Contact

Research Symposium Annual Edition

A collection of nine research papers exploring themes and issues as presented at the Fall 2008 conference

With this issue we are pleased to bring you the refereed proceedings of the ninth Annual Research Symposium, part of the 36th Annual TESL Ontario Conference held in Toronto in November, 2008. The four themes that formed the focus of the Symposium were:

- **Strategies for Language Learning and Teaching.**
- **Immigrants and Mental Health.**
- **Role of L1 in L2 Learning and Teaching.**
- **Standardized Tests: the State of the Art.**

As in previous years, the four themes covered topical issues that affect the classrooms and practice of ESL professionals in varied ways. Teachers who encounter problems and challenges related to these themes on a daily basis in their classrooms look for background information and practical ideas that will help them meet their learners' needs and the needs of their own professional development. In organizing the Research Symposium around topical themes and publishing the proceedings, TESL Ontario offers ESL professionals relevant information on recent research and developments that informs classroom practice and the development of the profession.

Following past practice, the different presentations in this special issue have been grouped around themes selected in consultation with the TESL Ontario membership and in conjunction with the Ontario Region LINC Advisory Committee (ORLAC), the Ministry of Culture and Immigration and Citizenship and Immigration Canada. They represent a focus on pedagogical challenges that classroom teachers, administrators, other language professionals and broader segments of the population deal with on an ongoing basis in trying to provide learners with optimal learning conditions. We are confident that readers will find the selected papers interesting and relevant to their teaching. We

hope that they will feel inspired by the ideas presented and launch their own inquiries into an aspect of their teaching context, then report their insights at future TESL Ontario conferences.

On behalf of TESL Ontario, we thank the Ministry of Citizenship and Immigration (Canada) and the Ministry of Culture and Immigration (Ontario) for supporting the research symposium and the publication of this special issue. Their commitment to this important event for ESL professionals has been a source of encouragement and strength for our association and its members. We look forward to continued cooperation and support from the different ministries involved in language, immigration, settlement and training issues. We also wish to thank all the presenters who participated in the different themes of the symposium for sharing their expertise. Without them, we could not have organized the symposium and compiled these proceedings.

Finally, we would like to thank the members of the Reading Committee; the Symposium Moderators and Monitors; the Conference Chair Barb Krukowski the *Contact* Editor; Clayton Graves and TESL Ontario administrative and office staff for supporting us in organizing and preparing the publication of this refereed Research Symposium issue of *Contact*. Without their continuing support, our work would have been more difficult and considerably less pleasant. ❖

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Robert Courchêne

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Contact welcomes articles of general interest to association members, including announcements, reports, articles, calls for papers and news items.

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Introduction

This special refereed issue of *Contact* reflects presentations from the Research Symposium organized for TESL Ontario, November 2008. The symposium brought together important experts from across Canada and the USA who shared their research findings on a number of themes and, where possible, considered potential implications and applications to classroom teaching at all levels. Contributions from all four themes of the 2008 Research Symposium are addressed in these proceedings:

- Strategies for Language Learning and Teaching.
- Immigrants and Mental Health.
- Role of L1 in L2 Learning and Teaching.
- Standardized Tests: the State of the Art.

The papers selected for inclusion examine a range of complex and often interrelated issues which are explored through different methodologies.

Theme 1 – Strategies for Language Learning and Teaching

Two papers from the *Strategies for Language Learning and Teaching* theme are included in these proceedings. The first paper, "Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies: Applications for English Language Teachers," by Keith Folse examines the challenges that second/subsequent (L2) teachers and English Language Learners (ELLs) face in teaching and learning vocabulary. ELLs can only acquire a certain number of words at a time and therefore must use the best possible strategies to achieve this task. L2 teachers, for their part, must decide not only what strategies to teach but the most effective way to teach them. After summarizing the current research on vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs), including its strengths and weaknesses,

Folse suggests implications for classroom teachers toward the ultimate goal of augmenting ELLs' vocabulary knowledge.

The second paper, "Educator Macrostrategies and Child L2 Learning Strategies: A Case Study," by Shelley Taylor focuses on the strategy use of a trilingual child in a multicultural classroom in Denmark, where the languages used were Danish and Turkish. The paper begins with an examination of L2 learning strategies and their relationship to autonomous learning, motivation and academic achievement. Taylor then examines the importance of raising students' awareness of learning strategies and the role of strategy training in improving students' academic results. In her review of empirical studies supporting her position, she draws on the results of a large-scale study by the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and previous influential studies. Next, she presents the case of a trilingual child, followed by global lessons that can be learned from his case and applied to other multilingual classroom settings.

Theme 2 – Immigrants and Mental Health

Two papers have been included under this theme, one presented within the Research Symposium and a second solicited from a specialist in the topic. In the first paper, "Health Literacy, Mental Health and Immigrants," Laura Simich focuses on health literacy, a relatively new term defined as the ability to seek information, learn, appraise, make decisions, communicate information, prevent diseases and promote individual, family and community health. According to Simich, new immigrants face many challenges in trying to access the care they need from the Canadian health system: language proficiency, practices in their country of origin, previous experience with the health system, gender-related practices. To date, little research

has been carried out on how successful immigrants are in getting the health care they need. To meet this challenge, Simich argues, ESL teachers need to work closely with other health care providers to educate new and already established immigrants. To this end, she concludes her paper with a series of suggested educational practices.

In the second paper, "Educational and Linguistic Integration Outcomes among Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada," Joanna Rummens provides a brief synthesis of research findings from the available literature on integration outcomes among newcomer and second-generation immigrant children and youth in Canada, paying particular attention to educational and linguistic outcomes. She begins with an examination of the differences in educational aspirations and expectations of immigrant students and native born-students in the Canadian school system, concluding that variation exists both within and across these groups with no single pattern emerging. In subsequent sections she examines performance and achievement, trajectories and attainment, cross-cultural dynamics, home-school dynamics, language competence as well as language acquisition and literacy

Theme 3 – The Role of L1 in L2 Learning and Teaching

Three papers included in these proceedings address the topic of how learners' L1 comes into play in L2 learning. Shawn Loewen's study entitled "The Use of the L1 in Focus on Form" focuses on the rarely investigated role learners' L1 has in focus-on-form activities. The study drew on audio recordings and observations from two undergraduate foreign language classes, a third-year Chinese and a first-year Spanish class. The participants thus shared a common L1 (English) and target (Chinese or Spanish) language, making it reasonable for students and teachers to use the L1 in certain language situations. Analyses focused on determining the frequency of L1 use, the initiator (teacher or student) of each use, and the precise discourse moves involved. Results show that both teachers and students made use of the L1 to varying degrees. It remains to be determined whether similar uses of L1 occur in other language learning situations.

The second paper on this theme, "Integrating Language and Content: Focus on Form in a Content-Based Language Program" by Antonella Valeo, offers a research report of work in progress. Valeo's study addresses the issue of integrating language and content in a specialized language training program developed for adult learners preparing for employment. The content-based syllabus is delivered through entirely content-focused instruction to one group in the program, and adapted for focus-on-form instruction to the other group. Valeo discusses the kinds of questions the design and anticipated analyses of her study will be able to answer.

The third paper on this theme, Penny Kinnear's "Writing Across Languages and Cultures in a University Classroom" is an exploratory classroom-based study the author undertook in one of her undergraduate writing classes. Kinnear's objective was to observe how writers who are fluent in English and regularly use a language other than English in their daily lives deal with the challenge of describing in English an experience lived in another language, with different cultural values and traditions. Kinnear concludes with questions her observations raise about the role of literacy in bilinguals, the relationship between the two linguistic systems, and the contribution bilingualism makes to cognitive development in the pursuit of tertiary education and career training.

Theme 4 - Standardized Tests: State of the Art

Two of the four papers presented under this theme at the Research Symposium have been included in this issue. In the first, "A Theoretical and Empirical Evaluation of the Quality of Scoring Methods Used in Standardized Tests of ESL Writing," Khaled Barkaoui examines the issue of how to standardize the rating process in evaluating written texts to enhance the stability, and hence the validity, of test scores. Barkaoui suggests that one strategy to address this challenge is the use of rating scales to standardize the evaluation criteria and processes that raters employ. He begins his paper by examining the literature related to holistic and analytic writing grids and their uses in evaluating samples of students' writing with the purpose of determining the effectiveness of each. Based on his review of the literature, he describes a study in which he asked a group of teachers to use an analytic and a holistic grid to evaluate students' writing samples. Teachers were provided with training on the two rating scales. The results of the study indicate that while the two types of grids measured the same construct, the two rating scales might be useful for different contexts, assessment purposes and test-taking populations. No single grid met all criteria; the type of writing task, the purpose of the evaluation (placement versus admission), teacher familiarity with the grids and teachers' personal preferences were some of the variables identified that determined the value of each grid.

In the second paper, "The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a Language Framework for Canada: Why, What, How?," Larry Vandergrift focuses on identifying a common framework of reference for describing language proficiency in Canada. Such a framework must:

1. Define language proficiency at identified levels of communicative competence on a continuum across languages and contexts.
2. Compare individual progress in language performance along a continuum (rather than against the language performance of others).
3. Measure learner progress at each stage of learning and on a lifelong basis.

After drawing up a list of criteria such a framework must meet, he applies them to the most common frameworks in use (e.g. IELTS, CLB, ACTFL). Finding them all lacking in some way, he then presents the Common European Framework of Reference as being the one that most closely meets the list of criteria. While admitting its shortcomings, he suggests that it is the only one whose criteria have been empirically verified and which can be adapted to specific contexts. It is used by 40 countries in Europe and has been adopted by the Ministers of Education for Canada for French as a Second Language.

To grow, the TESL profession needs to keep exploring new areas of research and look for new and better ways to meet the challenges encountered on a regular basis in teaching and research. We hope that the articles contained in this issue will inspire you to experiment with new methodologies or new techniques in your classrooms. ❖

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STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Research on Vocabulary Learning Strategies: Applications for English Language Teachers

Keith Folse, University of Central Florida

Abstract

In the last three decades, research on vocabulary learning has burgeoned—albeit be-latedly. Resultant data clearly indicate that English language learners (ELLs) suffer from a severe shortage of knowledge of vocabulary of all types, including words, phrases, idioms, collocations, and lexical bundles, and that this shortage hinders ELLs' production and comprehension in English. Though ELLs and their teachers are working hard to overcome this lexical dilemma, the quandary facing both ELLs and teachers is that there are so many words to learn and yet so little time to do so. Teachers must also acknowledge that the number of unknown words is too great to be explicitly taught or even indirectly encountered in reading or listening within the time frame that most ELLs have. Given these stringent limitations, ELLs must become independent vocabulary learners, making use of the most efficient vocabulary learning strategies (VLSs). The purpose of this paper is to summarize current research on VLSs, including its strengths and weaknesses, and suggest applications for classroom teachers toward the ultimate goal of augmenting ELLs' vocabulary knowledge.

The Lexical Gap Facing ELLs

To function well in English, ELLs need a solid knowledge of vocabulary. A basic level of vocabulary will allow learners to communicate some ideas to a certain degree, but no learner should want to accept such a low plateau. To move beyond their comfort zone, ELLs must seek out new vocabulary, which will in turn stretch their interlanguage and ultimately improve their English (Folse, 2006). The ability to speak or write fluently depends heavily on an ELL's vocabulary knowledge. The demands of more advanced communication can be accomplished only when learners have acquired more vocabulary—whether in a more passive skill such as listening (Chang, 2007; Huang & Eskey, 2000; Markham, 1999; Smidt & Hegelheimer, 2004; Vidal, 2003) or a more active skill such as writing (Coxhead & Byrd, 2007; Dordick, 1996; Engber, 1995; Ferris, 1994; Folse, 2008a; Pizarro, 2003; Santos, 1988).

At times, not knowing a specific word can severely limit communication; however, in many cases a lexical lapse will actually halt

communication completely. Wilkins (1972) summarized this lexical plight by noting that "without grammar very little can be conveyed, without vocabulary nothing can be conveyed" (p. 111). The lexical gap that ELLs face is huge. In fact, the problem is so severe that it frequently prevents ELLs' comprehension of aural or print input, and for instructors who advocate a natural approach to learning English, ELLs must have access to comprehensible input. However, ELLs' lack of vocabulary often renders English input incomprehensible, thus denying ELLs an opportunity for natural language learning (Folse, 2004).

ELLs certainly recognize that insufficient vocabulary is one of their biggest frustrations (Green & Meara, 1995; James, 1996), but just how important is vocabulary really? While an educated native speaker of English knows about 20,000 word families (Nation, 2001), ELLs know only a fraction of this number. What ELLs have been saying all along—that they need more vocabulary—is clear from the lexical gap that ELLs face.

Of all the language skills, the most extensively researched with regard to the role of second/subsequent language (L2) vocabulary knowledge is reading. Reading ability correlates well with vocabulary knowledge, a statistical fact that has been known for many years (Davis, 1944). With some researchers showing that readers need to know 95 per cent to 98 per cent of the words in a passage to be able to comprehend it (Nation, 2006), ELLs are at a

> ### "...ELLs certainly recognize that insufficient vocabulary is one of their biggest frustrations."

stark disadvantage when compared to their native-speaking counterparts. Cobb (2007) notes that there is a lexical paradox at the heart of L2 reading.

After decades of promoting guesswork as the preferred learning strategy, there is now widespread agreement among researchers that text comprehension depends heavily on detailed knowledge of most of the words in a text. For too long, teachers were encouraged to tell students to guess at unknown vocabulary and to make use of context clues, but if learners do not know the words that surround an unknown word, then they actually have no context clues to use to make a viable guess. In sum, learners need vocabulary – and a lot of it. (See Folse, 2004, pp. 71-82, for a detailed summary of the limitations of using context clues to guess the meanings of unknown vocabulary.)

The Progress of Vocabulary Research in English Language Teaching (ELT)

Despite the lexical gap faced by ELLs and its debilitating effect on their language proficiency growth, research on vocabulary in ELT was neglected for many years (Meara, 1980). In fact, it was not until the early 1990s that L2 vocabulary research finally seemed to come alive. In that decade, many more published studies on L2 vocabulary appeared in journals, with some L2 journals even dedicating whole issues solely to vocabulary acquisition (e.g., *Canadian Modern Language Review, 1996, 2006; Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 1999; Reading in a Foreign Language, 2008*).

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As evidence of the upswing in interest in research on vocabulary, a database search of the keywords 'vocabulary,' 'empirical,' and 'second (or foreign) language' in the *Linguistics and Language Behavioral Abstracts* and *ERIC* showed 129 articles during the 1980s. By the 1990s, this figure had more than tripled to 415 (Folse, 2007). In Meara's 2002 article about four monographs on L2 vocabulary acquisition, he notes that this kind of review article would have been impossible just twenty years earlier because books on vocabulary acquisition were so rare. He went on to comment that Nation's 1990 *Teaching and Learning Vocabulary* was the first substantial work on L2 vocabulary for more than 50 years.

Indeed, vocabulary research has come a long way. ELT practitioners have witnessed the relative paucity of research findings prior to 1990 burgeon into an extensive collection of quantitative and qualitative reports. This growth has been fuelled by the Internet, which has facilitated access to research, networking among researchers and teachers, and dissemination of research findings.

L2 vocabulary research has been, by its nature, applied inquiry, and as a result, researchers and teachers have benefited from it. For instance, perhaps the single most comprehensive and certainly up-to-date listing for researchers can be found at the Vocabulary Acquisition Research Archive Group, or VARGA, at **www.lognostics.co.uk/varga** (2009). While VARGA is primarily of interest to researchers, Tom Cobb at the University of Quebec at Montreal has constructed one of the most impressive teacher-researcher sites for L2 vocabulary study at **http://www.lextutor.ca** (Cobb, 2006). This site offers many useful features, but of particular interest to teachers is a feature that verifies the degree of difficulty of

vocabulary in any given passage by labelling which words are from the Academic Word List (Coxhead, 2000), from the first one thousand of the General Service List, from the second thousand of the General Service List, or non-listed words. Words that are not from any of these lists are therefore less common.

Researchers have explored a wide range of diverse aspects of L2 vocabulary acquisition. Quantitative and qualitative studies have examined vocabulary acquisition in at least ten different areas, but as seen in Table 1, these studies can be grouped into three general areas: research on the vocabulary to be learned, research on how vocabulary is learned, and research on ELLs' strategies used in learning vocabulary.

Summarizing VLS Research

An entire book could be written regarding any one of these ten sub-areas of L2 vocabulary research. As Table 1 suggests, there is certainly a great deal of research on the vocabulary that ELLs should learn as well as how that vocabulary can be learned most effectively. There is relatively less research on VLSs, however.

One clear insight that has emerged from research is that the real quandary facing ESL teachers is that there are just too many words for teachers to teach and for learners to learn. To be sure, teachers as well as books and other learning materials can effectively teach vocabulary, but there is a threshold regarding how many words can be taught in any one lesson and certainly how many vocabulary items can be learned well in any given encounter (Folse, 2004). By default, the bulk of the task of learning vocabulary then rests squarely on the learner. Consequently, learners must be trained with strategies that will enable them to

Table 1. Range of L2 Vocabulary Research

AREA OF L2 VOCABULARY RESEARCH	SPECIFIC L2 VOCABULARY RESEARCH INQUIRY	EXAMPLE STUDIES
L2 vocabulary	1. The number of words L2 learners need to learn	Birch, 2007; Chujo & Utiyama, 2005; Cobb, 2007; Hazenberg & Hulstijn, 1996; Laufer, 1989; Nation, 2006; Vanderplank, 1993; Webb, 2008
	2. Which words students need to learn	Carlo et al., 2004; Coxhead, 2000; Laufer, 1990; Liu, 2003
	3. Why some words are more difficult to learn than others	Ellis, 1994; Laufer, 1997; Waring, 1999
How L2 vocabulary is learned	4. The development of the L2 vocabulary of ELLs	Barcroft, 2007; Cobb, Spada & Zahar, 2001; Ellis, 1994; Horst & Collins, 2006; Laufer & Hulstijn, 2001; Laufer & Paribakht, 1998; Lee, 2003; Nesselhauf, 2003; Parry, 1993; Schmitt, 1998
	5. Methods of vocabulary instruction (e.g., natural context or direct instruction; visual or aural)	Jones, 2004; Laufer & Shmueli, 1997; Mondria & Wit-de Boer, 1991; Zimmerman, 1997
	6. Comparisons of L1 (first language) and L2 for initial word presentation	Folse, 2007, 2008b; Grace, 1998; Hulstijn, Hollander & Greidanus, 1996; Prince, 1995
	7. The effect of different practice activities on L2 vocabulary learning	Barcroft, 2004; Chun & Plass, 1996; Folse, 2006; Joe, 1995, 1998; Laufer & Hulstijn, 1998; Nakata, 2008; Paribakht & Wesche, 1996, 1997, 1999
	8. The effect of certain types of marginal glosses and web annotations on incidental vocabulary learning	Chun & Plass, 1996; Folse & Chien, 2003; Grace, 1998; Groot, 2000; Hulstijn, Hollander & Greidanus, 1996; Lomicka, 1998; Roby, 1991, 1999; Watanabe, 1998
	9. New uses of specific technologies such as online dictionaries and web sites, mobile phones, blogs, etc.	Loucky, 2005; Suzuki, 2004; Thornton & Houser, 2004
Vocabulary Learning Strategies	10. ELLs' vocabulary learning strategies	Brown & Perry, 1991; Fraser, 1999; Gu, 2003a, 2003b; Lessard-Clouston, 1994; Nassaji, 2003; Sanaoui, 1995; Schmitt & Schmitt, 1993a, 1993b; Stoffer, 1995

become successful independent vocabulary learners. However, this requirement then begs important questions such as which strategies are most effective for L2 vocabulary acquisition. This question has often been answered by examining which strategies the most successful language learners employ.

In an early study of more than 600 Japanese junior high, high school, and adult learners, Schmitt & Schmitt (1993a) surveyed what these Japanese ELLs did when they encountered unknown English vocabulary. Schmitt & Schmitt devised a list of 42 strategies, of which 14 strategies dealt with learning new vocabulary and 28 with studying and remembering vocabulary. Participants were given this list of 42 strategies and asked whether or not they used each strategy and how useful they thought each strategy was for learning vocabulary. The three top-rated strategies were:

1. Written repetition.
2. Verbal repetition.
3. Continual study of the word over time.

The three lowest-rated strategies were:

1. Teacher verification of the accuracy of student-generated word lists and flash cards,

> "The most successful group of ELLs were the readers; they sought out vocabulary in reading through natural exposure."

2. Use of cognates.
3. Association of the word to previously-known related words.

Limitations of this study include the disparate groups of learners that were combined into one category "learners" and basing results on learners' perceptions of usefulness rather than any actual measured relationship to English proficiency or learning. These limitations aside, this survey study was conducted when Oxford (1990) and others were pioneering work in language learning strategies in general, and Schmitt and Schmitt's study was a model for other studies on other VLSs that followed.

Stoffer (1995) continued such research in identifying a taxonomy of VLSs. In a large study (n= 707) of vocabulary strategy use by foreign language students at a U.S. university, Stoffer used a special inventory instrument called the Vocabulary Learning Strategy Inventory, or VOLSI. In this questionnaire, participants were asked to read statements about certain strategies and then rank how often they used a given strategy when encountering a new word. Using factor analysis, Stoffer found that the 53 VOLSI items clustered into nine categories: strategies for authentic language use, self-motivation, organizing words, creating mental linkages, and memorizing words, as well as strategies involving creative activities, physical action, and auditory abilities. Limitations of this study include clustering strategies based on frequency, with the result that vastly unrelated strategies were awkwardly grouped into broader VLS categories.

Gu and Johnson (1996) used a questionnaire to investigate advanced learners' use of

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VLSs. They sought to correlate VLS use with English proficiency and to see which learners employed which clusters of VLSs. No single strategy emerged as promising for extensive L2 vocabulary growth, but vocabulary size and overall English proficiency correlated highly with each other (.53). Gu and Johnson found five types of learners with regard to L2 vocabulary study. The most successful group of ELLs were the readers; they sought out vocabulary in reading through natural exposure. The weakest group used passive strategies; they concentrated mainly on memorizing. These two groups composed approximately five per cent of the participants. Slightly more than 85 per cent fell into two middle groups that tended to use a variety of strategies, with one group doing so almost naturally and the other doing so more intentionally.

In a very large study of 1,067 learners at institutions of higher learning in Hong Kong, Fan (2003) looked at VLSs. In particular, the researcher examined the frequency of use of VLSs, students' perceived usefulness of the VLSs, and the actual usefulness of the VLSs. A vocabulary test and VLS questionnaire were used to collect data. Fan found strong evidence that Hong Kong learners do not favour association strategies for imagery or grouping in learning L2 vocabulary and that the most proficient students used more strategies more often than did the less proficient students. An especially interesting finding was the complexity of VLS use in lack of consistent correlation between a given strategy's perceived usefulness and its actual usefulness. Once again, the study fails to find something specific regarding VLSs.

While these studies sought to identify which strategies were actually being employed by a majority of learners, Sanaoui (1995) wanted to find out which strategies were being employed by successful learners of vocabulary and which were being used by less successful learners of vocabulary. In other words, she wanted to know which strategies were being used by those learners who seemed able to learn the most vocabulary. A main finding of her study with adult ELLs is that the most important aspect of learner strategy use was not the actual strategies employed but rather the fact that the better vocabulary learners had a plan for attacking unknown vocabulary. Thus, she found that her adult learners tended to fall into two categories: some learners adopted a structured approach toward vocabulary learning, while others did not. ELLs who had a structured approach took control of their vocabulary learning and did not rely on the words from their class textbook. Instead, they took the initiative to create opportunities for vocabulary learning through activities such as listening to the radio or watching movies because they realized that they needed more vocabulary than could be learned in class. Most importantly, these learners kept a systematic record of new words in their own vocabulary listings. In sharp contrast, the learners in the second group not only failed to use these same strategies, they were not really aware that they should even have an aggressive approach toward second language vocabulary growth. In sum, what mattered was not which strategies the ELLs used, but the fact that the better vocabulary learners had a systematic plan and executed it on a consistent basis.

Limitations of VLS Research

It is important not to confuse the number of studies of VLSs with results that are of use to English teachers or learners. Sanaoui's (1995) results are based on what learners actually did, and her data provide insight into the

VLSs used by more successful and less success-ful language learners. One logical conclusion would be that ELLs would see gains in vocabu-lary knowledge and/or English proficiency if teachers would train learners to use certain strategies – and this may indeed be true. How-ever, almost two decades after Oxford's 1990 seminal monograph *Language Learning Strate-gies: What Every Teacher Should Know*, few if any studies have demonstrated that training in any strategy or combination of strategies pro-duces a linked growth in language proficiency. Some success was reported with making learn-ers aware of strategy options (Flaitz & Feyten, 1996; Feyton, Flaitz, & LaRocca, 1999), but I have not seen any empirical data showing that ELLs who were trained in the use of a strategy or a series of strategies outperformed ELLs without such training.

Sanaoui's (1995) data were based on observations of what learners actually did with regard to VLSs, but the other three studies dis-cussed above used surveys in which ELLs re-ported the VLSs that they employed, but self-reporting perception data is often suspect. Sta-tistical methods in tabulating survey results of-ten assign scores on a scale that ranges from *always use* to *never use*. For example, when a survey question asks "How often do you use visuals to learn a new word?" students must choose a number from 5 to 1, where 5 suppos-edly means "always" and 1 means "almost never." If one ELL marks 3 because she does this *sometimes*, another ELL marks 5 because he *always* does this whenever he is able to draw the item, and yet another ELL marks 1 for *never* because he just cannot draw, the average score for this particular strategy use is 3, but what does this 3 mean? On the survey scale, 3 means *sometimes*, but does a 3 mean that the average learner uses this strategy *sometimes*? Or does 3 really mean that if the word represents some-

thing concrete that can be drawn, e.g., an ani-mal, ELLs *always* draw it, but when the new word defies drawing, e.g., honesty or intelli-gence, ELLs *never* draw it, and the average of these two possibilities is *sometimes*? It would seem that the answer is in fact much more com-plicated than a simple mathematical average of all participants' scores.

The results of any survey instrument are as accurate as any one of the questions. Do participants report what they actually do? Or do they report what they think the researcher wants to hear? And even if they do report the truth, and even if what they report is accurate (as opposed to just their perception of what they think they do), when the participants' num-bers are added and an average number is de-rived, what does that average number mean? Until research on vocabulary learning strate-gies can answer these questions, language pro-fessionals will have to interpret any results quite conservatively because what these com-posite numbers could mean is just not clear yet.

In general, research on language learning strategies seems to have peaked around 1990 when Oxford's work in this area was being replicated in many different con-texts. To be sure, further research on language learning strategies was completed, and re-search on strategies for specific areas such as vocabulary ensued. It would now appear, how-ever, that research on language learning strate-gies, including vocabulary, is dwindling.   In fact, Gao (2007) and Tseng et al. (2006) have even called into question the mere construct of a strategy, which is obviously the basis for this whole line of inquiry. In a comprehensive re-view of L2 vocabulary research since 1999, Read (2004) detailed how current vocabulary research has shifted to more emphasis on ques-tions related to corpus-based issues, the design of computer-based language learning pro-

grams, and assessment.

Implications for Teachers and for Learners

The potential of research on VLSs seemed at first very simple. If researchers could identify what successful ELLs did when learning L2 vocabulary, teachers could train ELLs in these strategies and vocabulary proficiency would increase. As noted, problems have prevented the implementation of this seemingly simple line of thinking, but there are facts that we know about L2 vocabulary that can be used to inform teachers. From this research, at least three maxims regarding learning L2 vocabulary have emerged:

1. ELLs must make an aggressively active attempt to learn as much vocabulary as possible because no vocabulary coping strategy is a substitute for knowing a word (Folse, 2004).

There are too many vocabulary items to be learned in any one class, so ELLs must face this fact and make it a point to seek out new vocabulary in every way possible. ELLs who know the most vocabulary need to rely on compensatory strategies the least – precisely because they know more vocabulary already. ELLs need to see how limited their vocabulary is when compared to that of a native speaker. Such a comparison should reinforce the notion that all ELLs need to work extra hard to gain the vocabulary that they need.

2. Perhaps the single most important component in remembering a new word is the number of times that a learner touches that word again. In other words, the number of

retrievals when learning a word is key. Learning activities that increase the number of rehearsals and word retrievals are the best (Folse, 2006).

Learners need to do practice exercises with words that require multiple encounters. If learners are keeping a vocabulary notebook, they should organize words in such a manner that they will have to encounter each vocabulary item as many times as possible. Teachers should teach learners how to keep a vocabulary notebook in such a way that it actually promotes student retrieval practice. One way to do this is to have students list four pieces of information for each word in two columns: word on the left side, English synonym on the far right side, L1 translation below the word, and then a collocation or short example phrase with a blank substituted for the target word (e.g., a _____ doughnuts [for the word *dozen*]) under the synonym. Having these multiple small pieces allows the ELL to practice retrieval via four different options, which means four different retrievals, but without overburdening the learner to bring in multitudes of information.

3. There is no one strategy or training that is better than another.

Most teachers are disappointed to hear this news. Gu (2004) very aptly argues that the effectiveness of a particular VLS is dependent upon the task, learner, and learning context, so research should not be so singly focused on which particular strategy produces the best results. Because we know that successful learners do use a variety of strategies to learn new vocabulary or to deal with unknown words in a text, the pedagogical implication here is that teachers should make their students aware of a variety of strategies. The general consensus from many studies (Brown & Perry 1991; Cohen

& Aphek, 1980; Lawson & Hogben 1996; Sanaoui 1995) seems to be that successful language learners not only have more strategies at their command but also use them more widely and more consistently.

