

Canadian Immersion Education in an Evaluative Perspective: A Synthesis of Research Findings on the Efficiency of French Immersion Programmes (1)

Harumi ITO

(Key words: Canada, French immersion, efficiency)

1. Introduction

As the value and potential of classroom learning has come to be reappraised (Widdowson, 1990), the importance of English as a means of communication inside the classroom, namely as a means of learning, has come to be focused upon (Seedhouse, 1996). In this new conceptualization of classroom learning, subject matters are now conceived of as optimal learning materials or optimal comprehensible input (Krashen, 1982) for second language learners at school. This new perspective has dramatically increased people's interest in so-called immersion education, in which a second language is used as a means of instruction for all or part of the school curriculum. As a result, French immersion programmes in Canada have come to be focused upon among Japanese educationalists. Their interest in immersion education has further been propelled by a project called Super English Language High School Project, which was initiated in 2002 by the Japanese Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT) as part of its 'strategic plan to cultivate Japanese with English abilities.'

Now that immersion education has become a hot topic among Japanese educationalists, we can even suspect that immersion education has come to be regarded by many people engaged in school education, and especially those worried about the relative inefficiency of our school English language education, as a trump card for reforms of our creaking second language education system. However, with a very limited information and experimentation accumulated so far on immersion education for schools in Japan (e.g., Bostwick, 2001a; 2001b), we should be discreet enough not to conceive too great an expectation for immersion education. Indeed it is necessary for us to conceive a realistic expectation for the efficiency of immersion education for our educational system, taking into account socio-cultural as well as academic contexts which may have contributed to the success of immersion education in Canada. This recognition

has led to the inception of the present study.

The purpose of the present study is then to synthesize research findings presented by numerous evaluation studies on the efficiency of French immersion programmes in Canada, incorporating insights obtained by the present author through his repeated field research in Ontario. The synthesis will be attempted in terms of the following four perspectives; effects on French language skills, effects on English language skills, effects on general scholastic achievements, and effects on socio-cultural domains. Out of these four perspectives, the present paper, the first of the series of two, will focus on the first two perspectives of linguistic nature. That is, it will focus, firstly, on the effects of French immersion programmes on the development of French language skills both in comparison with regular English programmes and in comparison with other immersion alternatives within French immersion. Secondly, it will focus on the effects of French immersion programmes on students' English language (L1) skills. The other two perspectives—effects on scholastic achievements and socio-cultural influences—will be dealt with in the second paper of the series.

2. Evaluation Studies in a Perspective

As to the efficiency of French immersion programmes in Canada, a large number of empirical evaluation studies have been conducted so far since the inauguration of a small-scale French immersion programme in St. Lambert in the suburbs of Montreal, Quebec in 1965 (Genesee, 1987). Among those are included a large number of studies conducted by a group of researchers headed by M. Swain and S. Lapkin at the Modern Language Centre of the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education as part of their large-scale, well-funded Bilingual Education Project, which evaluated different types of French immersion programmes across Canada from various evaluative perspectives. A fairly large number of efficiency-oriented studies have also been conducted by a

group of researchers represented by W. Lambert and F. Genesee at McGill University in Montreal, a birthplace of French immersion education in Canada, and also by a group of researchers represented by M. Wesche at the University of Ottawa, to cite just a few conspicuous examples.

However, it is also true that most of these evaluation studies concerning the efficiency of French immersion programmes in Canada are hardly accessible to researchers outside Canada because they have been published in most cases in the form of action reports issued by individual school boards which have commissioned such evaluation studies. Fortunately, the present author has had several opportunities to visit Ottawa and Toronto and interview not only those who were and have been engaged in such evaluation studies but also those who are now engaged in French immersion programmes as coordinators, superintendents, principals or teachers. This has enabled the present author to have access to a large number of evaluation studies on French immersion programmes, including those action reports issued by school boards. Academic journals such as *The Canadian Modern Language Review* have also featured French immersion programmes fairly frequently, publicizing a large number of empirical evaluation studies and review studies summarizing research findings obtained by such empirical studies.

As far as strategies commonly used in such empirical evaluation studies on French immersion programmes are concerned, the following two strategies have been predominant. One strategy is cross-sectional in nature since it compares skills and achievements of immersion students (experimental group), whether linguistic, academic or socio-cultural, with those of students (control group) enrolled in regular English programmes in which French is taught as a compulsory or elective subject, or with those of French-speaking students (another control group) studying in French schools where every subject is taught in French for francophone pupils. The other strategy is longitudinal in nature in a sense that this requires researchers to follow a certain number of students for several years, measuring the improvement of relevant skills at each significant developmental stage. The first strategy of cross-sectional nature was quite popular in the early years of evaluation studies on French immersion, during which period a large number of large-scale comparative studies were conducted throughout Canada, but mostly in Ontario and Quebec, usually amply funded by federal and provincial governments and school boards concerned. Nowadays, however, the second strategy of longitudinal nature is getting more and more popular as the focus of evaluation studies has shifted

from a large-scale cross-sectional or interpersonal comparison onto a small-scale intrapersonal comparison as is often used in case studies. The present paper has tried to integrate research findings of both types of studies as much as possible.

3. French as a Second Language in Brief

Before we look into specific research findings as to the efficiency of French immersion programmes in Canada, it is worthwhile at this stage to recapitulate FSL (French as a Second Language) programmes in Canada briefly. To take the province of Ontario for an example, three different types of FSL programmes are offered at its elementary and secondary schools; Core French, Extended French and French Immersion (OMET, 1998; OME, 2001; Ito, 1997). Students enrolled in Core French receive 20-40 minutes of French language arts instruction on a daily basis. In many provinces of Canada, this Core French programme is designated as a compulsory FSL programme, respecting the fact that English and French are the official languages of Canada. The length in which students are to be enrolled in Core French programmes varies from one province to another.

Extended French is an intermediate programme between Core French and French Immersion. Students enrolled in Extended French study one or two subjects in French in addition to a regular Core French programme. In this sense, Extended French can be viewed as an enriched version of Core French.

