

Challenging the use of English as an essential scaffold in French immersion

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Deborah Palmer & Susan Ballinger:
The Role of Context in Translanguaging*

L1 use in immersion?

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 - ▶ French immersion typically avoids English during instruction in French in order to maximize exposure and use.
 - ▶ Teachers are expected to use various scaffolding techniques other than English to help students understand content.
 - ▶ There is, however, a growing research interest in examining the role of the L1 as a cognitive tool for L2 learning and for subject-matter learning through the L2.
 - ▶ But, context is a determining factor in making decisions about L1 use.

L1 use for minority-language students

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 - ▶ ELLs in the U.S. benefit from maintaining their L1 and using it as a resource for learning English L2 and subject matter taught in English L2.
 - ▶ If their L1 is not part of the school curriculum, ELLs need to be encouraged to draw on their home language not only to help them to engage with complex subject matter but also to validate the multifarious functions of their home language.

L1 use for majority-language students

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 - ▶ English L1 students are unlikely to benefit as much from use of their L1 given its high status that militates against use of non-English languages.
 - ▶ Sustained use French by English L1 students is more beneficial for pushing its development forward than recourse to English (given sufficient scaffolding to sustain L2 use).
 - ▶ There is already plenty of support for English both at school and beyond.

"Through producing language ... language acquisition may occur" (Swain, 1993)

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 - ▶ Using English to avoid processing complex subject in French L2 may be detrimental to moving French development forward.
 - ▶ Retrieval and use of the French strengthens associations in memory and makes French more readily accessible (de Bot, 1996; Lyster & Sato, 2013).
 - ▶ In the words of a CLIL student:
 - ▶ "you often have discussions in lessons and when you have to think about what you want to say and which words you can or should use for that then they are imprinted on your mind and you can use them much more quickly next time" (Hüttner, Dalton-Puffer, & Smit, 2013, p. 277)

English in French immersion?

(Swain & Lapkin, 2013)

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 - ▶ "Students should be permitted to use their L1 during collaborative dialogue or private speech in order to mediate their understanding and generation of complex ideas as they prepare to produce an end product (oral or written) in the target language."
 - ▶ "Vygotsky argued that language mediates cognitively complex thinking, and that the first language is the most powerful tool for doing so."

English in French immersion?

(Cummins, 2007, 2014)

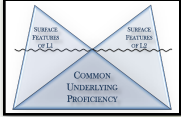
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- “Students who use English for planning are able to develop strategies to carry out tasks in French and to work through complex problems more efficiently than they might be able to do when confined to using their weaker language.”
- “If prior knowledge is encoded in a students' L1 then the engagement of prior knowledge is inevitably mediated through L1.”
- Use of L2 is unlikely to activate students' prior knowledge or, at best, is “likely to limit its expression to what students can articulate through their L2.”

Common underlying proficiency

(Cummins, 2007)

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- “makes possible the transfer of cognitive/academic or literacy-related proficiency from one language to another” given threshold levels of proficiency in each.
- If there is a CUP, then prior knowledge can be activated through French even if the knowledge had been initially encoded through English, and French can be used to process complex content.

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- If knowledge were irreversibly engraved in memory in the language of initial encoding, and if complex thinking occurs in L1 but not L2, then we would need to rethink content-driven immersion programs and return to more traditional ways of L2 study.
- Vygotsky's work on child development in the 1930s did not specifically distinguish a first from a second language as the more powerful tool for cognitive processing, but he did say that:
 - “children grow into the intellectual life around them” (1978, p. 88).

To use or not to use L1...

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- “What we do not know is if any use of the L1 by the students is essential; if it expedites the learning process or is simply the easier route to take” (Swain & Lapkin, 2013, p. 110).
- “The decision to use one language over another at a particular time is in part influenced by the history and power relationships between those languages” (Hall & Cook, 2012, pp. 279-280).

They already use English...