Conclusion

The sheer number of vocabulary items to be learned is staggering and cannot be covered by any teacher in any course or even series of courses. Teachers and materials should present the most useful vocabulary in a systematic way, but even then the bulk of vocabulary learning for any ELL must be borne by the ELL. Though teachers should teach vocabulary explicitly, it is equally important to encourage ELLs to interact with native speakers as much as possible to receive a great deal of exposure to natural English input, but it is up to ELLs to carry out these suggestions. Though no research has shown that a given VLS or combination of VLSs is the magic bullet to solve this lexical dilemma facing ELLs, studying the more successful learners has shown us that it is better to have a specific set of multiple strategies at one's disposal than knowing just one or two strategies. In the meantime, language professionals can examine what successful language learners do and then teach other learners about these strategies. The more vocabulary learning strategies that teachers can present to ELLs, the more successful ELLs may be at learning a greater number of new vocabulary items. ❖

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STRATEGIES FOR LANGUAGE LEARNING AND TEACHING

Educator Macrostrategies and Child L2 Learning Strategies: A Case Study
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Abstract

All learners employ learning strategies, but some employ them more than others, which has implications for multilingual children's language learning and academic success. What role can teachers play in creating optimal conditions for multilingual children's strategy usage, and what role do educator macrostrategies play in the process? This paper explores where and how these topics intersect. Literature on the relationship between educator macrostrategies, student strategy usage, second language development, and academic success are reviewed, as are Cummins' (2001) empowerment and academic language learning frameworks. A key event that arose during the course of a longitudinal ethnographic case study is described. It entailed a shift in language policy, practice and interactions between a teacher and a cohort of ethnic Turkish, Kurdish and Danish children schooled in Denmark. The incident is presented to illustrate the interplay between constraints on student and educator strategy usage, multilingual children's language learning and subsequent academic success.

One of the first pedagogical principles that preservice teachers learn is to draw on learners' background knowledge and use it as a scaffold when introducing new concepts. This teaching strategy forms an integral part of Chamot and O'Malley's (1994) cognitive-academic language learning approach (CALLA), Cummins' (2001) work on links between identity investment, cognitive investment and language learning, and other cognitive and socio-cultural researchers' work on second language (L2) learning and teaching strategies (e.g., Diaz-Rico, 2008; Wink, 2005). It is a teaching strategy used in a broad array of instructional settings—majority and minority language learning in foreign language/mainstream/bilingual classroom settings internationally. The practice of drawing on learners' background knowledge and using it as a scaffold to build new knowledge is so widely accepted that it may be viewed as a 'canon' of L2 teaching—even in a "postmethod" era (Kumaravadivelu, 2006).

Given the widespread acceptance of this pedagogical principle, one would assume that drawing on the home language (L1) part of

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learners' background knowledge would be a guiding macrostrategy for practising teachers. Kumaravadivelu (1994) describes macrostrategies as broad guidelines that teachers can use to "generate their own situation-specific, need-based micro-strategies or classroom techniques" (p. 32). Yet, the present paper describes a case in which an educator went against her own beliefs and stopped adhering to this pedagogical principle in her practice. What sorts of constraints can lead a language teacher to deviate from a teaching canon, and what influence can such a situation have on her multilingual students' strategy usage, L2 learning and academic success? These questions are addressed in this paper.

The paper begins with a brief review of the role of strategy usage in L2 learning and academic success along with factors influencing strategy usage. After presenting the theoretical framework to answer the research question, the author describes an episode drawn from an 18-month long ethnographic study on the educational experiences of ethnic Turkish and Kurdish children schooled in Denmark (Taylor, 2001) to illustrate the interplay between educator macrostrategy use, student strategy use and language learning. The paper concludes with a discussion of the interview data cited and observations reported, and summary remarks.

Literature review

Educator role definitions, educational structures, macrostrategies and constraints

Cummins (1996) defines "educator role definitions" as "the mindset of expectations, assumptions and goals that educators bring to the task of educating culturally diverse students" (p. 18). In addition, Cummins (1996) fur-

ther suggests that the way in which educators define their roles (e.g., their mindset, assumptions, expectations and goals) in relation to culturally diverse students and communities influences students' educational experience (p. 141). Like learners, educators' mindsets, personal histories and situational constraints influence their beliefs and motivations.

Furthermore, constraints exist at two levels: at the macro (societal) level and at the micro level (e.g., at the classroom level). Constraints at either level influence educators' ability to translate their beliefs (or role definitions) into practice. As Canagarajah (2006) notes, "There are serious socio-cultural considerations that shape one's motivation and the power to attain one's objectives. Furthermore, motivation can be multiple, contradictory, and changing" (p. 14). In Cummins' (1996) terms, educators must operate within given "educational structures" (i.e., "the organization of schooling in a broad sense that includes policies, programs, curriculum, and assessment") (p. 18). These same educational structures frequently constrain educators' agency or ability to act in accordance with their beliefs.

While macro- and micro-level constraints and challenges are a reality in the teaching professions, educators must remember that the learning situations they create greatly influence student learning. Therefore, they must strive to create optimal learning situations for children. As Cummins (2009) notes:

> Educational structures, together with educator role definitions, determine the micro-interactions between educators, students and communities. These micro-interactions form an interpersonal space within which the acquisition of knowledge and formulation of identity are ne-

gotiated.... As such, the micro-interactions constitute the most immediate determinant of student academic success or failure. (p. 263)

Cummins (2009) also notes that policymakers, administrators and individual educators can choose how to orchestrate students' identity development by selecting educational structures. Later in this paper, factors that impinged on the choices that an individual educator was able to make in this case study are described, as are how her subsequent choices impinged on the interpersonal space between her and her minority language students.

Learner self-esteem, autonomous learners, L2 learning strategies and academic achievement

While the terms that Oxford (1990) and Little (1995) use to describe learners who accept responsibility for their own learning and employ strategies to meet their goals to influence their language learning differ somewhat, both researchers view learner strategy usage, in a positive light. Oxford (1990) refers to them as "self-directed" learners, and Little (1995) refers to them as "autonomous" learners. Canagarajah (2006) does not use either term, but refers to the same type of learner as Oxford (1990) and Little (1995) describe and to how their strategy usage makes them successful L2 learners. That is, Canagarajah (2006) relates goal-orientation, strategy usage, and the ability to adapt strategies to fit macro and micro constraints to successful L2 learning: "The strategies one adopts to negotiate the contextual constraints on his or her motivation will have an effect on one's mastery of the language" (p. 14). As not all learners are "autonomous" or "self-directed" (i.e., not all L2 learners employ strategies), some are better

equipped to navigate contextual constraints in L2 learning than others. The findings of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development 2004) in its PISA Report suggest that learner self-esteem is the main reason for this discrepancy. Language proficiency is also mentioned as an important factor.

The PISA Report

The Program for International Student Assessment (or PISA) Report was based on the results of an international survey (OECD, 2004). It measured the reading, mathematics, and scientific literacies performance of 15-year olds in 26 different countries, with a focus on the role of student learning strategies, motivation and confidence in learning abilities (OECD, 2004, p. 8). The results of two consecutive PISA Reports (PISA 2000 and 2003) indicated that students who took ownership of their own learning used more learning strategies (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004). These highly motivated students with high levels of self-esteem outperformed their peers on all the indicators (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004).

Analysis of the PISA Reports (2000 & 2003) indicated that self-esteem was a greater determiner of students who would take ownership of their learning than family background; however, ongoing issues in children's lives (e.g., school variables) do play a role in their self-esteem (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004).

Background

Cummins' (2001) has long emphasized the vital role teachers play in L2 learners' lives, going so far as to state that "*[n]obody is more important...than the teacher*" (p. 132, original

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emphasis). In that, he refers to the teacher's ability to encourage minority language students with limited target language skills and limited understanding of the target culture to invest emotionally and intellectually in language and content learning. Cummins (2001; 2009) concurs with the PISA report findings, stressing that self-esteem comes from a positive sense of identity. He views supporting students' positive identity development as a teacher's primary job even before providing students with strategy instruction or employing any particular strategy herself, as "…techniques and strategies will only be effective when teachers and students forge a relationship of respect and affirmation" (Cummins, 2001, p. 132). This belief forms the basis of both Cummins' (2001) academic language learning and empowerment frameworks. As mentioned above, in Cummins' (2001) view, classroom-based interactions between educators and students are the quintessential "space" for the co-construction of knowledge and identity negotiation.

Also key to Cummins' (2001) work is recognition of the fact that educator-student micro-(school-based) interactions do not take place within a vacuum. Rather, they take place within a macro (societal) context and, while educators and students can make choices (i.e., they have agency) (Cummins, 2009), there are constraints on the sorts of learning environments that educators can create; constraints on the sorts of environments in which students can learn best, and constraints on educators' and students' abilities to alter those environments.

> "The bilingual/ bicultural program was designed to counteract the situation of children being made to feel like 'nobodies'."

In summary, student self-esteem comes from a positive sense of identity. The PISA Results (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004) suggest that students with poor self-esteem do not question their academic underachievement as they never felt they were capable of academic success. Cummins's (2001 & 2009) work suggests how educators can create learning environments in which all students feel worthy of academic success; however, he cautions that constraints exist on educators' ability to exert agency in creating such learning environments.

Methodology

The interview and observational data reported on in this paper were collected for a longitudinal ethnographic case study on the educational experiences of ethnic Kurdish children schooled in Denmark (Taylor, 2001). The data presented in the present paper were drawn from interviews conducted with: the school principal, the Danish teacher "Vibeke" attached to the younger of the two cohorts whose progress I followed, one ethnic Turkish child in Vibeke's cohort, "Orhan," as well as an ethnic Danish child ("Stig") an ethnic Kurdish child ("Dilan") in the same cohort. Though a Turkish teacher was attached to Vibeke's cohort, I draw on interview data from "Songül", the Turkish teacher attached to the older cohort, because her interview was relevant to a key event described in the present paper.

The aspects of Vibeke's interview used for the purposes of this paper were her descriptions of her role definition, educational struc-

tures in her classroom, and advantages her students had derived from enrolment in the bilingual/bicultural program. Interview data elicited from Turkish, Danish and Kurdish students in her cohort are also analyzed to shed light on their views on themes and issues identified by their teacher, and to better understand their positions on the key event. I also drew on observations made in Vibeke's classroom throughout my study. These observations provided the context needed to understand four key events in the Taylor (2001) study, one of which is described in this paper. In the case of a classroom-based ethnographic case study such as this, coherence comes from grasping the bigger picture by identifying recurring patterns in a classroom over time, knowing how the patterns evolved, and recognizing their significance (Woods, 1996).

> "The program had been designed in response to an influential report entitled *Du er ingen!* (You are nobody!)"

Context

The cohort included in my study had been part of a Danish/Turkish bilingual/bicultural program until its cancellation two years prior to my data collection. The program had been designed in response to an influential report entitled *Du er ingen!* (*You are nobody!*) by two school psychologists (Sahl & Skjelmose, 1983). These researchers linked "Turkish" (i.e., Turkish and Kurdish[1]) children's poor academic achievement to poor self-esteem. The bilingual/bicultural program was designed to counteract the situation of children being made to feel like "nobodies." It was intended to shine a positive light on what the minority language children knew (i.e., on their culture and language), encourage them to use their background knowledge to scaffold their learning and, in the process, build up their self-esteem. The researchers assumed that, in so doing, the children would also develop high levels of L2 mastery in a manner reflective of the PISA Report findings (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004).

It was also thought that the program would promote social harmony as ethnic Danish children participating in the program would be exposed to ethnic Turkish children and an intercultural model of learning.

The "Turkish" children in the program received initial literacy instruction in Turkish with a gradual transition to Danish-medium instruction. (Learning Turkish was never a program goal for the Danish children in the program.) They received Danish-medium instruction and did not take Turkish as a subject. The program was designed as a transitional bilingual education pro-

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1. Since the ethnic Kurdish children were listed as "Turks" on their passports and registered as such at school, the school board turned a blind eye to the fact that their L1 was Kurdish, not Turkish, and enrolled them in the Danish-Turkish "bi-"lingual/"bi-"cultural program. Understandably, this decision had an impact on how they fared in the program. (For program inception details, see Taylor, 2001; for further information on how the children fared in the program, see Taylor, 2009).

gram for the ethnic "Turkish" children; there was no "two-track- bilingual" component in the program. After the program was cancelled, the Turkish teachers formerly attached to the bilingual cohorts provided bilingual classroom support several hours a week, and taught Turkish L1 language courses to "Turkish" children three hours a week.

At the time of the program's inception, there was enough public goodwill towards 'Muslims' for Danish parents to enrol their children in the program, but public support for the program waned by the end of the 1980s and completely disappeared in the 1990s in tandem with growing anti-Muslim sentiment targeted at "Turks" (an all-inclusive term, meaning Muslims in general). This led to the program's cancellation and the tension between Danes and Turks only worsened following September 11th, 2001. The tenor of the November 2001 Danish election debate was so raw that foreign journalists covering the election wrote articles with titles such as "Copenhagen flirts with fascism" (Smith, 2002).

Participants

Over the course of the Taylor (2001) study, I observed the same two cohorts of students over three grade levels, from ages 10-12 and 11-13. At the time of the study, only twelve children were left in the younger cohort: there were ethnic Danish boys, but no ethnic Danish girls; there were ethnic Turkish or Kurdish girls, but no ethnic Kurdish boys. The only ethnic Turkish boy left in the cohort was Orhan.

For purposes of this paper, I discuss my observations of the younger cohort and interviews with Orhan, Stig and Dilan (ethnic Turkish, Danish and Kurdish children respectively), and Songül. As noted above, she was the Turkish bilingual support teacher in the older cohort. I also discuss my observations of the micro-

interactions between the students in the younger cohort with Vibeke. She was not only their homeroom teacher, but also taught them Danish language arts and "sheltered" Danish language arts.

History and interpretation of a significant event

In this section, I outline Vibeke's description of her role in the program and her views on educational structures. I then outline the key event, followed by the presentation the principal's concerns and the top-down intervention they engendered. I then present student views and conclude the section with a description of Vibeke's macrostrategy and her micro-interactions with the students following the intervention.

Role definition and educational structures

Vibeke described her role as a teacher in terms of what she valued:

(a) Learning Turkish herself.

(b) "Turkish" students receiving instruction in their L1 (starting with what students know).

(c) Exposing Danish children to cultural and linguistic diversity.

(d) Having Turkish bilingual classroom teachers to provide L1/L2 support. She felt it was advantageous to have housed the bilingual/bicultural program in her school because, by having Turkish children grouped together, she had been able to focus on learning their L1 at night school. In fact, the minority language children had more than one L1 (Turkish

(Continued from page 25)

and Kurdish), but that is not the topic of this discussion. (See Taylor, 2001; Taylor & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2009).

In describing the intercultural/anti-racist aspect of the former bilingual/ bicultural program and how it had benefited the ethnic Danish participants, Vibeke described her role in terms of exposing Danish children to cultural and linguistic diversity. To elaborate on this point, Vibeke suggested that by, virtue of enrolment in the program, "her" ethnic Danish students had developed tolerance for diversity. That is, she felt that through their knowing Turkish children as individuals, rather than just as "Turks", the ethnic Danish children had developed more tolerance of diversity than average ethnic Danish children, including tolerance for hearing non-Danish L1s spoken in class. She phrased her views as follows:

> [If] Turkish is spoken in our class, then it normally isn't the case that any of the [Danish] pupils experience, that there's anything wrong in it. And it is more my experience that other [Danish] children who are not so used to Turkish being spoken think: That's weird. Why are they speaking Turkish? They live in Denmark. So why aren't they speaking Danish? And problems can really arise on account of that, you know, because the Danish children perhaps think that they [the Turkish children] are talking about them [the Danish children] when they speak Turkish, and I can sure understand that when they aren't so used to hearing it. That is, that they can believe that. But our [Danish] children in this class are used to hearing it and don't feel like they [the Turkish children] are necessarily talking about them or like it's a threat. We don't really find anything unusual about it and we have got them [the Turkish children] used to us always asking them what they're talking about, and so they tell us in Danish what they're talking about. [2]

Thus, Vibeke expressed the view that she valued a classroom in which Turkish children's home language and culture are valued, respected and present, and felt her ethnic Danish students had developed similar values.

Key event

Nonetheless, a month after this interview, a chain of events resulted in Vibeke distancing herself from a valued metastrategy (L1 inclusion in the classroom) and implementing a "no Turkish" policy in her classroom. The father of an ethnic Danish boy in Vibeke's cohort, Preben, met with the principal to complain about Vibeke. Preben's father complained that Vibeke

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2. All interview data in this paper are my translations from the original Danish.

favoured the minority language children in the cohort, that there was poor discipline in the classroom, and that the Danish boys were suffering as a result.

Songül, the older cohort's bilingual support teacher, provided background information on the event. She said that Dilan, one of Preben's classmates, had bitten him one day during an in-class fight. Songül felt that Preben's father was blowing the incident out of proportion to create a scandal. The principal reacted by informing Preben's father that a colleague of Vibeke's would monitor her teaching once a month to see whether she favoured the minority language children and was unduly hard on the Danish children; he also assured Preben's father that there would be ongoing meetings to monitor the situation.

Administrative concerns and intervention

The Turkish teacher felt that the principal was taking Preben's father's side so that he would not transfer Preben to another school. My interview with the principal largely confirmed her suspicions. He told me in no uncertain terms that, having just observed the effects of "white flight" in a nearby school that had also housed a bilingual/bicultural program, he wanted to maintain the number of Danish students in the school:

> [That other] school is near [ours]. You know, there they've just started up two kindergarten cohorts with only, yeah, what was it? Only four Danish children in them, yeah, this year; where the rest of them were minority language children, you know? And that means that parents who should have had children in

those classes, they moved them to other schools. I mean, they wouldn't accept completely minority language classes, and so that means a flight from that school, and we're very nervous about that here, you know? That people might move their children away from here on the grounds that, that there are too many minority language children or refugees overall.

The principal stated that a school comprised of half Danes and half non-Danes would be acceptable to Danish parents: "Children shouldn't be in a classroom where there's a majority of minority language speakers. I don't believe that's good." He explained that parents would withdraw their children from that school—a move he agreed with—if they had the impression that immigrant and refugee children made up a majority of the school population.: Vibeke appeared to share the principal's view, but for different reasons. She stated that it would be problematic if only four children out of a cohort of 15-20 were ethnic Danes because that situation would limit the minority language children's chances of learning oral Danish while playing with native-speaking peers.

The combined effect of the Danish public's hesitation to school their children alongside minority language children, the principal's stance on maintaining a critical number of Danish children in the school, and the ethnic Danish children's intolerance for a language other than Danish in the classroom resulted in a situation which made Vibeke go against her beliefs by banning Turkish from the classroom. Her agency was severely limited by these situational constraints, and this impeded Vibeke from acting in accordance with either her beliefs or a canon of L2 teaching.

(Continued from page 27)

Student views

My interviews with children in Preben's cohort revealed that he was not the only Danish child unhappy in the cohort, and that Vibeke's goal of instilling tolerance of diversity and intercultural understanding was not being met. Similarly, the comments I overheard or what I saw during the course of my classroom observations suggested that she was not achieving this goal. The minority and majority language children did not play together and there was always a tension in the classroom between the two groups. Both of the Danish children that I interviewed complained about the use of Turkish in the classroom, particularly Stig. I was surprised by how acerbic a child of that age could be on the topic. For example, Stig said that he found hearing Turkish irritating and that he did not like being laughed at behind his back in a language he did not understand. When I asked Stig what structural change he would make to the school to improve it, he replied that he would prefer to be in a Danish-Only cohort rather than a bilingual/bicultural cohort. Stig stated that Turkish sounded "weird" (*underlig*), and he preferred English. He described Preben's strategy when he heard Turkish spoken in class: "Sometimes it's just downright irritating if they frequently speak Turkish. But when they say something to Preben, he speaks English back to them so they can't understand him either." Preben and Stig's reactions to hearing Turkish do not suggest that Vibeke's goal of fostering intercultural understanding was being met.

The same feelings of unhappiness were apparent in the minority language children in the cohort. The similarities are especially apparent in the case of Dilan, one of the ethnic Kurdish girls in the cohort. As is discussed in Taylor (2009) and Taylor and Skutnabb-Kangas (2009), extended silencing of Kurdish in the classroom

reduced Dilan's motivation to invest in the language: Turkish became the *lingua franca* of her friendship network and part of her linguistic capital at school—both before and after the cancellation of the bilingual/bicultural program. Two educational structures, a *de facto* "no Kurdish" language policy, and the Turkish-based peer network that resulted from that policy, influenced her choice of languages in which to develop strategies; namely, Turkish was prioritized and Kurdish marginalized.

As for the lone ethnic Turkish boy in the cohort, Orhan, his answers resembled Stig's, but with a Turkish bent. Orhan was the only student to have been in both a "regular Danish" classroom and a bilingual/bicultural classroom. Vibeke reported that he had been enrolled in a *regular Danish* Kindergarten classroom, but then was placed in a segregated Special Education classroom for undisclosed "behavioural" issues. After two years there, he was placed in Vibeke's cohort. When I asked Orhan which program he preferred, he misunderstood or decided to take the conversation in a different direction, replying: "I would prefer an all Turkish classroom." He continued in the same vein when asked about his favourite and least favourite activities, specifying: "In Denmark?" He kept switching between talking about life in Turkey during the summer holidays and life in Denmark during the school year. He volunteered: "I don't like Danish. I don't like going to school because I think it's boring." When asked how he would improve school so he would not find it boring, Orhan had replied:

> Well, if I was going to school here [in Denmark], then I'd go to school back in Turkey for a week. Then I'd come back here and start again here. In Turkey, they always talk Turkish. We don't talk like here.... Yeah, in Turkey, they don't under-

stand Danish. They understand English. *What's your name?* [Orhan asked that question in English, in the middle of our Danish interview].

He later added that it would be better if Turkish-medium instruction were offered at school, and better still if he lived in Turkey year-round rather than just going there for summer holidays. In my follow-up correspondence with Orhan's teachers over the next few years, I discovered that he transferred to another school in the same town two years later.

Post-intervention

My observations following the enforcement of the Danish-only language policy showed subtle and not so subtle differences in the children's educational space. The ethnic Danish children seemed buoyed by Preben's linguistic "victory" and the minority language children's formerly warm relationship with Vibeke developed a palpable edge. There had always been a degree of tension between the minority and majority group students, but the minority group children had been very warm towards Vibeke. After their L1 was "outlawed," they appeared confused and angry. When I was in the classroom at recess with the minority language girls while Vibeke and all the boys were out of the room, the girls would gripe about Vibeke, which they had never done before. Also, Songül reported that a week-long class trip went very poorly because of tension between the girls and Vibeke. Indeed, almost overnight the status quo of the classroom had shifted.

> "After their L1 was 'outlawed,' they appeared confused and angry."

Turkish went from being a source of cultural capital—a language in which they had invested their cultural capital and which had been highlighted and valued since their early years of schooling, to a non-entity or a source of chastisement. While the ethnic Kurdish girls were not "Turks," they were Turkish citizens. A quote from Anzaldúa (1987/1999) explains what Vibeke's change in metastrategy signified: "So if you really want to hurt me, talk badly about my language. Ethnic identity is twin skin to linguistic identity. I am my language. Until I can take pride in my language, I cannot take pride in myself" (p. 271). Seen in Anzaldúa's (1987/1999) terms, it is understandable how the children could internalize the move as an affront to their identity.

The preceding section illustrated how a key event led Vibeke to distance herself from key features of her role definition and alter the metastrategy that guided her classroom practice, i.e., drawing on children's background knowledge, including their L1. The shift had ramifications for the micro-interactions between Vibeke and her minority language students as the rules of the game of space in which knowledge was generated and identities were constructed had been fundamentally altered. A new educational structure (i.e., the Danish-Only language policy) was imposed top-down as a result of macro and micro constraints. Its ramifications are summarized below.

Summary and Conclusion

Cummins' (2001) observation, cited earlier in this paper, that "*[n]obody is more important...than the teacher*" (p. 132, original emphasis) was supported in the short illustration of Vibeke's case; however, his further observation that peer-peer and teacher-student micro-interactions do not take place within a vacuum was also borne out in this case study. The micro-interactions described in this paper took place within a context over which the teachers and students had some control (choices), but they also faced substantial constraints. For the teacher, there were constraints on her ability to use macrostrategies that she had developed to meet situation-specific needs (e.g., building on her minority language students' prior knowledge). The change in her practice reflects support for Canagarajah's (2006) view that sociocultural considerations can shape one's power to attain objectives. They can also make one's metastrategies appear multiple, contradictory, and changing. Vibeke's change in practice (and metastrategies) resulted from an externally imposed educational structure (a Danish-Only language policy). It forced the minority language children in her cohort to renegotiate the strategies they used to navigate contextual constraints (e.g., they could no longer draw on their L1). The policy change altered the classroom dynamics.

In conclusion and in support of Cummins' (2001 and 2009) work and the PISA Report findings (Artelt, Baumert, McElvany & Peschar, 2003; OECD, 2004), self-esteem is key to students' ability to believe in themselves sufficiently to develop enabling strategies. Students who believe they are "nobodies" are not surprised when they underachieve academically. They view their lack of success as 'natural' and do not develop strategies to change what they feel is inevitable; students who believe in their self-worth take the necessary steps to develop winning strategies. Teachers, through their micro-interactions with students, can make them feel like nobodies or agents of their own success. Therefore, teachers should not lose sight of their potential to create learning environments in which students feel validated and their self-esteem flourishes, even when faced with great situational constraints, or when they feel their choices are limited. ❖

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IMMIGRANTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Health Literacy, Mental Health and Immigrants

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Abstract

This article describes the multidimensional concept of health literacy, including mental health literacy, and why it is important for immigrants and immigrant service providers in Canada. Evidence about levels of health literacy in Canada, and the relationship of health literacy to health outcomes, and to official language proficiency, gender and other social determinants of health is reviewed. Systemic and cultural barriers to immigrant health literacy are discussed in the context of understanding health literacy as a two-way communication process in which institutions and service providers can and should play a significant role. Mental health literacy in particular is emphasized in terms of settlement experiences, stigma and cultural relevance. The article concludes by suggesting health literacy examples and practices that can inform program and policy development, and that may be useful in educational settings.

A relatively new concept, the term "health literacy" describes the ability to obtain, process, understand and use health information to make appropriate decisions (Ad Hoc Committee, 1999). There are many definitions of health literacy, but the most clear and comprehensive definition includes the ability to seek information, learn, appraise, make decisions, communicate information, prevent diseases and promote individual, family and community health (Rootman, Frankish, & Kaszap, 2007). Some scholars have suggested that health literacy is simply another way of talking about health education and empowerment (Tones, 2002; Wills, 2009), but it may, in fact, be important to reinvent the terms of the discourse to renew interest and action (Zarcooldas, Pleasant & Greer, 2006).

Current definitions of health literacy encompass a critical understanding of health issues and knowledge of how to use the health care system (Nutbeam, 2000), and emphasize the responsibility of health and educational institutions to smooth the two-way communication process and help people obtain needed health care (Nielsen-Bohlman, Panzer & Kindig, 2004).

According to the Canadian Public Health Association, attention should be paid to health literacy among immigrants because these are areas in which immigrants are especially disadvantaged (Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008).

Good mental and physical health, defined as feeling good and functioning well in daily life, is a key outcome of successful immigrant settlement and integration. Newcomers to Canada must obtain new information about health issues and services while experiencing resettlement stress and often new health needs. This is where educators, such as ESL professionals, can play a critical role in bridging a knowledge gap by promoting health literacy, and by extension, better immigrant mental and physical health.

The basic idea behind health literacy is simple: the greater a person's ability to learn about health, the better that person's health. But health literacy is not just a personal ability or a one-way process that depends upon the individual's linguistic proficiency or comprehension of written information such as a doctor's prescription. Rather, it is a complex, multi-dimensional communication process that also involves health-care providers' competencies, the "legibility" of the health care system for diverse groups and appropriate policy and programs to achieve effective communication (Kickbusch et al., 2005). Thus, health literacy is a function of basic literacy and education. Definitions of health literacy are now broader in scope, involving both community empowerment and health system responsiveness.

> **"...health literacy is a function of basic literacy and education."**

International literacy surveys, such as the *International Adult Literacy and Skills Survey* (IALSS), have assessed individual and collective health literacy skills in the areas of health promotion, health protection, disease prevention, healthcare maintenance and system navigation (Canadian Council on Learning 2007, 2008). Three basic levels of health literacy skills have been identified: the first, involving reading and numeracy, the second, interactive skills, i.e., knowing how to converse with a busy health professional about symptoms and concerns and, the third, known as *critical* health literacy, describing the ability to analyze and use health information to exert greater control over life situations.

From this perspective, health literacy is seen as a right and an issue of equity and citizenship (Nutbeam, 2000; Kickbusch et al., 2005). In other words, critical health literacy empowers people with information and other resources needed to achieve and maintain well-being, a growing expectation of health "consumers" in society today (Kickbusch 2007). Moreover, health literacy is a complex interaction that goes beyond reading; it is affected by education, culture, and language (Nielsen-Bohlman et al., 2004). Immigrants arrive in Canada having had different health and health care experiences and knowledge of health issues in their homelands. The resettlement experience involves cultural adaptation, which produces new health challenges as well as new opportunities for knowledge exchange about health in family life, schools, neighbourhoods and the

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workplace. The process of enhancing health literacy, therefore, applies not only to medical settings, but also to a variety of settings across one's life span; hence, its relevance to immigrant settlement and integration. Language educators who come into contact with newcomers to Canada and who foster confidence in communication can play an integral role in enhancing health literacy.

