeavor together. In chapter four, I will examine the results of my study.

## CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS

### Introduction

Chapter three outlined the research methods that were used in this study. The methods outlined were: pre and post-tests, journaling, field notes and lesson themes. My research question was: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism? I referred to it as modified because I only used the method for six weeks and my study focused on my family, not one individual learner as Thomas describes. In Chapter four I give an analysis of the results of my study and my key findings. I describe my goals for my study, give details of my six-week plan, give results of my pretests, describe my individual and my children's language sessions, give examples from my journal and field notes, give examples from my lesson themes, and lastly give the results of my post-test.

### Goals of Study

The main goal of my study was to improve my French and to help two of my children to learn French. My research question is: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism. Since we were moving France, I wanted us to all get a jump start into French. I knew that two of my children would be starting school in France and I did not want them to be thrown into it without knowing at least a little French. Also, I have such a love of language, in

particular French, that I wanted our family to engage in language lessons together so we could bond as a family and learn something together.

The pre and post tests were used as a way to measure my French level before and after our language studies. My children did not have a pretest since their level of French is almost a true beginner.

Journaling was an avenue for me to explore what I was learning and feeling about the language sessions. This gave me the opportunity to pinpoint what was lacking in my language sessions as well as what exactly I was learning. I also used it to highlight new vocabulary words I learned and key grammar points that I learned during the session.

I wrote field notes when I watched my children's lessons. This gave me the ability to help my children by changing the structure and format of the language lessons while observing what worked with them and what did not. This also helped me to see how they advanced in their language lesson and to see how the Thomson method would work for them.

Finally, I had lesson themes to guide both my lessons and my children's lessons. This helped my language resource person to stay on topic and discuss what I wanted her to discuss. Each lesson theme had sub-topics that I wanted addressed within the main theme. At the end the themes were assessed by me and our language resource person evaluating how they did based on the ratings of "with ease," "with effort," and "with difficulty."

#### The Six-week Plan

I chose to study French for six weeks for several reasons. Since I was working full-time and homeschooling as well, I felt like six weeks was manageable and not too

taxing for my family. Also, we were planning on moving to France at the end of January, thus I only had about 10 weeks from when I started my study to when we would depart. I wanted a few weeks padding because I knew there were holidays during my six weeks. Also, I wanted a buffer for potential sick days. Lastly, I wanted this to be a positive experience for everyone involved and not stressful in the least.

My six-week plan included some time for me and my children to get to know our language resource person. It was important for me that we had a good working relationship. I had specific lesson themes for my children and myself that I will describe in detail below. In addition to lesson themes, I wanted our language sessions to concentrate on listening comprehension, as well as speaking. This is not to say we did not study writing and reading, but rather they were more secondary aspects to our learning. I did not have grammatical goals as part of my six-week plan for my children because I wanted them to learn the language naturally focusing on TPR and lots of hands-on applications because the Thomson method utilizes TPR a lot.

As for me, I did not have any specific grammatical goals, but I did want to make sure that I was able to practice different tenses of French and to branch out into different tenses within the same conversation. I wanted to be able to switch naturally and with ease. This was always difficult for me, so I wanted to ensure that I worked on this.

#### Pretest

Before starting language sessions with my LRP, I took a pretest. My children did not take a pretest since they were almost true beginners. The test I used for myself was administered by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). I took only the speaking part and it was delivered on the phone. My results were

Intermediate – Mid. The results of my test were what I had expected them to be. I can understand most of what people can say to me, but it has always been difficult for me to quickly respond to questions in French.

### Language Sessions

Our language sessions began on November 8, 2010 and ended December 30, 2010. The language resource person, Lilou, came to our house and spent two hours with us every week day. The times of day varied depending on my work schedule and her various appointments and job.

The first week of language lessons began on November 8, 2010. My youngest child, who was two years old at the time, was in day care so that I could concentrate on my French sessions. My lesson was during the first hour. We started by getting to know each other and conversing in French in a basic way. We talked about our families and our interests. This was the first of my lesson themes for me: basic conversation skills, focusing on chatting about interests and family.

