

## TEACHING AND LEARNING ENGLISH IN BILINGUAL EDUCATION

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Since its beginning some twenty years ago bilingual education programs for minority language (ML) students in the U.S. have been the subject of heated debate. The most controversial feature of these programs has been their use of non-English languages for a substantial part of curriculum instruction. On the one side are those who argue in favor of such a practice for theoretical, logical and social reasons (Chavez, 1984; Cummins, 1981). On the other side are those who argue against it, largely on ideological and economic grounds (Bethel, 1979; Edwards, 1981). The debate has been longstanding and far-reaching, drawing in academics, researchers, public policy makers, government officials, media editorialists and even "the common man and woman in the street". It is far from being resolved.

At the same time, there would appear to be a general consensus concerning the other side of the bilingual education coin; that is to say, the English side. Even the most ardent supporters of native language instruction for ML students recognize the primary importance of English language proficiency for these students: "for minority language children in the United States, strong English proficiency in all domains is essential." (Chavez, 1984, p. 171) In this paper I will address the issue of teaching and learning English in bilingual education programs for ML students drawing on my experiences with Canadian

immersion programs.

Notwithstanding their common interests in language education, immersion and bilingual education have been uncomfortable allies. In fact, as often as not immersion programs and their very success have been depicted as "enemies" of bilingual education, or at least as an approach to be avoided. For example, Paulston (1980), in a discussion of theoretical issues in bilingual education opined "I consider the St. Lambert 'immersion' study one of the most potentially dangerous studies I know, as its findings are so often cited as a rationale against bilingual education for minority group members" (p. 25). Paulston clearly acknowledges that it is not the immersion programs themselves that are to be mistrusted, but rather the interpretations that are often made of them; nevertheless, the mistrust prevails. Chavez (1984) also expresses concern about the relevance of immersion programs for bilingual education: "The Canadian enrichment model (i.e., immersion) is not appropriate for language minority children in the United States because the requisite sociopolitical, sociolinguistic, and educational conditions for the successful conduct of an enrichment program are completely different." (p. 168).

Concerns over the relevance of "the immersion approach" for educating ML students are based largely on programmatic or structural features of the immersion programs, and especially the early total immersion alternative. In particular, the use of a second language as the primary language of instruction prior to use of the native language, as is the case in immersion programs,

runs counter to the bilingual education approach which advocates use of the students' native language for instructional purposes before English is used.

On the one hand, reservations about using the immersion approach to educate ML students are appropriate and well founded because of the sequence of language issue. There is no logical or empirical basis on which to justify the application of this feature of immersion with ML students. Very simply, it does not follow from the success of the immersion programs with majority language students that ML students receive primary instruction through the medium of the majority group language. Even within the Canadian context itself, immersion programs in which minority French-speaking Canadian students would receive their primary instruction through English have been disfavoured by experts in the field for fear of the detrimental effects that might result from use of this sequence with minority group children (Lambert, 1980; Tucker, 1980). Moreover, there is no evidence to suggest that providing ML students with more English language instruction will enhance their English language proficiency. In fact, all available evidence indicates that when it comes to learning English in North America more exposure to English is not necessarily better.

On the other hand, examining the relevance of immersion for educating ML students exclusively in terms of the sequencing of language issue risks throwing the baby out with the bathwater by ignoring other aspects of immersion programs of possible relevance. One would be surprised if the Canadian immersion programs were totally irrelevant to bilingual educators--after



all, evaluations of immersion programs indicate that they provide effective general education and more specifically effective second language education, both of concern to bilingual educators (Genesee, 1983). The relevance of immersion to ML student education is likely to be found at the level of pedagogical approach or methodology rather than at the level of program structure. In the remainder of this paper then, I would like to consider three pedagogical features of immersion programs of potential relevance to educational programs intended to teach English to ML students.