What do we know about health literacy and immigrants in Canada?

Results of the IALSS, which surveyed 23,000 Canadians, showed that 60 per cent of adults in Canada lack the capacity to obtain, understand and act upon health information and services and to make appropriate health decisions (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Health literacy is a strong predictor of overall health status and self-reported health status is, in turn, a reliable indicator of health outcomes. Canadians with the lowest health literacy scores are 2.5 times as likely to perceive themselves as being in fair or poor health compared to those with higher health literacy scores. This statistical relationship holds even after removing the impact of age, gender, education, mother tongue, immigration and Aboriginal status (Canadian Council on Learning, 2008). This finding is cause for concern because low health literacy may have a long-term impact on population health.

Both literacy and health literacy are related directly and indirectly to knowledge of health outcomes or health services (Canadian Council on Learning, 2007). Those individuals with lower literacy skill levels are 1.5 to 3 times more likely to experience negative health outcomes and difficulties managing chronic diseases, although it is difficult to disentangle the effects of poor literacy and poor access to health care (DeWalt, Berkman, Sheridan, Lohr & Pignone, 2004). In addition, studies have found low literacy to be associated with lower levels of screening and immunization (Scott, Gazmararian, Williams & Baker, 2002), increased risk of hospitalization (Baker, Parker, Gazmararian & Williams, 2002) and depression (Zaslow, Hair, Dion, Ahluwalia & Sargent, 2001). Other outcomes of low literacy and health literacy include lower income and less community engagement--outcomes that are also associated with poorer health and quality of life. These outcomes may impact recent immigrants who are not well established. Barriers to health literacy, such as lack of meaningful multilingual information about health issues, knowledge of where to find the right health care or how to access preventive services contribute to the deterioration in health status of immigrants in Canada over time (Zanchetta & Poureslami, 2006).

Low health literacy levels are barriers to the prevention of illness and access to health care for many Canadians, but the impact of health literacy is even greater for immigrants among specific sub-groups. Recent immigrants, those with lower levels of education and low French or English proficiency, seniors and people receiving social assistance tend to have lower levels of literacy and health literacy (Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008, p.21). While available evidence demonstrates that immigrants experience many linguistic and cultural barriers in accessing health care in Canada (Bowen, 2001; Gagnon, 2002), not enough is known about how social and cultural barriers actually affect health literacy or health outcomes. Relatively little research is available on health literacy and immigrants in Canada, but it is becoming clear that health literacy has been underestimated as a problem. Improving health literacy levels is challenging because it

entails the need to accommodate different cultural views of the world, science and health, for example, different meanings of "risk", and understanding "different realities" among service providers and immigrants (Zanchetta & Poureslami, 2006). Although more research is needed, there is sufficient evidence to suggest practical ways to enhance immigrants' health literacy skills, including using clear and multiple forms of communication, community-based development and delivery methods and increasing the cultural competence of the health and social service providers. Some examples are provided at the end of this article.

Language proficiency, gender and health literacy

Despite the high education levels of many immigrants and refugees, it is not surprising that health literacy levels may be low in the early years of settlement. As the 2003 IALSS results show, average health literacy scores tend to be lower for immigrants in Canada, especially recent immigrants, and those who do not speak English or French well. About 60 per cent of immigrants fell below Level 3 in prose literacy (considered the minimum level for coping with the demands of everyday life and work in a knowledge economy) compared to 37 per cent for the Canadian-born population (Canadian Public health Association, 2006, p. 27). This proportion does not vary by length of time in Canada. It is assumed that immigrant women have lower health

"Self-reported poor health was significantly related to lack of improvement in language proficiency over time for both immigrant men and women."

literacy than immigrant men because of their lower literacy scores. The IALSS estimated that 32 per cent of foreign-born women have extreme difficulty with, and only limited use of printed materials compared to 24 per cent of foreign-born men and approximately 10 per cent of Canadian-born women and men (Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008, p. 17). Moreover, the 2001 Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada found that 15 per cent of the respondents cited language as a barrier to health services (Statistics Canada and Citizenship and Immigration Canada, 2003).

Immigrant women's lower levels of health literacy can have a wide impact on information exchange about health and help-seeking for immigrant communities because women often play a central care giving role in families and other social networks. Longitudinal research with Southeast Asians has identified English fluency as a significant determinant of both depression and employment, particularly for immigrant women (Beiser & Hou, 2001), and found that when women participate in formal language training they benefit more than men. Analysis of the Longitudinal Survey of Immigrants to Canada (LSIC) has shown that self-reported poor health was significantly related to lack of improvement in language proficiency over time for both immigrant men and women (Pottie, Ng, Spitzer, Mohammed & Glazier, 2008). Ongoing analysis of this data set also suggests that daily literacy practices and participation in education and training are two contributing factors for health

literacy (Ng & Omariba, 2008). These preliminary findings point to the need for more research into factors that contribute to health literacy, including gender and educational practices.

The relationship between immigrants and health literacy has implications for the availability of language training as well as health care and immigrant social integration. A lack of affordable English or French as a Subsequent Language, ESL or EFL programs for adults is a barrier for newcomers to Canada who wish to improve their literacy and health literacy skills, which in turn promote social integration and well-being. The paucity of language programs is also a concern for children. For example, in Ontario between 2000 and 2007, there was a 29 per cent increase in the percentage of elementary schools with E SL students, while the percentage of schools with ESL teachers declined by 23 per cent (People for Education, 2007). Without basic literacy skills, new immigrants have difficulty becoming health literate enough to manage health-relevant information within the context of the Canadian health system (Rootman & Gordon-El-Bihbety, 2008, p. 26).

Structural and cultural barriers to health literacy

Common sense suggests that providing written information alone is not enough to ensure good health. The social and cultural context in which information is exchanged, ways of communicating and the timing of health information also matter. A recent pilot study of the types of information that immigrants need and how they find it found that information about employment, housing and other immediate needs are often priorities in the early years in Canada; however, information about health is one of the top needs of longer established immigrants (Caidi, 2007). Immigrants report more barriers to health care than non-immigrants and perceive that existing health services and information are not sensitive to the cultural, faith, language or literacy needs of diverse communities. Barriers identified by immigrants include fear of speaking English; suspicion of authority; isolation and sense of being an outsider; reliance on children (who may have inadequate experience and language proficiency themselves) to find accurate information; lack of familiarity with Canadian information sources; cultural differences; and absence of knowledge of how to ask for services (Caidi, 2007). Factors that affect health literacy for immigrants may include, but are not limited to, language proficiency, prior education about health issues in the country of origin, cultural beliefs about illness, familiarity with the health care system in Canada and perceptions of cultural awareness among health service providers and institutions. Unfortunately, a narrow understanding of health literacy as primarily a function of verbal skills still prevails among many health service providers. When service providers think of health literacy only in narrow terms of verbal skills during their interactions with immigrants, the social and cultural context of communication is neglected and the meanings of important messages are lost.

Consideration of cultural diversity in health literacy has to extend beyond language to a broader appreciation of cultural values, help-seeking beliefs and community engagement. Most health care providers have a very limited understanding of immigrants and refugees' experiences and special health needs. Often the first need is not primarily "medical," but the need to improve trust, comfort and communication, which highlights the two-way na-

ture of health literacy as a social process and an agent to help break down structural and cultural barriers (Anderson, Scrimshaw, Fullilove, Fielding, Normand & the Task Force on Community Preventive Services, 2003; Vissandjee & Dupere, 2000; Weerasinghe, 2001). Thus, responsibility for raising levels of cultural competence and health literacy falls to both health service providers and immigrants. Some mental health care practitioners in Canada are also raising awareness and developing professional training about how to work with immigrants and culturally diverse groups (Fung, Andermann, Zaretsky, & Lo, 2008; Guruge & Collins, 2008). Finally, there is growing recognition that safe and effective health care requires the provision of trained cultural or community interpreters (Abraham & Rahman, 2008).

Mental health literacy, stigma and culture

Mental health literacy poses particular challenges for front-line educators and the immigrants and refugees who rely on them. However, they are not alone in feeling helpless when grappling with mental health issues. Lack of public awareness about mental health and stigma against people suffering from mental illness are widespread problems in Canada (Bourget & Chenier, 2007); new policy and program initiatives are required to meet these challenges (Standing Senate Committee, 2006). The Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health has identified new Canadians as a prior-

> **"Mental health literacy may be defined as knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention."**

ity group for mental health literacy interventions. In multicultural focus groups, it was found that new Canadians tended to identify life stress, such as the challenges of cultural adaptation, as the primary cause of mental health problems (Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health 2008, p. 21). Although new immigrants in general tend to suffer from depression and alcoholism in lower proportions than Canadian-born citizens (Ali, 2002), the early years are especially hard. Many refugees have acute, unmet needs for mental health care because of traumatic pre-migration experiences (Watters, 2001). For refugees and some immigrants, resettlement stresses such as discrimination and underemployment experienced after arrival in Canada can add to the risks of experiencing psychological distress (Beiser, 2005). The problem results from the fact that immigrants and refugees have less access to mental health information and services when they need them (Beiser, Simich & Pandalangat, 2003; James & Prilleltensky, 2003). This disparity is partly due to some newcomers having little familiarity with mental health services, resulting not only from lack of mental health care in their country of origin, but also from linguistic barriers and lack of culturally appropriate mental health promotion and services in the Canadian mental health care system.

Mental health literacy may be defined as knowledge and beliefs about mental disorders which aid their recognition, management or prevention (Jorm, 2000). It entails knowl-

edge and beliefs about mental health disorders that emerge from general pre-existing belief systems. Lack of mental health literacy results in delays in seeking appropriate treatment and creates difficulties communicating with health professionals. Research suggests that lay people generally have a poor understanding of mental illness (Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, 2007). They are unable to identify mental disorders, do not understand what causes them, are fearful of those who are perceived as mentally ill, have incorrect beliefs about treatment, are often reluctant to seek help for mental disorders and are not sure how to help others (Canadian Alliance on Mental Illness and Mental Health, 2008). In some languages, there are no specific equivalent terms for mental illnesses (Littlewood, 1998), and talking about them may be considered *taboo*. To overcome the negative impact of stigma and promote mental health in immigrant communities, it may be necessary to simply talk about mental health as a first step in increasing mental health literacy (Simich, Maiter, Moorlag & Ochocka, 2009). However, since refugees suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder in higher proportions than other groups, such open discussions with refugee participants should only take place voluntarily and in safe environments where professional mental health care is available, if desired.

Culture is of particular interest with regard to mental health literacy because there are significant cultural variations in how people recognize, explain, experience and respond to mental disorders. People in all cultural groups experience depression, but they may talk about it differently (Jadhav, Weiss & Littlewood, 2001). Their experiences are often closely connected to social support, expectations about how others will respond and to fear of shame and social isolation, which can delay help-seeking

(Lauber, Nordt, Falcato & Rossler, 2004). Current research on mental health with ethnocultural and immigrant communities in Canada, however, strongly suggests that they would like greater access to mental health information that is culturally responsive. To achieve this community-based and collaborative mental health promotion initiatives are necessary (Simich et al., 2009).

Suggested educational practices

Health literacy interventions appear to help counteract factors such as poverty, unequal access to quality health services, lack of preventive health care and culturally and linguistically relevant health services. In general, using participatory educational methods for learners to identify and learn about health issues results in an improvement to most aspects of health literacy (King, 2007). It is beyond the scope of this paper to assess the educational effectiveness of existing mental and physical health literacy initiatives, particularly because few have been evaluated; however, a small body of literature describing characteristics of promising community-based health literacy interventions with established immigrant communities may inspire useful educational innovations. Shohet & Renaud (2006) distinguish three domains of good health literacy practices: first, clear writing; second, oral communication (between patients and health care professionals, and training for health professionals targeting low-literate groups); and third, visual tools such as video and other non-written means of communication. The most promising practices combine multitasking approaches and direct inter-personal communication, usually by an educator who is linguistically competent and culturally acceptable to the community involved. It has been effective to combine easy-

to-read, written, patient-education materials with oral instruction, use of existing social networks, cultural interpreters and community facilitators (Elder, Ayala, Campbell, Slymen, Lopez-Madurga, Engelberg & Baquero, 2005). In addition, relying on a variety of public outreach sites is important for immigrant communities for whom language classes, community health centres, ethnic associations, places of worship and shopping malls are often points of contact.

Some health literacy initiatives in Canada are using a broad range of approaches including communication, education, community development, organizational and network development. For example, one small, but creative Canadian project developed a photonovella about nutrition as a health literacy tool with ESL-speaking immigrant women (Nimmon, 2007). The British Columbia Health Literacy Research Team has carried out projects focusing on Farsi speakers (Poureslami, Murphy, Nicol, Balka & Rootman, 2007) and is currently looking at ways to help Spanish-speaking immigrants develop health literacy skills.

Mental health literacy initiatives are generally rare, but one popular resource produced by the Centre for Addiction and Mental Health with funding from Citizenship and Immigration Canada in Ontario is the booklet, *Alone in Canada: 21 Ways to Make it Better*. This booklet has been used widely in ESL language classes in Ontario since 2002.

> "Individual TESL educators can play a key role in promoting health literacy as a form of empowerment."

The content for *Alone in Canada*, which focuses on ways for newcomers to adapt and to reduce mental distress during settlement, was developed in each target language by focus groups of immigrants and refugees who shared their personal experiences and coping strategies.

The content was written in plain language, translated and edited by ethnolinguistic community experts and again verified by community focus groups (Simich, Scott & Agic, 2005). *Alone in Canada* is available in 18 languages in print and on line at www.camh.net and at www.settlement.org.

Also available online from CAMH are a number of other resources: multilingual educational fact sheets about mental health and addictions problems, including the types of problems and what contributes to them, information on asking for help when things are not right and on coping with stress.

CAMH fact sheets can be found at: http://www.camh.net/About_Addiction_Mental_Health/Multilingual_Resources/index.html.

Conclusion

Teaching mental and physical health literacy for immigrants is likely to help improve the settlement and integration process as well as health outcomes for newcomers. Adopting a critical health literacy perspective emphasizes

the active role that educators, immigrant communities and service providers can play. Government agencies and professional organizations could focus on improving health and mental health literacy not only by integrating mental health literacy initiatives in existing language classes and settlement programs but also by funding innovative programs and cross-sectoral collaborations. Individual TESL educators can play a key role in promoting health literacy as a form of empowerment by encouraging active, continuing public health education that will benefit immigrant families, communities and the population as a whole. ❖

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IMMIGRANTS AND MENTAL HEALTH

Educational and Linguistic Integration Outcomes Among Immigrant and Refugee Children and Youth in Canada

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Abstract

How are our immigrant and refugee children and youth faring in their integration into the Canadian educational system? Though much is known about some of the challenges faced by newcomers to Canada and the ways to best address these barriers, relatively less is known about the actual educational and linguistic outcomes of immigrant and refugee students. This paper provides a brief synthesis of research findings from the existing empirical research literature on integration outcomes among first and second generation immigrant and refugee children and youth in Canada, paying particular attention to educational and linguistic outcomes. First generation children and youth are the foreign-born offspring of both newcomer and longer established immigrant and refugee families in Canada, while second generation children and youth are the Canadian-born offspring of immigrant or refugee parents. The thematic topics addressed in this paper include: educational aspirations and expectations, performance and achievement, trajectories and attainment; cross-cultural dynamics, home-school dynamics; language competence, as well as language acquisition and literacy. The paper's purpose is both to inform and to stimulate subsequent reflection, in particular around the question of how well educators and researchers committed to fostering student success are doing in helping to achieve successful educational and linguistic integration outcomes for all Canadian children and youth.

A **growing body of research** literature has contributed to our increased knowledge of the various challenges experienced by both immigrant/refugee and racialized students in Canada. Efforts have similarly gone into identifying, implementing and evaluating best policies and practices to most effectively address these existing barriers. However, relatively little is known about the actual educational and linguistic outcomes of immigrant and refugee children and youth.

This paper provides a brief overview of concrete findings drawn from the existing research literature that explores educational and linguistic integration outcomes among immigrant and refugee children and youth in Canada from which policy and practice implications might be distilled. The discussion focuses specifically on first and second generation immigrant and refugee youth, many of whom are at the same time members of ethno-culturally di-

verse and/or racialized communities. Both education and language are addressed as they are integrally intertwined in their relationship to student success. Whether taken separately or together, each is critical to the successful integration of new Canadian youth into Canada's social, economic, and political life.

Educational Expectations and Aspirations

Immigrant parents often bring with them high hopes for the educational success of their children. Decisions to migrate are fundamentally based on the desire to enjoy a better quality of life within a safe environment. Newcomer immigrant and refugee parents alike are willing to face the different challenges inherent in both the migration and the resettlement process and to make possible sacrifices to secure this for their offspring. For them, successful educational and linguistic integration is seen as key to the realization of this desire for a better future for their children. At the same time, for Canadian society as a whole, their successful integration is key to realizing the full potential of all of Canada's children and youth.

Krahn & Taylor (2005) found variations in educational expectations and aspirations among immigrant and refugee populations in relation to their racialized/non-racialized social position, ethnocultural origin, and migrant/native-born status. Findings from Canada's *2000 Youth in Transition Survey* (Statistics Canada, 2007) a national survey of 15-year-old students and their parents, reveal that visible-minority immigrant students in general have higher educational aspirations than Canadian-born non-visible minority students. This is the case despite considerable research evidence, which indicates that visible-minority and immigrant students are disadvantaged within the school system (Krahn & Taylor, 2005). There is, however, considerable variation across different ethno-cultural immigrant populations. For example, newcomer Chinese immigrant children

Educational Expectations and Aspirations

- Tend to be the same or higher among immigrant students when compared to their native-born peers.
- Vary considerably both within and across different ethno-cultural groups.
- Vary according to immigration status per se.
- Are often associated with different factors for refugee populations.

between 8-13 years of age have been found to have similar, rather than different, educational expectations and aspirations as their non-immigrant Caucasian peers (Dyson, 2005).

Differences also exist according to immigration status per se. For example, a number of factors, such as family socioeconomic status, typically found to influence educational success and occupational aspirations among Canadian-born non-migrant youth, appear to be of less salience for refugee youth (Wilkinson, 2001). Others may impact immigrant and refugee youth differently.

Academic Performance and Achievement

Considerable variation has also been found among immigrant and non-immigrant stu-

dents in terms of their actual academic perform-ance and achievement. These academic out-comes are often – though not always – tied to respective language skills in either English or French, and have been found to vary according to subject area as well as across societal context. Findings from the *Third International Mathematics and Science Study* (TIMSS, 1995) indicate that children of immigrants to Canada in grades 3-4 and 7-8 do significantly less well on standardized tests in math and science when compared to Ca-nadian-born children due to their respective level of linguistic skills in the language of in-struction. The gap is smaller when the children being tested speak the language of instruction, whether English or French at home (Sweetman, 1999), pointing to the critical role played by lin-guistic mastery of one of Canada's two official languages in academic performance outcomes.

Interestingly, the larger societal context appears also to be of critical importance. When TIMSS (1995) findings, i.e., the same dataset, were used in a second set of comparative analy-ses, immigrant students' mathematics achieve-ment was found to be lower than that of native-born children only in England, the United States, and Canada; scores were comparable or better in Australia and New Zealand (Huang, 2000). It is not yet clear whether these international differ-ences are due to respective immigration pat-terns, migrant selection policies, educational systems or pedagogical practices, or to a combi-nation thereof. However, these findings clearly indicate that migrant status in and of itself may not be the determining factor. This conclusion is further supported by research in which non-English language background has been related to poor mathematics and science learning out-comes for immigrant and native-born children alike (Huang, 2000).

In contrast to these findings, data analy-ses using the Canadian sample of the *Program for International Student Assessment* (PISA, 2000) found no differences in mathematics achieve-ment between immigrant and non-immigrant students (Ma, 2003). Other Canadian studies

similarly found that in all numeracy measures, immigrants/English as a Subsequent Language children performed as well as or better than na-tive English-speaking children with Canadian-born parents (Kerr, 2008). This finding may be due to the focus in the PISA data analyses on mathematics alone; the TIMSS (1995) findings reported above considered mathematics and science jointly. Together, both sets of research findings point to the importance of language competence in academic performance out-comes.

Differences in academic performance among immigrant children and youth begin to appear more clearly when considering the aca-demic subject areas in which both oral and writ-ten linguistic skills play a relatively greater role in subject comprehension and communication of competency. Analyses using the Canadian sam-ple of the PISA (2000), for example, indicate that non-immigrant students aged 15 years out-performed immigrant students in both reading and science achievement (Ma, 2003), again pointing to variations in respective academic performance according to subject area and the differential embeddedness of language across various subjects. Interestingly enough, greater gender equity in overall academic achievement (math, science, reading) was found among immi-grant than non-immigrant students in these analyses (Ma, 2003).

Linguistic mastery in the language of instruction is clearly central to academic per-formance outcomes in language-dependent sub-jects in particular. A study designed to measure official language linguistic skills among immi-grant children and youth found that vocabulary distribution is lower for children of immigrant parents whose mother tongue is neither English nor French than for children of Canadian-born parents; however, this difference is not found in comparable test scores for reading and mathe-matics (Worswick, 2004). Variation is also found according to age: children of immigrant parents whose mother tongue is neither English nor French have low performance in vocabulary be-fore age six, but performance in reading by age

fourteen that is comparable to that of the children of Canadian-born parents (Worswick, 2004).

The above findings combined point to the important interplay between age of arrival, language mastery and subject area in determining and interpreting academic performance outcomes among newcomer immigrant children. Other important factors found in relevant studies that correlate with academic performance include ethno-cultural background, grade placement upon arrival, absence/ presence of refugee camp experience, parents' health, place of settlement, and time since arrival (Wilkinson, 2002). Data collected using the *Child Behavior Checklist*, academic records, and a standardized intellectual aptitude test furthermore suggest that other factors may also need to be considered. In the case of war-affected newcomer populations, for example, emotional problems are often associated with learning difficulties and academic achievement among refugee children (Rousseau et al., 1996).

There may also be institutional and pedagogical factors within educational systems and practices that play a key role as well. A Canadian case study of an ethnic school that explored the academic and psychosocial outcomes of immigrant students from the former Soviet Union found higher than average academic achievement among its students (Asanova, 2005). School programs and practices in curriculum, pedagogy, discipline policy and teacher-student relationships, were all found to contribute to these success rates. The researchers con-

> "...the creation of this ethnic-based school suggests that Canada's educational system does not always meet the needs of its diverse immigrant groups."

cluded by suggesting that the creation of this ethnic-based school suggests that Canada's educational system does not always meet the needs of its diverse immigrant groups.

A large scale research project that examined the perspectives of parents, teachers and children regarding cultural identity and academic achievement of immigrant children from Latin America identified cultural capital as an important variable that helps to explain the differential performances of the children (Bernhard et al., 1997; Bernhard, & Freire, 1999).

These researchers found that educators' commonplace explanations of the children's academic performance, parents' own efforts to help their children's educational process, and parents' experiences in maintaining cultural identity and language in the family played an important role.

Educational Trajectories and Attainment

Foreign-born versus native-born status, generational status, age at arrival, and visible versus non-visible minority status have all been associated with the educational trajectories and attainment outcomes among immigrant and refugee students. Data analyses using the *Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics (SLID) – 1996 Panel* (Boyd, 2002) reveal that foreign-born youth migrants and Canadian-born second generation adults aged 20-64 years have more years of schooling and higher percentages of high school completion compared with the third-plus generation (Canadian-born to Canadian-born parents) adults; adult visible minority immigrant offspring in Canada were also found to exceed the educational attainments of other non-visible-

(Continued from page 47)

minority groups.

While the existing research suggests that foreign-born immigrant youth often enjoy greater educational attainments than domestic-born youth, there is as yet no coherent theoretical explanation of why this happens. However, a study that explored possible explanatory factors and operationalized individual and structural factors, terms of measures of planful competence (e.g., goal setting and individual preparation) and social capital respectively found that both independently predicted educational attainment among foreign-born youth (Boyd, 2002). Age at immigration was also found to be related to attachment to school and planful competence. Study measures of occupational attainment further indicated that these educational histories may have lifetime effects.

Linguistic competencies in both Canada's official language(s) and the relevant heritage language have a clear impact on educational attainment. While the existing research data do not provide sufficient evidence for a positive effect of youthful immigration on educational attainment, bilingual foreign-born students have been found to enjoy a greater likelihood of university attendance than other students (Dinovitzer et al., 2003). Findings from studies conducted in Canada and Belgium furthermore provide concrete evidence that formal instruction of heritage languages in elementary education actually helps to enhance cognitive abilities and literacy acquisition in the country's official language(s) among immigrant children (Danesi, 1993). In brief, Danesi (1993) found that literacy acquisition in the heritage language allows for verbal skill transfer and provides for enhanced adjustment into other academic areas, suggesting an important relationship between the bilingual education of minority children and their academic achievements.

Educational aspirations themselves also play an important role. Despite the fact that refugee children and youth are often placed in

Academic performance and achievement vary according to:

- Societal context.
- Age.
- Gender.
- Age of arrival.
- Time since arrival.
- Mother tongue.
- Level of mastery of official language.
- Subject area.
- Ethno-cultural background.
- Grade placement upon arrival.
- Presence/absence of refugee camp experience.
- Child/youth emotional well-being.
- Parents' health.
- Place of settlement.
- Education systems and contexts.
- School programs and practices in curriculum, pedagogy, discipline policy and teacher-student relationships.
- Cultural capital of immigrant families.
- Educators' explanations of student's academic performance.
- Parental support of child's educational process.
- Parental experiences regarding cultural and linguistic retention.

(Continued from page 48)

grades too low for their age upon arrival in Canada, many go on to become relatively successful in the Canadian education system (Wilkinson, 2001). An in-depth study of educational performance and occupational attainment among refugee youth aged 15-21 found that approximately half of the refugee youth were on-track for post-secondary education. However, the other half of the participants in the randomized study sample were experiencing some difficulty even finishing high school, with one in five study participants expecting not to be able to complete their secondary education (Wikinson, 2001), pointing to some of the unique challenges faced by war-affected and/or visible minority newcomer children and youth.

As is the case for all students regardless of background, the presence or absence of both risk and protective factors for early school leaving play a key role in their educational trajectories and attainment. However, the nature and relative importance of individual factors that influence the process of school disengagement among immigrant and refugee youth may differ from those affecting native-born youth. A comparative examination of early school leaving between immigrant and Canadian-born secondary school urban youth found significant differences between these two groups in terms of social, psychological, and academic characteristics linked to school leaving (Hrimech & Theoret, 1997). These researchers interpreted the differences in light of a theoretical framework focusing on youth values. The lack of importance of school learning among certain individuals proved to be one explanatory factor for their decision to leave school prior to successful completion of the high school diploma. A large-scale, qualitative and comparative study of early school leaving in Ontario found that the main risk factors for school disengagement among newcomer youth included language difficulties, inappropriate linguistic assessment, lack of language instruction, non-recognition of prior educational achievements, and unfamiliarity with the Cana-

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Key risk factors for school disengagement among both newcomer and second generation immigrant youth include cultural dissonance, differential acculturation, family financial stresses and unwelcoming or difficult school climates.

Key protective factors supportive of school engagement by immigrant youth include extended familial involvement in school and the general life of youth, parents' desire to ensure better future for their children through education, religious faith or community social support and a positive, inclusive school ethos.

dian school system (Rummens, Tilleczek, Boydell and Ferguson, 2007). The main risk factors for both newcomer and second generation immigrant youth included cultural dissonance, differential acculturation, family financial stresses, and unwelcoming or difficult school climates. The key protective factors included extended familial involvement in school and the general life of youth, parents' desire to ensure a better future for their children through education, religious faith or community social support, and a positive, inclusive school ethos.

Family and household characteristics have also been shown to play a role in the educational trajectories and attainment outcomes of immigrant and refugee students, as does the early development of linguistic competencies. International comparative analyses using econometric results from the *Programme for International Student Assessment* (PISA-OECD, 2000) indicate that the influence of the socioeconomic background of parents on school performance among 15-year-old students differs strongly across nations, with the highest impact found for Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005).

Results from the same study also showed intergenerational transmission of educational attainment to be less likely in Scandinavian countries and in Canada. For all European countries (France, Finland, Germany, United Kingdom and Sweden) and traditional countries of immigration (Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the U.S.) included in the PISA survey, a key for catching up in terms of immigrant youth educational attainment is the language spoken at home and the development of language skills at the early stage of childhood development (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005).

Cross-Cultural Dynamics Affecting School Adjustment

For immigrant and refugee children alike, the educational system – as embodied

within the school itself - is the very site of socio-cultural acculturation, socialization, and integration. School adjustment is therefore also an important indicator of socio-cultural integration. A study of post-migration stress among newcomer children reveals that school adjustment is often a key resettlement stressor (Hyman & Beiser, 2000). School adjustment in turn is often affected by other key resettlement stressors. The latter include compromised parental labour market integration, parental absence due to shift work or multiple jobs, parent-child role reversals, child assumption of early adult responsibilities, home-school as well as intergenerational value conflicts, and language barriers, all of which may individually and jointly have direct or indirect impacts on educational integration outcomes.