Students enrolled in French Immersion study regular subjects entirely or partly in French. Depending upon the grade in which the programme is started, French Immersion is further subdivided into Early Immersion, Middle Immersion and Late Immersion. Taking for an example the elementary school FSL curriculum of the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board,² Early French Immersion is started in senior kindergarten for students who have completed junior kindergarten Core French (20 minutes a day). Students are taught 100% in French in senior kindergarten and grade 1. With the introduction of English language arts instruction in grade 2, the French portion drops to 80% in grades 2 to 5, and then diminishes to 50% in grades 6 to 8, but not seldom below 50%, since 50% French language instruction is usually considered the lowest threshold for any type of immersion programme (Genesee, 1987, p.1). The exact percentages of the French portion vary to a certain extent from school to school, depending upon local educational resources and environments.

Middle French Immersion is started in grade 4 for those

students who have taken Core French from junior kindergarten to grade 3 and wish to transfer to French Immersion. All subjects are taught in French in grades 4, 5 and 6, except the English language arts class, which accounts for approximately 20% of the instructional time or 60 minutes per day. Students in grades 7 and 8 receive 70% of their daily instruction in French and the rest 30% in English. Middle Immersion is the newest of the three types of immersion, and therefore the number of school boards which offer Middle Immersion is rather limited.

Late French Immersion is started in grade 7 for students who have taken Core French from junior kindergarten to grade 6 and wish to transfer to French Immersion. Generally speaking, students enrolled in Late French Immersion have achieved a fairly solid basis in French through their 7-year-long Core French and have a high motivation to further improve their French. The French portion accounts for 70% to 75% of the programme in grades 7 and 8.

In addition to these three types of immersion with different starting points, French immersion education is subdivided into Total Immersion and Partial Immersion, according to the volume of French portions within the total instructional time. Total Immersion refers to those programmes in which students study their regular subjects 100% in French, at least at the initial stages. Partial Immersion refers to those programmes in which students study their regular subjects half in French and half in English. In practice, Partial Immersion takes different forms, depending upon the way the 50% French portion is realized within the school curriculum. In some Partial Immersion programmes, students study morning subjects in French and afternoon subjects in English. In others students are taught certain specific subjects in French by one teacher and the rest in English by other teachers. The number of school boards that offer the Partial Immersion option is also rather limited.³

4. Effects on Linguistic Achievements (1): French Language Skills

4.1 Background

French immersion education in Canada was initiated by parents' strong concern about the inefficiency of FSL programmes in those days and their equally strong wish for their children to acquire French that should be good enough to be socially and professionally accepted (Genesee, 1987). It is not surprising at all, therefore, that most of the evaluation studies conducted on French immersion programmes in the early stages centred upon how good immersion students'

French was.

In order to verify the claim of French immersion programmes for the achievement of a high level of French proficiency, the following three different approaches were adopted by researchers. The first approach compared the French language skills of immersion students with those of non-immersion students who were enrolled in regular English programmes in which they learned French 20 to 40 minutes every day in their Core French programmes. The second approach compared the French language skills of immersion students with those of native French-speaking students of the same age group. This approach was adopted mostly in order to see whether particular immersion programmes had succeeded in achieving so-called functional bilingualism among students. The acquisition of functional bilingualism has often been quoted as a most important legitimate goal of French immersion programmes. The third approach was taken by researchers who were interested in finding the optimal stage for starting immersion education. It compared the French language skills of students enrolled in different immersion programmes under discussion, namely, early immersion vs. middle immersion vs. late immersion.

4.2 Comparison with Core French students

Studies which compared French immersion students and regular English programme students (hereafter referred to as regular English students for short) in terms of their French proficiency revealed that the French language skills achieved by immersion students, whether enrolled in early, middle or late immersion programmes, were uncomparatively higher than those achieved by regular English students who had received only 20 to 40 minutes of French language instruction per day (Barik & Swain, 1975; Genesee, 1978; Swain, 1978a; Swain, 1978b; Swain, Lapkin & Andrew, 1981; Lapkin, Swain, Kamin & Hanna, 1983).

This is not surprising at all if we take into account vast differences in the accumulated hours of French language instruction between immersion programmes and regular English programmes, not to mention methodological advantages of immersion programmes in which French is used not only as a means of classroom communication but also as a means of classroom learning. According to an estimation by the Ottawa Board of Education (OBE, n.d.), by the end of elementary school education (i.e., by the end of grade 8) those students who have been enrolled in Core French have accumulated 1,050 hours of French language instruction while those students who have been enrolled in Early French Immersion have accumulated 5,580 hours of

French language instruction (approximately five times the accumulated hours in Core French); those in Middle French Immersion have accumulated 3,810; and those in Late French Immersion have accumulated 2,160. The Ministry requirements are 600 hours for Core French, 1,260 hours for Extended French and 3,800 hours for French Immersion by the end of grade 8 (OME, 2000, p.48). These are the minimum accumulated hours of French language instruction for grade 9 students to enrol in respective programmes at secondary school.

In fact, it is often reported by those engaged in comparative evaluation studies that it does not make sense educationally at all to compare the French language skills of immersion students and those of Core French (regular English) students. When researchers involved in such comparative studies prepared test materials to measure the French language skills of immersion students concerned, they often found out that those test materials were simply too difficult for Core French students to deal with. In contrast, test materials geared towards Core French students turned out to be too easy for immersion students, failing to measure their French language skills properly.

Setting aside these administrative problems, it is doubtless that French immersion programmes can foster French proficiency which is far more advanced than that accomplished by Core French students with 20 to 40 minutes of daily French instruction. This has been quite encouraging for those who started French immersion programmes in order to improve inefficient Core French programmes, but may not necessarily be so for those who promoted French immersion programmes as a legitimate way to foster so-called functional bilingualism among young English-speaking or anglophone people. The question for them is not so much whether immersion students can perform better than regular English students as whether French immersion programmes can really foster French proficiency which may approximate that of native speakers of French. Comparative evaluation studies on the efficiency of French immersion programmes have naturally shifted their focus onto this latter issue.

4.3 Comparison with French-speaking students

It is true that when French immersion education was first introduced into the Canadian educational system there existed among parents and educators an expectation that French immersion programmes would foster in Canadian anglophone youths functional bilingualism in English and French, the official languages of Canada. Those people who were suspicious about such claims for bilingualism made by

those who supported the French immersion programmes also focused on this point, and attacked French immersion programmes for their inefficiency in producing bilinguals in English and French, relying on a relatively limited number of reported cases (Hammerly, 1989a; 1989b).

