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ABSTRACT

A study examined the written English proficiency of Windsor, Ontario francophone eighth-graders being educated entirely in French and compared it to norms for English-speaking eighth-grade children educated in English or French. Results suggest that these francophone students compare favorably with anglophone groups in syntactic maturity and surface feature control, despite weaknesses in spelling and in the use of verbs and pronouns. It is noted that the study examined limited aspects of the students' writing proficiency, and that some aspects of the francophone group's writing set it apart from the anglophone group, including use of unidiomatic expressions amounting to literal translations of French and a wider range of proficiency. Further research is suggested using more comprehensive analyses, making comparisons of native- and second-language writing proficiency, investigating influences outside the school, comparing these students with those in other communities, and looking at different grade levels. (MSE)

# A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF THE SYNTACTIC MATURITY AND SURFACE CONTROL OF GRADE 8 FRANCOPHONES WRITING IN ENGLISH

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There are in the schools of Windsor, Ontario, as in many communities across Canada, students following four very different paths to writing proficiency in English. The first of these paths, the widest and straightest, the one followed by the great majority of the students, is that which leads children who speak English fluently through English-speaking schools. The second, a much less direct path, is that which carries English-speaking children through French-speaking schools, which is the form that French immersion education currently takes in our city. The third, very narrow and less direct still, is that which leads French-speaking children through French-speaking schools in a community which is predominantly English. The last path, which can be very tangled and elusive, is that along which children who are not fluent in English struggle, sometimes receiving ESL attention, sometimes fending for themselves as best they can.

The progress of the English-speaking students in the regular English program has already been reported (Laing, 1985). Their syntactic maturity is entirely in line with the grade 8 results reported by Hunt (1970), Loban (1976) and Pringle and Freedman (1985). A second study comparing the writing abilities of the anglophones in francophone schools with those of a random sample from the regular English program will be published elsewhere. It reveals no significant differences between the two groups on fifty different variables, and thus confirms the view that education in a second language has no detrimental effect on native language abilities (Swain and Lapkin, 1981). It is the students following the third of these paths who are the subject of this paper. Apart from one class a day of English language arts in grades 4-8, required by the Ontario

Ministry of Education, the francophone students in this study were educated entirely in French. Their formal instruction in English consisted of 40 minutes a day in grade 4, 60 in grades 5-6, and 50 in grades 7-8. How, then do their writing abilities compare with those of English-speaking youngsters in English-speaking schools? This paper reports the results of a preliminary investigation into this question.

Subjects

The entire grade 8 cohort (N = 65) of the French-speaking schools of Windsor and four grade 8 classes (N = 95) from English-speaking schools located in similar areas of the city took part in the overall writing assessment. The present study looks at two subgroups drawn from this population:

a) Francophones; this subgroup consists of all the students in the French-speaking schools who were identified as native speakers of French and who had been educated predominantly in that language. Of the 33 students so identified, 31 had received their entire elementary education in the Windsor French system, one had moved from Quebec four years earlier, and another had attended an English-speaking school for four years.

b) Anglophones; this subgroup consists of a random sample of 33 students who claimed English as their na ve tongue. To reduce possible interference from other languages, 27 students who reported a native language other than English or who stated they regularly used a second language at home were excluded from the

pool of students from the English-speaking schools before the sample was drawn.

The actual number of students present on the four writing days was reduced by illness and other activities. As a result, in the francophone group 12 girls and 17 boys wrote narratives and 14 girls and 18 boys arguments. The average age of the francophone students was 13;9. In the anglophone group 17 girls and 15 boys submitted narratives while the entire group of 18 girls and 15 boys contributed arguments. The average age of the anglophone students was 13;11.

It should be noted that all the francophone students were actively bilingual. According to the 1981 census there were 16,620 persons claiming French as their mother tongue out of the total population of 246,110 in the metropolitan area of Windsor. In a community where English dominates as it does in Windsor, it is almost inevitable that children whose mother tongue is French are drawn into speaking English in the ordinary course of daily life. There are no areas in Windsor where a francophone child can readily assume that the children across the street or the person behind the counter in a neighbourhood store will also speak French. The students' responses to questionnaire items concerning their language use reveal the pervasiveness of English in their lives (See Table 1). Some 40% of the students report using English about half of the time at home and roughly another 20% indicate that English is actually the dominant language in their homes. The percentages for English use with their friends are even higher with approximately 90% of the students reporting the use of English at least half the time and 25% its use all the time. A factor in these high percentages is that many of

their classmates are anglophones enrolled in what amounts to a de facto immersion program. In fact, approximately half of the grade 8 students in the French schools, 32 out of 65, claim English as their mother tongue.