My children took the second hour and they looked at pictures in books and repeated a lot of the words that the teacher said. Their lesson themes were greetings and food. We stuck with this theme for a few days because they seemed to like it a lot and were learning lots of new vocabulary. During their first lesson, my goal was to sit on the couch and take notes while they sat at the dining room table and learned French, but my five year old daughter started crying, so I ended up sitting at the table with all of them. My daughter sat on my lap for the majority of the lesson.

We remained on those same themes for the remaining lessons that week until Friday. My children's lesson's theme was then family members. They played a fun

French card game and they really enjoyed it. My 7 year old son; however, threw a fit when his five year old sister beat him. He refused to play the game again during all of the language sessions. The card game introduced all of the names of the family like: mère, père, grand-mère, grand-père, sœur, and frère.

For my own theme, I switched to discussing France and the regions of France. I wanted to learn more about France and be able to converse about it more clearly. We also touched on cultural differences between the two countries and the social aspects that we could take advantage of when we moved to France.

The second week of French sessions started on November 15, 2011. We decided to meet Lilou at the library downtown since she had a doctor's appointment and would not be able to meet us unless we met her downtown. This plan did not work out very well. Normally, when I have my French session, my children go into their rooms and have the opportunity to play or relax. However, at the library, I had them read library books while they were waiting for their lesson. As a result, my daughter cried and my son sulked during their lesson because they were so tired. The rest of the week went without any problems.

The themes for my children continued to be family members and food. They also reinforced colors and numbers although my children knew these already. Some of the activities they did were: playing the card game UNO and playing the board game Candy Land to work on colors and numbers. They also learned game appropriate terms like "your turn", "draw", etc.

For my sessions, I continued to have the same format as an open discussion and allowed the discussion to go where it would. We also used a map of France and talked

about the different regions. We talked about our interests and descriptions of other people.

The third week of French sessions continued on November 22, 2011, as normal except for the fact that Thanksgiving fell in the middle of the week and we could not have lessons on Wednesday, Thursday or Friday. On Tuesday of that week, we took a trip to the park with my children in order to expand their vocabulary to consist of playground equipment and activities that children do. Our LRP also used a lot of TPR at the playground, for example, “climb up the ladder”, “slide down the slide”, “let’s go to the see saw”, etc.

For my lessons this week, we concentrated on things I might need to do while in France. The theme was daily activities and the subtopics were: at the bank, at the grocery store and at the post office. We did role plays where I was usually the customer, since that is how it would normally be when I moved to France.

The fourth week of French lessons started a bit slow because I came down with walking pneumonia. We had to skip the first 3 days of the week. We only had sessions on Thursday and Friday. We took those two days to review everything we had learned previously since we had such a big break. One noteworthy French tool that our language resource person used was online pictures for vocabulary for the children. They did not like this method. They preferred pictures on cards, or in the books. I saw that they were about to fall asleep and quickly made her change her technique.

The fifth week of French lessons started November 29, 2011. The kids focused on learning animals and learning verbs that were related to animals so that they could

discuss them more coherently. They used pictures in books, colored pictures and did roleplaying in order to learn the vocabulary.

During my language sessions for the fifth week, we practiced other scenarios that I might come across during my stay in France. We practiced getting tickets at the train station, going to a patisserie, going to a hair dresser and we reviewed some of the previous topics. We practiced mostly through role playing.

Week six of our language sessions began on December 6<sup>th</sup>. Our language resource person, Lilou, had to go out of the country to Italy for a few days, so we were not able to meet for the entire week. The children's lesson themes consisted of personal characteristics like hair color, face shape, etc. They played many games of the new version of Guess Who. It has several different cards with faces, as well as house hold appliances and monsters. They children really enjoyed this.