Acculturation and adaptation processes, family child socialization, and family-school communication all play a role in facilitating or hindering the transition of newcomer children to a new educational system in a new country. A study of the various challenges encountered by newcomer Nigerian immigrant youth in the Metro Toronto school system identified language/accent difficulties, English as a Subsequent Language placement, teacher attitude towards black students, lack of respect for teachers, and making friends as important school adjustment issues (Ogiorumua, 2004). According to the same study, key factors in the school adjustment process include the ways in which parents perceive the new culture and its influence on their children, the desire to maintain their national or cultural identities and associated moral and cultural values, as well as teachers' communication strategies and presence or absence of open diversity in the classroom .

Challenges to cultural or religious identity, experiences of marginalization or social exclusion, and discrimination based on race or language have all been identified as part of the cross-cultural dynamics experienced by immigrant and refugee children in Canadian schools. Somali immigrant youth in Toronto schools report entering the school system with a strong

identity of who they are but found the school did not always fully accommodate their religious identity (Collect, 2007). Similarly, Southeast Asian refugee children report that their adjustment to school in Canada often includes experiences of marginalization and cultural conflict (Hyman et al, 2000). A comparative study of values, aspirations and social experiences, on the other hand, found no discrepancies between Canadian immigrant (n=92) and non-immigrant children (n=92) aged 8-13 in terms of their social experiences: neither group reported experiencing exclusion within their school or community (Dyson, 2005). However, newcomer Chinese immigrant children aged 8-13 perceived the classroom as being more competitive than non-immigrant Caucasian children and reported experiencing discrimination mainly as a result of race and language differences.

Some immigrant and refugee students also report experiencing differential treatment by teachers based on their migrant status. A study of learning difficulties among refugee children aged 8-12 found that despite comparable academic records, remedial measures were more often prescribed for children from Central America (Rousseau, et al., 1996). At the same time, lack of teacher knowledge of the migration and resettlement process and the concomitant lack of appropriate support systems may leave school staff, in general, inadequately prepared to help refugee students who come from very diverse backgrounds and whose academic needs are additionally complicated by social and emotional factors associated with the refugee experience itself (Yau, 1995).

> "Some newcomer Chinese immigrant families found it difficult to translate Chinese educational values into the Canadian context, resulting in serious learning and social difficulties."

Cultural stereotypes and lack of cultural understanding among teachers and educators have also been cited in the existing research literature as important challenges to successful school adjustment by immigrant and refugee students. One illustrative study found that teachers and educators who were not very familiar with Chinese cultures tended to view all students of Chinese origin in a stereotypical way as 'inevitably destined for academic success' (Chen, 2002). Other research suggests that cross-cultural discrepancies in educational objectives may also affect the school adjustment of immigrant students. A narrative exploration of immigrant youth schooling experiences reports that some newcomer Chinese immigrant families found it difficult to translate Chinese educational values into the Canadian context, resulting in serious learning and social difficulties among their children (Xu et al., 2007). These findings point to the potentially adverse impact of culturally dissonant educational values, practices and expectations on immigrant students' adjustment and achievements.

Important to note is that experiences with cross-cultural dynamics within the school setting may vary greatly across immigrant and refugee populations. A large-scale study of immigrant students (n=35,000) in English-only secondary schools of British Columbia found, for example, that the experiences of refugees, landed immigrants, and children of foreign entrepreneurs are highly differentiated: positive views of English as a Subsequent Language classes among refugees contrast with negative views among high socioeconomic students preparing for college (Gunderson, 2000). A common theme, however, is students' high valuation of contact with native speakers for the

improvement of ability in English, coupled with their observed widespread difficulty and lack of success in interaction with such native speakers.

Home–School Dynamics Affecting Educational Experiences and Outcomes

Cross cultural differences clearly play an important role in the educational experiences and outcomes of immigrant and refugee children and youth. These manifest themselves both within the educational environment itself and through home-school interactions and dynamics.

Increasingly children in early childhood education settings (ECES) come from immigrant families with diverse languages, cultures and racial backgrounds. A study of the experiences of children of first generation Ethiopian immigrant parents both at home and at ECES found that these very young children experienced intense uneasiness during their transitions from home to early childhood education classroom settings. Three groups of children were identified: children who cry and scream the moment they arrive at ECES; children who get excited and play well for the first two or more days and then start crying and screaming; and children who adapt to the situation easily. The study found that the experiences of the children are influenced both by their parents' experiences in their country of origin and in their new country, Canada. It also found that the children's experiences at home and in their new early childhood setting are interconnected (Wubie, 2001). The importance of these findings cannot be overstated. In a second study of integration and socialization among daycare and nursery school children, early school-adaptation problems encountered by immigrant children were found to translate into delayed development, school failure, and early school leaving/dropping out (Jacques, 1989).

Educational trajectories and attainment vary according to:

- Foreign versus native-born status.
- Generational status.
- Age at arrival.
- Visible versus non-visible minority status.
- Linguistic competencies in official language.
- Linguistic competencies in heritage language.
- Bilingual competence.
- Educational aspirations.
- Presence/absence of risk or protective factors for early school leaving.
- Family socioeconomic status.
- Level of parental education.
- Language spoken at home.
- Early development of linguistic competencies.

Other home-school dynamics play an important role as well. A study of parental negotiation of the school system by members of the Ghanaian community found that immigrant parents' lack of awareness about educational policies and school processes in Canada, combined with the insensitivity of school officials, served to attenuate their potential contribution to the education of their children (Akoto, 2000). According to Akoto (2000), newcomer parents' attitudes and behaviors concerning their children's education

were found to be largely informed by their pre-immigration educational and socialization experiences in their country of origin, as well as by their present social, cultural and economic location and daily lived experiences in Canada. However, institutional and teacher practices do not always offer the needed support to immigrant parents because these educational and pedagogical practices are often far removed from the parents' own experiences and are, moreover, often fed by a 'deficit thinking' paradigm (Akoto, 2000) that places the onus on the child, family or community. These challenges may readily translate into home-school impasses and compromised student educational outcomes.

Home-school dynamics are also influenced by parental perceptions, experiences, and evaluations of the Canadian educational system. A study of Chinese immigrant parents' attitudes toward Canadian schooling found that they may best be described as "mixed." Overall, parents participating in the study indicated that they were generally 'happy' with the Canadian system, suggesting, for example, that their children enjoy school more in Canada. However, many immigrant parents expressed concern that their children will not be adequately prepared for the future (Zhang et al, 1998). A study of Somali parents' perceptions of the school and non-school learning conditions that help or hinder the education of their children found that parents were concerned about the lack of diversity and multicultural instructional materials in schools (Good, 1999).

School responsiveness to the unique needs of immigrant and refugee children and youth has also been found to play a key role in home - school dynamics. While parental responses regarding the treatment of their children in schools were found to vary widely, research findings reveal a consensus among immigrant parents that guidance counselors in general are not sensitive to the needs of immigrant students (Good, 1999). The study also reflects concern about schools' limited effort and interest in involving immigrant parents in school commit-

tees as well as about the lack of effective school-family communication .

Language Competence

Language competence in the language of instruction is undoubtedly the single most important factor affecting the educational outcomes of immigrant and refugee youth. It furthermore directly affects all other types of integration as well, most notably their full participatory inclusion in the social, economic, and political spheres of Canadian society. For many newcomer immigrant and refugee children and youth, their full integration into Canadian society is often complicated by the fact that many do not speak one of Canada's two official languages when they arrive (Burke, 1992). Cross-cultural adaptation begins with, and proceeds, via interpersonal communication, and is thus reflected in one's linguistic competence in the language(s) of the receiving society (Lee & Chen, 2000). Language competence in English or French among immigrant children and youth has been found to vary with age and mother tongue and to change over time. Vocabulary distribution, for example, has been found to be lower for children of immigrant parents whose mother tongue is neither English nor French than for children of Canadian-born parents (Worswick, 2004).

Both competence in Canada's official languages (Ma, 2003; Sweetman, 1999; Worswick, 2004) and in the language spoken at home (Entorf & Minoiu, 2005; Huang, 2000) have been correlated to academic performance at school. Language competence in one or more of Canada's official languages has, moreover, also been shown to be associated with psychological wellbeing among immigrant and refugee children. A study of 506 Chinese adolescents living in Canada found that age at time of arrival in Canada, length of stay in Canada, socioeconomic status, and reading ability in English all predicted acculturation, with English reading ability and socioeconomic status both predictive of their degree of acculturative stress (Kuo, & Roysircar,

2004). This relationship between language competence and psychosocial adaptation is supported by other research as well. A study of seventh- and eighth-grade Chinese immigrant children's cross-cultural adaptation in Canada found that in contrast to communication competence in their native language, communication competence in the language of resettlement was negatively associated with psychological problems (Kuo & Roysircar, 2004), pointing to the important relationship between linguistic ability in one of the official languages and the successful psychosocial integration of immigrant children.

Language Acquisition and Literacy

A number of factors influence language acquisition, linguistic skill development and literacy practices among immigrant and refugee children and youth. To begin with, the very social context in which language learning actually takes place has been found to play an important role in language acquisition. A study of two groups of language learners - immigrant children (primarily Portuguese) learning German and French in a Swiss school and English-speaking students in a French-language school in Ontario - found that school activities played a more important role in these students' language learning than their representations of either their second language or the community they live in (Gajo, 1997). The same is true for social networks. Described in terms of interactive environment, density, multiplicity, and linguistic homogeneity, the very web of student social relationships is also an important factor (Danesi, 1993). A common theme found among diverse immigrant youth is their high valuation of contact with native speakers to improve their ability in English, coupled with their difficulty and lack of success in achieving such interaction (Gunderson, 2000).

Similarly, family attitudes, particularly of the father, toward linguistic competence, cultural identity, attitudes toward the respective languages (French, English, first language), perception and value of language, and social networks were all found to affect linguistic skill development among immigrant students (Danesi, 1993). A study of home literary practices among Chinese immigrant families indicates that family physical environment and economic status have relatively little impact on children's literacy development (Li, 2000). Rather, parental cultural and educational background, and the social environments including parent-child interactions, shared family activities, the degree of parental involvement and support for children's learning, as well as media access and utilization play an important role in the families' literacy practices (Li, 2000). Disparity between immigrant children's home and school literacy practices, Li (2000) suggests, can hinder their literacy development and cultural integration into Canadian society.

A positive impact of bilingual heritage language education on linguistic skill development in the official language has also been found to exist. Research findings demonstrate that formal instruction of heritage languages in elementary education enhances cognitive abilities and literacy acquisition in the dominant language among immigrant children in Canada and Belgium (Hamers, 1994). An investigation of the development of bilingualism, the development of literacy and of the retention of the native tongue in children of immigrants to French Canada (n=720) indicated that socialization, acculturation and the attitude of the dominant society towards the culture or the child were all major factors in children's acquisition of a second language and retention of their first language (Danesi, 1993). Environments that foster multiculturalism result in children more effectively learning the second language, maintaining the first language, and effectively acquiring a third language.

Summary Reflections

The empirical research literature points to the fundamental importance of language com-

School adjustment may be affected by:

- Resettlement stressors.
- Adaptation and acculturation processes.
- Family-child socialization.
- Family-school communication.
- Linguistic difficulties.
- English as a Second Language placement.
- Teacher attitudes towards visible minority youth.
- Student attitudes towards teachers.
- Peer friendships.
- Parental perceptions of the new culture.
- Parental desire for cultural retention.
- Teacher communication strategies.
- Presence/absence of classroom diversity.
- Challenges to cultural and/or religious identities.
- Experiences of marginalization and social exclusion.
- Discrimination based on race or language.
- Differential treatment by teachers based on migrant status.
- Teacher understanding of migration and resettlement processes.
- Teacher understanding of the refugee experience in particular.
- Availability of needed support systems.
- Lack of cultural understanding.
- Existence of stereotypes.
- Cultural dissonance in educational values, practices, expectation.

petence in the language of instruction to academic performance outcomes and educational trajectories of immigrant and refugee children in Canada. It furthermore reveals the existence of a positive relationship between language competence and formal linguistic skill development in a heritage language, and subsequent successful language acquisition in one of Canada's official languages. Both heritage language competence and competence in an official language have, moreover, been directly related to academic performance outcomes among immigrant and refugee children. In turn, linguistic and educational outcomes are key to their successful overall social, cultural, economic and political integration into Canadian society.

To help achieve successful linguistic and educational outcomes among immigrant and refugee children and youth, a number of directions for research and practice might be considered. The existing literature points clearly to the critical need for protected funding for multi-year ESL/FSL programming for newcomer students. This provides them with the essential linguistic skills that are fundamental both to effective learning and to successful social-cultural integration. Beyond this core necessity, support for heritage language learning, including direct integration into the curriculum, has been shown to be positively correlated to cognitive abilities, literacy acquisition in official languages, and academic performance among immigrant children and youth. The creation and facilitation of multiple dialogue opportunities among native English or French speakers and newcomer students who are in the process of learning an official language is also key, not just for language learning but also for social integration, particularly in schools with large newcomer populations. Classroom diversity and use of multicultural curriculum materials help to foster a sense of inclusion and mutual learning, as does the development and support of innovative and culturally competent home - school outreach initiatives, activities and events that acknowledge and help

Home–school dynamics affecting educational experiences/outcomes:

- Linguistic, cross-cultural or ethno-racial differences.

- Initial school transition experiences.

- Parents' awareness and knowledge of educational policies and practices in Canada.

- Parental educational and socialization experiences in country of origin.

- Parents' lived resettlement experiences in Canada.

- Parental attitudes and behaviours towards education.

- Parental perceptions, experiences, and evaluations of the Canadian educational system.

- School encouragement of parental involvement in school activities.

- Parental outreach by school principals, teachers and staff.

- Awareness of and sensitivity to the needs of immigrant and refugee students by school staff.

- Classroom diversity.

- Use of multicultural instructional materials.

- Effectiveness of school-family communications

teachers, students and their families bridge what are sometimes very different cultural ways of life and enhance mutual understanding.

While teachers of English or French as a Subsequent Language (ESL/FSL) clearly have a pivotal role in the successful integration and life outcomes of Canada's immigrant and refugee children and youth, all educators have an important role to play. Educational and linguistic integration outcomes have been shown to vary both within and across immigrant and refugee populations; differences have also been found to exist between newcomer and native-born populations, and across both ethno-cultural and ethno-racial populations. Greater understanding of the nature and relative importance of critical factors such as age of arrival, time since arrival, as well as migration, generational, and visible/non-visible statuses respectively on educational performance, trajectories and concomitant integration outcomes is essential. Increased knowledge regarding the multiple mechanisms through which educational and linguistic integration outcomes are integrally affected by family migration and resettlement experiences, as well as by both cross-cultural and home-school dynamics, is also critical. Simultaneous attention to both risk and protective factors is equally key to ensuring optimal educational and linguistic outcomes for our immigrant and refugee students.

The existing research points to the importance of both knowledge of, and responsiveness to, the various factors that affect educational experiences, trajectories and outcomes of our immigrant and refugee youth. The onus lies with researchers and educators to examine and reflect upon what more can be done to ensure successful outcomes for all of Canada's children and youth. ❖

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THE ROLE OF L1 IN L2 LEARNING AND TEACHING

The Use of the L1 in Focus on Form

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Abstract

The role of the first language (L1) in the L2 classroom is controversial. Although studies have examined the advantages and disadvantages of L1 use in a variety of contexts, very few studies have looked at L1 use in focus on form, even though focus on form has received considerable attention recently. The present study, therefore, investigates L1 usage during focus on form activities, when the participants' attention turns briefly from meaning to linguistic items. The research was conducted in two university foreign language classes: a third-year Chinese class and a first-year Spanish class. A total of nine hours of regularly-scheduled class activities were observed and audio-recorded. The classroom interaction was analyzed for focus-on-form episodes in which the L1 (English) was used, as well as for the discourse moves (trigger, response and output) in which they occurred. Results indicate that L1 usage was similar in the two classes, and that both teachers and students made use of the L1.

The use of a student's first language (L1) in the second language (L2) classroom is controversial. Currently in L2 teaching pedagogy, there is a strong emphasis placed on both teachers and students to maximize L2 use in the classroom (Kang, 2008; Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), given the importance of input and interaction in the L2 (Gass, 1997; Long, 1996; Mackey, 2007). This emphasis exists both in L2 contexts where the target language is the language of the larger society and also in foreign language contexts where students' primary exposure to the L2 is in the classroom. In fact, there are often policies ranging from the national level (Kang, 2008) to the classroom level (Carless, 2007; Kalivoda, 1983, 1988) that mandate the exclusive use of the L2 in the classroom. In spite of such directives, there may be multiple reasons for the occurrence of the L1 in L2 classes, such as the ease of teaching L2 grammar and other curricular items in the L1 (Wilkerson, 2008), the lower L2 proficiency of teachers and students (Carless, 2007; Kang, 2008) and the reluctance of students to interact in the L2 (Carless, 2007). Furthermore, some SLA researchers (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Cook, 2001; Kang, 2008) argue that L1 use can be beneficial for L2 learners. Given the debate surrounding this issue, the present paper examines the occurrence of students'

L1 in two university foreign language classes, one Chinese and one Spanish.

Studies of L1 use in L2 classes have found varying results regarding both the frequency and purpose of L1 use. For example, Duff and Polio (1990) examined 13 different foreign language classes at UCLA and found that L1 use ranged from 0 per cent to 90 per cent. Similarly, Wilkerson (2008) found that five teachers of elementary Spanish at a U.S. university varied considerably in their L1 usage, with one teacher using minimal amounts of Spanish and another teaching exclusively in Spanish. Another study, one of French classes in Australia (Rolin-Ianziti & Brownlie, 2002), identified two primary reasons why teachers and students used the L1: the first was for translating L2 words into the L1 and the second was for contrasting L1 and L2 forms. These studies examined L1 use in general in various language classes; however, there was no effort to identify L1 use within specific types of L2 teaching activities.

In fact, the use of the L1 in focus-on-form activities has largely been ignored. This oversight may be due to the fact that some descriptive focus on form studies (Ellis, Basturkmen, & Loewen, 2001a, 2001b) have been conducted in contexts where L2 students come from diverse linguistic backgrounds and may not all share a common L1. However, Lyster and Ranta (1997) did address L1 use in their seminal study on focus on form in French immersion classes in Canada, saying, "We also included instances of the L1 unsolicited by the teacher in our category of error. Such uses are not errors per se, but we were interested in examining teachers' reactions to their students' unsolicited use of the L1" (p. 45). Additionally, Panova and Lyster (2002) considered L1 use as 'non-target-like' in their study of ESL classes in Quebec. While these studies were clear to point out that the use of the L1 in L2 classes is not necessarily wrong, such instances were nevertheless classified as errors.

Before considering the occurrence of the L1 in focus-on-form activities, it is important to consider what focus on form entails. Long's (1991) original definition states that focus on form "overtly draws students' attention to linguistic elements as they arise incidentally in lessons whose overriding focus is on meaning or communication" (pp. 45-46). This definition makes clear that focus on form does not consist of grammar-focused activities that have the primary goal of teaching linguistic structures. Rather, focus on form attempts to bring together brief attention to grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation during activities in which the primary goal is for the students to communicate or exchange information about various topics.

Researchers (Ellis, 2001; Long & Robinson, 1998) have identified several ways in which focus on form can occur in the classroom. In this paper we will consider three of them: reactive, student-initiated, and teacher-initiated. Reactive focus on form occurs when someone (generally the teacher) draws attention to an error in learner production (Ellis et al., 2001a; Long & Robinson, 1998; Lyster & Ranta, 1997). Such corrective feedback, as it is also called, can occur in a variety of ways such as recasts, elicitations, and meta-linguistic feedback. In example 1 below, taken from the data used in the current

Example 1	
S: uh Barbie estaba muy nervioso	S: Barbie was very nervous (masculine)
T: bueno, Barbie estaba muy nervioso, muy ner (T writing on board) viosa, o so?	T: good, Barbie was very nervous (m)very nervous (m) or nervous (f)?
S: sa	S: sa (feminine)
T: sa, nerviosa, nervous	T: sa, nervous (f), nervous

study, the teacher and students are talking about a story that the class is co-constructing about Ken and Barbie's first date. The student states that Barbie was very nervous; however, he uses the wrong gender on the adjective. The teacher briefly draws attention to the error by questioning which form to use as he writes the student's response on the board. The student provides the correct ending, which the teacher repeats. This example provides a clear illustration of how reactive focus on form can happen during communicative activities when the teacher corrects a student error.

The second example below illustrates a correction not of a student error per se, but of the use of the L1. Here, the student and teacher are discussing a reading and the student uses English to begin to ask a question about the reading. The teacher responds to the question by providing the Spanish form. The student acknowledges the teacher's feedback and then proceeds to ask the rest of his question in Spanish.

Example 2	
S: um el pair paragraph one	*S: um paragraph one*
T: mhm el párrafo uno	*T: mhm paragraph one*
S: sí, es imperfecto?	*S: yes, is it imperfect?*

Although reactive focus on form has received considerable attention in the SLA literature (Ammar & Spada, 2006; Egi, 2007; Ellis & Sheen, 2006; Loewen & Philp, 2006; Lyster, 2004; Mackey, 2007; Nicholas, Lightbown, & Spada, 2001; Russell & Spada, 2006), researchers have also acknowledged the existence of student-initiated focus on form, in which a learner raises a question about a problematic linguistic item even though no error in production has occurred (Ellis et al., 2001b; Williams, 2001, 2005).

Example 3	
S: cómo se dice sticky?	*S: How do you say sticky?*
T: sticky? pegajoso	*T: sticky? sticky*
S: el suelo era pegajoso	*S: the floor was sticky*

In example 2, the teacher and students are again describing Ken and Barbie's first date. The students are describing the location of the date, and one student wants to comment on the fast food restaurant where they have set the date. However, the student does not have the vocabulary item he wants, so he asks the teacher using Spanish except for the English vocabulary item. The teacher provides the Spanish equivalent, and the student uses the Spanish word to express his idea. In this example, then, the student draws attention to a problematic lexical item, even though the student has not made an error in using the form.

Example 4	
T: hoy es la primera cita de Ken y Barbie …. que es una cita	*T: today is Ken and Barbie's first date…*
	what is a date
S: date	*S: date*
T: date, bueno	*T: date, good*

The last type of focus on form to consider is teacher-initiated, which occurs when the teacher draws attention to a linguistic item even though no error in learner production has occurred (Ellis et al. 2001b; Williams, 2005). Again, an example helps to illustrate. Example 4 shows the beginning of the Ken and Barbie activity, with the teacher describing the task. In doing so, the teacher first uses the Spanish word for *date*, and then he asks the students about the meaning of the word. The students provide the English equivalent, and then the teacher goes back to describing the activity.

All of the examples above were chosen because they show the students and teacher using both Spanish and English to achieve a focus on form. Previous studies of focus on form have generally ignored L1 use in focus on form, with Lyster and his colleagues (Lyster & Ranta,1997; Panova & Lyster, 2002) being the only ones who, to the best of the author's knowledge, have addressed this issue. Even so, these studies did not provide separate analyses for L1 and L2 use. As a result, very little is known about the occurrence and characteristics of L1 use in focus on form. The present study, therefore, seeks to address this gap by asking the following research questions.

1. How frequently does the students' first language occur in classroom focus on form?
2. Who uses the L1 in these focus-on-form episodes?
3. In which discourse moves does the L1 use occur?

Method

The overall design of the study involved observations of two foreign language classes at a large midwestern University. The first class was a third-year Chinese class that was observed on six occasions. The second class was a first-year Spanish class that was observed on three occasions. These classes and the procedures used will now be detailed in turn.

Participants

The third-year Chinese class consisted of 14 students, with 5 females and 9 males. Thirteen of the students were native speakers of English, although 3 of them were heritage learners from Chinese families. The fourteenth student was a native speaker of Russian. The teacher of the class was a native speaker of Mandarin Chinese and a fluent speaker of English. She had a master's degree in Chinese literature and had taught Chinese as a Foreign Language in different American universities for more than 10 years.

The first-year Spanish class consisted of 20 students, with ten females and ten males. All of the students were native speakers of English. The teacher was a teaching assistant from the Spanish department, where he was completing a master's degree in Spanish applied linguistics. He was a native speaker of English and a fluent speaker of Spanish.

Procedures

The classes were observed and audio-recorded with a wireless microphone attached to the teacher. This arrangement captured all of the teachers' utterances, as well as all student utterances during whole class interaction. However, during group activities, the only student voices recorded were those with whom the teacher was speaking directly. A total of six hours were recorded in the Chinese class and three hours were recorded in the Spanish class. After the observations, the Chinese recordings were transcribed and analyzed by an L1 Chinese-speaking research assistant. The Spanish recordings were transcribed and analyzed by the researcher, who is an L2 speaker of Spanish. The Spanish recordings were analyzed by only one rater. The first step of the analysis process was to identify the focus-on-form episodes (FFEs) that occurred in the classroom interaction. The FFEs, which constituted the unit of analysis for the study, were defined as including all of the interaction focusing on a specific linguistic item (Ellis et al, 2001). For the purposes of this study, only FFEs containing English (the L1) were selected for subsequent analysis.

After the FFEs were identified, they were coded for three discourse moves: trigger,

response, and student output. The trigger was defined as being the reason for the start of the FFE. In the case of reactive focus on form, it was a student error that triggered the focus. For student-initiated FFEs, it was a student question that started the attention to form, and for teacher-initiated FFEs, it was a teacher question or statement about a particular linguistic item. The response move was defined as the teacher's utterance following the student's trigger. The response could come in the form of some type of provision of information about the targeted linguistic item or as an elicitation move that attempted to draw out the correct form or information from the student. It should be noted that there was no response move option in the teacher-initiated FFEs. The final discourse move was the student output, which constituted a reaction to the teacher's response (in the reactive and student-initiated FFEs) or trigger (in the teacher-initiated FFEs). The student output could consist of the correct linguistic form, the incorrect linguistic form or an acknowledgement token. In addition to coding the specific discourse moves, the language(s) used in each move was noted. Therefore, the current study can pinpoint where and how frequently English occurred in these FFEs.

To ensure reliability in the coding of the Chinese data, two steps were taken. First, the researcher and a research assistant together listened to and coded the first two hours of data. Any differences in opinion were discussed until satisfactorily resolved. Next, the research assistant coded the remaining data, which were then coded by an independent rater who was a Chinese L1 speaker. An agreement rate of 88 per cent was achieved in coding the characteristics of the FFEs, and a rate of 94 per cent was attained in identifying the languages used in the FFEs. The Spanish data were coded by the researcher alone.

Results

Throughout this section, the results will be presented first for the Chinese class and then for the Spanish class. To answer research question one concerning the occurrence of the L1 in focus on form activities, Figure 1 shows that, in the Chinese class, 44 per cent of the FFEs (189 out of 431) contained English, while in the Spanish class, 55 per cent (57 out of 104) contained English. There were almost no FFEs that occurred entirely in English. Thus, the answer to the first research question is that the L1 (i.e. English) was used in about half of the FFEs in both classes.

The next two research questions ask about who used the L1 and in which discourse moves. These two questions will be answered together by looking at the three types of focus on form (i.e. reactive, student-initiated and teacher-

Figure 1: Language use in FFEs
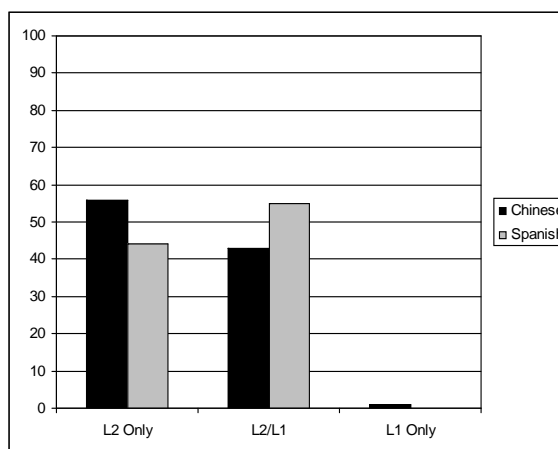
(Continued from page 63)

initiated) in turn. Table 1 and Figure 2 show that the overwhelming majority (80 per cent) of students' errors that triggered the FFEs were in Chinese; however, the teacher corrected those errors primarily by using a combination of Chinese and English. Student output was mostly in Chinese, but the percentage of output with both Chinese and English was higher than in the student triggers.

The patterns of language use in the reactive FFEs from the Chinese class were largely similar in the Spanish class, as can be seen in Table 2 and Figure 3. The student errors that triggered the FFEs were usually only in Spanish (80 per cent), and the teacher responded with a mixture of Spanish and English (60 per cent). The majority of student output was in Spanish (57 per cent); however, there was also a considerable amount of student output in English only (36

Table 1: Reactive FFEs (Chinese)

Discourse Move	Chinese		Chinese/English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student Trigger	64	81	10	13	5	6
Teacher Response	7	9	64	81	8	10
Student Output	24	56	14	32	5	11

Table 2: Reactive FFEs (Spanish)

Discourse Move	Spanish		Spanish/English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student Trigger	11	79	2	14	1	7
Teacher Response	6	40	9	60	0	0
Student Output	8	57	1	7	5	36

Figure 2: Reactive FFEs (Chinese)

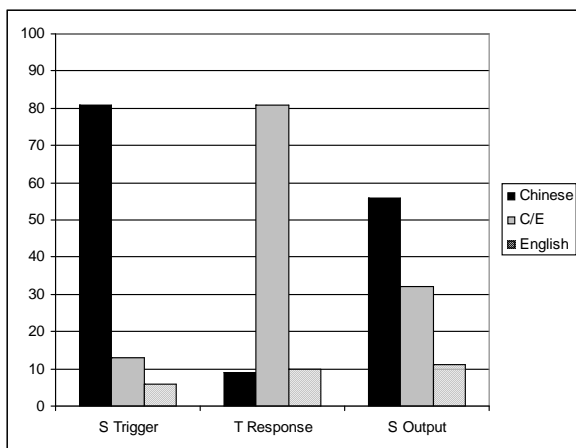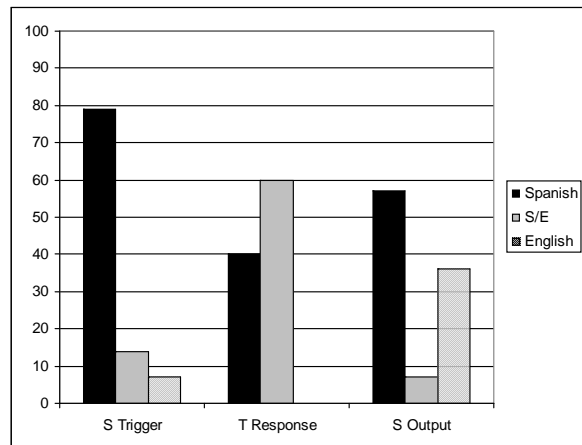*Figure 3: Reactive FFEs (Spanish)*

per cent), which differed from the mixed L1/L2 student output in the Chinese class.