Insert Table 1

Procedures

The grade 8 students of the participating schools were asked to write compositions in response to two stimuli from the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool (Ministry of Education, Ontario, 1982). The compositions were written two weeks apart in May and June under the supervision of the regular classroom teachers. The narrative stimulus offered the possible title, "Trouble Always Starts When _____ Is Around," and called for the students to write about someone in their own experience who seemed forever to be causing problems for other people. The argumentative stimulus asked, "Should Young Teenagers be Spanked?" The students were invited to consider both sides of the question and to suggest any alternatives to spanking that seemed reasonable. The supervising teachers were requested to provide time for the students to discuss the topics briefly amongst themselves before they began to write and to permit the use of dictionaries and other standard classroom reference materials. Forty-five minutes were given on the first day for the students to write a first draft, which was collected at the end of that time. On the second day an additional forty-five minutes were

TABLE 1

Francophone Students: Reported Language Use

Percentage of subgroup in parentheses

| Language Use | At Home | | With Friends | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Nar. | Arg. | Nar. | Arg. |
| Always speak French | 9 (31.03) | 10 (31.25) | 1 (3.45) | 1 (3.13) |
| Usually speak French | 2 (6.90) | 2 (6.25) | 2 (6.90) | 2 (6.25) |
| Speak both languages | 12 (41.38) | 14 (43.75) | 13 (44.83) | 13 (40.63) |
| Usually speak English | 3 (10.34) | 3 (9.38) | 6 (20.69) | 8 (25.0) |
| Always speak English | 3 (10.34) | 3 (9.38) | 7 (24.14) | 8 (25.0) |
| Totals | 29 (99.99) | 32 (100.01) | 29 (100.01) | 32 (100.01) |

allocated for revising and polishing a final copy. After the writing sessions, the papers, written on standard school foolscap and identified only by number, were taken to the university where they were photocopied, and then returned to the schools for whatever use the individual teachers chose to make of them within their own classroom writing programs.

The francophone students wrote 29 narratives with a mean length of 293.31 words while the English students submitted 32 papers with a mean of 384.16, a difference which is statistically significant ($F[1, 59] = 7.22$, $p < .01$). In argumentative writing, the 32 papers by the French-speaking students had a mean length of 230.38 words while the 33 anglophone scripts averaged 248.67, a difference which is not significant ($F[1, 63] = 0.95$, N.S.).

Syntactic Analysis

Following the procedures outlined by O'Hare (1973), each script was scored independently by two raters for four measures of syntactic maturity. The few differences in scoring that occurred were resolved by discussion between the raters until they reached agreement. Three of the measures scored are those Hunt found to be the three best indexes of syntactic maturity: words per T-unit (W/T), words per clause (W/C), and clauses per T-unit (Hunt, 1970). The third of these measures has been reported here as dependent clauses per T-unit (DC/T) so that comparison can be more readily made with Loban (1976) and Pringle and Freedman (1985). The fourth measure, the number of words in dependent clauses expressed as a percentage of the total number of words in the T-units (WDC/T%), was calculated to provide additional comparison with Loban (1976).

The results of the syntactic analysis are given in Table 3 along with comparative scores available for the same measures in the major reference studies. Listed for narrative writing are the scores reported by Hunt (1970) for all groups in his study, by Loban (1976) for his random group, and by Pringle and Freedman (1985) for personal narrative. Comparisons with the first two cited studies are made with some reservation. Hunt's scores are based not on actual grade 8 compositions but on how students performed on his "Aluminum" passage, an instrument which measures how they combine a series of short, choppy input sentences into a more mature statement. Loban's study does not take into account the effect which a difference in mode can have on syntactic performance. As more recent research has shown (Crowhurst and Piché, 1979; and Crowhurst, 1980), narrative writing makes the least demand on a writer's syntactic resources and argumentative writing the most. Since Loban is silent on the modes of writing within his sample, there is no way of knowing the extent to which his scores might reflect the greater complexity of some descriptive or argumentative papers. These reservations aside, it should be noted that scores much in line with Hunt's and Loban's have been reported with such consistency that they can be seen with some confidence as representing typical grade 8 performance. Nevertheless, more solid comparison can be made with Pringle and Freedman, a study which does differentiate between modes and provides results for argument as well as narration.

Insert Table 2

Table 2 shows that the differences between the francophone and anglophone students are extremely small on all four measures in both modes of writing. While six of the eight measures favour the anglophone group, one-way analysis of variance reveals that none of the differences reaches statistical significance at the .05 level. Also, the scores for both groups are much in line with those reported in the reference studies, showing in particular remarkable similarity to those of Pringle and Freedman in argument.

It is worth noting that Loban (1976) has shown that there is very little difference in complexity between oral and written syntax at the grade 8 level. What this analysis of syntax may actually be showing is that there are no significant differences in the written syntax of two groups of grade 8s who speak fluent English.

