

# The suitability of core French for recently arrived adolescent immigrants to Canada

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Recently arrived English as a second language (ESL) students were compared to their unilingual and multilingual Canadian-born peers on measures of French proficiency. All of the participants were enrolled in secondary core French (CF)—the ESL students were studying introductory French, whereas the Canadian-born students were in Grade 9 CF, their sixth year of French study. French proficiency was measured using a multi-skills test consisting of a multiple choice listening test, three reading tasks, two writing tasks, a dictation and three oral tasks. The ESL group outperformed the other groups in both the reading and listening test components and in one of the writing tasks. They also outperformed the unilingual group on one section of the speaking test and the multilingual group on another section of the speaking component. There were no significant differences found among the groups for the other test components: the dictation, the second writing section or the final speaking component.

Notre recherche a comparé, sur le plan de leur compétence en français, les élèves nouveaux arrivants dont l'anglais est la langue seconde (ALS) avec leurs pairs unilingues et multilingues nés au Canada. Tous les participants suivaient des cours de français de base (FB) de niveau secondaire — les élèves ALS étudiaient le français élémentaire alors que ceux nés au Canada étaient en FB de neuvième année, c'est-à-dire leur sixième année d'étude du français. La compétence en français a été mesurée au moyen d'un examen multi-compétences consistant en un test d'écoute à choix multiple, trois tâches de lecture, deux tâches d'écriture, une dictée et trois tâches de production orale. Les résultats du groupe ALS ont été supérieurs à ceux des autres groupes dans les volets d'écoute et de lecture et dans l'une des tâches d'écriture. Leurs résultats ont également dépassé ceux du groupe unilingue pour une partie du test de production orale et ceux du groupe multilingue pour une autre partie du volet de production orale. Aucune différence significative n'a été observée entre les groupes dans les autres volets du test : la dictée, la seconde partie de la production écrite et le dernier volet de la production orale.

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### **Introduction**

Is secondary core French (CF) a suitable area of study for recently arrived ESL adolescent immigrants? Canadian language policy suggests not, as does present practice. The study described in this paper, however, provides evidence that CF may not only be a suitable area of study but one that could be advantageous to students, administrators, parents and policy makers alike.

### **National context**

In addition to the increase in immigration to Canada (Statistics Canada, 2001), the greater diversity in country of origin of today's immigrants has also transformed the demographics in Canada's urban areas. This diversity has also brought students with varied linguistic backgrounds to our schools and our society. Indeed, the proportion of immigrants whose first language (L1) is neither French nor English is approximately 24%. On the one hand, this linguistic diversity can bring challenges. The Commissioner of Official Languages, for example, identified immigration as a challenge to official language duality in her 2002 report. On the other hand, learning French could provide ESL youth an opportunity to meet with academic success as they build upon their prior language learning abilities and thus contribute to one of *The Next Act's* (Canada Privy Council 2003) policy's goals to "double the proportion of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge in their second official language" (p. 27). Given the high number of immigrants, one might assume that in order to reach that goal immigrants would need to be included in the study of both official languages. Yet national and provincial policies tend to limit the study of French as a second language (FSL) to Anglophones (Canada, Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, 1967; Canada, Multiculturalism Act, 1985).

### **Provincial context**

Although Canadian language policy is created federally, second language instruction policy and implementation are the responsibility of the provincial governments. In Ontario, the province in which this study was conducted, the study of FSL is obligatory from Grades 4 to 9. However, Ontario, the province with the highest proportion of immigrants in Canada, has no provincially created curriculum for introductory FSL at the secondary level which would be crucial for ESL students with no previous exposure to FSL. The Ontario Ministry of Education also has policies that allow ESL students to be excluded from participating in the CF program, which is obligatory in principle for all students (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1994, 1999).

## Theory

Whereas Sharwood Smith (1994, p. 7) stated that “second language acquisition [SLA] will normally stand as a cover term to refer to any language other than the L1 . . . , (a) irrespective of the type of learning environment and (b) irrespective of the number of other non-native languages known by the learner”, it is clear from the policies above that multilingual language acquisition (MLA) is interpreted differently from SLA. Unlike Sharwood Smith, other researchers (e.g. Cenoz, 2003; Aronin, 2005) have insisted on the distinction between SLA and MLA. Such a distinction is important to this study as it reflects the differences among the participant groups—the unilingual group has one language as a base, whereas the multilingual groups have a language base of more than one language; their multilingualism offers possible explanations for their enhanced performance (as measured by French test scores).