Having looked at the reactive FFEs, we now turn to the student-initiated FFEs. Table 3 and Figure 4 reveal that in the Chinese class, students asked questions using both languages, but the most frequent format was to use English only (43 per cent). The teacher overwhelmingly responded to these questions in a mix of Chinese and English (73 per cent), and the student output

occurred most frequently in Chinese (54 per cent).

Again, we see in Table 5 a somewhat similar pattern of language use in the Spanish classroom. As in the Chinese class, student questions occurred in both languages; however, in contrast, the questions in the Spanish class were mostly in a combination of Spanish and English (68 per cent). The teacher's responses to these student questions also occurred primarily in a combination of Spanish and English (68 per

Table 3: Student-Initiated FFEs (Chinese)

Discourse Move	Chinese		Chinese/ English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student Trigger	12	20	22	37	26	43
Teacher Response	12	20	44	73	4	7
Student Output	17	54	6	19	8	25

Table 4: Student-Initiated FFEs (Spanish)

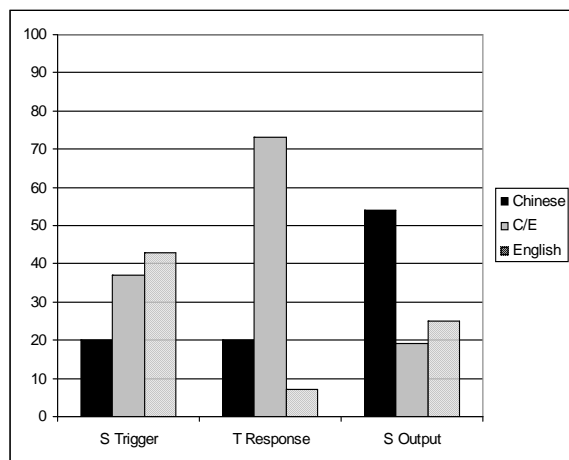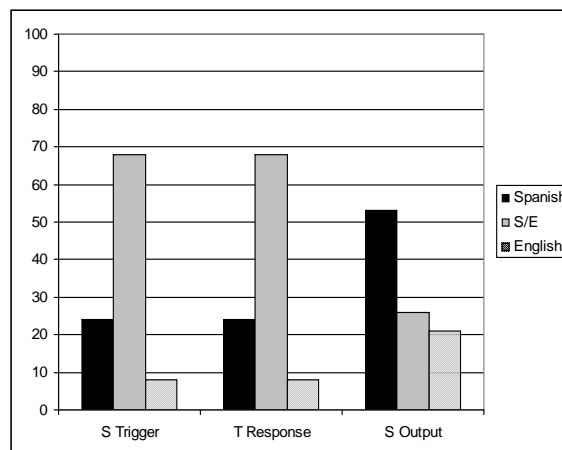| Discourse Move	Spanish		Spanish/ English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Student Trigger	6	24	17	68	2	8
Teacher Response	6	24	17	68	2	8
Student Output	10	53	5	26	4	21

Figure 4: Student-initiated FFEs (Chinese)

Figure 5: Student-initiated FFEs (Spanish)

cent), and the majority of the student output was in Spanish only (53 per cent). These patterns of teacher response and student output are very similar in both language classes.

Finally, we look at the teacher-initiated FFEs. Table 5 and Figure 6 indicate that the teacher's question or information about a linguistic item was usually in Chinese (74 per cent); however, the student output overwhelmingly occurred in English (86 per cent). Table 6 and Figure 7 reveal a somewhat similar pattern in the Spanish class, although there is a difference in

the proportions of languages used in the teachers' triggers. More of the Spanish teacher's triggers were in a mixture of both the L1 and L2 (64 per cent) than in L2 only (35 per cent), in comparison to the Chinese teacher's primary use of the L2 (54 per cent). However, the effect of these triggers on student output was virtually the same, with students responding in English at least 80 per cent of the time.

Table 5: Teacher-Initiated FFEs (Chinese)

Discourse Move	Chinese		Chinese/ English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teacher Trigger	56	74	20	26	0	0
Student Output	3	4	7	10	60	86

Table 6: Teacher-Initiated FFEs (Spanish)

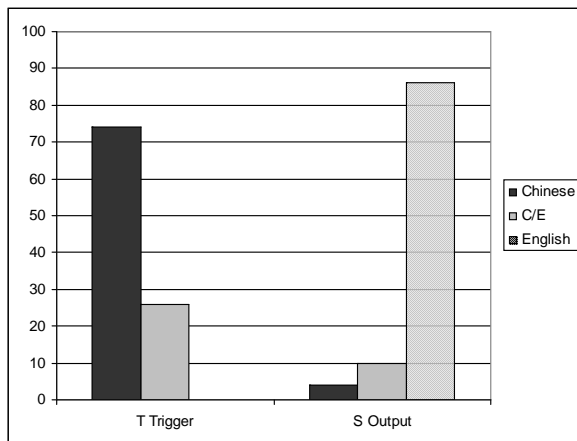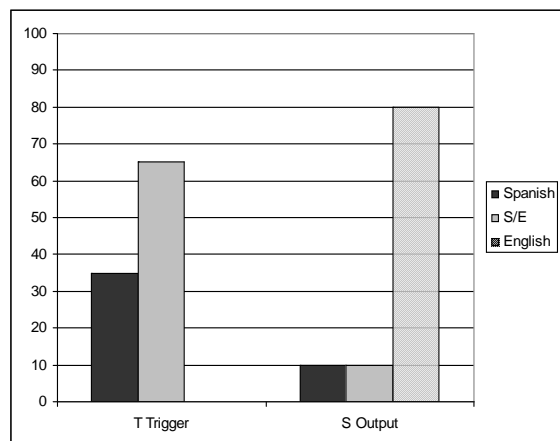| Discourse Move	Spanish		Spanish/ English		English	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Teacher Trigger	6	35	11	64	0	0
Student Output	1	10	1	10	8	80

Figure 6: Teacher-initiated FFEs (Chinese)

Figure 7: Teacher-initiated FFEs (Spanish)

Discussion

In summary, this study found that a considerable amount of L1 usage during focus on form occurred in these two classes. Both students and teachers used the L1, to varying degrees, in the different discourse moves of the FFEs. This section will consider some possible explanations for the patterns of L1 usage.

In the reactive FFEs, the students' triggers were primarily in the L2. This finding provides an indication that the students were actually using the L2 for communication, even though they were making errors. It also indicates that the teachers did not generally treat L1 usage as an error to be corrected, unlike the positions taken by Lyster and Ranta (1997) and Panova and Lyster (2002). While this study has not documented the overall occurrence of English in these classes, if teachers were continually correcting students' use of English as an error, then we would expect to see a much higher frequency of English-only triggers. Another encouraging result from the reactive FFEs is that students are generally responding to the teachers' feedback in the L2, indicating that there is probably some correction of the initial L2 errors.

Further examination of the types of student output, as well as the functions of L1 usage in the teachers' responses, would add to our understanding of L1 use in corrective feedback.

As for the student-initiated FFEs, it is interesting to note that it is the first-year Spanish students who are asking questions in a combination of L1 and L2, while the third-year Chinese students are using the L1 more frequently. A possible explanation for this could be in the types of questions that the students are asking. Previous research (e.g. Ellis et al, 2001b) has found that

Example 5	
S: um	S: um
T: dime	T: yes
S: puedo usar inglés?	S: can I use English?
T: bueno	T: okay
S: for the last one that we had there	S: for the last one that we had there
T: intentaron bailar	T: they intended to dance
S: before you changed it to intentaron you had another verb there, that you had	S: before you changed it to they intended to you had another verb there, that you had
T: querían bailar	T: they wanted to dance
S: querían	S: they wanted
T: querían bailar	T: they wanted to dance
S: and that's the imperfect	S: and that's the imperfect
T: mhm	T: mhm

(Continued from page 67)

the majority of student-initiated focus on form concerns vocabulary items. Thus, it could be that the lower-level Spanish students were using relatively formulaic phrases, similar to the *cómo se dice X/ how do you say X* phrase seen in Example 3 above. In contrast, the higher-level Chinese students could have been asking more complex questions about a wider range of linguistic items. Again, a more detailed content analysis of the FFEs would help shed light on this issue.

In the final type of FFEs, the teacher-initiated ones, it is clear that the teachers' questions, whether in the L2 or a combination of L1 and L2, almost always elicited a response in English. Once more, it may be that the nature of these questions led to a natural use of the L1. If teachers asked about the meanings of specific words, as in Example 4 above, it is most likely that the students would respond with a direct equivalent in English.

One final observation about the patterns of language use in these classes is that the participants did display some sensitivity to the use of the L1 in the classroom. Although there was no mention of any explicit language policy during the observed classes, it is not known if the teachers introduced such a policy at the beginning of the semester. Nevertheless, Example 5 indicates that at least one student recognized that the use of English in the Spanish class might not be permissible. Therefore, when he attempted to ask the teacher a somewhat complex question, he asked permission to use English.

While this study has demonstrated that L1 use can and does occur in focus on form, at least in these classrooms, it should be pointed out that this study has not investigated the relative effectiveness of such use. Given that there are differing opinions regarding the amount and benefit of L1 use in the L2 classroom (Anton & DiCamilla, 1998; Cook, 2001; Kang, 2008 Turnbull, 2001; Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), it would be worthwhile to investigate the usefulness of L1 in focus on form for L2 learning. Anecdotal evidence from the present study provides food for thought regarding the role of the L1 in L2 focus on form. In Example 6, a student has asked about the meaning of a word she has

Example 6	
S: que significa cualquier	*S: what does whatever mean*
T: cualquier, por ejemplo si si ponemos los jeans en la lavadore para lavarlas, no, no pasa nada. si tiramos los jeans en una mochila, no pasa nada. si estamos así (rubbing his hands together) en las en las jeans, no pasa nada, son muy resistentes a cualquier trato, a todos los tratos. no hay nin- son muy resistentes a muchas cosas, muchos tipos de de de actividades, muchos tipos de actividades. así que cualquier significa any kind or whatever kind	*T: whatever, for example if we put the jeans in the washer to wash them, nothing happens to them. if we throw the jeans in a backpack, nothing happens to them. if we do this (rubbing his hands together) to the jeans, nothing happens to them. they are very resistant to whatever treatment, to all treatments. there isn't any- there are very resistant to a lot of things, many types of activities. so whatever means any kind or what ever kind*
S: oh	*S: oh*

encountered in a reading activity. The teacher provides a lengthy monologue in Spanish about the meaning of the word, but he ends with two short translation equivalents in English. One could argue that a first-year student such as the one in this example would probably have had a difficult time understanding the meaning from the Spanish description alone. In this case, the use of the L1 seems an efficient means of helping the student work out the meaning of the L2 word.

In sum, this study has considered some of the issues regarding the role of the L1 in L2 focus on form. It is clear that L1 use does occur, and it is probable that it can be helpful for L2 learning. Nevertheless, there are several limitations to consider. First the sample size was small, with only nine hours of observed instruction. Additional investigation into the routine focus-on-form practices of numerous teachers in varied instructional contexts is needed. In addition, it was not possible to measure the effectiveness of the L1 use in terms of L2 learning. Such investigation is needed in order to provide recommendations to classroom teachers based on empirical evidence (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002). In spite of these limitations, the current study has detailed the ways in which L1 use can occur in focus on form in L2 classes. ❖

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Integrating Language and Content: Focus on Form in a Content-Based Language Program

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Abstract

Content-based language instruction has been widely accepted as good pedagogy in a variety of language programs. Yet teachers and researchers debate the question of how best to integrate language and content. One approach that is adopted is form-focused instruction (FFI), which incorporates attention to both form and meaning in language instruction (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2001; Spada, 1997; Swain, 2001). In this paper, I describe a current study exploring the effectiveness and effect of FFI in a specialized language training program developed for adult learners preparing for employment as childcare providers in Early Childhood Education. In this language program, two classes were taught by the same teacher using a content-based syllabus. For this study, one class received instruction and material adapted to focus on specific grammar points within the content area while the other class received entirely content-focused instruction and material. At the end of the teaching period, learners' progress for language and content learning was measured via a set of spoken and written tasks and the results were compared for the two groups. Data collection from these measures has been completed. The study is now in the data analysis stage and results will be reported at a later date. In what follows, I will present the rationale and theoretical framework for the research and describe the methodology for the study. I will then outline the analyses that will be conducted as the next steps in the study.
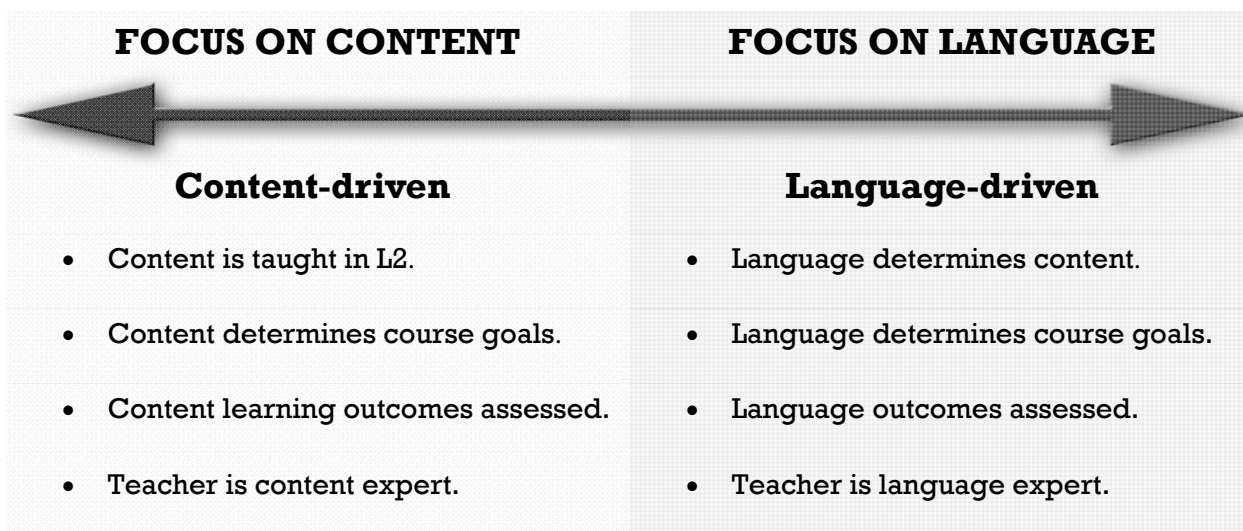
Content in the Language Classroom

Content-based language teaching has become widely accepted as effective pedagogy in language education and draws support from both classroom practice and research (Kasper, 2000; Snow & Brinton, 1997; Stoller, 2004; Stryker & Leaver, 1997; Wesche & Skehan, 2002). Teachers and program developers describe how content in language instruction motivates learners, provides meaningful relevant learning, builds on past experiences and helps learners remember and learn more

Figure 1: Language and content continuum

FOCUS ON CONTENT	FOCUS ON LANGUAGE
Content-driven	**Language-driven**
• Content is taught in L2.	• Language determines content.
• Content determines course goals.	• Language determines course goals.
• Content learning outcomes assessed.	• Language outcomes assessed.
• Teacher is content expert.	• Teacher is language expert.

Adapted from recent work by Zyzik and Polio (2008)

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quickly (Genesee, 1994). Researchers describe how content enriches input, encourages recall (Anderson & Reder, 1979) and supports the development of academic language proficiency (Cummins, 2000). Early research in second language acquisition posits the role of content as providing meaningful input necessary for language acquisition (Krashen & Terrell, 1983). Other research has explored the interdependent relationship between form and meaning in the learning process (Spada, Lightbown & White, 2005; VanPatten, Williams, Rott & Overstreet, 2004).

Premised on this support, a variety of models have been developed and implemented in various educational settings. These models combine language and content by drawing on themes, academic subject matter, and workplace skills and knowledge. They include theme-based community programs, academic courses in colleges and universities, language immersion in Kindergarten to Grade 12 and post-secondary programs, discipline-specific language programs, and workplace communication programs. While they share a fundamental belief in the beneficial role of content in second language instruction, they differ in the degree to which they emphasize content or language. Rather than constituting distinct categories, however, the various models can be seen as placed along a continuum. This continuum is illustrated in Figure 1, adapted from recent work by Zyzik and Polio (2008) who explored the integration of content and language in a program focused on outcomes in both areas. At one end are those programs that are distinctly content-driven. Their purpose is to teach content in the second language. Content determines the course goals and content knowledge is what is evaluated. Ordinarily, in such a case, the class is taught by a teacher who is primarily an expert in the content and the learners in these pro-

grams see the teacher as a source of content knowledge. Both teachers and learners are distinctly focused on content as their common purpose. At the other end of the continuum are programs that use content to learn the language. In such contexts, language determines the course goals and how language proficiency is evaluated. The teacher is ordinarily a language expert with or without knowledge of the content. In such programs, content is provided via material and tasks, rather than the teacher as source, and the learners are more often aware that they are there to learn language with content as a bonus.

Despite the support afforded to content-based language instruction and the variety of models that have been developed, questions remain as to how best to actualize the pedagogical links between content and language. While researchers and teachers describe this relationship as integrated, instruction varies widely with regard to the focus given to content and language. A primarily language-focused program may include content to support meaningful discourse while a primarily content-oriented program may include language instruction to help learners to understand and communicate specific content. Teachers may choose to draw explicit attention to language or focus exclusively on content. In programs more concerned with content the language component may sometimes be neglected as teachers teach content while learners are assumed to be 'picking up' language. When attempting to integrate content and language in content-based

> **"...the challenge lies in drawing attention to language as form, without drawing attention away from the focus on meaning..."**

language classes, the challenge lies in drawing attention to language as form, without drawing attention away from the focus on meaning and disrupting content learning. One attempt to achieve this integration draws on research in form-focused instruction (FFI).

Focus on Form in the Content-Based Classroom

Language form, in this study, refers specifically to grammatical form. Form-focused instruction (FFI) is a term that often refers to the teaching of grammar and has been defined in various ways (Doughty & Williams, 1998; Ellis, 2001; Spada, 1997). Within the context of content-based language teaching, FFI is best defined as "any pedagogical effort which is used to draw the learners' attention to language form either implicitly or explicitly within an overall communicative context" (Spada, 1997, p. 73). In other words, FFI is intended to direct learners' attention to language form without detracting from the meaning of content. While not a teaching strategy in itself, FFI can be implemented via a range of instructional strategies and options. They are familiar to teachers in the classroom and researchers have investigated their relative effectiveness in second and foreign language teaching (Williams, 2005) and in content-based language classrooms (Lyster, 2007). For example, teachers concerned with drawing learners' attention to form in content-based classrooms may choose to focus on language forms to which learners are exposed in the content material (Leow, Egi, Nuevo & Tsai, 2003).

They may also design tasks that elicit the use of particular forms (Pica, 2002), provide corrective feedback on language forms during the lesson (Doughty & Varela, 1998), and plan activities that require learners to focus on both content and form via collaborative dialogues (Swain, 2001).

With regard to language outcomes, research has shown benefits for FFI in a variety of contexts, including content-based language instruction for adults and immersion programs for children (Lyster, 2007; Norris and Ortega, 2000; Spada, 1997). Despite these findings, classroom observation has revealed that a focus on form has not been widely adopted in content-based language programs for adults (Musumeci, 1996; Pica, 2002). While it is not clear why this is the case, the nature of content-based programs may have an influence on both learner and teacher attitudes towards FFI. Adult learners may select a course of study according to the content, which may predispose both learners and teachers to focus more on content over language. Attention to language may be seen as attention drawn away from content. Yet, there have been few empirical studies investigating the effect of FFI on content learning, in particular with adult learners.

Empirical studies investigating content outcomes have had diverse results. VanPatten (1990) investigated learners' ability to focus on both language form and content meaning in a study with adults studying Spanish in a university in the U.S. The participants in this study were asked to listen to a lecture and to pay attention to a particular type of item while they listened: specific content, specific content and vocabulary, or specific content and grammar. When the participants were asked to recall the content, those who had been asked to listen for content and grammar could not recall content as well as those who had focused on content only or on content and vocabulary. The differences were particularly pronounced in the case of learners with lower proficiency.

A partial replication of the VanPatten study found results differed depending on the modality (Wong, 2001). Wong's study had the same findings when the learners listened to a lecture but not when they read a passage for content. In the written mode, comprehension as measured by how much content they could recall was not compromised when learners were asked to pay attention to grammatical form and content at the same time.

Other studies have explored the effect of specific FFI options on content learning. One such option is text enhancement in which learners are asked to read a text in which grammatical forms have been bolded, underlined or enhanced in some other way to direct the learners' attention to the grammar forms. Leow (1997) investigated the effect of text enhancement on content comprehension in a study with adult learners of Spanish. The results showed that text enhancement had no effect on comprehension of content. A later study examined the effect of text enhancement with two different grammatical forms (Leow et al., 2003). The results of this study showed that text enhancement had an effect on the learning of one of the forms but not the other and no effect on content learning. In contrast, Lee (2007) investigated the same FFI option in a program with a group of young adults studying English in Korea and found that text enhancement had a negative effect on comprehension of content as measured by recall but a positive effect on language learning outcomes. According to another study, one with adult learners of French, learners were able to recall more of the information when it was enhanced in the text (Wong, 2003).

Evidently, more research is needed to fully investigate the effect of FFI on content learning in content-based language programs.

Questions remain as to the effect of different FFI options on content learning via different modalities. In addition, the existing research involving adult learners has been carried out predominately in academic programs or in foreign language contexts. There has been little research of this nature carried out in programs preparing adult learners for employment. In the following section, I describe the present study designed to investigate the effect of explicit FFI on language and content learning in a content-based language program preparing adult learners for sector-specific employment.

The Study

Research Questions

   The research questions guiding the study were:

1. What effect does FFI have on language learning, as measured on tests of linguistic accuracy, in a content-based language classroom?
2. What effect does FFI have on content learning in a content-based language classroom?

Program Setting

   This study was carried out in a publicly funded non-credit language program for new-comers to Canada. It was designed to provide sector-specific specialized language training for newcomers preparing for work or further training as childcare providers. At the time of this study, adult learners in this program attended 200 hours of instruction over a 40-week period. When learners registered in the program, their English language proficiency was assessed using a competency-based assessment tool, the Canadian Language Benchmark Placement Test[1] in order to place them in a class at the appropriate level. In addition, each learner was interviewed regarding their professional background and goals to ensure that they were compatible with the program mandate. Learners were placed in one of six classes according to their language proficiency and schedule availability. All the classes were part-time and took place either during the day, two evenings per week, and on Saturdays. Most of the learners attended the evening and Saturday classes for a total of five hours per week.

   The mandate of the program was the development of language skills to support the learners' employment goals as childcare providers. The syllabus and course material had been developed by a course writer who also taught in the program. The syllabus was content-driven and organized by units of occupation-specific content knowledge such as developmental stages of children, behaviour management techniques used in childcare centres, and the how of planning an age-appropriate learning program for children.

1. The Canadian Language Benchmarks Placement Test (CLBPT) is an assessment tool aligned to the Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB), a descriptive scale of communicative proficiency in English as a Second Language expressed as 12 benchmarks. Development and implementation of the CLB is funded by the Government of Canada and managed by the Centre for Canadian Language Benchmarks (see Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000 for more detailed information).

Language was addressed in the course as it emerged from the content. Through the instruction and material, learners were exposed to language connected with (related to) the content. As they participated in classroom activities, they used specific language to access and communicate about the occupation-specific content.

Participants

A total of 36 adult newcomers to Canada participated in the study. They attended one of two content–based language classes taught by the same teacher; 16 learners attended one class and 20 learners attended the other class. The groups consisted of one man and 35 women and were comparable in terms of background. The majority of the learners were between 35 and 50 years old, with college or university education in their countries of origin. The learners in the groups represented a total of 17 different languages. Speakers of Mandarin and Cantonese comprised the largest language group, just under 30 per cent; the second largest group, also almost 30 per cent, consisted of speakers of Bangla, Tamil and Urdu.

The majority of the participants had worked as childcare providers before enrolling in the class but had not had formal training. Just over half of the learners had studied English for over eight years outside of Canada and for less than three years in Canada. Their language proficiency had been assessed as between Benchmarks three and five on the Canadian Language Benchmarks proficiency scale.

The teacher was also a key participant in the study. She brought both language and content expertise to the program. She was a certified childcare provider working in a daycare centre and a qualified language teacher with several years' experience teaching English as a Subsequent Language (ESL) to adults in the program in which the study took place.

Classroom instruction: focus on language form—focus on content meaning

In this study, the adapted instruction took place over 10 weeks of the 40-week program. During this 10-week period, the teacher used the same content-driven syllabus for both classes, organized by subject matter such as knowledge of child development, nutrition, behaviour management and child abuse. One of the two classes, however, received instruction that focused entirely on the content, identified here as meaning-focused (MF), while the other class received instruction which also included an integrated focus on language form, identified here as form-focused (FF). In the FF class, the teacher provided explanations of the same two grammar forms and assigned the learners' tasks, which were designed to direct learners'attention to the grammar. She also corrected the learners when they made errors on two specific grammar forms.

In the MF class, the teacher did not explain grammar or draw attention to grammar in tasks. She was also asked not to correct learners' errors explicitly, but she was permitted to provide implicit corrective feedback, known as recasts. In recasts, the teacher repeats or paraphrases the learner's error and corrects the grammar mistake while maintaining the meaning of the learner's phrase or sentence. For example, if the learner says "*The child is ill yesterday*", the teacher may respond with "*Yes, the child was ill yesterday*" and then continue with the conversation. These aspects of the MF instruction were consistent with the classroom practice self-reported by the teacher. For this reason, recasts were considered ecologically acceptable within the design of this study. In addition, classroom observation studies have shown that this type of response is the most common way in which teachers in content-

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based language classrooms give feedback to learners on their errors.

There is evidence suggesting that this type of feedback frequently goes unnoticed by learners in programs with a strong focus on content (Lyster & Ranta, 1997, Panova & Lyster, 2002). Immediately after the 10 weeks of adapted instruction, the teacher taught both groups using a MF approach. All the lessons for both groups from pre-test to delayed post-test were audio recorded in order to verify how the instruction had been carried out in both classes and to explore any differences that might emerge from the two groups of learners during class.

Table 1 illustrates how one of the lessons was adapted to include a focus on form for the FF class. The activities on the left describe the meaning-focused, content-driven lesson, while the text on the right describes how the lesson was enhanced and adapted to draw learners' attention to form during the lesson.

Figure 2 illustrates how a task was adapted to direct learners' attention to form in the form-focused classroom. The excerpt from a handout on the left was designed for the MF class; the one on the right reflects the adapted version for the FF group.

Target grammatical features

In the FF group, the teacher focused on two specific grammatical forms as the target features for this study: the *simple past* and the *real conditional* (Celce-Murcia & Larsen-Freeman, 1999). These forms were selected primarily on the basis of two criteria: how frequently and naturally they emerged from the content and how appropriate they were to the proficiency level of the learners. For example, the simple past is used when describing acci-

Table 1: Adapted lesson

Meaning-focused lesson	Form-focused adaptations
Display picture of room with hazards and ask learners to identify each danger; e.g. *There's a puddle of water on the floor.* Elicit an example verbally. Ask learners to complete with a partner.	Write the example on the board; elicit and explain the grammar in the sentence.
Review each hazard with the class and ask learners to explain why it is dangerous; e.g. *If the child slips, he might get hurt.* Ask learners to work with a partner and write a warning for each of the dangers.	Ask them to write in full sentences and to make sure the grammar is correct.
Elicit answers verbally and ask for alternate responses where appropriate.	Ask learners to write their answers on the board. Correct errors in grammar with the learners.

Figure 2: Adapted task

Indicators of Child Abuse

What are the indicators of child abuse? Complete the sentence to identify the type of child abuse.

1. If a child is afraid to go home,
_____.

2. If there are bruises on the child's body,
_____.

MF

Indicators of Child Abuse

What are the indicators of child abuse? Complete the sentence to identify the type of child abuse. Follow the example.

Example: If the child is often pale, he might be neglected.

1. If a child is afraid to go home,
_____.

2. If there are bruises on the child's body,
_____.

FF

dents: *The boy fell in the playground and scraped his knee* and the real conditional form emerges from the topic of behaviour management, as follows: *If children fight over a toy, the teacher should remove the toy until they behave.* Selecting frequently occurring forms was intended to maximize the opportunities for FFI throughout the 10 weeks of instruction.