Error Incidence

To measure surface control, the errors in each paper were classified and counted independently by two scorers working within the following general categories: Sentence Structure Errors, Verb Errors, Pronoun Errors, Punctuation Errors and Spelling Errors. Differences in scoring were resolved by discussion until agreement was reached. The scores within the categories were converted to their frequency per 100 words to provide fairer comparison of scripts of varying length and to offset the fact that, as a group, the

TABLE 2

Scores for Syntactic Complexity

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Franco-phone | Anglo-phone | F | df | Hunt | Loban Random | Pringle/ Freedman |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n = 29 | n = 32 | | | | | |
| W/T | 9.87 (2.92) | 10.45 (1.82) | 0.88 | 1, 59 | 9.84 (3.06) | 10.37 | 11.15 |
| W/C | 6.74 (0.98) | 7.18 (1.10) | 2.63 | 1, 59 | 6.79 (1.12) | ---- | ---- |
| DC/T | 0.45 (0.24) | 0.46 (0.14) | 0 | 1, 59 | 0.43* | 0.50 | 0.43 |
| WDC% | 25.88 (8.70) | 27.74 (7.41) | 0.82 | 1, 59 | ---- | 26.30 | ---- |
| Argument | n = 32 | n = 33 | | | | | |
| W/T | 13.97 (3.23) | 13.83 (3.01) | 0.03 | 1, 63 | ---- | ---- | 14.09 |
| W/C | 7.54 (1.32) | 7.65 (1.61) | 0.08 | 1, 63 | ---- | ---- | ---- |
| DC/T | 0.85 (0.34) | 0.85 (0.45) | 0 | 1, 63 | ---- | ---- | 0.84 |
| WD% | 40.83 (12.89) | 41.81 (14.90) | 0.08 | 1, 63 | ---- | ---- | ---- |

* Hunt reports a mean score of 1.43 for clauses per T-unit. Subtracting 1.00 to eliminate the principal clause provides the score for dependent clauses per T-unit.

anglophone students wrote significantly longer narratives. The results were tested by one-way analysis of variance to determine if the differences between the two groups of students are significant at the .05 level.

Sentence Structure Errors. The papers were examined for three sentence structure errors that are given prominence in many school composition programs and textbooks: the run-on sentence, the comma splice, and the sentence fragment. It should be noted that in the interests of consistency the scorers adopted a very rigid and narrow view towards these errors and paid no heed to possible stylistic justification for these errors. In narrative writing in particular, comma splices are common enough in the prose of highly skilled writers, and sentence fragments may well have powerful rhetorical effect. Such niceties were ignored. Thus some of the errors included here would undoubtedly not be seen as errors by many competent teachers reading with other ends in mind.

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Insert Table 3

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As Table 3 shows, the differences between the francophone and anglophone students reach significance at the .05 level only in the number of comma splices in argumentative writing, and it is the English-speaking students who make the error more frequently.

Verb Errors. The verb system is an extremely complex part of the English language. Writers have to make decisions concerning

TABLE 3

Sentence Structure Errors per 100 words

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Francophone | Anglophone | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n =29 | n =32 | | |
| Run-ons | 1.04 (1.54) | 0.60 (1.01) | 1.74 | 1, 59 |
| Comma Splices | 0.24 (0.46) | 0.51 (0.66) | 3.32 | 1, 59 |
| Fragments | 0.09 (0.16) | 0.16 (0.35) | 0.91 | 1, 59 |
| Argumentative | n =32 | n = 33 | | |
| Run-ons | 0.49 (0.68) | 0.23 (0.53) | 2.94 | 1, 63 |
| Comma Splices | 0.14 (0.43) | 0.41 (0.48) | 5.33* | 1, 63 |
| Fragments | 0.20 (0.33) | 0.28 (0.43) | 0.64 | 1, 63 |

* $p < .05$

voice, tense, person and number with every verb they use. In addition, many of the most common verbs have irregular morphology. Furthermore, these decisions extend beyond the boundaries of individual sentences, calling for attention to decisions made perhaps several sentences before. As a measure of how well the students cope with the complexities of the verb system, the number of verb errors per 100 words in each mode of writing is given in Table 4. The Table also includes the results for the three most frequently occurring types of error, examples of which follow:

a) errors in form:

(1) use of an ungrammatical form; e.g., "The parent can do, then and only then, spank him and ground him."

(2) use of a nonstandard form; e.g., "My friend and I seen them get caught"; "If I would steal a car I should be punished."

b) agreement errors:

(1) lack of concord between subject and verb; e.g., "Bobcat has eight years and so does the other members of the gang."

(2) singular verb used with conjoined subjects; e.g., "Anxiety and anger make you hard to live with."

(3) singular following existential <u>there</u> with plural subject; e.g., "There was two girls that never stopped asking us questions."

c) shifts in tense:

e.g., "He looked so cute. He could hardly walk without tripping over the blanket. Then all of a sudden he sees another dog."

It should be noted that errors in verb form involving only tense or person markers or the apostrophe are classified as spelling errors in this study. Thus errors such as the following are not included in Table 4:

They should be grounded because being grounded last longer.