Accepting that almost everyone is cognitively capable of learning a second language, the influences of languages known cannot fully explain differential success, nor do they account for all the distinctions between SLA and MLA. My purpose, then, is not to give a detailed review of second/multilingual language acquisition theories but rather to touch on those distinguishing issues that are relevant to the quantitative portion of my study. My focus is therefore limited to the effects of already having a second language on proficiency in subsequent languages.

A differentiating factor that needs to be considered as an influence on the outcome of MLA is the learners’ knowledge of other languages. Cross-linguistic influences are determined by factors such as language typology, language proficiency and order of acquisition. First, the similarity between languages can enhance positive transfer. Second, the level of proficiency/literacy in the first language can influence L2 proficiency; L1 and L2 acquisition, including literacy, are interdependent. While such multicompetence allows for more possible points of influence, the factors on which this influence is dependent are similar to SLA, but more complex (e.g. Cenoz, 2000). First, the possibility of transfer must be considered from the perspective of each of the various languages. Such a comparison among languages can in turn increase metalinguistic awareness. Second, learners of additional languages (Ln) have a range of proficiencies in their known languages. In addition to L1 proficiency, proficiency in other acquired languages may influence Ln acquisition. The knowledge of languages and the interaction among them distinguish multilinguals from L2 learners, and imply that this broader base can also enhance Ln acquisition.

In order to support the above notion that multilingual learners bring additional contributions to the language-learning process beyond those of the L2 learner, the following review of relevant research considers the impact of

previous language-learning experience on L<sub>n</sub> learning integrating the distinguishing features of MLA with specific reference to the diverse experience of ESL students learning French in Ontario.

### Relevant research

This practice of exclusion as documented by Mady (2006) and others (Taaffe, Maguire and Pringle, 1996) seems to be founded in the belief that French is an additional (perhaps unnecessary) obstacle for ESL students. However, while teachers and administrators express concern about including ESL students in CF (Calman, 1988; Carr, 1999; Mady, 2006), research suggests that French class is a time where ESL students can function at or above the level of their English-speaking peers whereas they may struggle with academic achievement in other areas (Simons and Connolly, 2000). Although not abundant, from the research that investigates minority students studying French (e.g. Genesee, 1976; Taylor, 1992; Dagenais and Day, 1999) three comparative, quantitative studies are relevant to the question of suitability of CF for ESL students. These studies are relevant because (1) they are conducted in the official language-learning context of Canada; (2) they measure and compare French proficiency; and (3) the participants are minority language students.

In their study of Grade 8 French immersion students' French proficiency, Bild and Swain (1989) compared three groups of students: an English L1 group, an Italian L1 group and a heterogeneous non-Romance L1 group. After establishing comparability among the groups, using one-way ANOVAs with information gathered through questionnaires, school records and achievement tests, Bild and Swain measured the students' French proficiency with four different measures: two oral tests and two written tests. The results indicated that both groups of bilingual students significantly outperformed the English L1 students on the written tests and on most of the oral test items; thus, previous language learning positively affected French acquisition. Between the bilingual groups, the Italian group performed better than the non-Romance group; although the difference was not statistically significant, it implied that proximity in language typology had a positive effect on L3 acquisition. Bild and Swain also found that ongoing study of the L1 correlated positively with French proficiency—students who continued to study their home language performed better on the tests of French proficiency than those students who did not formally continue L1 study.

Hart, Lapkin and Swain (1988) compared the socio-demographic characteristics and the linguistic and attitudinal outcomes of early and middle French immersion programs in the Metropolitan Toronto School Board. However, I discuss only their results from the middle immersion program, which had a substantial number of students from a non-English or non-French L1 back-