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- Preference for English during French increases around Grade 4 (Harley, 1992).
- Similar patterns have been found in:
 - U.S. one-way immersion (Fortune, 2001)
 - U.S. two-way immersion (Hernández, 2015)
 - Irish immersion in Ireland (Hickey, 2007)
- Increased preference for English co-occurs with a plateau effect for oral proficiency development (Fortune & Tedick, 2015; Lapkin et al., 1991).
- Students feel dissatisfied with their proficiency in French and hesitant to use it, and do not see themselves as legitimate speakers of the language (Auger, 2002; Roy 2010).

Use of English L2 in group work


(Blos Bolzan, 2016; Storch & Aldosari, 2012)

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- 1st-year university students in Saudi Arabia used English L2 in 96% of their interactions regardless of their level of proficiency.
- Speaking English was not a problem during collaborative writing tasks in an 8th grade class in Brazil:
 - Some students said that speaking about the texts in Portuguese could have made it more difficult because they would be using one code to talk about the other.

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- In Brazil and Saudi Arabia, students were both willing and able to use English L2 to complete tasks without the use of the L1 for cognitive support.
- The use of English by French immersion students may be more related to its majority status as a global language than to its value as a cognitive tool.



Translation in French immersion

(Cummins, 2014)

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- Students in early grades should write stories in English during English LA then translate them during French LA.
- In higher grades, they should do the same but from French to English.
- For support, Cummins draws on Manyak's (2004) study of an 'English immersion' class of Spanish-dominant students:
 - an all-English program without a bilingual curriculum
 - 1st-2nd graders spoke Spanish L1 and their teacher translated their utterances into English or requested other students to do so.

Recommendations for translation in immersion need more support

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- Immersion teachers have not been trained in teaching translation techniques and there is no evidence of their effectiveness.
- Translating words from French into English can reorient the instruction away from contextualized content learning towards decontextualized vocabulary learning (Pessoa et al., 2007).
- Students might be more likely to remember a word in French if they have been pushed to think about its meaning in French than if they are simply told its equivalent in English (Cameron, 2001).

Who is translating: teacher or student?

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- Even though teachers are advised to not rely extensively on concurrent translation, use of translation by students for comprehension is unavoidable insofar as bilinguals tend to access meaning through both languages.
 - Use of two languages by students to solve math problems led to a more profound use of the text for deducing a mathematical model (Berger, 2015).

Students' use of L1 in CLIL

(Berger, 2015)

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- German L1 CLIL students solving math problems in English L2 engaged in longer phases of text comprehension than monolingual peers as they often used L1 to test their interpretations.
- Use of two languages
 - provided opportunities for switching their attention between language and content
 - contributed to a more profound use of the text for deducing a mathematical model to solve the problems.
- This is a good example of students processing content by means of two languages in a way that enhances engagement with content.

Teachers' use of L1 in CLIL

(Gierlinger, 2015)

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- CLIL teachers at the secondary level in Austria used German L1 as a means to help students understand academic content and to scaffold learning.
- However, they did so because they were not sufficiently fluent in English and did not possess the pedagogical knowledge required to help students understand concepts through English.

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What do students prefer?

(Denman, Tanner, & de Graaff, 2013)

- CLIL students in vocational secondary education in the Netherlands were asked which teacher behaviour was most useful to help them learn subjects through English L2.
- The most important teacher behaviour scoring far above all the others was the teacher speaking English all of the time.
- The second teaching strategy considered most useful was the teacher encouraging the students to use English themselves.

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Crosslinguistic pedagogy

Cummins (2007, 2014)

- makes connections across languages
- strengthens biliteracy development
- promotes two-way cross-lingual transfer

(Lyster et al., 2009; Lyster et al. 2013)

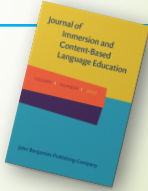
- To help students make connections across languages while maintaining distinct spaces for each, the French and English teachers of the same group of students collaborated to co-design biliteracy tasks that began in one language in one class and continued in the other.

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Forthcoming position paper

Ballinger, S., Lyster, R., Sterzuk, A., & Genesee, F. (forthcoming). **Context-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy: Considering the role of language status in immersion.** *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, 5(1).

Thank you



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