If they got out of hand, I would straightened them out.

But sometimes the parents dont take time to discuss it.

That will stop what they we're doing wrong.

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Insert Table 4

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Given the complexity of the English verb system, it is not surprising that the francophone students as a group produce significantly more errors in it than their anglophone counterparts, particularly when coping with the greater cognitive load of argumentative writing. What is surprising, however, is that in narrative writing the differences between the groups for the three types of error reported are insignificant, and in argumentative writing for two of the three. The significant difference in the totals can be attributed partly to the francophone students' making more of each kind of error and partly to their making errors of kinds that the anglophone students simply do not make with any frequency, if at all. One such kind of error is the unidiomatic use of a verb; e.g., "You went in every class and met some activities"; "If they were caught doing sex with another person." Another is the use of incorrect forms of the verb in situations calling for the participle;

TABLE 4

Verb Errors per 100 Words

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Francophone | Anglophone | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n = 29 | n = 32 | | |
| Form | 0.18 (0.39) | 0.07 (0.12) | 2.61 | 1, 59 |
| Agreement | 0.06 (0.17) | 0.04 (0.12) | 0.51 | 1, 59 |
| Shifts | 0.33 (0.53) | 0.13 (0.26) | 3.61 | 1, 59 |
| All | 0.66 (0.72) | 0.25 (0.32) | 8.59** | 1, 59 |
| Argumentative | n = 32 | n = 33 | | |
| Form | 0.24 (0.42) | 0.14 (0.32) | 1.22 | 1, 63 |
| Agreement | 0.09 (0.26) | 0.04 (0.16) | 0.85 | 1, 63 |
| Shifts | 0.28 (0.44) | 0.13 (0.25) | 4.66* | 1, 63 |
| All | 0.80 (0.76) | 0.32 (0.52) | 8.93** | 1, 63 |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

e.g., "There should be other ways, like get grounded for three days."

Again, the standard deviations in Table 4 are very high, an indication that there are students within both groups that make these errors with some frequency while others make them hardly at all.

Pronoun Errors. Like the verb, the pronoun provides student writers with ample opportunity for error. Its use can involve decisions concerning number, gender and case, and, again like the verb, attention to surface detail beyond the sentence. The number of pronoun errors per 100 words is given in Table 5, along with the results for the following three most frequently occurring types of pronoun error:

a) errors in form:

(1) objective used for nominative; e.g., "When Jennifer is around my friends and me always get embarrassed."

(2) nominative used for objective; e.g., "There was bad blood between him and I."

(3) objective following copula; e.g., "The only people that knew were me and him."

b) shifts:

(1) shifts in gender; e.g., "He was a rotten dog. His owners treated it like dirt."

(2) shifts in number; e.g., "I was so happy to get home and jump in our beds."

(3) shifts in person; e.g., "You can't trust her. They never know what she is going to do."

c) errors in reference:

(1) lack of between agreement between pronoun and referent; e.g., "Nobody knows how their life is going to end."

(2) pronoun without explicit referent; e.g., "After talking to them, it still didn't do anything."

Pronoun reference is another type of error where the rigid attitude toward error taken in the study has some influence. An indefinite pronoun followed by a plural noun was considered an error in accordance with what has been to date prevailing textbook convention. Thus students who may have been trying to deal with the absence of a gender-neutral pronoun in English by resorting to the plural--as no less an authority than the National Council of Teachers of English encourages us to do--were held to have erred. In other circumstances, then, the number of pronoun reference errors would have been scored lower.

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Insert Table 5

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Table 5 shows no significant differences between the groups in argumentative writing. In narrative, the results for the number of errors per 100 words for all pronoun errors and for the subcategory of reference errors differ significantly. It is true here, as with verbs, that the total for all pronoun errors is increased among the

TABLE 5

Pronoun Errors per 100 Words

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Francophone | Anglophone | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n = 29 | n = 32 | | |
| Form | 0.14 (0.21) | 0.06 (0.14) | 2.82 | 1, 59 |
| Shifts | 0.04 (0.13) | 0.03 (0.09) | 0.08 | 1, 59 |
| Reference | 0.23 (0.31) | 0.08 (0.18) | 5.67* | 1, 59 |
| All | 0.53 (0.49) | 0.23 (0.31) | 8.35** | 1, 59 |
| Argumentative | n = 32 | n = 33 | | |
| Form | 0.03 (0.10) | 0.02 (0.07) | 0.34 | 1, 63 |
| Shifts | 0.48 (0.70) | 0.24 (0.30) | 3.05 | 1, 63 |
| Reference | 0.48 (0.50) | 0.54 (0.75) | 0.11 | 1, 63 |
| All | 1.06 (0.94) | 0.84 (0.75) | 1.11 | 1, 63 |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

francophone students by a small number of idiosyncratic uses of the pronoun which do not occur in the anglophone group. For example, several students, likely influenced by the fact that qui can mean who or which, produced sentences with relative pronouns used incorrectly; e.g., "That's the person which causes the trouble" and "Danny which was twelve." Other examples are the use of the reflexive for the personal pronoun (e.g., "So my mother got mad at him and myself") and the use of the personal pronoun as a determiner (e.g., "them boys").