ground. Data collection consisted of English achievement testing and questionnaires in Grades 5 and 8 and French proficiency testing in Grade 8. The French proficiency testing included a listening comprehension test, a cloze test, a sentence repetition task, an open-ended speaking task and an open-ended writing task. Hart *et al.* analyzed the French test results according to social background factors and found that students from homes where unofficial L1s were used outperformed students from English L1 homes in all measures except the fluency rating. In addition, the more a non-official L1 was used in the home, the higher the students' French test scores in listening, speaking and reading. Students from Romance language backgrounds consistently outperformed those from non-Romance language backgrounds. Hart *et al.* claimed that this success might be due to positive transfer from one language to another. Students with foreign-born parents also performed better than students with Canadian-born parents on the French listening, reading and writing tests. On the measures of English and math achievement, however, students from non-official L1 backgrounds showed the lowest mean score as compared to Canadian-born students. In further analysis of the above data, Swain, Lapkin, Rowen and Hart (1990) set out to answer this question: Is the learning of a third language enhanced through literacy in one's first language? Further analysis of the students' background questionnaire provided information regarding the parents' level of education and occupational status and the students' patterns of heritage language use and frequency of use. The researchers discovered that literacy in the heritage language correlated positively to L3 learning, regardless of socio-economic status. Swain *et al.* concluded that promotion of first language literacy had a positive effect on the learning of other languages.

In her evaluation of CF in the former North York Board of Education, Calman (1988) gathered data from curriculum documents, textbooks, program content, teacher questionnaires, classroom observations at Grades 5 and 8, teacher, parent and principal interviews and student listening comprehension tests involving 808 students in 32 Grade 8 classes. Forty ESL students who had been in the country for more than two years were included in the test. Listening tests were computer scored and results were provided for the North York Board of Education as a whole, as well as results for ESL and English Literacy Development<sup>1</sup> students, separate from the overall board results. Acceptable student achievement under ideal conditions was set by the teachers at 74–82%. The mean percentage of correct responses was 76% system wide. There was no significant difference between ESL students' performance and that of the system as a whole. The ESL students' mean was 71%, indicating that they performed at a similar level of achievement as their Canadian-born peers by Grade 8.

To summarize, studies of minority children studying French in Ontario are few in number. Furthermore, the available studies involve samples/procedures

that would inhibit their generalizability to the context of secondary ESL students studying CF. First, all of the above-mentioned studies investigated elementary students. Second, two of the studies examined students of immersion, thus limiting their application to secondary CF students: immersion at the time of the studies cited may have attracted students of higher motivation and ability (Genesee and Lambert, 1983). More specifically, Bild and Swain's study presents another difference—the participants, though minority language students, were born in Canada; they were not immigrant students studying ESL at the same time as French. Lack of generalizability from the studies above to ESL students studying CF in secondary school therefore underlines the necessity to consider the ever-increasing diverse immigrant population within the context of secondary CF.

### **Researcher's experiences and hypothesis**

I have had the opportunity to teach introductory CF to recently arrived ESL students in three different secondary schools in two different cities. In each location, it has been my experience that ESL students were successful in learning French. Yet despite my years of perceiving the success of ESL students in CF, in each school location, I have needed to advocate to the schools' administrations and guidance departments for the ESL students to be included in CF. As is often the case (Deford, 1985), my belief that ESL students can successfully learn French while learning English is based on my knowledge that has developed through experience. Therefore, in order to respond to the question of the suitability of CF for ESL students, I designed a comprehensive, detailed investigation of secondary ESL students studying CF. My experience led me to hypothesize that the ESL students would outperform both Canadian-born groups—the unilingual and multilingual groups. I also anticipated that the multilingual Canadian-born peers would outperform their unilingual counterparts.

### **The study**

In order to respond to the question of the suitability of FSL for ESL secondary students, I designed a mixed-method study to explore whether the practice of exclusion, where it occurs, is well founded. First, through a survey of the secondary principals and guidance heads of a large urban southern Ontario school board, I examined the present practices of inclusion of ESL students in CF. Second, I compared the French proficiency of three groups of secondary students: recently arrived ESL adolescents, multilingual Canadian-born students and unilingual Canadian-born students. Third, this study examined the contributions the ESL participants brought to the French-learning context by means of participant journals, participant and parental interviews. In this article, I

report on the French proficiency testing results in response to the following research questions: how does recently arrived ESL students' proficiency in French after one semester of introductory French compare to that of Canadian-born English L1 students who have studied French for five years? How does recently arrived ESL students' proficiency in French after one semester of introductory French compare to that of Canadian-born multilingual students who have studied French for five years?

### *Definitions*

For the purpose of this study, ESL students include those who have arrived in Ontario between 2002 and 2005, during their elementary or secondary school career, and who are required to continue to study ESL before entering mainstream English. These students' first language is neither French nor English. CF in Ontario is a program in which French is taught as a subject for one period each day or several periods each week, approximately 40 minutes per day in elementary school or 75 minutes per day for one semester in a semestered secondary school.