It is quite natural then that researchers who were commissioned by educational authorities to investigate the efficiency of French immersion programmes focused their attention on this problematic issue, and conducted a large number of evaluation studies, comparing French language skills acquired by immersion students with those of French-speaking or francophone students. Before we look at specific evaluation studies, however, it should be made clear first that French immersion programmes are not expected to produce among participating students so-called true or equal bilingualism, by which is meant the attainment of native proficiency in two languages. True bilingualism is not the goal of French immersion programmes. Their goal is the attainment of so-called functional bilingualism or near-native fluency, which enables people to carry out daily linguistic transactions in two languages, without necessarily implying the attainment of the full native proficiency in two languages. For example, the Ottawa-Carleton District School Board stipulates the objective of their French immersion programmes as enabling students whose mother tongue is not French "to become functionally bilingual through maximum exposure to French."⁵ In fact, it is well reported that there exist very few people in the world who have attained true bilingualism with equal competence in two languages. In most cases, one of the languages is more predominant than the other (or others in the case of multilingualism), whether it is their native language or the second language acquired later in life.

Keeping this in mind, a number of evaluation studies have tried to endorse the claim for functional bilingualism by those who support French immersion programmes. For example, on the basis of the results of a battery of tests which measured the French language skills of both early total immersion students in Ottawa and native French-speaking students in Quebec at the relevant grade levels, Swain (1978a) found out that early immersion students performed better than at least 30 percent of native French-speaking students, implying that French immersion programmes can achieve near-native proficiency in French among anglophone students. This means that early immersion students can achieve relative native-like proficiency in respective grades. Similar findings are also reported by Swain & Lapkin (1982).

The fact that early immersion students can perform in French as well as their francophone peers, however, does not

mean that early immersion students achieve the same degree of functional proficiency in all the language skills; listening, reading, speaking and writing. It has been shown that immersion students ultimately develop near-native proficiency in receptive (listening and reading) skills but fail to do so in productive (speaking and writing) skills (Swain, 1978a; Swain & Lapkin, 1982, Lapkin, 1984; Genesee, Holobow, Lambert, Cleghorn & Walling, 1985; Genesee, 1987; Safty, 1989; Genesee, Holobow, Lambert & Chartrand, 1989; Lapkin, Swain, & Shapson, 1990; Wesche, Morrison, Pawley & Ready, 1990; TBE, 1993; Wesche, 1993). Lapkin (1984), for example, characterizes immersion students' speaking and writing skills as "well enough for effective communication but not well enough to be indistinguishable from their native French-speaking counterparts" (p.584).

This gap in proficiency between receptive skills and productive skills is not surprising, but quite normal not only for most second language learners, but also for monolingual speakers. There are a large number of Japanese learners of English who can read classics of English literature such as Dickens or Hemingway, but very few who can produce English at that level of sophistication. Similarly, most of the Japanese can enjoy reading Natsume Soseki or Akutagawa Ryunosuke, but very few can write Japanese used by such novelists. Therefore, the fact that immersion students usually fail to attain near-native proficiency in productive skills can not be used as an evidence to disprove the claim by immersion supporters for functional bilingualism.

Another group of evaluation studies (Harley & Swain, 1978; Harley, 1984; Harley & Swain, 1984, Lapkin, 1984; Safty, 1989; Harley, 1992) looked into spoken and written outputs of immersion students more carefully, and found out that French utterances produced by immersion students contained a substantial number of grammatical errors concerning articles, verb conjugations, verb tenses, and so on, and that immersion students tended to avoid complex grammatical structures and overuse simple, but functional grammatical structures. It is also reported, however, that those grammatical mistakes and overuses of simple structures, although being indicators of non-native proficiency, do not prevent immersion students from engaging themselves in daily transactions with francophone people. This is because semantic errors are considered to be more serious than grammatical errors in daily linguistic transactions, and consequently those grammatical errors do not pose much hindrance to message comprehension.

In short, it is clear from these research findings that as far as receptive skills of listening and reading are concerned,

immersion students ultimately approach native-like proficiency in French, but they remain behind their francophone peers in productive skills of speaking and writing. Genesee (1991) concludes that French immersion education has succeeded in providing participating students "functional proficiency in French that surpasses that of students in all other forms of second language instruction in school settings where the learners have little or no contact with peers who are native speakers of the target language" (p.184).

4.4 Comparison among immersion students

French immersion programmes are usually subdivided into early immersion, middle immersion and late immersion, depending upon their starting grades. They are also subdivided into total immersion and partial immersion, according to the ratios of French portions within the total instructional time. This diversity in the way French immersion programmes are offered to anglophone students means that several options are available for parents who wish to enrol their child or children in an immersion programme. This in turn enables parents to choose an optimal type of immersion programme which suits their own pedagogical principles and the physical and psychological conditions of their child,⁶ and thus is to be appreciated by parents, and possibly by students as well.

For those in the administrative sectors, this diversity of French immersion programmes is not a matter of great appreciation, since having more than one programmes in a single school will incur additional educational and economical burdens, making it necessary for the school to prepare additional classrooms, textbooks, and other teaching resources, and to reallocate their teaching staff members or even to hire new teachers. Since the number of students who receive elementary and secondary education remains more or less the same, the deployment of more than one programmes within a single school may mean fewer students in a class. This may lead to higher educational attainments on one hand, but on the other hand it may reduce the administrative efficiency to a considerable degree. If it turns out that late French immersion programmes are as effective as early French immersion programmes in fostering near-native French proficiency among students, it will become less imperative for school boards to set up early French immersion programmes at senior kindergarten. For administrative people, the shorter the immersion programmes are, the less the economic burden they have to assume will be. This is one reason a number of evaluation studies were conducted, comparing different modes of French immersion

in terms of their efficiency in producing students with near-native French proficiency.

In addition to this secular motivation, researchers considered it a pure academic challenge to find out the optimal starting age of immersion education and the optimal rates of French language instruction in specific grades for attaining the highest level of French proficiency. Researchers were especially interested in finding out whether early French immersion would really lead to a higher French proficiency than middle or late French immersion, just as researchers of second language acquisition in general are interested in finding out whether children are better language learners than adults. With these related, but different motivational factors in the background, a large number of evaluation studies have been conducted so far to compare the educational efficiency of different types of immersion programmes.

