Making "Wiggle Room" in French as a Second Language/Français langue seconde: Reconfiguring Identity, Language, and Policy

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In this two-year ethnographic study, I critically examined the problematic nature of the construct French as a Second Language (FSL), drawing specifically from the lived experiences of Canadian youth of Italian origin, participating in a teacher education course to prepare teachers of French. Using discourse analysis of interviews, observations, and focus groups, I found that participants' social identities and linguistic practices were complex and varied. However, current FSL policies and practice do not reflect such diversity or multidimensionality. To conclude, I demonstrate the importance of making some "wiggle room" regarding the construction of French as a Second Language (FSL) to reflect a more pluralistic society.

Key words: identity construction, Italian Canadian youth, ideologies, official language policies, teacher education, Ontario education

Dans cet article, basé sur une étude ethnographique de deux ans, j'ai examiné la nature problématique du construit « français langue seconde (FLS) » en portant spécifiquement sur les expériences vécues de jeunes Italo-canadiens durant leur formation pour devenir enseignants de français langue seconde dans le paysage multiculturel de Toronto. En faisant une analyse de discours des entrevues audio et vidéo semi-dirigées, des réunions avec les groupes cibles, et des observations, j'ai découvert que les identités sociales ainsi que les pratiques langagières de ces jeunes étaient complexes et variées. La politique et les pratiques actuelles du français langue seconde, pourtant, ne reflètent pas une telle diversité ou la multidimensionalité des réalités sociales des jeunes. Pour conclure, je souligne l'importance de créer des « zones du confort » ou « Wiggle room » en ce qui concerne le construit « français langue seconde » afin qu'il corresponde plus à la société qui est marquée par le pluralisme.

Mots clés: Construction identitaire, français langue seconde (FLS), jeunes italo-canadiens, idéologies, politique officielle des langues, formation des maîtres, éducation en Ontario

In this article, I put forth a call to reconceptualize the constructed curricular label, French as a Second Language education, not only to reflect the linguistic and cultural diversity of a pluralistic society, but more importantly to take into account the complex significance that multilingualism (including French, in this case) represents for individuals. As such, I have based this article on a two-year, multi-site ethnographic study (Byrd Clark, 2008a), which critically and closely examined the importance of French language education, in particular, for seven [1] (out of 25 participants), multi-generational, self-identified Italian Canadians, training to become teachers of French in the Greater Toronto Area (GTA).

Although considerable advances have occurred in sociolinguistics, critical pedagogy, and applied linguistics as regards the fluidity, multiplicity, and heterogeneity of social identity construction, conceptualizations of languages (including notions of proficiency and competence) and language education remain rather divisive, fixed, homogeneous, and unidimensional. Thus, using an interdisciplinary approach with reflexive discourse analysis (Byrd Clark, 2008a, 2009; Fairclough, 1995; Heller & Labrie, 2003), I have set the goal of this article to illustrate that people and languages do not fit neatly into social categories, and that some categories, such as French as a Second Language, are problematic, particularly because of the impact of globalization, rapid technological change, and mobility on the everyday lives of individuals.

Although there is a macro-level discourse emanating from social institutions, namely education, on what counts legitimately as French (hence the reference to French language learning as French as a Second Language), the participants' discourse, [2] varied engagements, and com-

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[1]   For this article, I have chosen to present a discourse analysis of the social practices of seven participants from a larger pool of 25 participants originally involved in this study (see Byrd Clark, 2008a). The participants selected were articulate and reflective, representing various perspectives.

[2]   I use the term discourse here to represent language practices and social practices that individuals use to make sense of their actions or their social realities by expressing positions and representations (see Fairclough, 1995; Labrie, 2002). In other words, how individuals use their linguistic resources or different elements of a linguistic repertoire, in relation to societal norms through different interactions and contexts.

plex positionings at different moments from a micro-level, however, demonstrate their management, adherence, and more importantly, their resistance to dominant discourses, blurring and confounding homogeneously conceived-of identities, languages, and policies. For many, French is not a "second" language socially, politically, historically, linguistically, socio-affectively, or geographically. Therefore, my main research questions are concerned with:

(1) How and why do these youth invest in the acquisition of French beyond high school?

(2) Do their investments in French impact how they see themselves, or self-represent in different contexts? and

(3) How do these symbolic, complex investments have an impact on broader and more interdisciplinary conceptualizations of French as a Second Language?

Before addressing these questions, I first present my interdisciplinary theoretical positioning, and then situate the study contextually by providing a rationale for my choices of conceptual approach and methodology. I briefly explain the data instruments used to collect data for this article. After presenting the analyses, I conclude with a summary and discussion of the findings and the significance they hold in making some "wiggle room" in French as a Second Language education to reconfigure identity, language, and policy.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: AN INTERDISCIPLINARY APROACH [3]

Over the past 15 years, with the impact of globalization, the emergence of a new economy, as well as increased transnational spaces [4] in multilingual societies, an insatiable interest among both theorists and practitioners has developed to look at the relationship between language learning and identity from a sociocultural perspective. Much of this interest has created spaces to move beyond an essentialist view of identi-

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[3]   A section of this theoretical framework that follows has been published in: Byrd Clark, J. (2009). *Multilingualism, citizenship, and identity: Voices of youth and symbolic investments in an urban, globalized world.* London, UK: Continuum Publishers.