### *Study context*

This study involved two secondary schools in urban southern Ontario, both with mixed populations of newly arrived, multilingual immigrant ESL students and Canadian-born students. These schools offer a locally created introductory French course and ESL courses to recently arrived immigrants.

### *Participants*

All Grade 9 students taking compulsory French for the 110-hour French credit requirement in Ontario secondary schools (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1999), in one school in the fall semester completed a questionnaire and a multi-skills French test. Similarly, all ESL students studying French in two schools completed the same questionnaire and test but at the end of the fall semester, in January 2006, their first and only semester of French study. From these participants, three groups were formed based on background information from the questionnaire—one group of 44 Grade 9 unilingual English-speaking Canadian-born participants, a second group of 40 Grade 9 multilingual Canadian-born participants and a third group of 51 ESL participants. The Canadian-born participants came from seven different classes in one school. The ESL participants were from two intact classes of recently arrived ESL students taking introductory French, one class in each school. In both schools, the ESL students had a program option to obtain their compulsory French credit. This introductory French course was created for ESL students who had not had the opportunity to study French in elementary school and thus were beginning

their study of French in secondary school. This course was a separate course offering a highly modified version of the Grade 9 applied level (Ministry of Education and Training, 1999), as the Ministry of Education did not provide curriculum guidelines to meet the needs of the ESL students studying French.

#### *Participant characteristics*

In addition to providing information to divide the students into participant groups, the questionnaire also collected information pertaining to the students' languages, the importance attributed to such languages and the students' success in school. The unilingual group had no knowledge of languages other than French and English. Of the participants in the multilingual Canadian-born group, twenty-two (55%) indicated that Punjabi was the first language they learned, ten (25%) reported having learned English first, two (5%) learned Tamil first and two Hindi. One student learned Bosnian first (2.5%) and one Vietnamese. Two of the participants did not respond to this section of the questionnaire. The multilingual Canadian-born participants used their languages frequently, but not in writing.

Of the participants in the ESL group, eleven of whom did not complete the questionnaire, the majority, twenty-two (55%) stated that Punjabi was the first language they learned, seven (17.5%) reported having learned Urdu first. Hindi was reported as the first language learned by four (10%) of the ESL participants. The remaining ESL participants indicated having learned one of the following languages first, one participant per language (2.5%): Portuguese, Laotian, Chinese, Akan, Nepali, Arabic and Vietnamese. The ESL group used their first languages frequently and the vast majority was able to read and write them.

It is worthy to note that the multilingual Canadian-born group cited that their home languages were more important to them and to the city than French, whereas the ESL group consistently ranked French ahead of their own languages in terms of importance to them or the city. A minority of both the unilingual and multilingual Canadian-born groups claimed that they performed better in French than their other subjects; yet a majority of the ESL group stated that they were doing better in French. Lastly, the questionnaire included items on the parents' educational and occupational status. As might be expected with an immigrant population, the ESL parents did not have occupations commensurate with their levels of education. However, it was shown, through Pearson correlation coefficients among the seven French proficiency tests and the parental socio-economic status (SES) was not related to the French proficiency test results.



***Pretest***

In order to ascertain that the Grade 9 students had indeed gained some basic communication skills in French and that the ESL students were inexperienced French learners, all students completed a French Vocabulary Recognition test (Meara, 1994). This test in particular was chosen as it has proven to be a good measure of overall FSL proficiency both within and outside of the Canadian context (Meara and Buxton, 1987; Meara and Jones, 1990; Harley and Jean, 1999; Jean, 1999). The French Vocabulary Recognition Test consisted of 100 words, 65 French words and 35 artificial words, created for the purpose of the test (e.g. *gôter*, *un moup* are non-words). The students eliminated the words for which they could not give a meaning. All participants completed the test in their French classes in September 2005.

The test was scored according to the formula developed by Anderson and Freebody (1983):  $P(K) = P(H) - P(FA)/1 - P(FA)$ , which corrects for guessing by taking the proportion of truly known words (referred to as hits —  $(H)$ ), subtracting the proportion of false alarms ( $FA$ ) — pseudo-words the participant identified and dividing by 1 minus the proportion of false alarms. A negative score indicates that the student may have been guessing more than identifying truly known words.