My language sessions focused on people's interests like movies, books and TV shows. I wanted to be able to discuss these things with people in France. I also tried to focus on the future tense since I tended to avoid this tense for some reason.

Although our language sessions were only supposed to be six weeks, due to holidays, sicknesses and vacations, we held a few more additional sessions that continued on and off over the next three weeks of December. Lilou and our family both went away for Christmas, so we were unable to have language sessions around that time. For the eight sessions we had during these 3 weeks, the children focused on reviewing what they had previously learned and also practiced labeling common objects around the house and neighborhood. They used flashcards and TPR for these sessions.

For the last of my language lessons I focused on talking about fine art and also about talking to other parents about my children and their children. We used role plays, as well as friendly conversation to reinforce these topics.

The last language session took place on December 30, 2011. We had a small French party where we cooked some crepes and practiced French together as a group. I also allotted some time for Lilou to tell me about her thoughts about our progress in our French learning.

#### Observations from my Journal

After the study was concluded, I read and reread my journal to find some common themes that rang throughout the study. After summarizing parts of my journals and color coding themes I was able to see a pattern within my journal. The themes that stood out the most were: mental and physical fatigue, limited opportunities for meaningful interaction, interpersonal connection, Language activities with low impact on learning, positive outcomes and impact on my language pedagogy.

#### Mental and physical fatigue

During the entire time that we had language sessions, I felt mentally and physically drained. Most of the fatigue came from keeping my children engaged during their French language lessons. On November 9, 2011, I wrote, "I would've loved to just escape to my room for even fifteen minutes to wind down from my own language session, but I had to hold Adelaide the entire time so she wouldn't cry. I'm not sure that this is the best way for children to learn a foreign language. I think a child should learn a foreign language like they learn their first language, to be immersed." Also, on December 6, 2011 I wrote, "I was so brain dead after my hour of language learning that I

couldn't believe that I had to keep the children engaged for another hour. I would have really liked to have just relaxed and unwind after my session." On the last day of our lessons I wrote, "At last, I have a bit more free time, my body and my mind are so tired."

#### Limited Opportunities for Meaningful Interaction

There were several instances in my journal where I described my desire to have more people to practice French with, but was unable to due to family circumstances and having to take care of my two year old son. I had already put my two year old son in day care during these sessions and I could not have him spend more time away since he was adopted and needed to bond appropriately to me and our family. On December 7, 2011, I wrote, "I would love to go out and speak French to more than two people. I only have the opportunity to speak to Lilou and sometimes to my husband. I wish I had more time to go to the local French club. Unfortunately, it's too far away and takes place during the evening when I need to take care of my two year old and also when I work for my job."

Again on December 17, 2011, I wrote, "I wonder how I would be able to speak French to someone who I'm not accustomed to? I wonder if it would be very difficult. And then I wonder about even understanding Quebecois." It was always in the back of my head during my lessons, as shown in these two entries.

#### Interpersonal Connection

I found a theme of friendship with my language resource person throughout my journal. There were at least fifteen instances where I discussed how I appreciated and liked the friendship we had developed. The first example was from November 16, 2011 when I wrote, "Wow, I really like spending time with Lilou. She is such a joy to talk with

on a daily basis. I love how our conversations can take us wherever I want. I am able to learn so much from her.”

Towards the end of our language sessions, on December 28, 2011, I wrote, “I really hope that Lilou and I can remain friends even after our language sessions end. I hope that she is enjoying this as much as I have been.” I realized on December 30, 2011, that the sentiments were mutual. I wrote, “Today, Lilou surprised me with a present and card. The present was a book about Paris and she said that she hoped we would stay in contact. I think we will via Facebook.”

#### Language activities with low impact on learning

Throughout my journal I wrote several teaching techniques that I felt did not help with my language learning. One day Lilou brought a French grammar book and thought it would be helpful if we reviewed some information on the passé composé and imparfait. This is what I wrote about that lesson, “What a waste of time and my money. I really wish I would’ve put my foot down when she made this suggestion. I think some people feel that you need a book in order to learn, but I disagree. I can spend my own time going through grammar drills. Luckily after half an hour, I put the book down and asked if we could just chat. I felt that was much better for me and for the purpose of this study.”