### **The Nature of Language Proficiency**

A discussion of effective approaches to second language teaching must begin with a consideration of what kinds of language skills are to be taught. The work of Jim Cummins is particularly useful here. Cummins (1981) has proposed that language proficiency, first or second, can be conceptualized in terms of two distinct continua. One of these continua is of particular relevance to our current discussion. It is related to the degree of contextual support available for expressing or comprehending meaning through language. This continuum is characterized at one extreme as context-reduced and at the other extreme as context-embedded. In the case of context-reduced language use, meaning conveyed by language is supported by a wide range of non-linguistic or para-linguistic cues. An example of such language use would be a conversation between two individuals who know one another and who are talking about a familiar topic-- there is no need under these conditions for the interlocutors to

use linguistically elaborated messages to convey meaning; much of what they want to convey can be left unsaid or implicit. Context-embedded communication of this type is characteristic of much of our day-to-day use of language.

In contrast, context-reduced communication lacks such contextual support so that the message must be conveyed in an explicit and elaborated linguistic fashion if it is to be effective. An example of context-reduced communication would be a conversation between two strangers who are meeting for the first time--neither speaker can assume anything about the other so that all relevant information needs to be conveyed in a linguistically explicit and elaborated way. Conversations about unfamiliar topics would also fall into this category to the extent that the individual who is trying to convey new information to his or her interlocutor needs to provide a detailed and explicit account of what it is that he/she is trying to say. Much of what goes on in school during academic instruction is of this sort -- the teacher is trying to convey information or to teach skills to the learner that are not already known. Certainly the essence of reading and writing for academic purposes is explicit and elaborated use of language to convey meaning.

Cummins' conceptualization of language proficiency and similar suggestions are significant for bilingual educators because they compel us to consider what type(s) of language proficiency we want ML students to learn. It seems likely that it is the use of language for context-reduced, cognitively-demanding communication that is important since this is what



characterizes language use in school. Indeed, the development of language skills, and especially literacy skills, for abstract and complex intellectual purposes has always been and will continue to be the chief responsibility of schools and teachers. Although it could be argued that proficiency in the interpersonal use of language for social purposes is an important element of education, it is unlikely that this kind of language proficiency is sufficient to accomplish the academic goals of education. Schools have not traditionally assumed responsibility for the development of context-embedded, cognitively-undemanding kinds of language skills. It could be argued, in fact, that these skills are best acquired in untutored, peer-contact situations and, therefore, are most effectively learned outside formal school settings.

It follows then that instruction in English as a second language for ML students needs to focus on the attainment of English language skills for academic purposes. This point may seem self evident and, in fact, it has been made forcefully before (see Cummins, 1981), but it warrants repeating here because it raises important questions about what type s of school environment best promote acquisition of such skills. Let us now consider this issue by examining a number of significant features of the immersion approach to second language teaching.

### Pedagogical Aspects of Immersion

Very briefly, immersion programs are designed for English-speaking students. They provide all or a substantial part of the students' academic instruction through the medium of a second

language, French in most cases. In early total immersion programs this means that the students are taught reading, writing, mathematics, social studies and sciences in French before they are taught these same subjects in English, their home language. The teacher emphasises listening comprehension and oral production skills in French during the early part of the program. The students themselves are not required to use French with the teacher or with one another. In fact, the children commonly use English among themselves and with their teacher during this early phase. It is only later on that they begin to actually use French for communication in the classroom. This strategy has been adopted to reflect the stages that characterize first language acquisition whereby children's comprehension of language usually precedes their production. Moreover, immersion teachers do not want to force the students to use French before they are ready to do so for fear of inhibiting their initial attempts.

Generally speaking, immersion programs are designed to create the same kinds of conditions that occur during first language acquisition; namely, there is an emphasis on creating a desire in the student to learn the second language in order to engage in meaningful and interesting communication. Thus, second language learning in immersion is somewhat incidental to the students' learning about their school subjects, their community and one another. This approach contrasts sharply with more conventional ESL methods in which there is an emphasis on the conscious learning of the elements and rules of the language.