First of all, concerning the difference between total immersion and partial immersion, Swain & Lapkin (1982) compared an early total immersion programme, an early partial immersion programme and a late (partial) immersion programme in terms of their efficiency in attaining high French proficiency, using elementary school students in Ontario as subjects. The obtained results revealed that at the end of grade 8 the students of early total immersion had attained higher French proficiency than the students of early partial immersion, although both groups attained much higher French proficiency than students of Core French. To be more specific, at the end of grade 8 the students of early total immersion were almost one year ahead of the students of early partial immersion in terms of the development of French proficiency, although they were in the same grade. In fact, students of early total immersion were almost as proficient as French-speaking students of the same age. These findings concerning the difference between total immersion and partial immersion endorse similar findings obtained by previous studies (Swain, 1974; Swain, 1978a; Swain, 1978b) and are reconfirmed by later studies (Campbell, Gray, Rhodes & Snow, 1985).

Concerning the difference between early immersion and late immersion, Swain & Lapkin (1982) compared the French proficiency of early (total and partial) immersion students with that of late immersion students at the end of grade 8, using a battery of testing strategies to measure students' French proficiency. In every respect of the adopted evaluation measures, the students of early immersion, whether total or partial, were far more advanced in French proficiency than those of late immersion. This observed difference in French proficiency was attributed to the difference in the

accumulated hours of French language instruction between early immersion and late immersion.

Another study in Montreal which compared early immersion and late immersion, however, presents a somewhat different conclusion as to the supremacy of early immersion over late immersion. Genesee (1981) compared the French proficiency of three different groups—students of early total immersion, students of one-year late immersion and students of two-year late immersion—through six different kinds of French proficiency tests, including tests of the four language skills (listening, reading, speaking and writing). These tests were administered in grade 7 through grade 9.

The careful analysis of the obtained data revealed that the students of one-year late immersion were far less proficient than those of early total immersion and two-year late immersion, but at the same time, rather surprisingly, that there was no statistically significant difference in French proficiency between the students of early total immersion and the students of two-year late immersion in every respect of the adopted evaluation measures. The study also revealed that both the students of early total immersion and the students of two-year late immersion marked high scores in the dictation test and the reading comprehension test which were almost equivalent to the scores achieved by francophone students of the same age. These findings led to a conclusion that early total immersion would not always be a best solution for fostering high French proficiency among anglophone children, and that kindergarten children would not always be better language learners than students at senior levels (grades 7 and 8) of elementary education.

It is apparent that there exists some contradiction between the findings of the two studies summarized above, one in Ontario and the other in Montreal, Quebec. In response to this disturbing situation, Lapkin, Swain, Kamin & Hanna (1983) conducted another evaluation study in Ontario, comparing early immersion and late immersion in terms of acquired French proficiency. This study compared the French proficiency of the two groups at the end of grade 8, by which time the students of late immersion had been immersed in French at school for two full years. In this sense, the late immersion students of this study may safely be compared to those enrolled in the two-year late immersion in the Montreal study. The obtained findings revealed that the early immersion students marked higher scores in the listening comprehension test, the reading comprehension test, and the standardized proficiency test than the late immersion students. Thus the supremacy of early immersion over late

immersion in fostering high French proficiency was acknowledged once again.

As far as the contradiction with the findings of the Montreal study is concerned, Lapkin, Swain, Kamin & Hanna (1983) claim that the contradiction was probably brought about by the difference in the ratios of French language instruction in the two early immersion programmes in question. In the case of the early immersion programme in Ontario, the ratio of French language instruction was maintained at 50% even at the end of grade 8. In the case of the early immersion programme in Montreal, however, the ratio of French language instruction in grade 8 was reduced to 40% from 100% at the very beginning. This means that the French language instruction hours accumulated by the students of the Montreal two-year late immersion programme for the preceding two years (i.e. in grade 7 and grade 8) were larger than those accumulated by the students of the Montreal early immersion programme in the same period, although the total accumulated French language instruction hours were far greater in the early immersion programme than in the two-year immersion programme. This may explain why there were no statistically significant differences in French proficiency between the students of the Montreal early immersion students and the students of the Montreal two-year late immersion programme.

The overall supremacy of early immersion over late immersion was reconfirmed by Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain (1998), who compared the French proficiency attained by grade 12 students who had been enrolled in early immersion, middle immersion and late immersion respectively. It should be noted, however, that there are cases where late immersion students do perform as well as early immersion students in some aspects of French proficiency in spite of difference in accumulated hours of French language instruction. In the French proficiency test administered by Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain (1998), the late immersion students performed as well as the early immersion students in five subtests out of 12. The early immersion students performed significantly better than the late immersion students mostly in speaking subtests. It is also well acknowledged that most of the differences in French proficiency observed at the end of elementary education will usually disappear by the end of secondary education, provided students follow bilingual programmes at secondary school (Hart, Lapkin & Swain, 1989, cited by OBE, 1996).

Concerning the difference between early immersion and middle immersion, Hart, Lapkin & Swain (1988) compared French performance of students enrolled in early immersion

and middle immersion programmes. This study targeted two groups of grade 8 students enrolled in early immersion and in middle immersion respectively under the jurisdiction of the four school boards in Toronto. The obtained data revealed that the early immersion students were significantly more proficient in all of the four French language skills than the middle immersion students. The difference between the two groups was particularly conspicuous in productive skills of speaking and writing. This observation was confirmed by a later study conducted by the same team of researchers (Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1991) and also by Genesee, Holobow, Lambert & Chartrand (1989) and Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain (1998).

Finally, concerning the difference between middle immersion and late immersion, McVey, Bonyun, Dicks & Dionne (1990), cited by OBE (1996), compared the French language skills of students enrolled in early, middle and late immersion in grades 6 and 8. The obtained results revealed that as a whole the students from middle immersion performed at a level between that of early immersion and late immersion. The study attributes this difference in French proficiency to the difference in the relative number of accumulated hours of French language instruction. Dicks (1994), also cited by OBE (1996), reanalyzed the students' performance data obtained through a set of different assessment tasks, focusing on the use of verb tense and aspect, and found the same tendency detected by the earlier study (McVey, Bonyun, Dicks & Dionne, 1990).