Another problem I had was location. It was very difficult for me to have my language lesson at the library. I had to make sure my children were doing what I asked them and take them to the restroom. My sentiment was seen in this entry: “That by far was the most tiring language lesson to date. Not only did I have to drive 1 hour 1-way to

get to the downtown library, but I had to watch my children during my lesson more closely and take them to the restroom. My mind was not totally focused on my lesson.”

### Positive outcomes

This topic rang out throughout my journal. I was constantly raving about various techniques so that I could utilize them in my classroom as an English teacher and so that I could use them with my children when I continued their lessons in French or maybe a different language.

Another positive outcome was simply the fact that everything started to click with my French. I had a sharp increase in fluency and communicative competence. I noted this on three occasions. “I’m so excited!! Today I really felt as if my French was just coming out of my mouth and I didn’t have to think about it as much as before. I didn’t have to mentally translate everything.” Another entry I wrote, “Another good day, I’m so happy when everything comes today and I can see my improvements in my language learning.”

### Impact on my Language Pedagogy

I realized when I read through my journal is that I noted techniques that I liked that we used and techniques that I wanted to use in my English as a Second Language classroom. One technique that I noted that I liked was role-playing. One December 1, 2011 I wrote, “That was such a great session. Lilou is so good about getting into the different roles that we played today. Every time we did a new role play she was dynamically a different part. I really need to harness her energy and use it in my own classroom.”

On December 13, 2010 I wrote, “Lilou puts forth so much energy into our lessons. I feel like she’s putting everything she has into them and not holding anything back. I really need to try to do that more in my own classroom and not have any reserves for later.”

### Field Notes on my Children’s Language Learning

Even though I usually had my five year old daughter sitting on my lap, I did manage to take some field notes about my children’s French learning. When reading through my field notes, I found a few reoccurring topics: lack of engagement, reoccurring problems, positive outcomes.

#### Lack of Engagement

My children have been homeschooled since they were ready to start preschool. They have had structured classes like karate, dance, gymnastics, soccer and Sunday school. Our homeschool structure is pretty strict and they do lots of reading and quiet learning throughout the day. I could see how tired they were after half an hour of French lessons. They would keep asking what the time was and how much longer they had. “Adelaide just asked me for the tenth time in 20 minutes how much longer. I think this is a sign that she’s very bored with the task. I had to ask the language resource person to switch tactics in order to once again regain Adelaide’s attention. Luckily this time it did work.”

One day when we went to the library and they had been reading an hour silently before their lesson even started. “I think my children have lost their ability to concentrate any longer. My son seems like he’s going to crawl out of his skin and my daughter keeps

crying. We had to cut this lesson short.” We only went to the library once, since I noticed it was not an ideal environment for their language learning.

The very next day I wrote, “Another day of crying from Adelaide. I know it’s not too hard for her, but I think it’s overwhelming to her and not her style of learning. She likes to learn things when, where and how she likes.”

### Reoccurring problems

There were several reoccurring problems that I had with my children while using this adjusted Thomson method. On December 14, 2011 I wrote, “I really thought my children would pick up French like a sponge using the method of TPR, rich picture usage and playing games. However, Lilou just had to tell Cormac for the 15<sup>th</sup> time how to say “draw” in French. It does not seem to be clicking.”

Although both Lilou and I tried hard to make these lessons natural for the children to learn, it did not seem to always work, “Again, it has happened where Lilou had to tell both children how to say glasses in French while we played ‘Guess Who’. I don’t know why they don’t remember the words. I almost sense a bit of apathy in their learning.”

