Editorial:

Current Perspectives on Oral Communicative Competence of French Second Language Speakers

Perspectives actuelles sur la compétence de communication à l'oral en français langue seconde

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The motivation for creating this special issue emanated, in large part, from the symposium, "Perspectives actuelles sur la compétence communicative à l'oral en français L2", held in Montreal at the annual (2014) conference of the *Association francophone pour le savoir* (ACFAS). The symposium generated much interest and discussion among participants surrounding the linguistic, cultural and cognitive complexities underlying the acquisition of oral production skills in French as a second language (L2), and how such skills developed over time in various learning contexts. One important observation to surface from these discussions was the need to move beyond an overwhelming research focus on linguistic features that are common to both written and spoken French (e.g., the classic *passé composé* versus *imparfait* use) in order to broaden our understanding of both linguistic and non-linguistic phenomena unique to spoken French. This special issue therefore features six articles (four in English, two in French) addressing some of the latest theoretical developments and empirical results from a variety of key areas in oral production research (e.g., phonological development, awareness and use of stylistic and geographical features, accentedness, fluency, comprehensibility and accuracy). Together, these areas provide a comprehensive view of how specific factors may directly and indirectly impact French L2 learners' oral communicative competence in such different instructional settings as the school context (articles 1 and 2), adult L2 teaching, (articles 3 and 4) and study away (articles 5 and 6).

In collaboration with Diane Huot at Université Laval, we introduce this issue with a discussion of the development of oral communicative skills by reviewing the retrospective narrative of an expert French L2 user. The key linguistic and sociocultural experiences shaping his development are examined in light of Celce-Murcia's (2007) model of communicative competence, highlighting the individual and contextual factors affecting his developmental trajectory over a 20-year period. Interestingly, what results from this examination is that successful development of L2 oral competence seems very much to consist of a dynamic and nonlinear process where learners continuously act upon their own perceived needs and communicative goals, and thereby develop speech habits that are not necessarily promoted in the classroom or speech community. Many of the speech habits referenced in the retrospective narrative are examined theoretically and/or empirically in the six articles of this issue.

In the first article, Rabia Sabah Meziane and Andrea MacLeod from the Université de Montréal focus on the French phonological development of preschool allophone children in Montreal. Using a picture naming task, the authors describe the phonological repertoire of these children and compared their phonological abilities to those of monolingual French-speaking children. Their findings suggest that allophone children's phonological abilities in French progress in a similar fashion as their monolingual peers, although they appear to rely on different phonological processes. Meziane and MacLeod argue that their description of phonological norms of French in bi/multilingual preschool children would be of particular benefit to speech therapists and language teachers, who, until recently, have based their interventions on monolingual norms.

In the second article, Terry Nadasdi and Alison Vickerman of the University of Alberta focus on the oral speech of French immersion learners. More specifically, targeting the lax vowel (/ɪ/), a socially neutral phonetic feature typical of Canadian French, they examine the extent to which these learners produce the vowel in the same linguistic context as native speakers of Canadian French of the same age, using a Labovian semi-directed interview. Their findings reveal that, in general, French immersion learners do not adopt the lax vowel feature. The authors centre their discussion on the attitudinal and identity issues related to adoption of geographically marked phonological variants in L2 French.

In the third article, Pavel Trofimovich and Sara Kennedy, both from Concordia University, and Josée Blanchet from the Université du Québec à Montréal, explore the relationship between explicit pronunciation instruction in L2 French and listener-based ratings of accent, comprehensibility, and fluency. Thirty university students performed two oral tasks (a picture description task and a read-aloud story) before and after a 15-week pronunciation course. Their oral performance was then evaluated by 20 untrained French-speaking listeners. Findings indicate overall improvements in listener-based measures of fluency, comprehensibility, and accent following targeted instruction; improvement across the three speech ratings also varied as a function of task. Given the scarcity of research examining the linguistic aspects of L2 speech associated with listener ratings of accent, comprehensibility, and fluency in L2 French, this article provides new insight into the perceived development of French learners' oral production in a classroom setting.

In the fourth article, using 10 textbooks designed for French as a second language (FSL) in Canada, and French as a foreign language, Marie Duchemin from Université Laval examines if and how different varieties of French are portrayed throughout each textbook. Her findings reveal, on the one hand, that European textbooks do include explanations about different varieties of French; however, the descriptions tend to be shallow or stereotypical. On the other hand, Canadian textbooks provide no description regarding geographical variation, and concentrate mainly on differences in registers with respect to Quebec French. Consequently, the author offers pedagogical recommendations on how to better implement accurate textbook descriptions of geographical varieties of French in order to increase sociolinguistic awareness.

In the fifth article, Daphnée Simard from Université du Québec à Montréal, Leif French from Sam Houston State University, and Micheal Zuniga from Université du Québec à Montréal investigate the longitudinal changes in self-initiated self-repair behaviour of 50 English-speaking French L2 learners enrolled in a 5-week study away program in Quebec. Oral performance data were collected through an elicited narration task at the beginning and the end of the 5-week study period. Their results revealed a significant reduction in self-repair frequency across repair types, which was also accompanied by an

overall increase in accuracy of repair outcomes. This article provides new evidence that repair behaviour, including increased repair accuracy, may indeed change over a short time period as a result of explicit teaching coupled with naturalistic exposure.

The last article in the issue, authored by Norman Segalowitz from Concordia University, Leif French from Sam Houston State University, and Jean-Daniel Guay from Université Laval targeted a threefold objective: (a) identify a set of core speech features that best characterize utterance fluency in a picture description task, (b) examine L2 fluency gains in 50 adult learners participating in a 5-week study away program, and (c) replicate the initial main fluency results with another set of 50 participants recorded under the same conditions. Overall, the results show that it is possible to operationally define L2 fluency markers without reference to fluency gains, and to then use these fluency markers to study L2 fluency gains in longitudinal oral data. The authors suggest that their proposed fluency methodology would be particularly useful for providing informed guidance when choosing specific L2 fluency measures in future fluency development research.

Finally, we would like to dedicate this special issue to three beloved individuals: Danielle Guénette, Larry Vandergrift, and Elizabeth Gatbonton. Not only were all three extremely special and inspirational to us as friends and colleagues, but they were also exemplary models of scholarship and mentorship to the entire applied linguistics community, both in Canada and internationally. Danielle, through her lively personality and smile, brought joy to all those who knew her, and her love for language and language teaching was indeed contagious. Larry, a man of kindness and endless generosity, was a source of inspiration and motivation for his students and colleagues, and memory of his humorous anecdotes continue to bring warm smiles to the faces of those who knew him. Beth, who left us so unexpectedly, was an extraordinary example of selfless giving of her ideas and incredible culinary talent; her drive to help all succeed, regardless of the circumstances, will never be forgotten. All three will be truly missed.