In considering the proficiency level of the learners, the goal was to select forms that were familiar but had not been mastered by the majority of the learners. The teacher in the program drew on her experience with similar learners to suggest that these two forms were suitable for learners at the proficiency range of the classes. The simple past feature was not new to the learners but continued to pose a challenge while some of the learners were aware of the real conditional grammar but not able to produce the structure correctly.

Measuring outcomes: language and content learning

Before participating in language and content measures, the learners were asked to complete a questionnaire that gathered information about their previous education and experience related to childcare, previous language study, length of time in Canada and first language spoken. Following the questionnaire activity, they were asked to complete a set of four tasks designed to assess specific language and content knowledge. Just prior to the 10 weeks of instruction, they completed these tasks as pre-tests. Immediately after the 10 weeks of instruction ended, they completed the same tasks as immediate post-tests, and 10 weeks later the same tasks were administered as delayed post-tests. To reduce disruption for learners and the loss of class time, the tests were carried out over several classes in a period of three weeks.

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Language measures

Language learning was measured in terms of performance on specific tasks. These included speaking tasks that measured learners' ability to use the grammar forms in conversation and written tests to measure their knowledge of the grammar. The tasks were designed to measure the learners' knowledge and ability to use the forms under varying conditions. The task types differ in terms of the degree to which they draw on more spontaneous or more analysed language. For example, the speaking tasks were designed to assess learners' ability to use the language in spontaneous language production while the written tasks were designed to measure learners' conscious knowledge of the language forms. The same versions of all the tests were used as the pre-tests, immediate post-tests and delayed post-tests to allow for direct comparison of the same items over time.

The speaking tasks were designed to elicit the use of each of the target forms in a task-natural context familiar to childminders. Two tasks were included to test the two grammar forms separately. They were completed one-on-one with the researcher and digitally recorded. The past tense task consisted of a series of nine pictures. Each picture showed a child who had had some type of accident. The pictures did not show the accident taking place. They showed the result of the accident, for example a bandaged finger, a broken pencil and a toothbrush floating in a toilet. At the start of the task, the learner was told that the child in the pictures had had a bad day and that the learn-

> **"...the learners were required to pay attention to form but also to process information beyond the sentence level."**

ers' task was to describe what had happened as they were shown the pictures, one at a time.

The task for the real conditional consisted of a picture of a kitchen with a man, two young children and a dog. The picture showed a number of potentially dangerous situations. For example, there was a knife on the edge of the counter, a hot water tap overflowing, and a kettle cord dangling off the counter. There were a total of 10 dangerous situations in the picture. The learner was asked to identify each danger and give a warning. They were given one example from the picture: *If the man stands on the stool, he might fall down.*

The writing tasks consisted of a cloze task and an error correction task (ECT). The cloze task consisted of a 310-word passage from which 15 words were deleted. Of the 15 deletions, five were from sentences using the real conditional and eight were from sentences using the simple past tense. The passage described the work day of a childcare provider in a daycare centre. The learners were asked to complete each deletion by using the verb supplied in parentheses in the base form and were given 10 minutes to complete the passage. To complete this task, the learners were required to pay attention to form but also to process information beyond the sentence level. In this way, the cloze measure was intended to elicit more contextualized use of the target features.

The ECT consisted of 40 sentences which contained one error per sentence. Learners were asked to locate and correct the errors by deleting or adding words or morphemes. This task focused the learner's attention on the

use of the form at sentence level only. As with the cloze task, the ECT included sentences with both of the grammar forms. The learners were given a maximum of 12 minutes to complete the test. Because this type of task was not typical of the activities carried out by learners in this class, it was possible that the task would heighten their awareness of the forms at the start of the instruction and in this way change the treatment of the MF class. In an attempt to mitigate this effect, a number of sentences with errors in grammar forms other than the real conditional and simple past were included and most of the sentences were about children or events common to childcare.

Content knowledge Measures

Content learning was measured by tests that addressed the content of the specific units from which the target grammar items emerged. These units were: behaviour management, safety, and child abuse. The content measures in this study had elements of both types in that they required learners to demonstrate an understanding of course content and also to recall discrete items addressed during instruction. A pre-test was used to establish a baseline of content knowledge. Post-tests consisted of three mid-term tests rather one post-test at the end of the course. The mid-term tests were delivered immediately after the target unit content was completed. For example, one content test was completed after the unit on behaviour management, and another after the unit on child abuse. The pre-test included items from all three target content areas. The tests were developed in consultation with the instructor and the content was based on previous tests that she had given in the same course with other learners. They included multiple-choice, true-false and short–answer questions.

Data Analysis - Next Steps

The primary data collected in the present study consisted of test scores from the language and content measures. As described earlier, these tests were administered as pre-tests, immediately before the specific instruction began; immediate post-tests, immediately after the instruction ended; and as delayed post-tests, 10 weeks later after a period in which both groups received the same type of instruction. Statistical analyses designed to respond directly to the research questions in two ways will be carried out; first, to determine if there was any positive or negative effect of FFI on the outcomes measured; and second, to explore the factors that might have contributed to these results. I will describe some of these analyses in what follows.

To determine the effect of instruction, outcomes from the three sets of tests will be analysed to determine the degree of gain, loss or absence of change. Analysis of pre-test and immediate post-test scores will provide information about how the learners responded to the instruction they received. The delayed post-test analysis will indicate if the effect of instruction was maintained after the instruction period or if change occurred after the instruction ended.

Following this analysis, the findings will be compared across the three different types of language tests: the error correction task, the cloze test and the speaking tasks. These three types of tests make different demands on the learners and as such may actually test different types of language learning and knowledge. For example, the error corrections task is highly structured and may access more explicit language knowledge, whereas the less controlled speaking tasks may provide evidence of less analyzed language knowledge useful in more spontaneous language use.

The outcomes for the two target features will be also compared. As described earlier, the two grammar points, the simple past

and the real conditional, were selected primarily as they intersected appropriately with the content. However, they differ in a number of ways that may influence the degree to which a focus on form is effective, including the complexity of the form and the salience of the form to learners. Additional data will be examined to explore how other variables might have influenced the outcomes. For example, the backgrounds of individual learners will be examined to see if there is any correlation between language background and performance on the measures.

　　　　The final stages of the study described in this paper will be completed in 2009 and the research findings will be submitted for publication. In describing the present study, I hope to encourage others to conduct research in content-based programs which have not been widely adopted as a research context, that is, programs providing employment-based specialized language training for adults. ❖

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THE ROLE OF L1 IN L2 LEARNING AND TEACHING

Writing Across Languages and Cultures in a University Classroom

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Abstract

This paper considers the educational experiences of a group of university students not categorized as ESL but who regularly use a language other than English in a large part of their everyday lives. It raises issues around the role(s) of home, heritage, or first languages for students in a multicultural, multilingual context such as the Greater Toronto Area. The study and the course it examined focused on writing decisions, techniques and strategies used by students in a professional writing program as they crossed linguistic and cultural boundaries in creative non-fiction pieces. Issues of identity(ies) permeated their writing and writing practice. Their responses to this course made visible, to some extent, just how much the "other" language had been silenced and put aside. The study raises questions about the role of literacy in the other language, how it can support English language proficiency as well as contribute to student cognitive development when pursuing academic study and careers.

The topic of the symposium in which an earlier version of this paper was presented was the role of first (L1) and second (L2) language use in language learning or teaching. I address this issue in the context of an ESL classroom, in a "normal" classroom, i.e., a classroom in which all the students are assumed to have no second language problems, a classroom in which all students perform at an acceptable level of language proficiency for university undergraduate students. I propose to question some of the accepted categorizations of who an L2 user is, his or her linguistic history and competencies and the kinds of teaching strategies teachers use with L2 learners. I conceptualize the role of the L1 and its attendant experiences, cultures, values and practices as *mediational means*. I define mediational means, on the basis of Vygotsky's (1978) work, as symbolic or material tools that a person may use to regulate his or her behaviour and cognitive development.

The linguistic reality for many Canadian classrooms today is that of mulitlingualism. Multilingualism is represented not only by the

number of languages spoken by students in classrooms, but also by the way in which the students live their daily lives—in more than one language. This is a function of Canada's immigrant population, particularly in its largest cities. According to the STATSCAN report on the 2006 Canadian census, immigrants now make up 45.7 per cent of the population of Toronto, 39.6 per cent of Vancouver, and 20.6 per cent of Montreal (Statistics Canada, 2006). In the last introductory writing class I taught for a professional writing and communication program, only three of the 35 enrolled students identified themselves as monolingual English speakers. At the university where I teach, this is the norm. In the class from which I drew the writing for this small-scale research project, 16 different linguistic and cultural backgrounds were represented and the six participants in the study came from five distinct linguistic, religious and cultural communities. This reflects the current reality of public school, university and college classrooms in the Greater Toronto Area. However, most students have had to subsume their other language to the dominant one, in this case English. Wolfram (2008), making use of Lippi-Green's (1997) idea of linguistic subordination, pointed this out in his contribution to the 2006 Georgetown University Roundtable.

> The sustained application of descriptive labels such as "correct," "proper," "right," and "grammatical" when speaking of language differences is hardly accidental; it directly reflects the underlying belief that non-mainstream and minority varieties of English are simply unworthy approximations of the standard variety. (p. 189)

These students defy categorization within the traditional dichotomy of native/non-native speaker. Some were the children of immigrants but born and raised in Canada, educated in English and French and speaking the language of their parents at home. One young woman wrote about attending kindergarten and being put in the ESL class because she spoke only Tagalog at home, even though she had been born in Canada. A few of the students had experienced formal instruction in their home or heritage language and had achieved some degree of literacy while others had not. One student had arrived in Canada from Nicaragua at age 4 but happily exchanged her Spanish for English until her father re-taught her to read and write in Spanish at home. Another student endured Saturday school in Cantonese, not taking it as seriously as she now wishes she had. Some students had maintained linguistic and cultural ties through face-to-face and electronic (Facebook, email, online chats, Skype) visits with relatives and friends in the "home" country. One young woman visited her relatives in India regularly, but depended on her mother and aunts to help her with different registers of Hindi. Others have not maintained ties. Some came to Canada as immigrants themselves and completed their education in Canada, initially learning English through ESL classes. One young man traded Korean for English. Another had never become literate in his home language of Tamil because he came into the Canadian education system via a convoluted series of refugee experiences. Some came as immigrants from an English language education outside of Canada. Some of the students could be labelled as trans-nationals—they carry two passports and maintain active lives in both Canada and their other home country. And one or two are "international students" who will return to their home country to pursue careers in their first languages but with their status and workforce

skills enhanced by their English proficiencies. The students present a complex linguistic mosaic that defies efficient institutional categories of support provided in English as a Subsequent Language (ESL) support programs for graduate students, English for Academic Purposes (EAP) courses or English conversation courses for international students.

Students who choose the Professional Writing major or minor understand that writing will be a part of their future either in the communication industry or in further academic studies. Students from the program have gone on to graduate work in journalism, law, medicine, information studies and management. Others have entered public relations, journalism, advertising and other media-related fields. Although the majority of the students in the program are multilingual, their English language proficiency has not been questioned. At the same time, their other languages have not been acknowledged as part of their skill sets. At some point in the drafting and revision process, their writing betrays a "non-nativeness" in a turn of phrase or use of an idiom or preposition, but not consistently nor in any way that interferes with the meaning they attempt to convey or that labels the writer immediately as "non-native" or "L2".

The Professional Writing and Communication (PWC) program teaches creative non-fiction as one of its genres. Students are encouraged to use incidents they have experienced as the basis of the writing they produce for these courses. Given the demographics of the classes, many of the students use experiences that oc-

> **"Although the majority of the students in the program are multilingual, their English language proficiency has not been questioned."**

curred in their other languages. Based on a focus-group discussion and interviews with bilingual student writers, I proposed a course, *Relanguaging: Writing Across Languages and Cultures*, that would explicitly address the challenges of re-creating an experience in one language and culture into English for a Canadian reader. Translation, as a field of inquiry, has increasingly recognized that "They [translators and interpreters] need to move away from being seen as photocopiers and working as human dictionaries to being perceived as visible agents in creating understanding between people" (Katan, 2004, p.30). While the students in the writing program are not studying translation, they are motivated to share their experiences and, through sharing, to garner greater understanding from Canadian readers who do not share their cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

The study presented in this paper was conducted with participants from the first offering of *Relanguaging: Writing Across Languages and Cultures*. Given the opportunity to explicitly acknowledge and use their "other" language in these creative non-fiction pieces, all six participants expressed some degree of relief, pleasure and legitimation of their language and culture in the process of practicing and learning about boundary-crossing writing. I use the term "boundary-crossing" to refer to narratives and reflective essays that take a reader into another language and culture, not as an observer but as a participant. Anzáldua (1990) exemplifies this kind of writing, including the mix of Spanish and English within her work. Such writing acknowl-

edges the writers' multiple linguistic and cultural selves.

In this preliminary study, I am primarily concerned with two intricately intertwined issues: the role(s) of a first or other language in L2 learning and proficiency and re-defining L2 learners to reflect the complex linguistic histories they bring to the classroom. Norton's research (1997, 2000) provides strong evidence for the interdependence of identity and language competencies and subsequent social and economic success. Cummins' (1991) research into the role of the L1 in the development of the L2 provides the theoretical foundations for his advocacy for heritage language and bilingual education. Moll and his colleagues (Moll & Dworin, 1996; Moll, Sáez & Dworin, 2001) in their work with Spanish bilinguals have explored the benefits of supporting biliteracy. The findings from this preliminary study may also hold implications for future research in biliteracy and bilingual or heritage language pedagogy and practice. More work, however, needs to be done to recognize the social and economic contributions these students can make as bilingual and biliterate citizens and to build on the recent work of Ivanic (1998) and Rivera & Huerta-Macias (2008).

The issue of linguistic proficiency, not English proficiency, but proficiency in the home or heritage language, highlights a tension in current language policy and practice in North America. Despite evidence that the development of an L1 can support the development of the L2 (Bialystok, 1991; Cummins, 1991, 2006; Genesee 2008), both popular opinion and public policy support either the use of student's L1 as a transition tool to the exclusive use of English for school or the segregation of school and home languages. In the second case it becomes the responsibility of the family to find ways to maintain and develop the home language. As the growing literature on the "1.5" generation[1] attests, this is not always successful. On the margins of the policy and practice debates, some voices have begun to argue for a more informed debate citing the intellectual, social and economic advantages of supporting "heritage" languages. The 2006 Georgetown Round Table conference was devoted entirely to the consideration of linguistic diversity. The edited volume (King, Schilling-Estes, Fogle, Lou & Soukup, 2008) of research presented at the conference reinforces the policy and pedagogical importance of acknowledging the linguistic resources in classrooms around the world.

Re-languaging: Writing Across Languages and Cultures—An overview

The undergraduate course that I teach, *Re-languaging: Writing Across Languages and Cultures*, runs thirteen weeks and is open to Professional Writing and Communication majors and minors who have a minimum of two writing credits. This course provides an almost ideal context in which to examine how writing mediates student understanding of the role(s) of an L1 and the understanding of the writing process. Two characteristics of this course make this possible. First, the content of the course focuses on student experiences that occurred in the L1. Second, writing is continuously revised during the term, thus producing a series of artefacts

1. The "1.5" generation refers to the children who immigrated. These children are usually literate in their first languages (if they have had the opportunity for schooling) but continue their educations in their second languages. The term was first used in reference to Southeast Asian refugees in the United States (Rumbaut & Ima, 1988).

that provide a glimpse into part of the composing, editing and meaning-making process. During the course, students produce seven pieces of writing: six are narrative and based on their own or another's experiences and one is reflective, submitted as a final portfolio. All seven pieces go through multiple revisions in editing sessions with peers, in class and with the instructor. Class readings, mini-lectures and exercises explicitly address issues of using the "other" language—translation/equivalency, development of adequate context (background cultural information), stereotyping and the use of multiple narrative voices.

As the researcher and the instructor in this course, I work from a socio-cultural perspective. I see writing as a mediating, meaning-making process that produces a product, an artefact, for a particular time and purpose. That artefact becomes simultaneously a mediational means for the writer and reader. In particular, I draw on Vygotsky's (1987) conceptualization of speech, and include writing that states "thought is not merely expressed in words: it comes into existence through them…thought finds its reality and form in language" (p. 218).

Early on in my experience of teaching writing, especially to bilingual students, I understood the process of writing as one of a mediated creation rather than the transference of a completed thought from one brain to paper and from one set of linguistic forms to another. Reading Vygotsky (Rieber & Carton, 1987; Vygotsky, 1986; Vygotsky, 1934, 1978) and Bakhtin

> **"…writing is continuously revised during the term, thus producing a series of artefacts that provide a glimpse into part of the composing, editing and meaning-making process."**

(Bakhtin, 1953/1986; Bakhtin, 1981) reinforced this sociocultural interpretation of the writing experience.

I also draw on Swain's recent work with the concept of *languaging*. Swain (2006, p. 89) defines languaging as the activity of using language to mediate cognitively complex ideas and problem-solving. When students write about an incident for the first time, regardless of what linguistic barriers they cross, they "language" that experience. Translating that experience involves much more than finding the right words in English. The writer must solve cognitively complex problems in the course of re-creating the experience. For this reason, I use the term re-languaging, rather than translation to attempt to capture this complex activity. The writers must make decisions about which details to use, which words, if and when to include words, phrases and sentences in the other language, which syntactic structures to use, what perspective(s) to use, and how to manage transitions between these perspectives when faced with the cognitively complex problems writers must solve.

The activity of learning to write for public perusal in the PWC program requires much more than extensive semantic and syntactic knowledge, knowledge of discipline and genre styles and rhetorical strategies. PWC students learn and practice editing and revision skills. Whole-class editing seminars and smaller editing groups that meet regularly outside of class time are part of every PWC course. Peer editors concentrate on the writing strategies necessary

to produce writing that adheres to the criteria of the program (clear, jargon-free, interesting prose that respects the subject of the writing, readers' intelligence and time) and matches the meaning the writer wants to communicate— meaning that can and often does change as pieces emerge. In the course, students break down the various strategies to use another language in the prose and ways to embed the meaning; transitioning between narrative voices (ontological, public, conceptual and meta-narrative (Baker, 2006); building context/ background information without destroying flow; using juxtapositions; avoiding cultural and linguistic clichés and finding ways to work with linguistic and conceptual equivalencies (Besemeres, 2006; Pavlenko, 2006). Revision plays a major role in all the writing produced for the course. I interpret what happens in these revisions as a complex series of interactions between the artefact the writer creates, his or her emerging meaning of the experience(s), a dialogue with an imagined audience, and the comments of the peer and instructor editors. This potentially creates new meanings for the writer. Simultaneously, the writers create opportunities or affordances that readers may use to construct their own meanings. I use van Lier's (2004) ecological linguistics sense of affordance here.

a) An affordance expresses a relationship between a person and a linguistic expression (a speech act, a speech event [including writing]; it is *action potential*; it is a *relation of possibility*, as Neisser put it.

b) Linguistic affordances are specified in the linguistic expression, and available to the active interlocutor (or addressee) who may pick up one or more of those affor-

dances as they are relevant at the moment.

c) The affordances picked up serve the agent—depending on his or her abilities—to promote further action and lead to higher and more successful levels of interaction. (p. 95)

Using another language within English and building enough context requires both linguistic and writing proficiency. The writing proficiency was addressed in a series of exercises I assigned. For example, students chose a word, phrase or sentence critical to the meaning(s) they wished to create and incorporated the meaning by embedding it in dialogue, through actions, context or repetition. I encouraged them to have editing sessions with readers unfamiliar with their other language and culture so they could judge the effectiveness of their attempts. I also required that they read published writers (e.g. Anzãldua, 1990; Belcher & Conner, 2001; Goto, 1994; Lesser, 2004; Malkami, 2006) to see how they had handled the challenges.

The Research Project

To gain a better understanding of the writing problems student writers face when they write across linguistic and cultural boundaries and how they go about solving those problems, I designed a preliminary research project that would use drafts from writers as the prompts for stimulated recall interviews. While stimulated recall interviews do not provide direct access to the decision making process the writers used, they do provide a way for writers to language their understanding of the writing challenges they perceived and to demonstrate how they solved them, making direct reference to words, sentences, details and organization in their writing.

Because I was teaching the course, ethical considerations prevented me from recruiting participants or conducting the interviews. With the approval of the Ethical Review Office, I relied on an undergraduate research assistant to recruit participants, collect the drafts and Assignment 7, the final reflective essay and to conduct the interviews. In addition to the interview and collection of their work, all participants agreed to publication of all or parts of their work.

As criteria for the interview questions, my research assistant and I used five issues of concern that had emerged from our analysis of an earlier focus group and the interview transcripts. The focus group discussion and interviews had been conducted with eleven multilingual PWC students prior to the introduction of this course to create questions to use with the student writing. The issues that emerged from the focus group were:

1. Language and word choice.
2. Humour.
3. Contextualization.
4. Writer motivation.
5. Concern with audience understanding and perceptions.

The stimulated recall interviews with the six students who had volunteered to participate focused on decisions they had made with regard to the five issues. For example, "How did you decide to include "x" from your first language in the dialogue? How did you attempt to ensure a reader would understand the meaning?" My research assistant recorded and transcribed the interviews. After the course had concluded, I read through the transcripts. Based on our discussions, we agreed on a number of follow-up questions for my research assistant to ask the partici-

pants. Once the data collection was complete, we independently coded one transcript and final reflective essay using the five initial categories. Our initial coding and subsequent discussions refined the categories and their definitions to include linguistic and writing competency, stereotyping, unsolvable problems and identity. Using this new list, we again independently coded a transcript. We achieved 92 per cent inter-coder reliability on our application of the codes. We then proceeded to finish coding the interviews and final reflective essays. We met weekly over a period of about six weeks to discuss our finding and refine the category definitions. Our final categories were:

Linguistic competency–writers' perceived competence in English and the other language(s) of the incident, including literacy in the other language(s).

Writing competency–writers' perceived ability to apply consistently principles of good writing as articulated and practiced in the PWC program.

Stereotyping–writers' concern that readers will form or reinforce positive or negative stereotypes of the linguistic or cultural group represented in the writing.

Humour–writers' frustration with different definitions and appreciations of what is funny.

Decision making–writers' decisions of what to include or exclude based on assumptions about readers, writer's articulated purpose and writing principles.

Approach–writers' way of starting and shaping a piece.

Language–writers' decisions about including language other than English, including script, in the work.

(Continued from page 89)

> **Seemingly unsolvable problems**–writing problems that stymie student writers.
>
> **Identity 1**–writers' chosen identity asserted in the writing.
>
> **Identity 2**–writers' expressed identity that may or may not be included in the narrative writing.

Findings

Most of the reflective pieces echoed the issues we had identified in the interviews, but issues of identity and the role of the other language, including perceived competency and literacy, dominated. Although identity–writer, ethnic, linguistic, or cultural–was never explicitly addressed in the course, it seeped into students' writing deliberations and decisions. Issues of identity pushed up through the talk, as evidenced in the interview transcripts, around rhetorical strategies, sentence construction, transitions between narrative voices, decisions about structure and the amount of contextual information and narrative voice(s). While consideration of issues of identity was not an instructional goal, it emerged as a goal for the writers. The writing activity mediated an understanding and possibly a transformation of students' relationship(s) with their other languages and cultures. I found that writers expressed identities they chose or did not choose to assert in their pieces, depending on what sense of an experience they wanted to express or re-create for readers. Whether or not students claimed a particular ethnic or linguistic identity in their piece was not the issue. The critical issue was that the students had to make that identity decision. This meant that students had to acknowledge, as writers, their choices and their subsequent implications.

For example, the following student felt he had learned to use and not subsume his Korean language and cultural knowledge in his English language academic work:

> I learned more about myself. Even though I'm a bilingual speaker, whenever I write, I always had to force myself to think in English and write in English. I blocked myself from using the Korean language and cultures that could influence my writing to look different from other typical English writings. But I realize having the knowledge of two languages is not a disadvantage when it comes to writing but a huge advantage. (JW, Assignment 7)

For another student, the daughter of Colombian immigrants, her Colombian and Spanish heritage were acknowledged and recognized as she wrote:

> I struggled with my identity as a bilingual writer. I tried to figure out what elements in myself were Colombian, and which were Canadian. At first, I dismissed my Colombian heritage altogether, convinced I was not Hispanic enough, nor aware enough of the culture, to create narratives rooted in Colombia. I doubted my abilities to recreate a foreign world, a world where I was not a native speaker and a world where I did not encounter many of its people.… I discovered that Colombia indeed built my character. (MM Assignment 7)

Yet another student redefined herself as a bilingual, bi-literate student and writer:

> I no longer choose to completely exclude one tongue nor do I choose to let them dominate in their 'own' domains …

Instead I choose to surrender to which ever tongue overwhelms me. It is often my English tongue but even within an English context it is never to the exclusion of my Spanish tongue. …both tongues are always a part of me, and what's more they are both within my power. I have the ability to express myself through different means—different codes. Neither is better. Neither is dominant. Both are mine. (AM, Assignment 7)

In each of the preceding examples, the student chose to embrace and assert his or her cultural and linguistic identity in the writing assignments. A second category of identity appeared when student writers claimed an identity but openly challenged or questioned the values, behaviours or practices associated with the identity. VG claims her Indian identity; however, she also chose in her writing to challenge the class-based relationships she identifies with Indian culture. She did so by deliberately choosing an incident that put her in her aunt's home with a servant close to her own age. VG's own actions, the dialogue of her aunt and the servant, work to allow VG to question the Indian status quo from her Canadian-identity perspective. VG made decisions that showed an example of the type of relationship that exists between servants and their employers in certain places and social classes in India. She also managed to show her own identity as someone uncomfortable with this relationship, even though she also claims an Indian cultural identity. She also showed her Canadian identity in her choice of words in her

> "While consideration of issues of identity was not an instructional goal, it emerged as a goal for the writers."

dialogue. Her own identity, her position(s) in relation to her two cultures, had to be negotiated in the process of making writing decisions about dialogue and contextual details (see narrative in Appendix 1).

I tried to think outside the box, do a ton of research, read about the subject, talk to people to find out different points of view on that issue so that I did not just write from my own perspective… I did try to show the "good" bits of the South Asian cultures…its positives even if I did talk about something negative. I did that "nicely" instead of blatantly and make it stereotypical. [For] example, my servant piece. I could have made it very mean and demeaning towards the servant but I didn't. (VG, stimulated recall interview)

SA challenged accepted or stereotypical portraits of Muslim women. She chose to do this through the juxtaposition of her inner thoughts with the words of the Imam during a prayer recitation during Ramadan. SA used the progression of Arabic words with English translations to Arabic words alone, reflecting her own partial understanding of the words she recited on a regular basis (see *Say a Little Prayer* in Appendix 2). She described this as follows:

This process has given me an avenue to explore who I am and who I want to be on a personal level and also on a public level. Being conscious of it means I can choose to construct whatever I want. For

me, this type of writing raises issues of the meaning of ethnicity and other labels and the role they play in writing. Why do I have to write about myself and what I know? By bringing in language that is not necessarily common to my readers, I separate myself from them or offer them a window to look through. (SA, stimulated recall interview)

SA's use of Koranic Arabic and the decisions to include the translation at first but not later reflect her own relationship with the language of her religious practice. Her reader experiences this. She asserts identities as a dutiful member of her family and as a questioner. Her details chip at the stereotypes of Muslim practices.

The course did more than give students permission to include snippets of their other language in their writing as representative tokens of their culture and language. By first acknowledging that the majority of the students lived in more than one language, and then charging students to use that other-language experience as a resource for the content of their writing, the other language and the experience were given official recognition and, I believe, legitimation, in an academic setting. While this appeared to have a profound impact on the issue of identity, this alone was not enough to effect any kind of transformation. The writing and revision mediated the changes. In Swain's (2006) terms, the students had to language the re-creation of these narratives as pieces of public writing.

Seeking solutions to writing problems was the mediating activity. One problem that required attention was the inclusion of context or background information. In other PWC courses, writers are taught to cut unnecessary detail. But for these pieces writers had to con-

sider what and how much background information to provide for readers unfamiliar with the language and practices they were reading about. Editing discussions considered how much a reader needed to know in order to experience the incident from the writer's perspective. A number of writing problems emerged. First came the decisions of how much and what kind of information to include. Next, came decisions about different techniques writers could use to include the information. Along with the decisions about techniques came careful consideration of the structure of the pieces, including the flow and the texture of the narrative. Students came into the class with a well-established narrative style that emphasized a first-person perspective, active verbs, dialogue, and detail written for an audience of their peers. Class discussions and editing sessions deliberated the challenge of bringing readers from a familiar to an unfamiliar place without losing them, scaring them, reinforcing their prejudgments or destroying the flow of the narrative. For example, in one in-class editing seminar, students pointed out that the description of a school ground did not give sufficient detail to set the school in India. The writer added details about the colour of the dusty ground, the trees and flowers around the school and the vehicles lined up outside the gate in order to clearly differentiate it from a Canadian school. The details, however, were embedded in the action of the student entering the school so as not to impede flow of the story.