Another reoccurring problem I had was the fact that Adelaide constantly wanted me to sit right by her. She was terrified for some reason of these language lessons. During the first lesson I wrote, “Adelaide is insisting that she sit on my lap during this lesson. She is trying to read what I’m writing and since she’s able to read like a fourth grader, I have to write in cursive so that she cannot read what I’m writing.”

On a different day during the first week I wrote, “Luckily Adelaide has moved from my chair to her own chair, but she does tend to cry towards the end of the lesson. I

think she's very bored with the format and repetition. I think I'm going to have to change the format of their language lessons."

### Positive Outcomes

I think that my children had the best times during their French sessions when they played board and card games with Lilou. They played 'Guess Who' for the whole hour one day. "I can't believe how animated Cormac is getting while playing 'Guess Who.' He's still using a lot of English, but he seems to be having fun." The purpose of playing "Guess Who" was to reinforce being able to describe the facial features of people and objects.

Another positive time that I witnessed was when they were playing a French card game of family members. My daughter was so excited to know that Cormac is her 'frère (accent).' I wrote in my field journal, "Adelaide has called Cormac 'her frère' about five times during their one hour lesson today. Every time she says it, she has a smile on her face. She is so proud of herself." Adelaide showed emerging confidence and enjoyment with the language play time.

In my opinion the positive outcomes were very limited. This kind of structure and every day lessons was not the best method for my children. This will be discussed more in chapter five.

### Lesson Themes

My children and I had different themes that I hoped to achieve by the end of our language sessions. Since they were beginners and I was intermediate level, I felt that we needed different goals and themes for our language sessions.

The main themes of my children were: greetings, food, family members, colors, numbers, basic objects, playgrounds, children's activities, animals, describing people and objects, and the neighborhood.

The goals for each theme are shown in the figure below.

Figure 4.1

*Children's French Language Themes*

Greetings
Saying hello Saying goodbye Asking how people feel and answering
Food
Fruits Vegetables Dairy and grain products Desserts Miscellaneous
Family members
Immediate family members Extended family members
Colors
Primary colors Secondary colors
Numbers
Numbers to 10 Numbers to 50 Ordinal numbers to 5th
Basic objects
Common Household Items Toys and Games Other Miscellaneous Objects
Playground equipment
Children's activities
Actions used when playing Outside Games
Animals
Neighborhood animals Animals at the Zoo Bugs and Insects
Describing people and objects

Facial Parts and Features Body Parts and Features Object Parts and Features Toys Household Items
About the neighborhood
Features of the Neighborhood Places in the Neighborhood

For myself I picked themes and scenarios that I felt I would most likely encounter during my first few months in France. They included: basic conversation skills, talking about interests and family, discussing regions of France and France in general, discussing interests, describing people, everyday scenarios, discussing current events and media, fine art, talking about children, grammar. Below is a detailed list of the themes with the goals that I wanted to accomplish.

Figure 4.2

*My French Language Themes*

Basic conversation skills
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The ability to speak freely about various topics</li> <li>• Using the correct greetings and salutations within the conversation</li> </ul>
Interests
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to ask questions about interests</li> <li>• Be able to answer questions about interests</li> </ul>
Regions of France and France in general
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discuss the various regions of France</li> <li>• Focus on three regions and learn a lot about them</li> <li>• Be able to discuss France in general</li> </ul>
Family
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to describe the make up of my family</li> <li>• Be able to ask questions about other people's families</li> </ul>
People
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Be able to describe people</li> <li>• Be able to ask questions about other people</li> </ul>
Everyday Situations
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• At the bank</li> <li>• At the grocery store</li> </ul>

• At the post office
• At the train station
• Going to the patisserie
• Going to the hair dresser
Current Events and Media
• Be able to discuss current events with ease
• Discuss movies
• Discuss books
• Discuss TV shows
Fine art
• Discuss paintings
• Discuss modern art sculptures
• Other types of fine art
Talking about children
• Be able to describe my children and talk about their interests
• Ask questions of others about their children
Grammar (ongoing in all sessions)
• Present
• Passé Compose
• Imparfait
• Future
• Conditional

### Post Test

The post test for myself was for me to again take the French oral proficiency test administrated by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). The post test for my children was for me and our language resource person to judge how they were able to talk based on the various lesson themes. I also ended up using a similar method with myself after I was disappointed with the results of the ACTFL.