In contrast to these two studies endorsing the supremacy of middle immersion over late immersion, the results obtained by Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain (1998) revealed no statistically significant differences in grade 12 between middle immersion graduates and late immersion graduates in spite of the difference in the number of accumulated hours of French language instruction. This suggests that the relationship between the amount of French language instruction and the level of attained French proficiency is not direct or linear. Such factors as intensity and recency of immersion experience are assumed to play a significant role when immersion students' proficiency is tested. In any case, the research findings concerning the relative efficiency of middle immersion programmes are limited in volume simply due to the scarcity of middle immersion options.

4.5 Summary

The findings of these evaluation studies comparing different modes of immersion education in terms of their efficiency for fostering high French proficiency will lead us

to a conclusion that in fostering high French proficiency early immersion which starts in kindergarten is more effective than middle and late immersion, and middle immersion is more effective than late immersion. Between the two modes of early immersion, early total immersion is more effective than early partial immersion. This difference in relative efficiency in developing French proficiency among different modes of French immersion will usually disappear by the time immersion students graduate from secondary schools, provided that they equally follow secondary school bilingual programmes, accumulating the same number of hours of French language instruction.

The difference in attained proficiency among different modes of immersion education is usually attributed to the difference in the accumulated hours of French language instruction in each programme by the time evaluations take place. However, it is also reported that the percentage of time spent in French at a given grade level, namely, the intensity of immersion experience, and the timing or recency of immersion experience is more important than the total accumulated hours of French language instruction in fostering French language skills (Swain, 1981; Cummins, 1983; Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1998). Based upon these research findings, Lapkin, Swain, Kamin & Hanna (1983) stress the importance for early immersion to keep a high ratio of French language instruction in senior primary levels (i.e. in grade 6 to grade 8) if it is to maintain its supremacy over middle and late immersion.

5. Effects on Linguistic Achievements (2): English Language Skills

5.1 Background

Unlike bilingual education in the United States, which usually targets linguistic minority groups, French immersion education, a type of bilingual education, generally targets anglophone children, i.e., the linguistic majority group of Canada, who are living in the English dominant society. As a result, there seems to be little possibility that immersion experience will do major damage to immersion students' identity as English Canadians or will hamper sound development of literacy skills in English, their native language.

In spite of this reassuring expectation, parents who plan to enrol their child or children in French immersion are often worried about whether immersion experience may do any damage to the development of their English language skills. Quite naturally, this parental concern about some possible

damage to the development of English language skills is especially strong among parents who are going to enrol or have enrolled their children in early total immersion programmes, since children will be immersed in French with no or very limited knowledge of French, and English language arts instruction will be started only in grade 2 or grade 3 at the rate of one lesson per day. Researchers engaged in evaluation studies of French immersion programmes are quite naturally interested in this sensitive, but essential educational issue, since it is well acknowledged among educators that a firm grip on one's native language is a prerequisite for educational success at school, especially at primary school levels.

5.2 Initial lag among early immersion students

As in the case of French language skills, evaluation studies on French immersion programmes compared English language skills between students enrolled in French immersion programmes and students enrolled in regular English programmes, and also between students enrolled in different modes of French immersion programmes, i.e., early total immersion, early partial immersion, middle immersion and late immersion. The results obtained by evaluation studies that compared early total immersion students and regular English students suggest that in any variety of early total immersion, students experience some delay in the development of their English language (especially, literacy) skills in the beginning stages of the programmes in comparison with those enrolled in regular English programmes (Barik & Swain, 1975; Barik & Swain, 1976a; Barik & Swain, 1976b; Swain, 1978a; Genesee, 1978; Swain & Lapkin, 1982; Swain & Lapkin, 1991).

This delay is not surprising at all if we take into account the fact that early total immersion students receive no English language arts instruction at the beginning stages of their programmes, usually for two or three years, totally being immersed in French. This delay, however, is more often than not temporary. It is confirmed that this delay in the development of English language skills will usually be overcome within one or two years after English language arts instruction is started, except spelling (Barik, Swain & Nwanunobi, 1977; Genesee, 1978; Barik & Swain, 1978; Swain & Lapkin, 1982).

In the case of late immersion, the delay in the development of English literacy skills is rather short-lived, or may not be observed at all (Swain, 1974; Barik & Swain, 1976c; Barik, Swain & Gaudino, 1976; Genesee, Polich & Stanley, 1977). This is not surprising at all since students

enrolled in late immersion have had several years of English language arts instruction before the start of their immersion programmes and continue to receive English language arts instruction throughout their programmes.

As far as oral English language skills (i.e. listening and speaking) are concerned, students in any form of immersion will experience no delay in their development, compared with those in regular English programmes (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Genesee, 1983). In fact, they may even surpass regular English students in some aspects of oral English language skills. Genesee, Tucker & Lambert (1975) reported, for example, that students enrolled in primary level early total immersion performed better than regular English peers in the task of interpersonal communication which assessed a speaker's sensitivity to a listener's informational needs through a game description activity.

5.3 Beneficial effects coming from immersion

Thus immersion students, especially those in early total immersion, will experience some delay in the development of their English literacy skills at the start of their respective programmes, but in one or two years after English language arts instruction is started this initial lag in the development of English literacy skills will be overcome by early immersion students. It is reported that students learning in early total immersion will occasionally even surpass students in regular English programmes in the development of certain sub-components of English literacy skills, especially in their senior grades. Swain (1975) investigated English writing skills of grade 3 early total immersion students in comparison with those of regular English students in the same grade. The obtained results revealed that while immersion students were on a parity with regular English students in terms of the variety in their choice of English vocabulary, the number of punctuation, capitalization, and spelling errors, the number of syntactic errors, and the creativity of content, immersion students made fewer morphological errors in their use of nouns, verbs, adjectives, adverbs, prepositions, and pronouns, were less likely to misuse vocabulary, and wrote fewer simple and compound sentences and more complex and compound-complex sentences. Similar findings of positive effects brought about by immersion experience are reported by Barik & Swain (1978), Swain, Lapkin & Andrew (1981), Harley, Hart & Lapkin (1986), McVey, Bonyun, Dicks & Dionne (1990, cited in OBE, 1996), and others. It is also reported that immersion students' better performance in English in comparison with their regular English peers is usually seen in the area of grammatical form rather than lexical meaning

(Swain & Lapkin, 1991). These beneficial effects imply the possibility that immersion or bilingual experience in formative years can enhance children's language awareness in general.