It is not beyond expectation that the francophone students should make significantly more errors in pronoun reference than the anglophones. What is perhaps unexpected, however, is that the difference between the groups should disappear in the more demanding argumentative mode. It is apparent that both groups exhibit some loss of control in pronoun reference when the mode of writing changes, but no convincing explanation comes to mind why the change affected the anglophone students more.

Punctuation. Table 6 reveals no significant differences between the two groups of students in any of the conventions of punctuation examined. In relation to quotation marks and capitalization, the results are somewhat surprising as the conventions in French and English differ. It is true, certainly, that traces of the French convention for using capitals can be found--"The dictionaries are to convince them that we are pure french and have to look up the english words when they speak."--but they are not widespread. Throughout Table 6 the standard deviations are very high, revealing once again that there are a few students within both groups who have great difficulty with these conventions while others have them under

admirable control.

Insert Table 6

Spelling. The one area of surface control in which the two groups of students differ consistently is spelling. As Table 7 makes clear, the francophone students as a group spell more words incorrectly and more different words incorrectly in both modes of writing. In narrative writing the differences between the groups are significant at the .Ø5 level and in argument even more so, reaching the .Ø1 level. It should also be noticed that in both groups the standard deviations are very high, indicating that there is again considerable variance within the groups and that the mean has been influenced by extremely weak performance by a small proportion of the students. It is also true, of course, that in both groups there are students who make very few spelling errors indeed.

Insert Table 7

Two questions arise from these results: (1) what kinds of spelling errors do the francophone students make?, and (2) which of these kinds of errors do they make with significantly greater frequency than their English-speaking counterparts?

TABLE 6

Selected Punctuation Errors per 100 words

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Francophone | Anglophone | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n = 29 | n = 32 | | |
| Periods | 0.22 (0.48) | 0.39 (0.62) | 1.34 | 1, 59 |
| Question Marks | 0.03 (0.10) | 0 08 (0.23) | 0.91 | 1, 59 |
| Commas | 1.20 (0.92) | 1.23 (1.13) | 0.01 | 1, 59 |
| Quotations | 0.25 (0.55) | 0.20 (0.75) | 0.08 | 1, 59 |
| Capitals | 0.68 (1.63) | 0.[illegible] (1.07) | 0.12 | 1, 59 |
| Argumentative | n = 32 | n = 33 | | |
| Periods | 0.07 (0.28) | 0.06 (0.17) | 0.05 | 1, 63 |
| Questions | 0.11 (0.28) | 0.08 (0.19) | 0.13 | 1, 63 |
| Commas | 1.51 (1.02) | 1.[illegible] (0.91) | 2.93 | 1, 63 |
| Quotations | 0.03 (0.16) | 0.03 (0.11) | 0 | 1, 63 |
| Capitals | 0.40 (1.00) | 0.15 (0.30) | 1.83 | 1, 63 |

TABLE 7

Misspelled Words per 100 Words

Means with standard deviations in parentheses

| | Francophone | Anglopohone | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Narrative | n = 29 | n = 32 | | |
| Misspelled Words | 4.61 (5.75) | 2.13 (1.63) | 5.44* | 1, 59 |
| Different Words Misspelled | 3.67 (4.05) | 1.97 (1.47) | 4.96* | 1, 59 |
| Argumentative | n = 32 | n = 33 | | |
| Misspelled Words | 5.24 (4.71) | 2.42 (2.50) | 9.16** | 1, 63 |
| Different Words Misspelled | 4.46 (3.92) | 2.12 (1.98) | 9.34** | 1, 63 |

* $p < .05$
** $p < .01$

The first question is answered in Table 8, which lists the types of spelling errors made by the francophone students and the number of these errors made in each mode of writing as well as the total for both modes. The types of error are listed in order of frequency according to the total for both modes. It should be noted that the number of spelling errors reported here is greater than the number of words misspelled used in Table 7. Since the intent here is to trace patterns of spelling weakness, every spelling error is included. When a word has more than one spelling error, each is counted. For example, in the following sentence, "James is just a big tatle tailor," there are three spelling errors in the student's attempt to spell tattle-taler.

