The Colours of -ish

Aim: To raise awareness of the suffix *–ish* in English and similarities and differences with its French equivalents

Materials: poem handout (or projection) downloaded from the internet

Vocabulary: Words with *–ish* (colours, nationalities, character traits)

Procedure:

1. Make student copies (or an overheard transparency) of Shel Silverstein's poem called "Colors". It is widely available on the internet, e.g. at http://www.inspirationalarchive.com/texts/topics/understanding/color.s html.

2. Ask students about poems in French and English. Do they read French poems? Have they ever read English poems? If they have with you, which do they remember? This lesson has a short poem.

3. Tell students to read the poem. Or you may want to read the poem aloud first before they see it. The reading (or listening) focus question is, "What ending do you notice on the colour words?"

4. Then ask about the meaning of *–ish*. What is the difference between *yellow* and *yellowish*? (Answer: Yellowish is sort of yellow, not true yellow.) Also ask what *yellowish* is in French (Answer: *jaunâtre*).

5. Students read the poem aloud to each other in pairs. Option: Each partner may change two words or three colour words to personalize the poem to his/her own colouring. For students who finish early: What colours are <u>not</u> mentioned (in either the normal or *–ish* form)? Answer: purple, black (and possibly others). Note that these can have *–ish* endings too.

6. Elicit French equivalents for the *-ish* words in the poem, adding *–ish* to any that don't have it (e.g. greenish). What do you notice about the French ones? Elicit the idea that there is one main pattern in English but

two in French: Most take the *âtre* suffix (e.g.*jaunâtre, brunâtre, verdâtre,* etc.), but a few take endings with *é* (*rosé, violacé, bleuté*).

7. To conclude, ask the students about the message of the poem. Does it have a message? Maybe it is just a silly poem, or maybe the author is saying that skin colour is impossible to describe and doesn't matter?

8. Optional expansion: Point out that there are other uses of *–ish*, including adjectives for nationalities. Students will know *English* and possibly others. Elicit some using this example and question format:
    What is the adjective for people from England? English
    What is the adjective for people from _____?
    Etc.
    Some countries that follow this pattern: *Britain, Spain, Turkey, Poland, Ireland, Scotland, Sweden, Denmark.*
    As you elicit these, also ask for French translations and write them on the board in two columns:

English	anglais
British	britannique
Spanish	espagnol
Turkish	turc
Polish	polonais
Irish	irlandais
Scottish	écossais
Swedish	suédois
Danish	danois

    Note: Students may be interested to know that the English word *French* evolved from the older form *Frankish.*

9. Ask students to look for similarities and differences across the two columns. Similarity: many of the English *-ish* words end with a somewhat similar form (*-ais* or *-ois* in French). Difference: The English ones are all capitalized, but not the French ones!

10. Some additional (optional) questions. Ask, "How do we describe a person who ....?"
    - acts like a <u>baby</u> all the time (babyish)
    -spends all his or her time reading <u>books</u> (bookish)
    -is an older woman but acts like a little <u>girl</u> (girlish)
    -thinks about him or her<u>self</u> only and never about others (selfish)

-likes to wear fashionable clothes and dress in <u>style</u> (stylish)
-acts like a <u>child</u> younger than his or her real age (childish)