5.4 Factors behind immersion students' performance

Thus students enrolled in early total immersion students experience a temporary lag in the development of English literacy skills in comparison with regular English students, but in a relatively short time (usually in a matter of one year or so) they catch up with regular English students, and in some cases they even surpass regular English students in spite of their limited English language arts instruction. This suggests that "there is a transfer of processing behavior across languages" (Fagan & Eagan, 1990, p.165).

This transfer phenomenon may be explained by J. Cummins' interdependency hypothesis (Cummins, 1978a; 1978b; 1979a; 1979b). This hypothesis stipulates that children acquire two sets of knowledge in the process of language acquisition, namely CALP (cognitive, academic language proficiency) and BICS (basic, interpersonal communication skills). CALP is a general knowledge, shared by all human languages, and therefore once it is acquired, it works for any other human language to be acquired in addition to the first language. On the other hand, BICS is language-specific, working for a particular language. Therefore, it should be acquired in the context of learning a particular language. BICS acquired in the process of first language acquisition does not work for an additional language.

According to this interdependency hypothesis, the reason early total immersion students will acquire basic English literacy skills in a relatively short time with no or quite limited explicit teaching is because they have acquired enough CALP in the process of learning French, enough to be applied to the learning of English literacy skills. It is also hypothesized that in order for this transfer to occur, students have to acquire a certain (high) level of linguistic proficiency. This is supported by the findings that early immersion students, who usually attain high levels of French proficiency, will soon overcome their initial lag in the development of English language skills and will sometimes surpass their regular English peers in some aspects of English language skills.

5.5 Summary

In spite of parents' concern that immersion experience may hamper a sound development of English language skills,

research findings available clearly show that immersion students experience no deficit in English language development in the long term as a result of their immersion in French. This has been verified for all forms of immersion—early, middle, late, total and partial—and for students with different learning characteristics, including students who are generally disadvantaged in school (Genesee, 1991).

The non-existence of negative effects on the development of English language skills is reconfirmed by Turnbull, Lapkin & Hart (2001), who compared the results of the recently-initiated Ontario Provincial Test between grade 3 immersion students and regular English students. This Ontario Provincial Test is composed of the test of English literacy skills (reading and writing) and the test of mathematical knowledge. All students in grade 3, grade 6 and grade 9 are supposed to write both the literacy test and the mathematics test, and all students in grade 10 are supposed to write the literacy test as part of the requirement of high school diploma. When they compared the test results of the English literacy test between immersion students and regular English students, Turnbull, Lapkin & Hart (2001) did not find any significant differences between the two groups, thus supporting the research findings by previous evaluation studies conducted in 70's and 80's.

These findings support the claim (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Lambert, 1981) that immersion education will result in so-called additive bilingualism, not in subtractive bilingualism, guaranteeing the normal (sometime superior) development of English language skills and the attainment of high French proficiency at the same time.

6. Conclusion

French immersion education started in 1965 as a tiny experiment at a school board in St. Lambert in the suburbs of Montreal with only 26 students. Now throughout Canada more than 320,000 students are studying in French immersion programmes (Canadian Heritage, 2003). Thus French immersion education can be said to have “stood the test of time” indeed (Wesche, 2002, p.357).

There is no doubt that behind this enormous expansion of French immersion education lies strong confidence in its efficiency on the part of parents who have enrolled their children in French immersion programmes and students themselves who have studied in French immersion programmes as well as educationalists who have been involved in some way or another with French immersion

programmes. Without this confidence, immersion education would not have seen such an enormous expansion as is witnessed today not only in Canada but also on a global scale (Johnson & Swain, 1997). Stern (1984) describes the success of French immersion education in Canada as “a quiet language revolution” (p.506) in a metaphor from the Quiet Revolution in Quebec,⁷ and according to Krashen (1984), French immersion education in Canada is “not simply another successful language teaching programme—it may be the most successful programme ever recorded in the professional language-teaching literature” (p.61).

It is especially worthy of note that French immersion education in Canada has not been enforced from the top of the educational echelon but has been started as voluntary grass-root parental movements and developed in response to parental desires and needs. Canadian Parents for French,⁸ non-profit organisation supporting parents of FSL students, has also played a significant role in the expansion of French immersion education in Canada. Without such parental support, French immersion education in Canada would not have seen such an enormous expansion as we see today.

It is true, however, that there exist a number of problems to be solved carefully. For example, a substantial number of students who have studied in French immersion programmes at elementary school will opt out of immersion at secondary school. Consequently, by the time those former immersion students start career after they graduate from college or university, their French proficiency, though acquired with great efforts, may have withered so much as it may not be workable any more. Even the French proficiency of those students who have graduated from secondary school French immersion programmes is sometimes made a target for criticism for its lack of native-like accuracy, especially in productive skills. In addition, there exists criticism that French immersion programmes are in fact functioning as elitist programmes and as such doing a lot of damage to regular English programmes.

In spite of these problems, it is certain that French immersion education has now acquired a citizenship in the Canadian society not simply as an innovative approach to foster high French proficiency among young Canadians but also as “a bold alternative to traditional unilingual education” (Safy, 1989, p.549) under its official languages policy⁹ which designates English and French as Canada's official languages.