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Insert Table 8

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The most common variety of spelling error made by the francophone students, making up approximately one-quarter of all their errors, is omission. Some of these errors represent a failure to include unpronounced letters (e.g., shoud, hiting [hitting], befor) and some record informal pronunciations (e.g., ther [their], maby [maybe], a ["he's not a adult"]), weaknesses common enough in anglophone grade 8s. In others the influence of French spoken code is clearly discernible. Many of the misspellings are created by the absence of the "s" marker, which is generally not pronounced in French. The influence can be seen in the following situations:

TABLE 8

Francophone Students: Number of Spelling Errors by Type

Percentage of total for mode in parentheses

| Type of Error | Narrative | Argumentative | Both Modes |
|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Omissions | 106 (24.15) | 103 (25.62) | 209 (24.85) |
| 2. Phonetic | 125 (28.47) | 51 (12.69) | 176 (20.93) |
| 3. Homophone Confusion | 51 (11.62) | 86 (21.39) | 137 (16.29) |
| 4. Word Boundary/ Division | 61 (13.90) | 46 (11.44) | 107 (12.72) |
| 5. Insertions | 45 (10.25) | 50 (12.44) | 95 (11.30) |
| 6. Apostrophes | 24 (5.47) | 38 (9.45) | 62 (7.37) |
| 7. French Interference | 16 (3.64) | 18 (4.48) | 34 (4.04) |
| 8. Reversals | 7 (1.59) | 7 (1.74) | 14 (1.66) |
| 9. Other Errors | 4 (0.91) | 3 (0.75) | 7 (0.83) |
| Totals | 439 (100.0) | 402 (100.0) | 841 (99.99) |

a) plural nouns

on both side of the question

most of the delinquent

he should tell all the other

b) third person singular present tense

the way that work the best

being grounded last longer

it really depend on

c) possessives

he pulled Shelley hairs (hairs = les cheveux)

to the principal office

the kid name is.

Another form of omission error that occurs with some frequency is the absence of the (e)d marker in the preterite or past participle:

later when we watch television

I would get kick out

what had really happen was.

Being accustomed to stress on the final syllable, some francophone youngsters appear to find the marker more or less inaudible in these situations. The ellision of normal conversation has the same effect on many anglophones who, hearing no ed in the preterite before the to of an infinitive, produce "he was suppose to come over" and "he'd be use to it."

The absence of initial h can also be attributed to French spoken code in such examples as "you ave a great chance" and "I will just afto live with it."

The second most common type of spelling error, 20.93% of the total, arises from the students' attempts to spell words phonetically. One variety is substitution errors, the use of an incorrect but plausible grapheme to record the citation form of the word, as in laughed (laughed), clamby (clammy), fenses (fences), and tolled (told). Another variety, less common, demonstrates the influence of informal pronunciation, as in chiminy (chimney), [redacted] alsore (ulcer) and agreevate (aggravate).

Related to the second but treated as a separate category are homophone confusions, a bugaboo of English spelling for all youngsters whatever their mother tongue. At 16.29% of the total errors, homophone confusions ranked third in frequency. One type consists of using exact homophones such as to (two), beet (beat), nose (knows) and wood (would). Another, more common, is to use an actual English word very similar in pronunciation; e.g., where (were), were (where), bitter (better), and than (then).

Word boundary and division problems ranked fourth in frequency at 12.72% with the most commonly occurring variety being split words like a cross, an other, suit cases, anny butty (anybody), and no body. The fusing of separate words is found much less frequently. Apart from fusing the article in alot, which occurs with much the same regularity as among anglophone students, only three other examples appear: eventhough, everytime and runaway as a verb. Examples of faulty word division occurring at the ends of lines are tur- ned, and mak- eup.

Insertion errors such as whene (when), whimp (wimp), and happenned constitute 11.3% of the errors. Two types of insertion error are peculiar to the francophone group. One is the overgeneralization of the -ed marker to situations where it is superfluous as in "because it hurted" and "who didn't wanted to be." The other is the addition of an unnecessary s at the end of words, presumably the influence of French spoken code; e.g., "just becauses of them boys," "and others girls" and "a patio doors."

Errors in the use of the apostrophe make up 7.37% of the total. The more common problem is the insertion of the apostrophe in incorrect places and this occurs in relation to contractions and to verb and noun inflections but not in this sample in relation to possessives:

I guess that Gerry did'nt like it.

He was'nt going to become a Ninja.

That really get's my family.

I wen't to put my shoes on.

Then the guy's had to break it up.

Errors of apostrophe omission, on the other hand, are most frequent in possession but also occur in contractions:

His moms boyfriend wants to put him in a home for being a troublemaker.

I told her in my friends cabin.

Were trying to be nice with everyone.

Since the French and English conventions for the apostrophe are so very different it is only to be expected that some francophone

students find the apostrophe troublesome. What is perhaps unexpected is that they do not appear to find it any more troublesome than their anglophone counterparts who demonstrate much the same kind of confusion. I eed, many anglophones of al. ages, although they face only one set of conventions, appear to find the apostrophe beyond control.

Ranking seventh are the spelling errors that can be attributed to interference from the students' first language. One variety of interference is the direct use of the French word for its English cognate; e. g., "the classe," "for exemple," "a problème," "my projet," "humain beings," "this gigantique problem." Less frequent is the use of a French grapheme to represent an English phoneme as in "he will d'ou," "glace" (glass), "graduelly," and "wrond" (wrong). Just slightly over 4% of the errors are of this sort.