A one-way analysis of variance was run on the French Vocabulary Recognition scores to compare the three participant groups — the unilingual Canadian-born group, the multilingual Canadian-born group and the ESL group. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(2, 107) = 4.83, p = .01$ . The strength of the relationship between the groups and the pretest results, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was medium<sup>2</sup> with the group accounting for 8 percent of the variance of the dependent variable. Given that the homogeneity of variances was not significant, a post hoc comparison was conducted using the *Bonferroni* approach. The analysis showed that the differences in means are statistically significant between the Canadian-born groups and the ESL group but not between the Canadian-born groups themselves. The results indicate that the two Canadian groups are similar in abilities, their higher results denoting greater French knowledge, as one would expect, given their lengthier exposure to instruction in French. The ESL group's results are congruent with their lack of previous French instruction.

***French proficiency measures***

All students completed at least one subtest of the Grade 8 CF test package developed as part of a project in the Modern Language Centre of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education entitled "Testing outcomes in core French: The development of communicative instruments for curriculum evaluation and research" (Harley, Lapkin, Scane, Hart and Trépanier, 1988). These tests were developed to reflect the objectives of CF at the time, which were "to develop

communication skills in both receptive and expressive aspects of French” (Harley and Lapkin, 1988, p. 1). These aims remain pertinent to today’s curriculum, which highlights the importance of “basic communication skills in French and an understanding of the nature of the language” by the end of Grade 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 1998, p. 2). The tests were intended for use in the evaluation of CF programs at the Grade 8 level. Although the test package was intended for students at the end of Grade 8, it is appropriate for students entering Grade 9, because the range of the number of accumulated hours of previous French instruction—600–800 hours, corresponds with the number of hours of French instruction the Canadian-born participants accumulated before the test—approximately 625 hours. In view of the fact that the ESL students had not accumulated the recommended number of hours before completing the test, because one semester is 110 hours of French instruction, the test package was piloted in an ESL CF class one semester prior to the actual study to ensure its appropriateness for the participating ESL students. The test has four parts intended to measure four French language skills: listening, reading, writing and speaking. They were administered in that order as per the detailed instructions for administration of the tests.

#### *Listening comprehension test*

The listening comprehension test required students to listen to an audiotaped interview with two francophone students from Montreal. The students responded to 15 multiple-choice questions based on the interview. As with all the tests, the listening test was completed in the French classes with both their French teacher and myself present.

#### *Reading comprehension test*

The reading test consisted of three tasks. In the first, students matched a street sign with its meaning. In the second, students answered five multiple-choice questions after having read four postcards written by students on a bicycle tour in Quebec. In the third, students again answered five multiple-choice questions, this time based on a sports interview about skateboarding.

#### *Writing test*

The writing test was also divided into three tasks. The first consisted of a partial-dictation exercise about a bicycle race around Montreal. The students listened to the audiotaped passage three times: once to listen to the entire passage, once to fill in the blank portions as the passage was repeated slowly, and once to check their work. The second task required students to write an advertisement for a magazine in which they described themselves in order to find a pen pal. The third task involved students stating and justifying their opinions on the issue of mandatory school uniforms.

*Speaking test*

Approximately 25% of the participants, the same proportion as in Harley *et al.*'s pilot speaking test, were selected to complete the individual speaking part of the package which was recorded on audiocassette. The participants were chosen using typical-case sampling (Glesne, 1999) by their teacher. These participants represented typical cases for their class based on the mode grade for the class. The participants who were closest to having the mode grade were invited to participate. Each student who was orally tested chose a friend to assist with the test. The friend was not part of the test group and was a different person for each oral test participant. The speaking test was also divided into three parts. The first portion was a restaurant role-play that required the participants to order an item from each section of the menu provided. The next two sections required the participants to look at an image provided and then give comprehensible instructions to a friend so that he or she could draw the same image.

**Findings**

Analyses of the results for all test components were performed using SPSS one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) with the factor being the three different groups and the dependent variable being the test scores.