Use of the target language as a medium of instruction also allows the students to apply their natural language learning abilities to the task of learning the second language. It is now generally accepted that language acquisition is a systematic process that reflects the learner's active cognitive attempts to formulate linguistic rules that correspond to adult competence in the language--a process referred to as creative construction. According to this conceptualization, opportunities to communicate in the language are advantageous for learning, and errors are a normal and important part of the learning process. Accordingly, immersion teachers are discouraged from overcorrecting errors in their students' use of the second language. Error correction occurs but it never takes place for its own sake and, when it does occur, it never disrupts the flow of communication.

Thus, the most distinctive feature of the immersion programs is their use of the second language to teach regular academic content and skills. This feature of immersion is important for at least two reasons. First, it means that second language learning is performance-driven rather than competence-driven. Performance-driven learning involves acquisition of rules of real language use in contrast to competence-driven learning which proceeds according to some supposed grammatical, communicative or other order that may not have any direct relationship to real communicative proficiency. Use of the target language as a medium of curriculum instruction also means that language learning in immersion is task-based; that is to say, it proceeds according to the communicative demands of the tasks required of the students. These tasks can vary in terms of linguistic and



cognitive complexity, varying from fairly simple routines, such as understanding the teacher's classroom directions, to abstract and complex discussions, such as might take place in a science or math lesson. By systematically sequencing the tasks that she/he presents to the students, the teacher is able to shape the learners' language acquisition. A task-based approach also insures that students are learning language skills relevant to schooling.

The effectiveness of the immersion approach to second language teaching and learning has been documented repeatedly in a number of longitudinal evaluations. While time constraints do not permit a thorough review of the evaluation results, suffice it to say here that the evidence indicates that students in immersion programs attain high levels of functional proficiency in the second language--they are able, for example, to write examinations needed for their high school diploma in French and they are able to take government second language proficiency exams and place in the second highest category (Genesee, 1983).

#### An Integrated Approach to English Language Teaching

The effectiveness of the immersion approach suggests that mastery of academic content and skills provides a more effective incentive for language learning than language learning itself and, therefore, that an integrated approach in which academic and second language learning overlap is more effective than approaches that emphasize second language learning alone. Given ML students' need to acquire proficiency in English for academic purposes, as discussed earlier, and given the success of the

immersion programs, it follows that the English language needs of ML students could perhaps be achieved most effectively through the judicious use of English as a medium of academic instruction. Viewed from another perspective, having to teach curriculum material through English to ML students need not be viewed as impossible or disadvantageous. Rather, content instruction can provide a powerful means through which language learning can be promoted.

It seems unlikely that ESL instruction alone could provide ML students with the English language proficiency they need to survive and succeed in an English-taught curriculum. Time constraints along with the complexity of language skills needed for academic performance pose serious and real limitations for most ESL methods. The effectiveness of ESL instruction is limited further by pedagogical factors. In particular, to the extent that most existing ESL methods are basically grammar-driven, as noted earlier, they may fail to produce the communication skills ML students need for academic activities. Even communication-based approaches may fail to provide the range and type of communication skills required for academic tasks, unless they are careful to incorporate the same kinds of tasks that are likely to confront the students in the rest of the curriculum. The most effective way to insure that such tasks are part of the students' second language learning experiences is in fact to integrate language teaching with academic instruction.

Cummins (1981) has proposed that in the case of ML students use of the native language for primary academic instruction can facilitate the acquisition of English for academic purposes--an



effect he has referred to as linguistic interdependence. This in turn can facilitate the students' transition to an all-English curriculum. While there is good evidence for linguistic interdependence of the type Cummins refers to, it has not yet been established whether it alone is sufficient to prepare ML students for participation in an all-English curriculum or whether some intermediate transitional stage might not be necessary. Moreover, it has been argued that the effects of linguistic interdependence are most beneficial when academic skills in the native language have been developed to a high level. However, in many bilingual education programs, school districts are permitted or required by local policy to exit students from the program before such high levels of proficiency are achieved. Furthermore, current evidence indicates that it is not uncommon in bilingual programs for the use of English to predominate over the use of the native language so that much content instruction actually takes place through English even during the native language phase of the program. Thus the issue of how to integrate English language learning with academic instruction is salient even in bilingual education programs.