These discussions forced writers to consider which details to include. In turn, this required the writers to recognize those aspects of their other language and culture they assumed to be common knowledge but would be unfamiliar or invisible to their readers. VG described her understanding of this process as follows,

I think starting with the familiar to unfamiliar became like a ladder…it was one step at a time from someplace they [readers] knew a little bit about to some place unfamiliar. It built on until they reached the top where they could look back and put all the pieces together. (VG, interview)

The editing discussions mediated not only the writing but the students' understanding of their own cultures and languages as evidenced in the reflections of three students, JW, MM and AM, quoted above. SA, as she struggled to present an incident where she attended a concert, expressed her realization of the limits of her own understanding of poetic Urdu in her story. She used her constant whispered questions to her aunt, "What does that mean?" rather than providing a translation of the songs. By doing so she focused the readers' attention on her incomplete knowledge of a language she used daily.

Related to the issue of creating context was the issue of stereotypes. Students talked and fretted about stereotypes. They struggled with the idea that many stereotypes seemed based in behaviours and habits they had experienced or observed in their cultures, e.g. Italian accents, loud voices, Indian curries, and suburban minivans. Writers were faced with a conundrum: by using these habits and behaviours in their writing, they feared they would reinforce the stereotypes, but without these details their writing would lack power and immediacy. Again, it was the editing sessions that mediated their understanding of the concept of stereotyping and offered possible solutions. The students realized that they could escape stereotypes with details, but they had to choose the details they used carefully; to do so, they individualized the detail:

For example, in my Mid-Autumn festival piece, I didn't want the reader to think that every Chinese family honours their ancestor during the festival. Most families probably don't. I had to create the context that my family (specifically) does it. (ML, interview)

CI chose to use her father's Italian nose, but she connected it to her family with a reference to the same bump on her grandfather's nose and her own. The stereotypes were no longer associated with a group, but carefully connected to individuals.

Implications

The course syllabus explicitly established two goals: creating incident-based, non-fiction writing that would flow and hold readers' attention, and fostering writing that respected the "sense" in a Vygotskian (1986) meaning of the language and culture in which the original incident had taken place and had been experienced. Many other goals emerged in the languaging and re-languaging process. Some were specific to writing techniques; e.g., embedding meaning in the dialog or action or providing "background" information without interrupting the flow of the story. Others were personal: one student confronted his limited Tamil literacy, another began reading more in Urdu, and another student included her Spanish biliteracy on her resumé and graduate school application. Together with their increased writing proficiency, these students will likely carry with them into their future positions an ability not only to see and appreciate other perspectives but to make those perspectives available to general readers in anything they may write. Students gained an understanding of the nature of language and language variations beyond "correct-incorrect" and the ability to use all of that language in their own writing. Wolfram

(2008) pointed out the need for this when he wrote:

> Popular literary venues for the presentation of language diversity hold great potential, although the process of writing for such audiences is a formidable challenge that requires writing skills quite different from those typically exhibited by linguists. (p. 200)

I see two related tasks in writing pedagogy and research. Both involve developing the re-conceptualization of writing as something that is at once an artefact and a mediating activity. This is not a new idea, but one that has perhaps been reduced to the use of a variety of writing activities to engage or help students master content and discipline-specific forms of communication. Lester and his colleagues (2005) cited both Emig and Berthoff in their argument to understand writing and composing as a means through which students form concepts, make meanings and come to understand their worlds. This seems to restate the concept of writing as a mediational means for meaning-making.

More attention should be paid to the act of writing itself as a meaning-making activity. Developing theoretical and practical understanding of the dynamic, meaning-making interactivity in which writers (and their editors) participate in co-constructing meaning can inform understanding of the learning process as well as literacy for both mono- and multi-lingual learners. I believe in the need to research writing as a mediating activity in addition to the procedures students use to produce writing assignments. Some have begun this work, but it presents methodological challenges.

The research question that arises involves an in-depth exploration of the relationship between students' literacy proficiency in their L1 and their English writing proficiency in this context. I am interested in the interplay between the two literacies and how that supports (or not) writing development. At the same time such an exploration must consider how writing supports linguistic development.

Given the complex linguistic histories of students I see in my classrooms, L1/L2 categories and their accompanying support services are no longer always helpful. Perhaps the native/non-native categories need to be nuanced to reflect more clearly the experiences and needs of current student experiences. New categories demand different support services and pedagogies. One of the biggest changes is in the role of the L1: how it is developed and maintained; if and how literacy is developed and maintained seem to be key. However, the answers, or at least the directions to take, require further research that does not depend on the dichotomy of native and non-native speakers, or even L1 and L2.

Related to pedagogical practice is an understanding of writing as a mediating activity that could mean re-drawing the balance between the technicalities of genre-based instruction and recognition of how the act of writing mediates not just the meaning on the page, but also the experience and meanings for the writer. Such re-conceptualization makes me rethink what resources are necessary when developing writing assignments–the linguistic and cultural resources–not just writing clinics, dictionaries and on-line grammar checkers. Writers from programs need to know how to step outside themselves, how to use linguistic and cultural detail and not to assume that everyone experiences the world as they do. I can begin by acknowledging linguistic and cultural diversity and encouraging and teaching students to use their own linguistic and cultural experiences and identities in their classroom and professional writing.

Conclusion

As a result of this research, I have examples of some of the ways in which writing mediates writers' awareness of the role(s) their L1s play in their own identities and their understanding of their powers and responsibilities as writers when presenting readers with experiences outside the readers' normal cultural and linguistic worlds. The results also show the intricate relationship of identity and language for bilingual writers, suggesting possibilities for further research. As noted earlier, other researchers have argued these claims for subsequent language learners in elementary school or as adult language learners; however, once an individual reaches prescribed measures of proficiency, his or her L1 (and all the resources it entails) is no longer given any consideration. The writers who participated in this study expressed satisfaction with being able to explicitly draw on their other languages in an English context. But, this was only one course for these students. For me, the question becomes how I can conceptualize and design better courses to support and encourage bilingual and biliterate development. ❖

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Appendix 1

"Make a parantha for her and for me get some toast with Bikaneri Bhujia, and a cup of tea. Aur haan do it quickly, I have to go to work. Get me some water too."

Sunita listens attentively and nods her head then leaves. I ask Mausi,

"She has a cell phone?"

Mausi chuckles. "Everyone in India has a mobile. They're so common and cheap these days. These kaam-waali's talk to each other on the phone and gossip about people they work for. Everyone in India has a mobile now, it's not a luxury. No one wants to talk on the land line."

"Wow, that's cool. In Canada, cell phones are expensive! Should I go help her?"

"No, no, you sit and relax. She'll manage. She's used to it." Mausi reassures and folds and chucks the newspaper on the wicker table.

"I'm just going to go get some water. Do you want some?" I ask.

"Wait, let me call Sunita."

"No, Mausi. It's okay…I'll get it." I say getting up from the mooda.

"Okay."

I walk over to the kitchen. A strong smell of food sweeps over me. A couple of tube lights on the damp wall light the small kitchen. An exhaust fan on the wall spins. A steel dish rack hangs over the sink and houses steel plates, bowls, glasses, and spoons. On the kitchen's long wall is the granite counter top. A counter stove, mixer, rice cooker and other appliances occupy the space. Sunita rolls the parantha on the counter with a rolling pin and cooks it on a tava, a flat pan. She looks at me and asks, "Do you need something?"

I reach for a glass on the rack. "Just some water."

"Oh you should have told me." Sunita leaps towards me to snatch the glass. "Gimme the glass, I'll get water for you," she says grabbing a cold bottle of water from the fridge.

"No, it's okay."

"No, it's okay." She uncaps the bottle and extends her arm.

I hand the steel glass to Sunita. She fills the glass, flips the parantha, and hands the glass to me. She smiles and then lowers her eyes.

"Thanks."

"You just let me know if you need something. Your parantha will be ready soon."

"Okay, thanks."

Sunita grows red. "No, don't say thank you, Didi. Don't embarrass me."

I stare blankly. "Ok." I press my lips. Mausi comes in. "Kya ho raha hai? What's going on? Nasha tayar hai? Is the breakfast ready?"

"Bus, only, 5 minutes."

I walk out of the kitchen. Mausi and I sit at the dining table in the open area outside the kitchen. "Let her do her work. If you talk to her too much, yeh sir par chadtein hain, they get spoiled," Mausi whispers. ❖

Appendix 2: Say a Little Prayer

During Ramadan, Mama, Abu, Ami, Ali and I attend the Musjid on McLaughlin Road for iftar, the breaking of the fast. The Musjid looks like a Church because it used to be one. Carpet has replaced the wooden pews. The stage for the preacher is unused except by the children who run up and down the stairs while their parents pray.

The five of us sit around a folding table in the large dining hall next to the prayer area. Plastic plates with samosa, pakoras, chutney and dates rest on tabletops. Another table holds bottles of pop and Styrofoam cups.

"It's time," I say and pop a date in my mouth. It tastes sweeter then honey. My throat is dry after nine hours without water.

The people around us break their fasts with the food. The closing verse of the adhan, the call to prayer, bounces off the high ceilings and speeds people away from their plates to the prayer area

Allahu akbar

La ilaha illallah

[Allah is the greatest

Allah is the greatest

There is no god above Allah]

The double doors to the prayer area have a bottleneck effect. A confusion of shoes and boots spreads out from the door, slowing the exit. Carpet stretches across the hall. Wooden dividers, like a fence, divide the room horizontally. The women move behind the barrier. The men stand in rows in front. I join the line, next to Mama. Ami sits to pray in a chair against the back wall. I make my niyyat: Three rakats for Mughrib prayer, for Allah. I raise my hands and fold them over my chest.

The imam starts the prayer, "Allahu Akbar."

I whisper the words,

"Subhaana ala humma wa bihamdika
wa tabaara kasmuka wa ta'aalaa jadduka
wa laa ilaaha ghairuk
A'uudhu billaahi minash shaitaan ar-Rajeem"

Why do women have to pray behind a barrier? Oh right, I might tempt someone into sin. What happened to being responsible for your own actions? I wish there wasn't such a big difference between theory and practice. 1400 years of practice won't change overnight.

The imam recites Surah Fatiha:

Bismillaah ar-Rahman ar-Raheem

I hope they have biryani. Not that yucky grey curry. And noodles. I really hope they have noodles.

Al hamdu lillaahi rabbil 'alameen

Focus. Focus. Look at a spot and recite.

Ar-Rahman ar-Raheem

What is the matter with me? I need to focus. Look at a spot. Focus on that spot. Listen to the words. Focus on the sounds.

Maaliki yaumid Deen
Iyyaaka na'abudu wa iy yaaka nasta'een

Ihdinas siraatal mustaqeem
Siraatal ladheena an 'amta' alaihim
Ghairil maghduubi' alaihim waladaaleen
Aameen

One of these days, I'm going to have to sit down and learn the meaning of this prayer. I can't believe, I've been doing this since I was ten or eleven and still don't know what it means by heart. How can I say something so many times and not know what it means? ❖

—Rumbaut, R. G. and K. Ima (1988). "The adaptation of Southeast Asian refugee youth. A comparative study" Final report to the Office of Resettlement. San Diego, San Diego State University: 215.

STANDARDIZED TESTS: STATE OF THE ART

A Theoretical and Empirical Evaluation of the Quality of Rating Scales in Standardized Tests of English as a Subsequent Language Writing

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Abstract

      After a long history of reliance on indirect tests, most standardized assessments of second-language (L2) writing now include a direct test of writing in the form of one or several writing tasks. This newer form of assessment, however, raises important challenges; chief among them is the issue of how to standardize the rating process in order to enhance the stability, and hence the validity, of test scores. One strategy to address this challenge is the use of rating scales to standardize the evaluation criteria and processes that raters employ. In this paper, I discuss two types of rating scales, holistic and analytic, used to organize the evaluation criteria and guide raters in standardized L2 writing tests. I first define the two types in terms of scoring methods and assumptions and discuss theoretical evidence about their reliability and validity. I then present findings from a recent study I conducted to compare the effects of these two types of rating scales on L2 essay scores and rater performance. The paper concludes with several implications for L2 writing assessment practice and research.

After a long history of reliance on indirect measures of writing, such as multiple-choice tests, most standardized second language (L2) tests currently include a direct test of writing in the form of one or several writing tasks. This newer form of assessment, however, raises important challenges; chief among them is the issue of how to standardize the rating process in order to enhance the stability, and hence the validity, of writing test scores. Two strategies, rater-training and rating scales, are widely used to address this challenge. In this paper I focus on rating scales. Specifically, I discuss two types of scales, holistic and analytic, used in organizing the evaluation criteria and guiding raters in standardized tests of L2 writing.

Historical Context

      Williamson (1993) provides a brief account of the history of methods for assessing

first-language (L1) writing, while Hamp-Lyons (1990, 1991a) provides a similar account for L2 writing assessment. Both accounts indicate that, after a long history of relying mainly on direct methods of writing assessment in the form of "essay tests", the 1950s and 1960s were dominated by the use of indirect forms of writing assessment, mainly in the form of multiple-choice tests. This shift to multiple-choice questions (MCQ) was primarily a response to the subjectivity and variability that characterized the judgment of writing samples. MCQs were deemed objective and, as a result, were assumed to provide consistent estimates of test-takers' writing ability (Williamson, 1993). However, as Hamp-Lyons (1991a) noted, the increasing emphasis in the 1970s on language as communication and the developments in task-based learning and assessment in the 1980s led to a general dissatisfaction with MCQ tests and to a call for "tests that would combine stable judgments with meaningful judgments; that is, reliability with validity" (p. 7). As a result, direct tests of writing were introduced in many large-scale, standardized tests in the early 1980s. ELTS (English Language Testing System, now IELTS), for example, introduced a direct test of writing in 1980, while TOEFL (Test of English as a Foreign Language) introduced the TWE (Test of Written English), an optional writing test, in 1986. Currently, direct tests of writing, often in the form of timed impromptu essays, have become the most widely used method for assessing L2 writing (Hamp-Lyons, 1990, 2003; Weigle, 2002).

> "This shift to multiple-choice questions (MCQ) was primarily a response to the subjectivity and variability that characterized the judgment of writing samples."

Following Hamp-Lyons (1991a), Weigle (2002) listed seven main characteristics of essay tests that distinguish them from indirect tests of writing, such as MCQ tests:

1. Test-takers must write at least one piece of continuous text;
2. Test-takers are provided with a set of instructions (a prompt) but have considerable freedom as to how to respond;
3. Texts are written in a limited time frame (e.g., 30 minutes);
4. The writing topic is unknown to the test-takers in advance;
5. Each text is read by at least one, and normally two or more, trained raters;
6. Judgments of text quality are based on a common set of criteria in the form of a rating scale and/or sample responses; and
7. Judgments are expressed as numbers, rather than, or in addition to, verbal descriptions.

These characteristics often lead to variability in essay test scores. For example, test-takers may obtain different scores depending on who marks their essays and when. The measurement and composition communities adopt different perspectives on this variability.

Perspectives on Variability, Standardization, Reliability, and Validity

Traditionally, the measurement community considered variability in judgment of writ-

(Continued from page 101)

ing quality as "measurement error" that lowers the reliability (i.e., consistency) and, hence, the validity of essay test scores[1] (e.g., Coffman, 1971; DeGruijter, 1980; Diederich, 1974; Pilliner, 1968). DeGruijter (1980), for instance, maintained that although differences in rater opinion are legitimate, from a measurement point of view they become error, which is to be suppressed when rating students' writing performance. The main strategy to address this threat to validity is the standardization of test rating procedures and processes by [2]:

1. Selecting essay raters with the same or similar backgrounds.
2. Using a standard rating scale and model essays to direct all raters to look for the same aspects of writing and qualities in test-takers' papers.
3. 'Calibrating', 'normalizing' or 'standardizing' raters through rater training.
4. Concealing from the rater the identity of the test-taker whose answer is being rated.
5. Encouraging raters to read quickly to avoid 'second thoughts' which may result in divergence and bias.
6. Grading papers question by question rather than test-taker by test-taker.
7. Obtaining independent ratings of each paper by at least two raters, with a third rater adjudicating in cases of discrepancy.
8. Monitoring the raters periodically during the evaluation to check their consistency in applying the rating criteria.
9. Retraining or dismissing those raters who differ.

These procedures aim to reduce the subjectivity and variability that characterize judgments of writing quality and to obtain "objective," "accurate" and "consistent" estimates of test-takers' "true"[3] writing abilities that are not affected by whom, when and where the essays are written and evaluated (Coffman, 1971; DeGruijter, 1980; Wood, 1991). This in turn is assumed to enhance the consistency, and hence, the validity and fairness of judgments of writing quality, since "if a [test] is reliable, it is *fair* to writers" (Cooper & Odell, 1977, p. xi; see also Henning, 1987)

Composition teachers and researchers adopt a different perspective on variability in judgments of writing quality (Broad, 2003; Huot, 2002; Moss, 1994, 1996). Generally, they tend to see this variability as a natural part of the read-

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1. Reliability refers to the consistency of test scores across test forms, tasks, raters, occasions, and other characteristics of the assessment context. Validity is traditionally defined as referring to whether or not a test measures what it purports to measure. Reliability is a necessary but not sufficient condition for validity (e.g., Henning, 1987).
2. List adapted from Coffman (1971), Ebel & Frisbie (1986), Henning (1987), Jacobs et al. (1981), Underhill (1982), and Wood (1991).
3. In Classical Test Theory, it is assumed that every observed score is made up of two components, a "true" score and some degree of "error."

ing and evaluation processes. In addition, writing quality is seen as the outcome of the interaction between a reader and a text in a particular context, rather than as a fixed property of the text that can be recognized and quantified objectively (e.g., Broad, 2003; Huot, 2002; Moss, 1994, 1996). From this perspective, standardization practices that emphasize rapid reading, uniformity, and the production of reliable scores, ignore context, simplify the reading and evaluation processes, remove the diversity of opinions and interpretations that characterizes authentic reading, and force raters to ignore their experiences and expertise (Broad, 2003; Charney, 1984; Huot, 1990, 2002). Charney (1984), for example, cautioned that inter-rater reliability may be possible only when raters agree on superficial aspects of the text that lack construct validity such as sentence-level mechanics, while Johnston (1989) warned that the search for objectivity and reliability through standardization is not only futile, but may be destructive, because the personal commitment of both writer and reader crucial for good communication is contradictory to an objective approach. The result of standardization, composition educators have argued, is that valid or "true reading" and judgment of a text are sacrificed for "reliable" ones (Huot, 1990, p. 211; Broad, 2003; Charney, 1984; Huot, 2002; Moss, 1994, 1996; Williamson, 1993).

Although the differences between the two perspectives on variability in the judgment of writing quality are far from being resolved, both agree that there is a need for more research to identify the sources of variability in writing assessment and to understand the role and effects of standardization strategies, such as rater training and rating scales, on scores and rater performance. This paper focuses on the roles and effects of rating scales in the writing assessment process.

Theoretical Evidence: Definitions and Assumptions of Rating Scales

Davies et al. (1999) defined a rating scale as "a scale for the description of language proficiency consisting of a series of constructed levels against which a language learner's performance is judged" (p. 153). The rating scale is an important aspect of the rating context because it specifies what raters should look for in a written performance and will ultimately influence the validity of the inferences and the fairness of the decisions that we make about learners, teachers, and programs based on writing test scores (Weigle, 2002).[4]

In this paper I focus on two types of rating scales: holistic and analytic. These are the most widely used types of rating scales in both classroom and large-scale, standardized assessments of L2 writing (Hamp-Lyons, 1991b; Weigle, 2002). For example, *TOEFL, MELAB* and *CanTEST* employ holistic rating scales, while *IELTS* uses an analytic rating scale. The two types of scales differ in terms of scoring methods and assumptions (Goulden, 1992, 1994; Weigle, 2002). In terms of scoring method, in analytic scoring raters assign *sub-scores* to individual writing traits or dimensions (e.g. language, content, organization) and they may then sum those sub-scores to arrive at an overall score. In holistic scoring, raters may also consider indi-

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4. The focus in this paper is on the use of rating scales, rather than on their development. Readers interested in scale development are referred to Turner and Upshur (2002) and Upshur and Turner (1995).

vidual elements of writing but choose *one* score to reflect the overall quality of the paper (Goulden, 1992, 1994).

The two scales differ in terms of assumptions about writing components and development as well. Holistic scoring assumes that there is one, general, writing ability and that all writing sub-skills develop simultaneously, at the same rate, and to the same degree. Analytic scoring, on the other hand, assumes that writing ability can be divided into several components or sub-skills and that these sub-skills can develop at different times and rates and to different degrees in the same individual (Weigle, 2002). The two scales differ also in terms of assumptions about the relationships between the parts and whole of the writing product being assessed. Analytic scoring assumes that by evaluating the various writing components, the rater has evaluated the whole and that "the sum of the sub-scores for the parts is exactly equal to a valid score for the whole." Holistic scoring, by contrast, is "based on the assumption that the product is a whole entity and should be judged as such since the whole is not equal to the sum of the parts." Rather, "the whole is equal to the parts and their relationships" (Goulden, 1992, p. 265).

The differences, in terms of method and assumptions, between holistic and analytic rating scales have important implications for the reliability and validity of writing assessment

> "Holistic scores tend to correlate with surface features such as essay length, suggesting lower construct validity for this method."

results. Goulden (1994), for instance, argued that because analytic scales "limit the traits that a rater may consider to just those on the instrument and also control the amount of weight or importance the rater can give to a trait", they are likely to improve inter- and intra-rater reliabilities (p. 74). Holistic scales, by contrast, allow raters to include traits not listed in the scale and to "use personal judgment to determine how important a specific trait is to the overall score" (p. 74), which can reduce score consistency across and within raters. However, Goulden (1994) also pointed out that in analytic scoring, some important criteria or aspects of writing that may affect the overall quality of the essay may be absent from the scale, which may lower the validity of the assessment. Holistic scoring, in contrast, could include all relevant aspects since "raters can adjust the overall score to accommodate any aspects" of writing. The result of this flexibility, however, is that each rater can produce "an idiosyncratic set of supplemental traits different from those written in the basic guide" (p. 74), leading to raters moving away from the criteria originally designed to define what is being assessed.

Other authors have also pointed out several advantages and limitations of each type of rating scale (e.g., Hamp-Lyons, 1991b; Weigle, 2002; Wood, 1991). Weigle (2002), for example, identified the following advantages and limitations of the two types of rating scales. First, in terms of reliability, analytic scoring is believed to facilitate inter-rater and score reliability. Second, holistic scores tend to correlate with surface features such as essay length, suggesting lower construct validity for this method.

But holistic reading and scoring are better in terms of practicality and authenticity because they are fast, represent a more natural process, and reflect the total impression of a composition as a whole text. In terms of impact, holistic scoring may mask the fact that a learner has different levels of proficiency in different aspects of L2 writing. Analytic scoring is weak in terms of practicality and authenticity because it is time-consuming and isolates text features from context, but it provides teachers and learners with feedback and diagnostic information for placement and instruction purposes. Another problem with analytic scoring is the risk that raters may be unable to distinguish between rating categories, thereby assigning similar scores on many or all of the analytic criteria regardless of variations in performance across the categories (i.e., halo effect).

It should be noted here that the discussion above assumes that the two types of rating scales include exactly the same evaluation criteria, wording, number of levels, and descriptors, but are organized differently. Of course, variation in any of these aspects of the rating scale is likely to have an impact on the assessment results. This paper does not examine these aspects of the rating scale, however.

Empirical Evidence: The Current Study

To date, few studies have empirically compared holistic and analytic rating scales (Barkaoui, 2007). The findings of these studies are mixed. To address this research gap, I recently conducted a study to compare the performance of novice and experienced raters when using holistic and analytic rating scales to assess ESL essays. The study included 31 novice and 29 experienced raters, who each rated a random sample of 24 essays (out of 180 ESL essays) with both types of rating scales. Since stan-

dardized tests employ only experienced raters, in this paper I focus on the performance of the 29 experienced raters in the main study (for more details see Barkaoui, 2008).

Raters

All the 29 experienced raters who participated in this study were graduate students and/or ESL instructors who had been teaching and rating ESL writing for at least five years, had an MA or MEd degree, and had received specific training in assessment and ESL essay rating. They all rated themselves as being competent or expert raters. They were recruited from various ESL programs at universities in southern Ontario. They varied in terms of their gender (19 females and 10 males), age (between 30 and 60 years), and L1 backgrounds, but all were native or highly proficient non-native speakers of English.

Essays

The essays (obtained from an international ESL test, $n = 180$) included in the study were written in response to two comparable prompts under real exam conditions. Each essay had already been rated by two independent experienced raters employed by the institution that organized the international test. The original ratings classified the essays into three levels of ESL writing proficiency but these classifications were concealed from the raters in this study.

Rating Scales

The holistic and analytic scales used in the study were adopted from Hamp-Lyons (1991b). The two scales were developed specifically for assessing ESL students' writing ability at the university level and have been used in several studies and have typically achieved acceptable levels of validity and reliability (e.g., Hamp-Lyons & Henning, 1991). The two scales

included the same evaluation criteria, wording and number of proficiency levels (nine), which allowed for controlling the possible effects of these three aspects of the rating scale on essay rating processes and scores. The scales differed in terms of one aspect only: whereas the emphasis in the holistic scale is on evaluating the essay as a whole, the analytic scale instructs raters to rate each essay in terms of five criteria: Communicative Quality, Organization, Argumentation, Linguistic Accuracy, and Linguistic Appropriacy (see Hamp-Lyons, 1991b).

Data Collection Procedures

Each participant attended an initial individual training session about one rating scale and then rated a random sample of 24 essays at home. Essays were randomly selected and assigned to raters. To ensure counter-balancing, I randomly assigned half the participants in each group to start with holistic rating and the other half to start with analytic rating. All the ratings were done individually, at the participant's home. A random sub-sample of raters rated some of the essays while thinking aloud into a tape recorder. In addition, all raters were interviewed about their rating processes and reactions to the first rating scale. The same process (i.e., individual training, rating, and interview) was repeated with the second rating scale for each participant. Each participant rated the same batch of 24 essays but in a different random order of essays and prompts with each rating scale.

Data Analysis

I used a multi-faceted Rasch model (MFRM), as operationalized by the computer program *FACETS* (Linacre, 2007), to analyze and compare the scores assigned by the participants in terms of estimates of test-taker writing ability, rater severity, and inter- and intra-rater reliabil-

ities. MFRM is a measurement model based on the assumption that an observed score is a function of the interactions between test-taker writing ability, rater severity, prompt difficulty, and scale level difficulty. *FACETS* uses the ratings that raters award to essays to provide estimates of test-taker ability from high to low, prompt difficulty from most to least difficult, and rater severity from most severe to most lenient. *FACETS* also provides information on inter- and intra-rater reliabilities (McNamara, 1996). Correlational analyses were also conducted to examine relationships between the holistic and analytic scores the participants assigned to the same essays (see Barkaoui, 2008 for more details).

Key Findings

Test-taker Ability Estimates

There was a high correlation ($r=.85$) between the two sets of estimates of writing ability, indicating that the two methods can be seen as measuring the same construct. This is not surprising given that the two scales include the same criteria and wording and were originally developed to assess the same construct. However, there were several differences between the two methods. First, analytic scoring resulted in greater precision in estimating test-taker writing abilities as indicated by a smaller model standard error for this method ($M= .21$) than for holistic scoring ($M= .53$). This seems to be the case because analytic scoring generated more scores (or information) per test-taker than did the holistic procedure. Second, analytic scoring distinguished more statistically distinct levels of test-taker writing abilities (7) than the holistic scale (4). This means that analytic rating was more sensitive to differences among L2 writing samples.

Third, the analytic scale resulted in a higher reliability of separation indicating that

the same ordering of test-takers would be more likely to obtain with this method than with the holistic method if the test-takers were to take another test measuring the same ability. Finally, with holistic scoring raters tended to assign similar scores to test-takers regardless of differences in test-takers' writing abilities.

Overall, these results suggest that analytic rating is:

(a) More sensitive to differences among L2 writing samples.

(b) More "appropriate" for measuring the writing abilities of L2 learners because,

(c) This method generates more scores/information per test-taker and because,

(d) It takes into consideration the variability in the proficiency of test-takers in different aspects of writing (i.e., uneven profiles).

Rater Severity

Overall, the participants were significantly more severe when rating the essays holistically than when rating them with the analytic method (Wilcoxon Signed-Ranks test: Z=-2.66, p= .01, effect size= .49).

Inter-rater Agreement

Score analyses indicated that the raters attained higher levels of inter-rater agreement with holistic scoring than with analytic scoring. For example, separation statistics, which group raters into different groups based on their level of severity, indicated that the 29 raters could be grouped into nine distinct levels of severity for analytic scoring, but only five levels for holistic scoring. The analytic method, thus, seems to

have resulted in differences between raters in their judgments of the same essays.

Rater Self-Consistency

Rater self-consistency (or intra-rater reliability) refers to the rater's ability to use the rating scale consistently and to maintain their personal level of severity across essays. This is usually examined through the fit of the ratings to the expectations of the measurement model. Overall, the analytic method led to a higher proportion of raters with acceptable fit (i.e., acceptable self-consistency). The holistic method, by contrast, resulted in more raters with overfit (i.e., unusual self-consistency). This may be the case because raters tended to assign similar holistic scores to test-takers regardless of differences in their proficiency levels.

Other Relevant Findings

Correlation analyses of essay scores indicated that the raters gave more importance to communicative quality and linguistic accuracy when evaluating the essays holistically. The raters did not give much weight to linguistic appropriacy and organization in their holistic rating of the essays. In addition, both interview data and correlation analyses indicated that different raters gave different weightings to the different aspects of writing when rating the essays holistically, with some raters giving more importance to communicative quality and others giving more importance to linguistic accuracy. The participants also reported that they preferred and felt more confident in their ratings with the analytic method because this method does not require the rater to decide on a single score when an essay displayed different levels of proficiency on different writing dimensions. Several participants, however, reported that they had difficulty distinguishing between the rating dimensions in the analytic scale (e.g., linguistic

accuracy and appropriacy). Finally, correlations between analytic rating criteria tended to increase as essay proficiency increases. That is, essays at higher levels of proficiency tended to attain high scores on all criteria on the analytic scale, while essays at lower levels of proficiency exhibited different levels of proficiency in different aspects of writing.