Reversals are comparatively rare at 1.66%. Examples are freinds, dose (does), and dicsipline. One student consistently spells how for who.

A very small number of errors, less than 1%, do not fit any of the above categories. Most are indecipherable. A few are simply not English; e.g., "They might spank their childs," "I do hope that young teenagers of the future will receive more encouragement to wellbehaviour." The remainder remain mysteries; e.g., "he takes a ragne" and "we saw some shesens."

The second question to be asked in relation to the francophone students' spelling is: which of these error types of errors do they make significantly more frequently than their anglophone counterparts? After all, with the exception of the

interference errors, all of these spelling weaknesses are prevalent amongst anglophone children. The answer is given in Table 9, which provides the mean score per 100 words for both groups of students in both modes of writing according to the type of error. Interference errors are not included as none occurs in the anglophone sample.

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Insert Table 9

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It can readily be seen from Table 9 that the francophone students make more errors of every type in argumentative writing and in all but two types in narrative writing. In those two, apostrophe errors and reversals, the groups tie. In only three types of error, however, do the differences reach statistical significance. The francophone students make significantly more boundary and insertion errors ( $p < .05$). In narrative writing the difference between the groups in omission errors approaches the .05 level of significance; in argument it is highly significant ( $p < .001$).

It should be noted that the standard deviations are again very high, indicating very wide variation within the groups. There are, it is clear, within both groups a small number of students who make a great many of these errors while others make very few indeed.

Error Incidence Summary. As a group, the francophone students demonstrate a degree of surface feature control that is surprising. They compare very well indeed with their anglophone counterparts. There are no significant differences between the groups

TABLE 9

Mean Spelling Errors per 100 Words by Type

Standard deviations in parentheses

| Type of Error | Narrative | | F | df | Argumentative | | F | df |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | Franco. | Anglo. | | | Franco. | Anglo. | | |
| 1. Omissions | 1.19 (1.66) | Ø.57 (Ø.73) | 3.69 | 1, 59 | 1.39 (1.51) | Ø.42 (Ø.53) | 12.14* | 1, 63 |
| 2. Phonetic | Ø.87 (2.Ø7) | Ø.31 (Ø.49) | 2.21 | 1, 59 | Ø.69 (1.24) | Ø.42 (Ø.65) | 1.2Ø | 1, 63 |
| 3. Homophone | Ø.68 (Ø.95) | Ø.34 (Ø.49) | 3.Ø7 | 1, 59 | 1.Ø3 (Ø.96) | Ø.71 (1.Ø1) | 1.73 | 1, 63 |
| 4. Boundary/ Division | Ø.72 (Ø.81) | Ø.35 (Ø.39) | 5.37** | 1, 59 | Ø.62 (Ø.86) | Ø.22 (Ø.34) | 6.28** | 1, 63 |
| 5. Insertions | Ø.57 (Ø.96) | Ø.18 (Ø.3Ø) | 4.83** | 1, 59 | Ø.74 (1.18) | Ø.24 (Ø.5Ø) | 5.2Ø** | 1, 63 |
| 6. Apostrophe | Ø.3Ø (Ø.53) | Ø.3Ø (Ø.43) | Ø | 1, 59 | Ø.46 (Ø.64) | Ø.32 (Ø.57) | Ø.86 | 1, 63 |
| 7. Reversals | Ø.11 (Ø.34) | Ø.11 (Ø.22) | Ø | 1, 59 | Ø.Ø9 (Ø.25) | Ø.Ø7 (Ø.25) | Ø.1Ø | 1, 63 |
| 8. Others | Ø.Ø8 (Ø.29) | Ø.Ø1 (Ø.Ø5) | 1.81 | 1, 59 | Ø.Ø4 (Ø.12) | Ø.Ø2 (Ø.12) | Ø.34 | 1, 63 |

* $p < .001$
** $p < .05$

in control of punctuation. There is only one difference that is significant in sentence structure errors, and it is the francophones who score higher. On five of eight measures of verb control and six of eight relating to the pronoun there are no significant differences. Only in spelling do they perform consistently less well as a group.

All of these statements are made in reference to group performance, and, as the very high standard deviations that recur through this study remind us, there is wide variation within both these groups, and especially so within the francophone where the range of scores is generally wider. Two points in this regard must be stated firmly:

1. On all measures where the performance of the francophone students is significantly weaker than that of the anglophones, the scores for the francophone group are adversely affected by a small proportion of students who make far more errors than even the weakest students in the anglophone comparison group tend to do.

2. On all measures where the performance of the francophone students is significantly weaker than that of the anglophones, there are still francophones who perform as well as any of the anglophones. They are, however, proportionately fewer than their anglophone counterparts.