By its very nature, immersion promotes acquisition of language skills appropriate to school-related tasks while at the same time it incorporates the linguistic adjustments that are needed by limited language proficient students. Using English for academic instruction does not mean that English language arts instruction itself should be abandoned or minimized. However, English language arts should not exist apart from the academic

component of the curriculum. Rather ESL instruction should be tailored to meet the communication needs of ML students as evidenced by their language use in their other academic subjects. Typically ESL courses operate in a vacuum, bearing no clear relationship to students' demonstrated language needs.

The recommendation that English be taught as a second language to ML students through an integrated instructional approach has a number of implications: (1) English language learning should permeate the entire English language curriculum; (2) ESL instruction should be co-ordinated with the language requirements of academic instruction; and (3) teachers charged with academic instruction through English should recognize and assume some responsibility for satisfying their ML students' English language learning needs, that is to say, regular classroom teachers should be actively engaged in the second language learning of their ML students.

### The Interactional Basis of Second Language Learning

At the same time, it is not mere use of the target language for academic instruction that accounts for the effectiveness of immersion programs. Immersion is a communicative approach that is designed to reflect what are thought to be the essential features of first language learning and at the same time the special linguistic needs and characteristics of second language learners. The effectiveness of immersion depends very much on the quality of the interaction between the teacher and the learners. A useful way of characterizing student-teacher interactions in immersion programs is in terms of Gordon Wells' notion of



"negotiation of meaning" (Wells, 1979). Negotiation of meaning is a complex of interaction strategies that promotes the learners' comprehension of what the teacher is intending to mean, what the situation means and, therefore, what the language means and how it works.

The notion of "negotiation of meaning" resembles in certain important aspects Krashen's Input Hypothesis or what is more commonly known as comprehensible input. According to Krashen (1981), acquisition of a second language depends upon input that is comprehensible and just slightly ahead of the learner's current level of mastery of the grammar of the language. Krashen contends that the only role of output on the part of the learner is to generate more comprehensible input. He believes that language production skills, i.e., speaking and writing, proceed naturally from comprehending input--production skills do not have to be taught or practiced directly. Thus, Krashen's input hypothesis emphasizes the importance of comprehensible input over learner output and it emphasizes the teacher's role in providing comprehensible input over learner output.

There are a number of reasons to think that active production of language in communicative interaction is important for second language learning--not only in order to generate more comprehensible input, but, also, in order to generate language itself. First of all, there is the obvious argument that language comprehension does not by itself constitute total language proficiency. There is ample anecdotal evidence of children of immigrant parents who have learned to decode their parents' secret messages in the mother tongue but who are

incapable of actually speaking the language because they have never practiced using it. Expressed more technically, language production is important because it serves as a means whereby the learner can test out hypotheses about the elements and rules of language use--it is a way of trying out rules of expression to see if they work. Knowing all the specific rules of a language is not absolutely necessary for accurate comprehension of input, but effective, native-like oral production does depend upon the precise use of grammatical rules. There are good neurophysiological reasons for believing that language comprehension and language production depend upon different neurophysiological subsystems in the brain. That language production and language comprehension have different neurophysiological locuses of control suggests that perhaps they develop somewhat independently of one another. The implication here is that you learn to speak by speaking and you learn to write by writing. This is not to say that comprehension of spoken and written language is irrelevant for learning speaking and writing skills, but they are not the same thing.

It could also be argued that opportunities to produce language are particularly important in the course of studying academic material because talking about such material gives the learner an opportunity to linguistically analyze, manipulate and evaluate new concepts; such linguistico-cognitive activities may be important for acquiring new information (Piaget, 1926).