The listening section of the test was the first component of the test to be administered. An ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the participant groups and the listening test component. The means and standard deviations for the listening test scores, as presented in Table 1, indicate that the ESL participants outperformed both groups of Canadian-born participants. The ANOVA was significant,  $F(2, 122) = 11.02, p = .00$ . The strength of the relationship between the groups and the listening test, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was strong, with the groups accounting for 15% of the variance of the dependent variable. Because the variances among the three groups were homogeneous, I conducted a post hoc comparison using the *Bonferroni* approach, a test that assumes equal variances among the groups. This analysis, shown in Table 2, revealed that the ESL group significantly outperformed both Canadian-born groups.

The reading section of the test was the second component of the test to be administered. This portion of the test included three sections. Correlation coefficients were computed among the three reading tests. Using the Spearman approach, correlations are significant at the .01 level. The results of the correlational analyses presented in Table 3 show that the three reading sections' correlations were statistically significant. Therefore, I aggregated the three scores.

**Table 1:** Listening test results by group (maximum = 15)

Participant group	n	M	SD	SE
Unilingual Canadian-born	40	5.93	2.54	.40
Multilingual Canadian-born	40	5.85	2.34	.37
ESL	45	8.22	3.04	.45
Overall sample	125	6.73	2.88	.26

**Table 2:** Comparison of the listening test scores: *Bonferroni*

		M	SE	p
ESL	Unilingual Canadian-born	2.30*	.58	.00
ESL	Multilingual Canadian-born	2.37*	.58	.00
Multilingual Canadian-born	Unilingual Canadian-born	-.08	.60	1.00

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

**Table 3:** Correlations among the reading sections

		2nd section	3rd section
1st section	Correlation coefficient	.28**	.36**
	Significance (2-tailed)	.00	.00
	N	125	125
2nd section	Correlation coefficient		.31**
	Significance (2-tailed)		.00
	N		125

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

A one-way analysis of variance was conducted on the reading tests in combination. The ANOVA was significant for the aggregate reading results,  $F(2, 122) = 39.25, p = .00$ . The strength of the relationship between the groups and the aggregate readings results, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was very strong, with the groups accounting for 39% of the variance of the dependent variable. The means and standard deviations for the reading test scores, as presented in Tables 4 and 5, indicate that the ESL participants outperformed both groups of Canadian-born participants.

The partial-dictation section of the test was the third component of the test to be administered. The ANOVA of the results for the dictation test shows no significant difference among the groups.

The composition was the last section of the test to be done in the classroom setting. The participants had 20 minutes to write two short compositions. The compositions were scored for the ability to carry out the task regardless of

**Table 4:** Reading test results by group

Section of test	Participant group	N	M	SD	SE
1st (max. = 10)	Unilingual Canadian-born	43	3.49	2.37	.36
	Multilingual Canadian-born	38	3.79	1.98	.32
	ESL	44	6.34	1.36	.21
	Overall sample	125	4.58	2.33	.21
2nd (max. = 5)	Unilingual Canadian-born	43	1.09	.81	.12
	Multilingual Canadian-born	38	1.00	.70	.11
	ESL	44	1.98	1.17	.18
	Overall sample	125	1.38	1.02	.09
3rd (max. = 5)	Unilingual Canadian-born	43	1.67	1.36	.21
	Multilingual Canadian-born	38	1.47	1.16	.19
	ESL	44	2.77	1.63	.25
	Overall sample	125	2.00	1.51	.14
Combination of sections	Unilingual Canadian-born	43	6.28	3.11	.48
	Multilingual Canadian-born	38	6.32	2.49	.41
	ESL	44	11.14	3.05	.46
	Overall sample	125	8.00	3.71	.33

**Table 5:** Combination of reading test scores: *Bonferroni*

Participant group		M	SD	SE
ESL	Unilingual Canadian-born	4.86*	.63	.00
ESL	Multilingual Canadian-born	4.82*	.65	.00
Multilingual Canadian-born	Unilingual Canadian-born	.04	.65	1.00

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

punctuation. The maximum score for the first composition was 6 points: one point for each sentence in comprehensible French that responded to the test's instructions for name, address, age and interests. The maximum score for the second composition was four points: one point for each sentence in comprehensible French that responded to the test's request for the participants' opinion and three supporting arguments. In both compositions, students only lost points if their grammar and spelling errors obscured the meaning of the sentence.