Table 10 illustrates this fact for the most highly significant difference located between the groups--omission spelling errors in argument. It lists the number and percentage in each group that score within four ranges of error frequency from 0 to the maximum for

the group. It is is readily seen that the largest group of francophones, 11 students, just over one-third of the group, makes more than 1.5 of these errors per 100 words, while only 1 anglophone appears in that range. At the other end, the largest group of anglophones, 22 students, two-thirds of the group, makes fewer than 0.49 of these errors per 100 words while a much smaller number of francophones, 9 students, record similar performance.

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Insert Table 10

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Conclusion

How do the writing abilities of francophone students attending French schools in a predominantly English-speaking community compare with those of their anglophone counterparts in regular English schools? On the basis of this study, the answer must be that they compare remarkably well. Apart from their spelling and some weaknesses in the use of verbs and pronouns, this group of grade 8 francophones writes English as competently as the comparison group of English students on the measures of syntactic maturity and surface feature control applied.

It must be pointed out, however, that many aspects of writing proficiency are not included in this study, and that it is possible the differences between the groups in relation to them could be highly significant. Certainly, there are additional aspects of the writing done by the francophone students as a group that set it apart from that of the anglophone group. There are, for example,

TABLE 10

Frequency of Omission Spelling Errors in Argument per 100 Words

Percentage of the group in parentheses

| | Range of Scores | | | | Maximum Score |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | 0 -.49 | .50 - .99 | 1.0 - 1.49 | 1.50 - Max. | |
| Franco. | 9 (28.1) | 8 (25.0) | 4 (12.5) | 11 (34.4) | 6.21 |
| Anglo. | 22 (66.6) | 6 (18.2) | 4 (12.1) | 1 (3.1) | 2.11 |

unidiomatic expressions, particularly in the use of the preposition and the article, that amount to literal translations of French:

it depends of your parents (cela dépend de vos parents)

I think most of the teenagers would agree ( la plupart des )

ask a question to the teacher (demander quelque chose à quelqu'un)

unless there is a good communication ( une communication)

The good success in a punishment ( le succès)

It must be stressed also that the range of writing ability in English demonstrated in the francophone group is very large. At its weakest, it is very weak indeed:

> Breaker is person what think what he is good at Break Dancing. I think that he think that he is great but he is not great but he is not bad or not good he nose a little not much. And when he comes around us he aked me and my friends if [we] wood ave a Break Dancing Compotition they sed yes they Dance and Dance and Dance and Dance he Dance and Dance and Dance but they Dance until they win he wased to happy so he left mad.

This is the writing of a student for whom written English is unfamiliar territory; his oral facility in English far exceeds his knowledge of the conventions of English print and he needs many more opportunities to read and write in English if he is to bring his writing up to the level of his speaking. No writing in the anglophone group is quite at this level.

At its best, however, the writing of the francophone students, as the following example shows, is fully competent grade 8

writing by any standards:

> Julie is my younger sister. She is very temperamental, and I love to tease her. We often get into trouble together, and most of the time it's because we quarrel, being two very different people. I like her, but I hardly ever agree with her, on anything. For example, after dinner, [we are] usually asked to do the dishes. There are very few times this is ever done promptly, without arguments. I can't resist teasing her and criticizing her. (I sometimes have a "big mouth.") Neither of us likes doing dishes. (Who does?) We can never agree on who should wash, who should dry, and how it should be done.

The student who wrote that passage is a girl whose mother tongue is French, who speaks predominantly French in her home, and who has spent her entire elementary school career, K-8, in French-speaking schools. And yet she writes English well enough to stand comparison with the very best anglophone grade 8s, students who have had in school thousands of hours more instruction and experience in reading and writing English.

The results of this preliminary study raise several sets of questions worthy of further investigation. Prominent among them are the following:

a) How would the writing of francophone students in similar conditions compare with that of anglophones in a more comprehensive assessment that included measures in the affective and cognitive domains?

b) Does the English language performance of francophone students in French-speaking schools support Cummins' view that "literacy-related skills are manifestations of a common underlying proficiency" (Cummins, 1983, p. 123)? How does their writing in English compare with their writing in French? Are those least proficient in English also those least proficient in French? What relationships are there with reading ability and experience?

c) What outside-of-school factors contribute to the wide range in writing ability demonstrated by the francophone students? How pervasive is English in their lives? How much contact do they have with English print? What writing do they do in English outside the school?

d) How does the performance of this group of francophone students compare with others? Do other grade 8 cohorts exhibit similar characteristics? Is their performance a product of specifically local conditions? How do francophone students write English in communities where English is less dominant than in Windsor, Ontario?

e) Do the results of this study hold true at other levels? Do the differences between anglophone and francophone increase with further schooling as the students become more and more literate in their native languages? Do the comparative weaknesses in the francophone writing seen at this level reappear at higher grade levels?

These are questions that would carry research in bilingual education in Canada into areas that have not yet been systematically explored. They are areas of importance for a society committed to bilingualism.

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