Summary and Discussion

Both methods measure the same construct, but because it provided more information (i.e., multiple scores) for each test-taker, the analytic method allowed greater precision of measurement and finer distinctions among test-takers in terms of writing ability. Furthermore, test-taker writing ability was more appropriately measured by this method, perhaps because the test-takers had different levels of proficiency in different areas of writing (i.e., uneven profiles) that could not be captured in a single holistic score (cf., Weigle, 2002). Analytic scoring seems to have allowed raters to reflect the variability in the proficiency of the test-takers in different aspects of writing. This seems to be particularly true for low-proficiency essays. High-proficiency essays are likely to exhibit relatively even performance in the different aspects of L2 writing and, as a result, can be appropriately assessed holistically.

> "Analytic scoring not only allowed raters to reflect the variability in the writing performance of the test-takers, but also revealed the diversity of opinions and values…"

There are several issues with the validity of holistic scoring in L2 writing assessment. First, not all aspects of writing included in the scale seem to have been considered in rating the essays holistically. Second, different raters weighed different criteria differently when rating holistically. Although raters may apply the rating criteria in the analytic scale differently, this method seems to counter some of the problems with holistic scoring outlined above, particularly that of assigning different weights to different rating criteria (cf. Goulden, 1994).

Holistic scoring resulted in a higher level of *inter*-rater agreement. I expected that analytic scoring would result in higher inter-rater agreement because it focuses raters' attention on the same aspects of writing, thus reducing differences between raters in terms of their assessment criteria (Goulden, 1994; Song & Caruso, 1996). Instead, this method seems to have highlighted differences *between* raters in their judgments of the same essays (cf. O'Laughlin, 1994). Holistic scoring, by contrast, seems to support inter-rater agreement. One explanation for this finding is that, because it provides more observations (i.e., scores) for each rater, analytic scoring not only allowed raters to reflect the variability in the writing performance of the test-takers, but also revealed the diversity of opinions and values that the raters brought to the rating task. In addition, as Lumley (2005) argued, raters might agree in terms of their overall or holistic assessments of essays, but disagree on the reasons for assigning these scores, that is, the quality of the specific aspects of writing on the analytic scale. Finally, the same rater may assign the same ho-

listic score to different essays for different reasons. The overfit (i.e., over consistency) of holistic ratings supports this explanation.

Analytic rating seems to improve rater self-consistency (or *intra*-rater reliability). This might be because analytic scoring imposes greater constraints on raters. In other words, it limits the criteria used for evaluating the essays to those in the rating scale *and* eliminates or reduces the need to weigh rating criteria to arrive at an overall score (Goulden, 1994). These are two major sources of variability within and between raters. Analytic scoring seems to have focused the raters' attention on the same rating criteria across essays, thus reducing variability *within* raters (i.e., across essays). By contrast, with holistic scoring, the rating criteria that raters focused on and/or the importance they gave to different criteria might have varied across essays and rating occasions, which resulted in low self-consistency with this method. In addition, when rating essays holistically, raters tended to assign similar scores regardless of differences in ability across essays. This might be because these raters based their holistic assessments on a limited set of criteria that the test-takers did (or did not) perform successfully, such as linguistic accuracy.

Generally, raters tend to be less severe with analytic scoring. This may be because this method separates assessment criteria, so that weaknesses in any one area (e.g., linguistic accuracy) did not influence the overall assessment of an essay, as seems to be the case with holistic scoring. In addition, analytic scoring resulted in higher levels of confidence in ratings and, although it took more time, the participants generally preferred this method because it does not require the rater to decide on a single score when an essay displays different levels of proficiency on different writing dimensions. Holistic

scoring, by contrast, often leads to conflicting criteria, thus, making the rating task more complex.

Implications

The present study indicates that both scoring methods measured the same construct, but holistic scoring resulted in higher inter-rater reliability. From a traditional perspective this is an advantage for holistic scoring; but inter-rater reliability is not a sufficient condition for an accurate and valid assessment of writing quality (O'Laughlin, 1994), particularly given the limitations of holistic scoring outlined above. Analytic scoring has several advantages; it allows ratings to reflect variability in writers' profiles in terms of the various writing traits, reduces the number of conflicts raters face in their scoring decisions (cf. Lumley, 2005), and, as a result, improves rater self-consistency. Rater training should improve inter-rater reliability for this method.

The findings of this study suggest that the two types of rating scales might be useful for different contexts, assessment purposes and test-taker populations. First, in classroom assessment, where only one teacher is usually involved in the evaluation of students' writing, analytic scoring can ensure consistency across students and writing samples. This method also provides detailed feedback to teachers and students. In large-scale assessment, where the emphasis is on inter-rater agreement (Wolfe, 2006), holistic scoring seems appropriate; in addition, this method takes less time. Second, if fine distinctions between performances are required, as in placement or diagnostic assessment, analytic scoring should be the method of choice (cf. Hamp-Lyons, 1991b). On the other hand, if the goal of the assessment is to group students just into a few levels such as pass or fail in an exit or certification test, holistic scoring can be used. Third, if the target population of the test consists

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of beginner and intermediate L2 learners, analytic scoring could be used; holistic scoring can be used to assess advanced L2 writers without risking the masking of uneven profiles. Of course, decisions about which rating scale to employ should be based on all the factors discussed above as well as other relevant factors in the assessment context. Whichever scale is used, it is crucial to discuss the rating criteria extensively within a scoring group, establish anchor papers, and provide raters with careful training to enhance the quality of assessment results (Weigle, 1994).

Limitations and Future Research

As with any research, there were limitations to the present study. I discuss five main limitations and use them to point out areas for further research. First, the participants were not involved in selecting or developing the rating criteria and scales used in the study. Involving raters in the development and selection of rating criteria and scales is common practice in many assessment systems and is crucial for ensuring that raters understand and apply the criteria as intended and consistently. This was not the approach adopted in the current study. As a result, several participants reported that they did not like the rating scales and criteria and/or ignored some of these criteria (e.g., linguistic appropriacy) when rating the essays. Rating scales developed with input from raters would lead to different results.

Second, raters in this study were trained individually and for a short period of time on each scoring method. As a result, several raters were unable to use the scales consistently and/or to distinguish the rating criteria. Future studies could examine (a) whether group training has different effects on rater performance with different types of rating scales and (b)

whether and how it mediates the effects of rating scales identified in this study. Third, the two rating scales used in this study are only two of the scales available; other scales might lead to different results. Future research needs to compare rating scales that differ in terms of wording, rating criteria, and number of score levels.

Fourth, this study did not consider the impact of different types of rating scales on L2 learning and teaching, an important aspect of validity. Future studies could examine the consequences and impact of using different rating scales on L2 learning, motivation, and teaching.

Fifth, the current study was experimental and decontextualized. Although raters were provided with a detailed description of the test-takers as well as the test and its purpose, some of the motivation and institutional norms that appear in rating for a real test may have been lacking. In addition, there were no real consequences for test-takers and raters for low reliability, which limits the generalizability of the findings to real-test contexts. The study needs to be replicated with different rating scales, raters from different backgrounds, and in different contexts.

Finally, there is a need for more research on the development and validation of rating scales that can be used with alternative approaches to assessing L2 writing performance (e.g., portfolio, self-assessment, group-assessment) and that are more compatible with current views of written communication as a joint, situated, and "interactive, as well as a cognitive, endeavor" (Hyland, 2002, p. 34; Broad, 2003; Hamp-Lyons & Condon, 2000; Huot, 2002; Weigle, 2002). Developing and evaluating such scales is a major challenge that requires the concerted efforts of measurement and composition researchers and practitioners. ❖

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STANDARDIZED TESTS: STATE OF THE ART

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages as a Language Framework for Canada: Why, What, How?[1]

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Abstract

    At present, there is no common, comprehensive and coherent system for describing language proficiency in Canada. A common framework of reference for languages can provide Canadians with an objective system for:

1. *Defining language proficiency at identified levels of communicative competence on a continuum across languages and contexts.*
2. *Comparing individual progress in language performance along a continuum (rather than against the language performance of others).*
3. *Measuring learner progress at each stage of learning and on a lifelong basis.*

    Such a framework could also serve as a point of reference for language teaching and assessment without imposing a particular curriculum, teaching methodology or standard for achievement. Finally, a common framework could provide a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions across Canada and beyond into the international arena.

This article will begin by positing a number of criteria for evaluating the validity of a language framework, based on a review of the literature on language frameworks. These criteria will then be used to assess the validity of a number

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1. This paper is adapted from Vandergrift (2006)

of frameworks available in the public domain and their suitability for use in a Canadian context. The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), by no means perfect, emerged as the framework that best responds to the posited criteria. This analysis will be followed by a brief overview of the CEFR and a justification for retaining it as the framework of choice, as well as some limitations of this framework. The paper will conclude with an update on the current status of the proposal to adopt the CEFR in Canada and an overview of some of the initiatives underway across the country.

Choosing a valid framework for languages

Criteria for appraising the validity of language frameworks

A number of language frameworks exist in the public domain. How does one evaluate their strengths and weaknesses? Based on a review of the literature on language frameworks, the following criteria appear warranted to determine the validity of a framework for a particular context. First of all, a language framework should be theoretically grounded (Brindley, 2001; North, 1997) as this is necessary to ensure the construct validity of a framework. The descriptors of the framework should faithfully reflect the construct of communicative competence (or other theory of language learning) that they are purported to describe and measure. Second, a framework should be empirically validated (Brindley, 1991; North, 2000). The descriptor levels of the framework must be grounded in a theory of measurement and empirically validated for a number of languages, without making reference to native speaker per-

formance or the perceptions of native speakers. Third, a framework should have face validity, in that the descriptors make sense to those who will need to use them; i.e., they should be congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners (Brindley, 2001). Finally, in order for a framework to serve its purposes well, it should reflect contextual validity, in that it meets the particular needs of the context where it will be used. More specifically, a contextually valid framework for Canada should be:

- Transparent and user-friendly; i.e., accessible to learners and teachers (North, 2000; Hudson, 2005) in order to be understood by Canadian learners for the purposes of self-assessment.

- Context-free but context-relevant (North, 2000; 2006) in order to accommodate different curricula for learners of different ages and learners with different goals.

- Comprehensive, 'specifying as full a range of language, knowledge, skills and use as possible' (Council of Europe, 2001, p. 7) so that jurisdictions can describe their objectives by referring to the framework.

- Flexible and open (North, 2000) enough so that different jurisdictions can relate their own frameworks and descriptor levels to the larger framework (North, 2000; 2006), thereby providing a bridge between formal education systems, employers and cultural institutions.

- Sufficiently discriminating of levels at the lower end of the framework to register progress in language proficiency (Liskin-Gasparro, 1984;

North, 2000) in order to motivate learners in academic contexts.[2]

Assessing the frameworks

The following frameworks, available in the public domain, were examined for their potential as a language framework and their suitability for use in a Canadian context. They were chosen for closer scrutiny because of their currency, either in Canada or internationally. These frameworks are analyzed and described in greater detail in Appendix B in Vandergrift (2006).

Interagency Language Roundtable (ILR) Scale (Interagency Language Roundtable, 2009)

The ILR scale, developed by the United States Foreign Service Institute, describes language proficiency on a scale from 0 to 5 ('no functional proficiency' to 'educated native speaker'). The ILR serves as the common yardstick in all US government agencies to verify language performance for job purposes. It is less suitable for academic learning environments, however. In order to sustain student motivation, the lower end of the scale would need to be subdivided extensively to accommodate and describe small increments in proficiency.

American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL) Proficiency Guidelines (Breiner-Sanders, Lowe, Miles & Swender, 2000; Liskin-Gasparro, 2003)

The ACTFL proficiency guidelines were developed to expand the lower end of the ILR scale and make it more applicable to language learners in traditional academic contexts. While these guidelines have strong intuitive appeal, the sequencing of scale descriptors across proficiency levels makes assumptions about stages in second language development that may not be justified, thereby jeopardizing their validity. These guidelines are also less suitable in a Canadian context because they are tied to a specific test (Oral Proficiency Interview).

Public Service Commission of Canada (PSC) Second Official Language Proficiency Levels (Public Service Commission, 2005)

The PSC language proficiency levels describe the general language skills required to accomplish the duties and responsibilities related to positions within the Canadian public service classified as bilingual, on a continuum from A (lowest) to C (highest). There is also an E or exempt level. Given their focus on work contexts, the PSC levels are less comprehensive and would require adaptation for school contexts.

Canadian Language Benchmarks (CLB) (Pawlikowska-Smith, 2000)

The CLB, developed by Citizenship and Immigration Canada, serve as a framework of reference for learning, teaching, programming and assessing of adult English as a Subsequent Language in community colleges and the professions in Canada. Although the CLB do contain some can-do statements, they were created for adult immigrants who are developing language skills for entry into the Canadian workforce. As

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2.   For a more in-depth discussion of these criteria see Vandergrift (2006).

such, they are less suitable to academic contexts without significant adaptation, particularly at the higher levels.

The Common European Framework of Reference for Languages

What is the CEFR?

The Common European Framework (CEFR) has been developed from more than 30 years of work on language teaching, learning and assessment by the Council of Europe as a common basis for defining language proficiency among their member countries (Council of Europe, 2001). The CEFR defines levels of language proficiency along three broad levels of language performance: Basic, Independent and Proficient.

Table 1 is the most succinct scale of descriptors, describing the different levels of proficiency in a holistic manner. Table 2 in Appendix 1 presents the major categories of language use by skill strand (listening, reading, etc.) at each of the six levels. These level descriptors express language performance in terms of 'can do' statements. In addition to serving as reference points for purposes of evaluation and curriculum planning, the level descriptors can be used by learners to determine their level of language competence by skill strand.

In addition to the global scales, the CEFR also offers a vast number of highly detailed scales on many different dimensions of language use along the six levels. Separate scales exist for each skill strand (with separate speaking scales for spoken production and spoken interaction) along with more detailed scales for micro-functions within a skill strand. For example, in listening comprehension, scales emerged for genre; e.g., understanding conversations, listening as part of a live audience, listening to announcements, listening to recordings. In the case of a broader scale such as strategic competence, scales emerged by type of strategy use; e.g., planning, compensating, monitoring and repair.

How the CEFR responds to the posited criteria

Earlier, the criteria for a valid framework of reference for languages were identified. The following discussion demonstrates how the CEFR responds to these criteria, making it the framework most suitable to the Canadian context.

Theoretically grounded

The CEFR is grounded in a theory of language competence and language use (Bachman & Palmer, 1996) which is clearly reflected in the descriptors and the numerous individual scales. This provides the provinces and territories, and other interested stakeholders, with a common understanding of what it means to communicate in another language and a common terminology to describe progress towards functional proficiency.

Empirically validated

The CEFR proficiency scales have been empirically defined and ranked, using both a qualitative methodology and sophisticated statistical analyses. This was done for a number of different languages (North, 2006), providing jurisdictions with a valid framework for the range of languages taught.

Face validity

The CEFR proficiency scales have a high degree of face validity because they are congruent with teachers' perceptions and experiences with language learners. Teachers

Table 1: CEFR Levels: Global Scale

Proficient User	**C2**	Can understand with ease virtually everything heard or read. Can summarize information from different spoken and written sources, reconstructing arguments and accounts in a coherent presentation. Can express him/herself spontaneously, very fluently and precisely, differentiating finer shades of meaning even in more complex situations.
	C1	Can understand a wide range of demanding, longer texts, and recognize implicit meaning. Can express him/herself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. Can use language flexibly and effectively for social, academic and professional purposes. Can produce clear, well-structured, detailed text on complex subjects, showing controlled use of organizational patterns, connectors and cohesive devices.
Independent User	**B2**	Can understand the main ideas of complex text on both concrete and abstract topics, including technical discussions in his/her field of specialization. Can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible without strain for either party. Can produce clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects and explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.
	B1	Can understand the main points of clear standard input on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. Can deal with most situations likely to arise while travelling in an area where the language is spoken. Can produce simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. Can describe experiences and events, dreams, hopes and ambitions and briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans.
Basic User	**A2**	Can understand sentences and frequently used expressions related to areas of most immediate relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local geography, employment). Can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar and routine matters. Can describe in simple terms aspects of his/her background, immediate environment and matters in areas of immediate need.
	A1	Can understand and use familiar everyday expressions and very basic phrases aimed at the satisfaction of needs of a concrete type. Can introduce him/herself and others and can ask and answer questions about personal details such as where he/she lives, people he/she knows and things he/she has. Can interact in a simple way provided the other person talks slowly and clearly and is prepared to help.

(Continued from page 116)

played a seminal role in the validation process, followed by empirical validation. Initial feedback from teachers in Canada confirms that the CEFR level descriptors are meaningful representations of the language performance of their students.

Transparent and user-friendly

The CEFR level descriptors are designed to be accessible and meaningful both to language teachers and to learners. Each descriptor is worded positively in terms of what the speaker can do (even at early stages of language learning) and makes no comparison with levels above or below it, making the framework free from internal contradictions. Given that all descriptors can be answered with a 'yes' or a 'no,' they are ideally suited for self-assessment. A transparent, user-friendly framework will facilitate the ability of learners at all age levels to self-assess language proficiency.

Context-free but context-relevant

In order to accommodate the range of situations which learners in different contexts might face, the CEFR descriptors are not tied to a particular task or communication theme. At the same time, these descriptors do reflect the realities of language use at different levels of proficiency (as verified in the validation process), making them relevant in different contexts. This characteristic of the CEFR provides greater flexibility for accommodating different curricula for a range of jurisdictions and age levels.

Comprehensive

The CEFR is comprehensive because it was created to accommodate the needs and interests of the 46 member states of the Council of Europe. The framework describes a full range of language knowledge, skills and use through a series of reference points (levels) against which other jurisdictions can calibrate their own framework and descriptor levels.

Flexible and open

The CEFR was designed to accommodate the diverse needs of its member states and yet allow for reference to a common system; therefore, it is adaptable for use in different circumstances and capable of further extension and refinement. This openness and flexibility makes the CEFR an attractive option for Canada, because it can easily accommodate the needs and pedagogic cultures of the different provinces and territories, as well as other jurisdictions.

Sufficiently discriminating for levels at the lower end of the framework

The CEFR does not respond effectively to this criterion because it fails to adequately differentiate at the Basic levels to chart progress for beginning-level language learners. Language learners may become discouraged and abandon language learning if they do not see visible evidence of progress on the proficiency scale. However, the branching approach advocated by the CEFR offers flexibility to different jurisdictions and learning contexts to subdivide levels to chart progress and still make reference to the common system.[3]

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3. Finland has developed and empirically validated a scale for use in schools that further subdivides the lower levels.

Some limitations of the CEFR

While the CEFR enjoys wide scale acceptance as a common framework "shared by language professionals across linguistic and cultural barriers" (North, 2006, p. 26), it is not without criticism in Europe. Fulcher (2004a) suggests that, given the integral role of teacher rankings in the development of the CEFR, what is being scaled is not necessarily learner proficiency, but 'teachers' perception of that proficiency.' In response, North (1997) argues that the descriptors were validated in different languages with 'surprisingly similar results.' Furthermore, Fulcher (2004b) highlights the danger that comes with the institutionalization of a commonly accepted framework. After working with a framework over time, he argues, teachers may begin to believe, incorrectly, that the levels represent an acquisitional hierarchy; i.e., the descriptors and levels represent the actual order in which language is acquired. In the same vein, Alderson (2007) and Hulstijn (2007) argue that empirical data from language learners is needed to demonstrate the validity of the scales and the movement of a learner through scales over time. North (2007), on the other hand, argues that, while desirable, language acquisition research is not able to demonstrate how language proficiency develops, making it difficult to confirm any acquisitional order.

Other current challenges for the CEFR include the need for descriptors for young language learners, descriptors for content-based language learning and implementation of the framework, beyond the scales, 'to bring curricula, pedagogy and assessment into fruitful interaction with one another' (Little, 2007, p. 652). In spite of the challenges, particularly for clarity of some of the descriptors for test construction (see Weir, 2005, for example), work on the CEFR in Europe continues. To respond perfectly to all the posited criteria is 'a tall order' (North, 2007, p. 658); however, the CEFR is 'the least arbitrary sequence of scaled proficiency descriptors available to us at the moment' (Weir, 2005, p. 282) and can provide Canadians with a common framework and metalanguage for describing language proficiency that has international currency. As Byrnes (2007) concludes in her 'Perspectives' introduction, there is much to admire and appreciate in the work accomplished in Europe so far, on which we can build.

Mediating the CEFR to the language learner

The CEFR becomes meaningful to the language learner through its assessment tools. Two examples are the European Language Portfolio (ELP) to track and document learner progress, and standardized examinations to attest to a learner's language proficiency for accreditation purposes. The ELP model includes:

(a) A language passport summarizing language experiences and qualifications referenced against the CEFR.

(b) A language biography describing experiences in each language, designed to guide learners to plan, to reflect on their learning and to assess progress toward their goals.

(c) A dossier containing a selection of work that best represents the learner's proficiency (Council of Europe, 2000; Little, 2002, 2007).

In addition to this common core, the model can be tailored to meet the needs of a particular country (or jurisdiction within that country) or a particular age level. The CEFR levels are integral to the use of the ELP and it is through the ELP that the CEFR has had the strongest impact on language classrooms (Little,

2007). The level descriptors in Table 2 form the basis for self-assessment in the passport component, and then serve as the point of reference for goal-setting and further self-assessment of the biography component.

The CEFR served as the theoretical framework for DIALANG (Alderson & Huhta, 2005), web-based diagnostic tests for 14 different European languages at all six CEFR levels. Other standardized proficiency tests such as the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* (DELF scolaire, 2009) referenced against the CEFR can provide language learners with internationally recognized diplomas for post-secondary study and employment purposes. See Cummins (2007) for a list of tests for English, French, German and Spanish, all referenced against the CEFR.

Current status of the CEFR in Canada

A proposal to explore the applicability of the CEFR as a common framework for Canada was approved by the Council of Ministers of Education in Canada (CMEC) in September 2006. While working group discussions continue, the potential of the CEFR to inform learners, teachers and policy makers led the CMEC to announce that they are:

> …currently reviewing the applicability of the CEFR in the Canadian context. Given the potential for a common framework for languages to inform learners, teachers, policy makers, and others on a variety of matters related to language learning, Canadian jurisdictions may refer to the CEFR when undertaking activities related to language learning. As jurisdictions make policy decisions related to language learning or complete activities related to a common framework, CMEC will provide links to the relevant jurisdictional public Web sites. (Council of Ministers of Education in Canada, 2008)

Some jurisdictions are beginning to expand the basic CEFR levels by developing more fine-grained level descriptors using 'can-do' statements based on outcomes from their curriculum documents. Expanding the A levels into further sub-levels, as advocated by the CEFR, offers flexibility to accommodate different language programs and still make reference to a common benchmark. It is at these finer sub-levels that the CEFR and the ELP can take on local character without losing the benefit of linking back to a common system that has national and international currency. The CEFR is well suited to helping all Canadians track progress in language learning across learning contexts and attest to proficiency targets that have been attained.

Momentum for adopting the CEFR in Canada is building. Pilot portfolio projects are moving ahead in many provinces; some jurisdictions are experimenting with international language tests and diplomas; others are beginning to calibrate their framework with the CEFR to determine equivalencies. The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT) recently hosted symposia in three cities on the use of the CEFR and the ELP and is planning further information sessions across Canada in 2009. In Ontario, the Ministry of Education is developing a model of developmental continua for language assessment, consistent with the CEFR, to help set benchmarks and targets for English language learners. (E. Coelho, personal communication, November 11, 2008). On a national level, consultation with industry and business is beginning, so that the language skills of Canada's workforce, particularly youth, can be used to build stronger economic links with international partners and acknowledged, using a framework that has international currency (Roadmap, 2008). Use of the CEFR for curriculum design in Canada has not yet been ex-

plored; however, based on the European experience, the potential is strong. In a recent survey, 26 out of 29 responding COE member states suggested that the CEFR was 'useful' or 'rather' useful for planning and developing curricula (Martyniuk & Noijons, 2007).

The CEFR best responds to the criteria for a valid framework of reference for languages and addresses the particular needs of the Canadian context, in spite of its limitations. It is based on a long history of research and use in Europe and is available for use in other countries. The CEFR has the potential to provide different jurisdictions with a common tool for documenting and tracking progress in language learning that would have currency in Canada and beyond into the international arena. ❖

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Appendix 1: Table 2: CEFR Levels: Self-assessment Grid

		A1	A2	B1	B2	C1	C2
UNDERSTANDING	**Listening**	I can recognize familiar words and very basic phrases concerning myself, my family and immediate concrete surroundings when people speak slowly and clearly.	I can understand phrases and the highest frequency vocabulary related to areas of most immediate personal relevance (e.g. very basic personal and family information, shopping, local area, employment). I can catch the main point in short, clear, simple messages and announcements.	I can understand the main points of clear standard speech on familiar matters regularly encountered in work, school, leisure, etc. I can understand the main point of many radio or TV programs on current affairs or topics of personal or professional interest when the delivery is relatively slow and clear.	I can understand extended speech and lectures and follow even complex lines of argument provided the topic is reasonably familiar. I can understand most TV news and current affairs programs. I can understand the majority of films in standard dialect.	I can understand extended speech even when it is not clearly structured and when relationships are only implied and not signalled explicitly. I can understand television programs and films without too much effort.	I have no difficulty in understanding any kind of spoken language, whether live or broadcast, even when delivered at fast native speed, provided I have some time to get familiar with the accent.
	Reading	I can understand familiar names, words and very simple sentences, for example on notices and posters or in catalogues.	I can read very short, simple texts. I can find specific, predictable information in simple everyday material such as advertisements, prospectuses, menus and timetables and I can understand short simple personal letters.	I can understand texts that consist mainly of high frequency everyday or job-related language. I can understand the description of events, feelings and wishes in personal letters.	I can read articles and reports concerned with contemporary problems in which the writers adopt particular attitudes or viewpoints. I can understand contemporary literary prose.	I can understand long and complex factual and literary texts, appreciating distinctions of style. I can understand specialized articles and longer technical instructions, even when they do not relate to my field.	I can read with ease virtually all forms of the written language, including abstract, structurally or linguistically complex texts such as manuals, specialised articles and literary works.
SPEAKING	**Spoken Interaction**	I can interact in a simple way provided the other person is prepared to repeat or rephrase things at a slower rate of speech and help me formulate what I'm trying to say. I can ask and answer simple questions in areas of immediate need or on very familiar topics.	I can communicate in simple and routine tasks requiring a simple and direct exchange of information on familiar topics and activities. I can handle very short social exchanges, even though I can't usually understand enough to keep the conversation going myself.	I can deal with most situations likely to arise whilst travelling in an area where the language is spoken. I can enter unprepared into conversation on topics that are familiar, of personal interest or pertinent to everyday life (e.g. family, hobbies, work, travel and current events).	I can interact with a degree of fluency and spontaneity that makes regular interaction with native speakers quite possible. I can take an active part in discussion in familiar contexts, accounting for and sustaining my views.	I can express myself fluently and spontaneously without much obvious searching for expressions. I can use language flexibly and effectively for social and professional purposes. I can formulate ideas and opinions with precision and relate my contribution skilfully to those of other speakers.	I can take part effortlessly in any conversation or discussion and have a good familiarity with idiomatic expressions and colloquialisms. I can express myself fluently and convey finer shades of meaning precisely. If I do have a problem I can backtrack and restructure around the difficulty so smoothly that other people are hardly aware of it.
	Spoken Production	I can use simple phrases and sentences to describe where I live and people I know.	I can use a series of phrases and sentences to describe in simple terms my family and other people, living conditions, my educational background and my present or most recent job.	I can connect phrases in a simple way in order to describe experiences and events, my dreams, hopes and ambitions. I can briefly give reasons and explanations for opinions and plans. I can narrate a story or relate the plot of a book or film and describe my reactions.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions on a wide range of subjects related to my field of interest. I can explain a viewpoint on a topical issue giving the advantages and disadvantages of various options.	I can present clear, detailed descriptions of complex subjects integrating sub-themes, developing particular points and rounding off with an appropriate conclusion.	I can present a clear, smoothly-flowing description or argument in a style appropriate to the context and with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points.
WRITING	**Writing**	I can write a short, simple postcard, for example sending holiday greetings. I can fill in forms with personal details, for example entering my name, nationality and address on a hotel registration form.	I can write short, simple notes and messages relating to matters in areas of immediate needs. I can write a very simple personal letter, for example thanking someone for something.	I can write simple connected text on topics which are familiar or of personal interest. I can write personal letters describing experiences and impressions.	I can write clear, detailed text on a wide range of subjects related to my interests. I can write an essay or report, passing on information or giving reasons in support of or against a particular point of view. I can write letters highlighting the personal significance of events and experiences.	I can express myself in clear, well-structured text, expressing points of view at some length. I can write about complex subjects in a letter, an essay or a report, underlining what I consider to be the salient issues. I can select style appropriate to the reader in mind.	I can write clear, smoothly-flowing text in an appropriate style. I can write complex letters, reports or articles which present a case with an effective logical structure which helps the recipient to notice and remember significant points. I can write summaries and reviews of professional or literary works.