But, how is meaning actually negotiated? A number of obvious and simple strategies come to mind. The first five that follow



are strategies used by the teacher; three of them are explicitly linguistic in nature while two are non-linguistic:

1) Modifications of teacher talk: the use of simplified, redundant and slower speech can serve to facilitate comprehension by second language learners in much the same way that it does in the case of first language learners (Snow & Ferguson, 1976). Slower, redundant speech gives the learner more time to process language input and at the same time decrease memory load by reducing the amount of language that has to be stored in memory.

2) Direct questioning by the teacher of previously presented material: teachers must be prepared to assume considerable responsibility for communication breakdown; they must be prepared to reformulate misunderstood messages or to try other means of conveying the same thing.

3) Explanations of new or unfamiliar concepts or linguistic terms that might be part of an instructional unit and that might cause confusion in the learners if they are not clarified before instruction begins: this strategy is akin to a needs analysis of the learners' conceptual and linguistic needs prior to each lesson.

4) Contextual support: the use of non-verbal frames of reference, such as physical objects or realia, or experiences familiar to the students;

5) sensitivity to non-verbal feedback from the learners that they are confused or do not understand: teachers need to be able to detect and interpret feedback from the learners that may be culturally different from what they are used to.

Other negotiation strategies involve the learner:

6) direct questioning of the teacher or demands for clarification, simplification or repetition: the teacher must make it clear to the students that such demands are perfectly legitimate and she/he needs to make sure that the students know how to ask such questions or make such demands;

7) non-verbal gestures that indicate a lack of comprehension; and

8) use of the native language: there is no reason why students should not use their native language to communicate with teachers who understand the language. Teachers, however, should avoid overuse of both languages, as in the case of the so called concurrent method. The success of second language learning ultimately depends on the learner having to rely almost exclusively on the target language for communication.

Negotiation of meaning then provides an interactional strategy by which both the learner and the teacher actively pursue both second language and academic goals. Negotiation of meaning serves academic development since academic content provides a substance for negotiation and a reason for negotiation. At the same time, it is through active negotiation of meaning about academic material that the new language is decoded and ultimately mastered.

### Motivational Aspects of Second Language Learning

Second language acquisition through academic learning raises a number of important issues about motivation, the third aspect of effective language learning environments that I want to discuss. Motivational problems might be expected to arise in



bilingual education programs and other types of second language programs in view of the not unreasonable assumption that very few individuals are motivated to learn languages for their own sake. Indeed, it is almost accepted as a truism by contemporary language educators that languages are learned as tools to serve other functions that themselves are generally more highly valued than language itself. And yet, most existing second language methods suppose such a language learning motivation, or they make thinly disguised attempts to present language learning as something else. In contrast, the premise of an integrated ESL approach is clearly that second language learners will learn the second language to the extent that they are motivated by the curriculum to learn academic material. Viewed from this perspective, the issue of student motivation is not unique to ML students. It is common to all education and is fundamentally a question of the quality of the educational curriculum that students face. The question can then be re-formulated to ask what types of school environments best motivate students.

Social psychological research has shown that the social environment can have a strong effect on the type of motivation that underlies people's actions (Deci, 1985). More specifically, it has been found that environments that are controlling engender predominantly extrinsic motivation; that is, feelings of being pushed by external rewards and punishments to achieve. In contrast, environments that support autonomy or independent action engender intrinsic motivation, defined as the internal desire to be effective. Research on motivation in

school settings has found that students in the classrooms of control-oriented teachers show more extrinsic motivation and less intrinsic motivation; they also perceived themselves to be less competent, and they felt less good about themselves than other students. When achievement outcomes were examined, both intrinsically- and extrinsically-motivated students were equally good at rote memorization tasks, but intrinsically-motivated students demonstrated greater conceptual learning than extrinsically-motivated students.