References

- Barik, H. & Swain, M. 1975. Three-year evaluation of a large scale early grade French immersion program: The Ottawa study. *Language Learning*, 25(1): 1-30.
- Barik, H. & Swain, M. 1976a. Primary-grade French immersion in a unilingual English-Canadian setting: The Toronto study through grade 2. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 1: 39-58.
- Barik, H. & Swain, M. 1976b. English-French bilingual education in the early grades: The Elgin study through grade four. *Modern Language Journal*, 60: 3-17.
- Barik, H. & Swain, M. 1976c. A Canadian experiment in bilingual education: The Peel study. *Foreign Language Annals*, 9: 465-479.
- Barik, H. & Swain, M. 1978. Evaluation of a French immersion program: The Ottawa study through grade five. *Canadian Journal of Behavioral Science*, 10(3): 192-201.
- Barik, H., Swain, M. & Gaudino, V. 1976. A Canadian experiment in bilingual schooling in the senior grades: The Peel study through grade 10. *International Review of Applied Psychology*, 25(2): 99-113.
- Barik, H., Swain, M. & Nwanunobi, E. 1977. English-French bilingual education: The Elgin study through grade five. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 33(4): 459-475.
- Bostwick, M. 2001a. Bilingual education of children in Japan: Year four of a partial immersion programme. In M. G. Noguchi & S. Fotos (eds.), *Studies in Japanese Bilingualism*. Clevedon, UK: Multilingual Matters, 273-311.
- Bostwick, M. 2001b. English immersion in a Japanese school. In D. Christian & F. Genesee (eds.), *Bilingual Education*. Washington, D.C.: Teachers of English to Speakers of Other Languages (TESOL), 125-137.
- Campbell, R., Gray, T., Rhodes, N. & Snow, M. 1985. Foreign language learning in the elementary schools: A comparison of three language programs. *Modern Language Journal*, 69(1): 44-54.
- Canadian Heritage (Department of). 2003. *Official Languages 2001-2002 Annual Report*. Ottawa: Minister of Public Works and Government Services Canada.
- CBE (Carleton Board of Education). 1989. *Immersion/Regular Program Study: Research and Development*. Nepean, ON: Author.
- Cummins, J. 1978a. Bilingualism and the development of metalinguistic awareness. *Journal of Cross-cultural Psychology*, 9(2): 131-149.
- Cummins, J. 1978b. The cognitive development of children in immersion programs. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 34(5): 855-883.
- Cummins, J. 1979a. Cognitive development and early French immersion. In B. Mlacak & E. Isabelle (eds.), *So You Want Your Child To Learn French!* Ottawa: Canadian Parents for French, 28-34.
- Cummins, J. 1979b. Linguistic interdependence and the educational development of bilingual children. *Review of Educational Research*, 49: 222-251.
- Dicks, J. 1994. *A Comparative Study of the Acquisition of French Verb Tense and Aspect in Early, Middle, and Late French Immersion*. Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. Ottawa: University of Ottawa.
- Fagan, W. & Eagan, R. 1990. The writing behavior in French and English of grade three French immersion children. *English Quarterly*, 22(3-4): 157-168.
- Genesee, F. 1978. A longitudinal evaluation of an early immersion school program. *Canadian Journal of Education*, 3(4): 31-50.
- Genesee, F. 1981. A comparison of early and late second language learning. *Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science*, 13(2) :115-128.
- Genesee, F. 1983. Bilingual education of majority-language children: The immersion experiments in review. *Applied Psycholinguistics*, 4(1): 1-46.
- Genesee, F. 1987. *Learning through Two Languages*. Cambridge, MA: Newbury House.
- Genesee, F. 1991. Second language learning in school settings: Lessons from immersion. In A. Reynolds (ed.), *Bilingualism, Multilingualism, and Second Language Learning*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 183-201.
- Genesee, F., Holobow, N., Lambert, W. & Chartrand, L. 1989. Three elementary school alternatives for learning through a second language. *Modern Language Journal*, 73(3): 250-263.
- Genesee, F., Holobow, N., Lambert, W., Cleghorn, A. & Walling, R. 1985. The linguistic and academic development of English-speaking children in French schools: Grade 4 outcomes. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 41(4): 669-685.
- Genesee, F., Polich, E. & Stanley, M. 1977. An experimental French immersion program at the secondary school level 1969 to 1974. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 33(3): 318- 332.
- Genesee, F., Tucker, G. & Lambert, W. 1975.

- Communication skills of bilingual children. *Child Development*, 46: 1010-1014.
- Hammerly, H. 1989a. *French Immersion: Myths and Reality*. Calgary: Detselig Enterprises.
- Hammerly, H. 1989b. French immersion (Does it work?) and the development of bilingual proficiency report. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 45(3): 567-578.
- Harley, B. 1984. How good is their French? *Language and Society*, 12 (Winter): 55-60.
- Harley, B. 1992. Patterns of second language development in French immersion. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 2: 159-183.
- Harley, B & Swain, M. 1978. An analysis of the verb system used by young learners of French. *Interlanguage Studies Bulletin*, 3: 35-39.
- Harley, B. & Swain, M. 1984. The interlanguage of immersion students and its implications for second language teaching. In A. Davies, C. Cripser & A. Howatt (eds.), *Interlanguage*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 291-311.
- Hart, D., Lapkin, S. & Swain, M. 1989. *Final Report to the Calgary Board of Education: Evaluation of Continuing Bilingual and Late Immersion Programs at the Secondary Level. Sections 1 and 2*. Toronto: Modern Language Centre, Ontario Institute for Studies in Education.
- Ito, H. 1997. *Canada no Bilingual Kyoiku*. Hiroshima: Keisuisha.
- Johnson, R. & Swain, M. (eds.). 1997. *Immersion Education: International Perspectives*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Krashen, S. 1982. *Principles and Practice in Second Language Acquisition*. Oxford: Pergamon.
- Krashen, S. 1984. Immersion: Why it works and what it has taught us. *Language and Society*, 12(Winter): 61-64.
- Lambert, W. 1981. Bilingualism and language acquisition. In H. Winitz (ed.), *Native Language and Foreign Language Acquisition*. New York: The New York Academy of Sciences, 9-22.
- Lambert, W. & Tucker, G. 1972. *Bilingual Education of Children: The St. Lambert Experiment*. Rowley, MA: Newbury House.
- Lapkin, S. 1984. How well do immersion students speak and write French? *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 40(5): 575-585.
- Lapkin, S., Hart, D. & Swain, M. 1991. Early and middle French immersion programs: French language outcomes. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 48(1): 11-39.
- Lapkin, S., Swain, M., Kamin, J. & Hanna, G. 1983. Late immersion in perspective: The Peel study. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 39(2): 182-206.
- Lapkin, S., Swain, M. & Shapson, S. 1990. French immersion research agenda for the 90s. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 46(4): 638-674.
- McVey, M., Bonyun, R., Dicks, J. & Dionne, L. 1990. *Early, Middle or Late? Ottawa Board of Education Students in Three French Immersion Programmes in Grade 6 and Grade 8*. Ottawa: Ottawa Board of Education.
- OBE (Ottawa Board of Education). 1996. *Comparative Outcomes and Impacts of Early, Middle and Late Entry French Immersion Options: Review of Recent Research and Annotated Bibliography*. Ottawa: Author.
- OBE (Ottawa Board of Education). n.d. Number of hours of French instruction. Ottawa: Author. (mimeo)
- OME (Ontario Ministry of Education), 2000. *The Ontario Curriculum: Grades 9 to 12: Course Descriptions and Prerequisites*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Also available at the Ontario Ministry of Education website, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.
- OME (Ontario Ministry of Education). 2001. *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Extended French Grades 4-8 French Immersion Grades 1-8*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Also available at the Ontario Ministry of Education website, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.
- OMET (Ontario Ministry of Education and Training). 1998. *The Ontario Curriculum: French as a Second Language: Core French Grades 4-8*. Toronto: Queen's Printer for Ontario. Also available at the Ontario Ministry of Education website, <http://www.edu.gov.on.ca>.
- Safty, A. 1989. Some reflections on a decade in the French immersion classroom. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 45(3): 549-560.
- Seedhouse, P. 1996. Classroom interaction: Possibilities and impossibilities. *ELT Journal*, 50(1): 16-24.
- Stern, H. 1984. A quiet language revolution: Second language teaching in Canadian contexts: Achievements and new directions. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 40(5): 506-524.
- Swain, M. 1974. French immersion programs across Canada: Research findings. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 31(2): 117-129.
- Swain, M. 1975. Writing skills of grade three French immersion pupils. *Working Papers on Bilingualism*, 7: 1-38.
- Swain, M. 1978a. French immersion: Early, late, or partial?