The composition test results presented in Table 6 show the means and standard deviations for the composition test scores. An ANOVA was conducted to evaluate the relationship between the groups and each of the composition results. It was significant for the first composition,  $F(2, 122) = 7.90$ ,  $p = .00$ . The strength of the relationship between the groups and the writing test

**Table 6:** Composition test results by group

Section of test	Participant group	N	M	SD	SE
1st (max. = 6)	Unilingual Canadian-born	41	4.0	1.70	.27
	Multilingual Canadian-born	39	4.0	1.65	.27
	ESL	45	5.1	1.09	.16
	Overall sample	125	4.4	1.58	.14
2nd (max. = 4)	Unilingual Canadian-born	41	1.2	1.16	.18
	Multilingual Canadian-born	39	1.2	1.47	.24
	ESL	45	1.5	1.06	.16
	Overall sample	125	1.3	1.23	.11

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

**Table 7:** Comparisons of the first composition test scores: Dunnett's C

Participant group	M	SE
ESL Unilingual Canadian-born	1.11*	.31
ESL Multilingual Canadian-born	1.11*	.31
Multilingual Canadian-born Unilingual Canadian-born	.00	.38

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

results, as assessed by  $\eta^2$ , was moderate, with the groups accounting for 11 percent of the variance of the dependent variable. Given that the homogeneity of variances was significant for the first composition, a post hoc analysis was conducted using the *Dunnett's C* test (Table 7). These results indicate that the ESL participants significantly outperformed both groups of Canadian-born participants. Because the ANOVA was not significant for the second composition,  $F(2, 122) = .91, p = .40$ , no post hoc comparisons were conducted on the second composition.

The speaking test was divided into three tasks. The first two tasks required the participants to describe images. A point was awarded for each piece of information given in French correctly describing the images' shapes, colors, sizes and/or locations. A maximum of 10 points was given for the first image and 20 points for the second. The third section was a role-play in which the participant ordered one item from each section of a menu. Points were given for correct pronunciation of six specific French phonemes and one liaison. The participants were also given points for a polite opening and closing, one point each. The maximum points for part three of the speaking test were nine.

Correlation coefficients were computed among the three speaking tests. Using the Spearman approach, the correlations were significant at the .01 level.

**Table 8:** Correlations among speaking tests

		2nd section	3rd section
2nd section	Correlation Coefficient	.53**	.31
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.00	.07
	N	36	36
3rd section	Correlation Coefficient		.25
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.14
	N		36

\*\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

**Table 9:** Speaking test results by group

Section of test	Participant group	N	M	SD	SE
1st (max. = 10)	Unilingual Canadian-born	10	3.90	.88	.28
	Multilingual Canadian-born	14	4.21	2.01	.54
	ESL	12	4.75	.97	.28
	Overall sample	36	4.31	1.45	.24
2nd (max. = 20)	Unilingual Canadian-born	10	5.30	.95	.30
	Multilingual Canadian-born	14	6.00	2.42	.65
	ESL	12	7.50	2.11	.61
	Overall sample	36	6.31	2.15	.36
3rd (max. = 9)	Unilingual Canadian-born	10	3.00	1.89	.60
	Multilingual Canadian-born	14	2.21	1.05	.28
	ESL	12	4.25	1.36	.39
	Overall sample	36	3.11	1.64	.27

The results of the correlational analyses presented in Table 8 show that the first and the second sections' correlations were statistically significant, whereas the third section was not correlated. The results for the speaking sections, then, are presented separately (see Table 9).

The means and standard deviations for the speaking test scores, as presented in Table 9, indicate that the ESL participants outscored both groups of Canadian-born participants. However since the ANOVA for the first section of the speaking test was not significant,  $F(2, 33) = .98, p = .39$ , no post hoc comparisons were conducted on the first speaking test results. The ANOVA for the second and third sections of the speaking test were significant,  $F(2, 33) = 3.54, p = .04$  and  $F(2, 33) = 6.68, p = .00$  respectively. The strength of the relationship between the second and third sections of the speaking test and the groups were strong as assessed by  $\eta^2$ . The groups accounted for 18% of the

**Table 10:** Comparisons of the second and third sections of the speaking tests:  
*Bonferroni*

Section of test	Participant group		M	SE	p
2nd	ESL	Unilingual Canadian-born	2.20*	.86	.05
	ESL	Multilingual Canadian-born	1.50	.79	.20
	Multilingual Canadian-born	Unilingual Canadian-born	.70	.83	1.00
3rd	ESL	Unilingual Canadian-born	1.25	.61	.14
	ESL	Multilingual Canadian-born	2.04*	.56	.00
	Multilingual Canadian-born	Unilingual Canadian-born	-.79	.59	.57

\*The mean difference is significant at the .05 level.

variance with the second speaking test and 29% with the third speaking component. Due to the homogeneity of variances for the second and third speaking test results, I conducted post hoc comparisons using the *Bonferroni* approach. These analyses, shown in Table 10, show (a) a significant difference between the ESL group and the unilingual Canadian-born participants on the second portion of the speaking test and (b) a significant difference on the third part of the speaking test between the ESL and the multilingual Canadian-born groups.