The use of these principles for curriculum design and the impact that they can have on student motivation and ultimately second language learning can be illustrated by reference to an activity-centred immersion program. The students who participated in this program were in grade 7 and had previously studied French as a second language for a number of years in elementary school and, therefore, had acquired rudimentary French language skills. This was a partial immersion program so that approximately 60% of the curriculum was taught in English and 40% was taught in French. The students worked individually or in small groups on a number of different social studies and science activities throughout the year. Many of the projects included hands-on experiences that provided rich contextual support for second language learning. In many cases the projects required that the students go beyond the normal classroom resources, involving library work or the collection of information in the community or neighborhood (see Stevens, 1983, for a discussion of some of these projects).

The program also emphasized individualization--each student



was actively involved in defining the goals and means of attaining the goals of each project while general themes and procedural guidelines were supplied by the teacher. The students could work at their own pace and according to their own personal learning styles, with the condition that a certain number of projects had to be completed in each subject by the end of the year. Each project was accompanied by a variety of language-related activities, such as written reports to the teacher and oral reports to their fellow students. All of this was done in French, their second language, so that the students had to learn considerable language skills in order to complete their projects. Thus, language was an essential but often incidental component of each project. The role of the teacher in this type of classroom is quite different from that of teachers in more conventional classrooms. The teacher serves as a resource and counsellor for learning, not as an authority who dispenses information.

The second language proficiency of students who participated in this program was compared to that of comparable students participating in a more conventional teacher-centered French immersion program also at the grade 7 level (Stevens, 1976). The curriculum was teacher-centred and group-oriented so that all students worked on the same topics, at the same time, and for the same length of time. Student participation generally involved reacting to teacher-led instructional activities and classroom routines.

The results of an evaluation carried out at the end of grade 7 showed that the students in the activity-centred program had

achieved the same level of proficiency in speaking and listening comprehension and almost the same levels of proficiency in reading and writing as comparable students in the regular immersion program. These findings are noteworthy because approximately only half as much time was spent in French in the activity-centred program as in the teacher-centred program. In other words, a program that was designed to promote second language learning through intrinsically-motivated, individual student activity was as effective as a conventional immersion program that was twice as long. While there are undoubtedly other innovative ways of designing educational programs that will motivate students, the activity-centred approach described here is of particular interest because it illustrates the three features that I have identified as important for successful language learning in school; namely, (1) integration of academic and language learning; (2) a classroom environment that promoted negotiation of meaning through student interaction with one another and with instructional materials, many of which were concrete or experiential in nature; and (3) a curriculum of study that promoted intrinsic motivation to learn academic material primarily and language incidentally.

### Conclusion

The concern for English language pedagogy expressed in this paper should not be interpreted simply as a call for extending the use of English in educational programs for ML students. To the contrary, the preceding comments need to be reconciled with the importance of developing ML students' home language both in



school and out of school. Research in Britain by Wells (1978) has found that an important precursor of language learning and academic achievement in school, especially the development of literacy skills, is the nature of the parent-child interaction at home. In particular, children who have home experiences using language in ways that are similar to how it is used in school (i.e., for context-reduced communication as, for example, when reading stories) subsequently show greater reading proficiency in school. ML parents should be encouraged to provide their children with these kinds of experiences in whatever language they are most able to; in many cases, this is probably the home language, not English. As Cummins (1981) has pointed out, ML parents who are enthusiastic about their children learning English may be prompted to use English themselves with their children even though their proficiency is limited. They may unwittingly be depriving their children of valuable language experiences that could be provided were the parents to use their more proficient home language.

The significant immersion features identified in this paper are implicit in immersion programs and in the reports that describe these programs; they have not always been examined in explicit detail in the published reports. In making these features explicit, it is hoped that they will contribute to the formulation of an effective pedagogical approach for the education of ML students that draws on the experiences and approaches of what is generally regarded as one of the most successful experiments in second language teaching.

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