- The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 34(3): 577-585.
- Swain, M. 1978b. Bilingual education for the English-speaking Canadian. In J. Alatis (ed.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1978*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 141-154.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. 1982. *Evaluating Bilingual Education: A Canadian Case Study*. Clevedon, Avon: Multilingual Matters.
- Swain, M. & Lapkin, S. 1991. Additive bilingualism and French immersion education: The roles of language proficiency and literacy. In A. Reynolds (ed.), *Bilingualism, Multilingualism, and Second Language Learning*. Hillsdale, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 203-216.
- Swain, M., Lapkin, S. & Andrew, C. 1981. Early French immersion later on. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 2: 1-23.
- TBE (Toronto Board of Education). 1993. *FSL Learning French Matters in Toronto Schools: Report of a Survey of Graduates of Extended and Immersion Programs in Toronto Schools*. Toronto: Author.
- Turnbull, M., Lapkin, S. & Hart, D. 2001. Grade 3 immersion students' performance in literacy and mathematics: Province-wide results from Ontario (1998-99). *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 58(1): 9-26.
- Turnbull, M., Lapkin, S., Hart, D. & Swain, M. 1998. Time on task and immersion graduates' French proficiency. In S. Lapkin (ed.), *French Second Language Education in Canada: Empirical Studies*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 31-55.
- Wesche, M. 1993. French immersion graduates at university and beyond: What difference has it made? In J. Alatis (ed.), *Georgetown University Round Table on Languages and Linguistics 1993*. Washington, D.C.: Georgetown University Press, 208-240.
- Wesche, M. 2002. Early French immersion: How has the original Canadian model stood the test of time? In P. Burmeister, T. Piske & A. Rohde (eds.), *An Integrated View of Language Development: Papers in Honor of Henning Wode*. Trier: Wissenschaftlicher Verlag Trier, 357-379.
- Wesche, M., Morrison, F., Pawley, C. & Ready, D. 1990. French immersion: Postsecondary consequences for individuals and universities. *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, 46(3): 430-451.
- Widdowson, H. 1990. *Aspects of Language Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Notes

1. Detailed information concerning MEXT's Super English Language High School Project, and its strategic plan to foster "Japanese with English Abilities" is available at MEXT's website, <http://mext.go.jp/english/topics/03072801.htm>.
2. Detailed information concerning Ottawa-Carleton District School Board's immersion programmes is available at its website, http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/General_Info/Fact_Sheets/French_Immersion/FSL.htm.
3. Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board is one of the few school boards that offer partial immersion. Detailed information concerning its partial immersion programmes is available at its website, <http://www.occdsb.on.ca/publication/FSL/fslrecom-mendation.pdf>.
4. Among students whose mother tongue is not French are included a small number of ESL students, for whom French is a third language. In the past ESL students were discouraged to enrol in French immersion, but nowadays they are well accommodated within French immersion. This fact is always to be kept in mind in the following discussion of French immersion programmes in the present paper.
5. Retrieved 7 September 2003, from the website of Ottawa-Carleton District School Board, http://www.ocdsb.edu.on.ca/General_Info/Fact_Sheets/French_Immersion/FSL.htm.
6. This is not always true. For example, the Ottawa-Carleton Catholic School Board offers either extended French or partial French for their students, depending upon the areas where they live.
7. Despite its historical and political importance, French remained "the disadvantaged partner in the Canadian confederation" (Genesee, 1989, p.7). The social (and sometimes politically radical) movement in Quebec in 1960s and early 1970s to rectify this disturbing situation is called the Quiet Revolution.
8. Detailed information concerning the activities of the Canadian Parents of French is available at their website, <http://www.cfp.ca>.
9. Detailed information concerning Canada's official languages policy is available at the website of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, <http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca>, or at the website of the Department of Canadian Heritage, <http://www.canadianheritage.gc.ca>.

Canadian Immersion Education in an Evaluative Perspective: A Synthesis of Research Findings on the Efficiency of French Immersion Programmes (1)

Harumi ITO

(Key words: Canada, French immersion, efficiency)

Abstract

The purpose of the present study is to synthesize research findings accumulated by numerous evaluation studies on the efficiency of French immersion programmes in Canada. The synthesis has been attempted in terms of the four different, but related perspectives; effects on French language skills, effects on English language skills, effects on general scholastic achievements, and effects on socio-cultural domains. Out of these four perspectives, the present paper, the first of the series of two, has focused on the first two perspectives of linguistic nature. Accordingly, it has focused, first, on research findings presented by those evaluation studies that compared students' performance in French between French immersion programmes and regular English programmes, between French immersion programmes and programmes for French-speaking students, and between different types of French immersion programmes. Secondly, it has focused on research findings from those evaluation studies that compared students' performance in English in a similar framework. A close examination of these research findings has revealed that in both perspectives the efficiency of French immersion programmes is well attested, endorsing the claim by supporters of French immersion programmes for the achievement of functional bilingualism in French and English among immersion graduates.