### My Language Results

On January 3, 2011, I took the ACTFL oral test on the phone. I was not as nervous as I was the first time when I took the test; however, I scored the exact same – intermediate-mid.

Together with my language resource person, Lilou, we went through the themes and we ranked my ability to speak about the various topics. I used this ranking system to judge my French skills: “with ease,” “with effort,” and “with difficulty.” These are defined in chapter three. Below is a graph that outlines what results we saw.

Figure 4.3

*My French Language Learning Results Based on Themes*

Theme	Level Attained
Basic conversation skills	With ease
Interests	With ease
Regions of France and France in general	With effort
Family	With ease
People	With ease
Everyday Situations	With effort
Current Events and Media	With ease
Fine art	With difficulty
Talking about children	With ease
Grammar	With effort

My children’s language results

I used the same method of evaluation on my children that I did for my second evaluation for myself. Together with the language resource person, I was able to evaluate the children on their themes. In the tables below are the results.

Figure 4.4

*Cormac's French Language Learning Results Based on Themes*

Theme	Level Attained
Greetings	With ease
Food	With ease
Family members	With effort
Colors	With ease
Numbers	With ease
Basic objects	With effort
Playground equipment	With difficulty
Children's activities	With difficulty
Animals	With ease
Describing people and objects	With effort
About the neighborhood	With difficulty

Figure 4.5

*Adelaide's French Language Learning Results Based on Themes*

Theme	Level Attained
Greetings	With ease
Food	With effort
Family members	With effort
Colors	With ease
Numbers	With ease
Basic objects	With effort

Playground equipment	With difficulty
Children's activities	With difficulty
Animals	With ease
Describing people and objects	With difficulty
About the neighborhood	With difficulty

Although my children made progress, I would have liked to have seen even more progress. However, they stuck with it and in the end were quite used to the French lessons.

#### Discussion

Having a language resource person to help my family learn French was a great experience. The open environment of learning was effective for me and my children. The study was only six weeks long, thus we did not excel as much as I would have liked, but we did make progress. TPR, picture books, cards, games and basic conversations were all used to help us make the progress.

The most disappointing thing to me in the study was that I did not move up a level in my ACTFL post test. Even though I had more confidence going into the post test, I do not believe I gained enough vocabulary or correct grammar usage to advance to the next level. I think the language lessons did not last long enough for me to get over the 'hump' of my French ability for a test, but they did help me to excel in the lesson themes that I chose. I am glad that I decided to test myself on the themes that I learned during my weeks of French sessions. This helped me to see that I really did succeed in ways that were not measured on the ATCFL.

I believe that had I had French lessons only once or twice a week for a longer period of time and reinforced the lessons myself, the results would have been better. With work, home schooling other subjects for my children, the time to commit to the amount of time to really gain fluency was not available to me or to them. I am however, happy that my children and I did increase the amount we did in French.

## CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study were discussed and analyzed in chapter four. The research question which was evaluated was: How does one family experience a modified version of the Thomson method in their journey toward bilingualism? I referred to it as modified because I only used the method for six weeks and my study focused on my family, not one individual learner as Thomas describes. Chapter five will focus upon the study in relation to the research material in chapter two. Reflections, implications, limitations of this study, options for further research in this topic, and concluding remarks about this research will be discussed in this chapter.

### Reflections

Using a modified version of the Thomson method for me and my children to learn French was incredibly time consuming, yet so fulfilling. Although it was difficult at times to have to sit and witness my children's whining during the lessons; however, it was nice to spend some quality time learning a language together. Because I watched their lessons, worked to keep them engaged and on task while taking field notes, I was also able to learn French during their lessons. This was great as it gave me an extra hour of listening to French, but after 2 hours of listening to nothing but French, my mind was completely tired.