To summarize, the ESL participants outperformed both Canadian-born groups on the listening, reading and one section of the composition test. While there were no significant differences on the dictation, the second composition and the first speaking portion of the test, the ESL group outperformed the unilingual group on the second speaking section and the multilingual group on the third speaking component.

## Discussion

Whereas at the beginning of the study the Canadian-born students outperformed the ESL students on the pretest of French vocabulary, after one semester of French study the ESL participants outperformed the Canadian-born groups on a majority of proficiency measures.

In interpreting the test results according to skill, it is not surprising that the ESL participants performed better on listening and reading comprehension sections than on the speaking and writing sections. Success in the receptive skill areas is consistent with research that claims the receptive skills develop before productive skills (Krashen, 1976). The ESL participants' superior speaking results are also congruent with the primary focus of their classes. Yet, it is at minimum puzzling if not disturbing that the Canadian-born groups performed so poorly. In addition, returning to my hypothesis that the multilingual



Canadian-born students would outperform the unilingual Canadian-born students as supported by studies that report the advantages of bilinguals in L3 acquisition (Bild and Swain, 1989; Swain, Lapkin, Rowen and Hart, 1990), it is bewildering that the Canadian-born multilingual participants never outperformed either of the other two groups. Given the language background of the majority of multilingual participants and all of the ESL participants it is unlikely that the learning of French was influenced by positive language transfer. Application of the interdependence principle to this study, however, strengthens the rationale for the ESL participants' superior results. An overwhelming majority (97.5%) of the ESL participants reported being literate in their first language. They also reported that they almost always used their L1 on a daily basis with family and friends. The ESL participants' literacy and frequency of use of their L1 then may have positively impacted their learning of French. The possible positive impact of literacy and frequency of use of the L1 is underlined by a comparison with the Canadian-born multilingual participants who reported using their home languages less frequently: 77.5% reported daily use with family, and 12.5% reported using another language with friends 50% of the time. The fact that the ESL participants were at minimum on par with their Canadian-born multilingual peers in spite of the gap in French exposure begs for explanation beyond that of the advantages of knowing other languages to include the consideration of prior language-learning contexts, parental influence, view of multilingualism and concepts of Canadian identity.

The French test results of the ESL participants are particularly striking given the discrepancy in their experience with French: the ESL participants had had only 100 instructional hours of French, while the Canadians had had over six times the amount of French instruction at 625 hours. While I recognize that the results may be telling with respect to the Canadian-born Grade 9 students' French experience to date, as per my research questions, my focus remains the suitability of French for ESL students. In keeping with that focus, these findings provide substantial evidence of the abilities of these ESL participants to learn French. It is reasonable to argue then that ESL students who arrive in Canada during their secondary school careers would benefit from taking French for several reasons: (a) they can meet with success in French whereas they experience difficulty in other areas of the curriculum; (b) having French allows ESL students similar job opportunities as their Canadian-born peers; (c) ESL students could take one semester of introductory French and then be integrated within the mainstream Grade 9 French program allowing them the opportunity to continue to enhance their French skills throughout their secondary school career. In addition to the benefits for ESL students, having ESL students take an introductory French course in secondary school offers the following benefits to the system: (a) offering a course that has no prerequisite knowledge allows for the broadening of program options that are appropriate for ESL students;

(b) students who meet with success are more likely to remain in the system; (c) augmenting the number of people who can speak French is congruent with Federal policy; and (d) offering French gives equality of access to the benefits of having both official languages in Canada.

### Notes

- <sup>1</sup> English Literacy Development is a program of literacy development for students who have significant gaps in their education.
- <sup>2</sup> Traditionally,  $\eta^2$  values of 1, 6 and 14 represent small, medium and large effect sizes.

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