I often wonder if my children were affected by the lessons at all. When we talk about the lessons today, nearly two months later, they ask, “What? Oh that.” I wonder if possibly they were not motivated enough or properly. According to Krashen (1997), motivation is an important aspect of learning a foreign language. People need to be properly motivated in order to have greater success. For me, I was motivated because I love French and I knew we were moving to France the next year. My children knew we were moving, but were unmoved by that fact. I think it can be hard to conceive living in a foreign country for a young person. Even though they both have lived in the past in Canada, Ireland and France, they have no memory of the latter two.

In the past I have used materialistic means to motivate them for school work and other similar activities. I think I overestimated my motivation and assumed theirs was the same as mine, when it was not at all. Motivation is a very important aspect of language learning and I think I overlooked this for my children.

For my own language learning, as always I was very happy to be expanding my vocabulary and just engaging in adult conversation. It was nice to develop such a wonderful friendship with a great woman. These few months of intensive language learning are something I will never forget and I will treasure forever.

#### Implications

Having a language resource person is truly a great way to learn a foreign language. I have studied passé compose and imparfait for countless hours for my French classes in college. Although I can grasp some of the rules and remember the rules, I still make mistakes. By having a language resource person, I was able to ask them why they

used the tense they did. It was also helpful for my LRP to give me other examples on the spot. This helped to reinforce my language learning.

### Language Learning Environment

The language learning environment that the Thomson method provides is an open environment where the learner can make their own goals and learn in a way that they are comfortable. This is an ideal way for adults to learn. This is especially helpful for adults who are shy or are intimidated in classrooms. One-on-one guided language sessions enable the learners to take control of their learning.

### Authentic Language Learning and Adequate Practice

The different aspects of the Thomson methods could be utilized in the classroom in order for students to be able to excel better. Teachers can put less emphasis on textbooks and more emphasis on comprehensible input in the forms of rich pictures. Furthermore, it would be extremely helpful if language classes could be smaller. I took French in college with 30 students in the class. In a forty-five minute class that was three times a week, I was only given the opportunity to speak a few sentences a week. Although one-on-one language lessons in the college lessons are not economical, perhaps Universities can hire work/study students to guide small group sessions and become language resource persons.

### Limitations of this Study

The limitations of this study are two-fold. First I will discuss the limitations to this project and then I will discuss the changes I would make to the study if I were to do it again. First and foremost, I believe that the fact that I am making judgments about myself and my children is a limitation. It is very difficult to not be bias especially when

describing one's own children. However, I tried to open and see the positive and negative sides to their learning.

Furthermore, the language resource person is not a trained teacher. Although the Thomson method actually states that you do not use a teacher, some people might see this as a limitation because the LRP would not be able to explain grammar with great detail.

Also, this language study is not representative of families because since we home school we had the extra time in the day to devote to language learning. Not every family would have this time available to them. We were fortunate to be able to undertake such an endeavor.

If I would ever use the Thomson method again I would do so many things differently. The first thing I would do is to focus on myself and not my children. I think it is mentally taxing for them to learn a language this way. I believe that they would learn French more easily being fully immersed. Also, if they would not have had language lessons, this would have given me more time to focus on my own language learning.

Secondly, I would use it to learn a language completely from scratch. I found it difficult to utilize the method completely since I had a pretty solid foundation of French. I think it would be completely different using the method on a language where I did not even know one word. I also think this method would work better with less commonly taught languages because learners could get a chance to learn a language that is not offered in college.

Thirdly, I think I would be even stricter with my language resource person if some activity was not working. I would ask her to switch it more quickly. As Thomson

(1989) explains, the learner is in control of their learning. This is a factor that is easily forgotten since we are brought up thinking the teacher is in control of the learning environment. Once I became friends with our LRP, it was harder for me to demand what I wanted to learn and to ask her to switch teaching techniques.

Fourthly, I would try harder to find other speakers of the language so that I could build friendships while learning the language. Thomson (1989) stated that building a network of friends in the target language is helpful to learn the language and I really felt as if this was lacking in my study. However, as stated above, due to family and work obligations, I was unable to commit to this part of the Thomson method like I would have liked to have.

#### Ideas for Further Research

The Thomson method has many different theories of language learning weaved within it. This provides countless of opportunities for future research. I think it would be very interesting and significant to the language community for a complete family to learn a foreign language together from the beginning outside of the country where the language is normally spoken. As stated in Chapter two, there is not much research performed on family bilingualism, thus I think it would be an important part of language research to have this studied especially given the global economy and the fact that many of today's families consider themselves transnational.

Another idea for further research is for teacher's to utilize the Thomson method in their own classroom. In the United States in English as a Second Language (ESL) programs at community centers or literacy programs. It would be great for teachers to find volunteers to be language resource persons for their students. Either to come to the

class and give the students the opportunity to speak to another English speaker or perhaps the LRPs could become personal tutors to some of the students.

The field of second language acquisition would benefit from further exploration of language resource people in general and how having one who can teach about cultural information can impact language development. The LRP's ability to give in depth accounts of the culture could help the learner delve into language learning as they are engrossed in the culture.

### Concluding Remarks

Now, I am currently living in France with my family and we are immersing ourselves within the French culture. I plan on using some of the aspects of the Thomson method to further my own language study. I plan on building a language community for myself so that I can gain more confidence with learning French. I think by building relationships around the French language that I will grow as a student with knowledge of their culture in addition to learning language skills. My children are in school and are surrounded by the language and have an endless amount of comprehensible input which is required to learn a language successfully (Krashen, 1997). I, on the other hand, do not have as much of an opportunity to meet people in which to carry an intimate conversation. I do have interaction with people in the grocery store and other public places.

My plan over the next few weeks is to find a language resource person here in Paris, where we can meet for two hours every few days. I could help them with their English and they can help me with my French. I want to utilize some of the Thomson methods as well during this process so I can get the most out of my time.

I believe that the most important thing that I learned from this study is how learning a language works differently for children and adults. I think my children need to learn a foreign language completely by immersion. I on the other hand work better by having language sessions with a native speaker. Just like I did not care to practice the piano when I was little, they do not care to practice French. French to them needs to be a way of life or they do not see the value of it. Also, how the language process works in general. The Thomson method is a great tool, which can be successfully modified to help people study language.

As an English as a foreign language (EFL) teacher, I plan on incorporating some of these methods in my lessons as well. Furthermore, I think it will be a good idea to have the students pair off and in their free time try to practice English together so that they can perhaps build their own network of English language learners.

Regardless if one chooses to use the Thomson method to learn a language or a different method, I believe that the Thomson method has a lot of good parts to it that can be incorporated into other methods. I believe that the learner needs to find what method works for them and use it. I think at times students try to stick with one method, but we as language learners should learn how to take control of our language learning and change the style of learning if it is not working. Before having language sessions with my language resource person, I had difficulty or needed much effort in order to talk or discuss these topics. This gives me great hope for my future language study and my ultimate goal of becoming fluent in French.

## Epilogue

My family and I are currently living in Paris, France. My children have been attending school for over one month now and have adjusted quite nicely. I think that the language sessions we did with our LRP helped them to learn just enough French so that this move would not be too stressful to them. My son's progression has been amazing. His pronunciation of so many words and phrases is native-like already. Every day he picks up new language. My daughter is doing well, also. However, since she is in kindergarten, she does not learn as much vocabulary words as my son. Both of them have embraced our new life and I am very grateful for that. Also, because we are immigrants in a foreign country, I have new found empathy for the ESL learners and immigrants of the United States. I think learning a foreign language and living in a foreign country will help me to become a better ESL teacher because my patience and understanding has increased throughout this entire process.

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