[4]   Simply put, transnational spaces means reaching beyond or transcending national borders.

ties as static, unitary, and fixed, shifting toward a more poststructuralist understanding of identities as fluid, multiple, and a site of struggle, constructed in linguistic interaction (Cameron, 2000; Le Page & Tabouret-Keller; 1985; Labrie, 2002; Quell, 2000). Consequently, this new globalized economy is also redefining the value of languages, setting standards, yet at the same time, blurring boundaries of ethnic, linguistic, racial, and gendered identities, furthering ambiguity, contradictions, and tensions around the interstices of being and becoming multilingual and multicultural (Byrd Clark, 2007; Heller & Labrie, 2003). Hall (2006) sums up this position:

The very process of identification, through which we project ourselves into our cultural identities, has become more open-ended, variable, and problematic. Within us, we have, contradictory identities pulling in different directions, so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about. (p. 251)

My research is situated within a post-structuralist framework (Bakhtin, 1981; Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001; Bourdieu, 1991) of the politics of identity and language (Giddens, 1991; Hall, 1990; Quell, 2000), and within discourses of language and ethnicity (Byrd Clark, 2007, 2008a; Heller & Labrie, 2003), which have a social and political history. To coherently discuss the complex meanings and representations associated with multilingualism, identity, and language learning in the present study, I have found the works of Bourdieu (1982), Giddens (1984), Erickson (2001), and Norton (2000) useful to support and represent the analysis of my data.

Bourdieu (1982) argues that language as symbolic capital regulates people's access to different resources (e.g., political, linguistic, social, material). In this light, he also sees language as a tool through which groups of people collectively mobilize and establish linguistic communities to create shared symbols to allow members to construct boundaries between the "us" and "them" and to use these symbols through interaction to create the repertoire of identity.

According to Bourdieu (1982), institutions produce and impose the process by which a language becomes more valued than another or other languages, which are markets [5] in and of themselves. The most obvious

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[5]   Markets are social spaces where there is a hierarchy depending on what kind or amount of symbolic capital one has.

and telling one, education, which is an institution that plays a significant role in social identity construction and in the unequal relations of power, at the same time setting up and normalizing a system of values, masking its concrete sources through hegemonic discourses to assure acceptance. Bourdieu (1977) calls this form of power as it relates to language "symbolic power." He suggests that education has a monopoly in reproducing the linguistic market through such (invisible) power. However, Thompson (2005) and van Zanten (2005) argue that spaces are created when new policies or new situations occur such as in the present study: Italian Canadian youth training to become teachers of French.

On that note, it is important to mention Giddens's (1984) theory of structuration, which examines the concept of "action," in other words, the dialectical relationship between structure and agency, which signifies that most action is meaningful (has a purpose) and individuals are constantly monitoring what they do and how others view them as well as in the discursive spaces they do things. As such, Giddens perceives individuals as "knowledgeable agents" who understand the world they live in and explain their actions to others and themselves. He argues that agency is not about intended actions, but the capacity or ability to act given the existing structural constraints.

This theory is important because individuals do have the capacity at different moments to create counter-hegemonic discourse by consciously making choices and acting upon these choices to negotiate their place within their world(s) because identity is not solely about where we come from, it is not merely a "recovery of the past," but rather it is about "who we might become," and how representations of who we are bear upon how we represent ourselves (Hall & du Gay, 1996). Similarly, Erickson (2001) draws upon the concept *bricolage,* used by Lévi-Strauss (1966), because bricolage (or the bricoleur/brick layer) expropriates and then makes use of certain ideas to accomplish different purposes from those for which the materials were originally intended. This innovation is a kind of "wiggle room" within which hegemonic reproduction can be partially interrupted or slid around (Erickson, 2001, p. 175), and demonstrates inventive resourcefulness of the interlocutors in the interaction (Goffman, 1967). It is precisely this notion of "wiggle room" that I found particularly insightful when I looked at the particular situation of Italian

Canadian youth investing in representations of French (and multilingualism) and the significance of their engagements.

What is useful when one talks about a person's engagement in and with language learning is the notion of investment (Byrd Clark, 2008a, 2008b, 2009; Norton Pierce, 1993, 1995; Norton, 2000). An investment, which does not necessarily have to be seen as a financial or economic term, can be positioned as a personal, social, or ideological term. In terms of how individuals represent themselves or desire to be represented, I build upon Norton's [6] (1993, 1995, 2000) conceptualization of the term investment; however, my contributions and expansions to his conceptualization demonstrate that investment is much more symbolic and complex because it shifts and allows for the overlapping of social reproduction and social transformation (see Byrd Clark, 2008a, 2009). I argue that investment must be multi-dimensional, taking into account the varied degree(s) to which an individual invests in social categories, ideologies, discourses, and representations of languages, cultures, and language learning in relation to certain ways of being (Foucault, 1980; Gee, 2000-2001) at different moments through different interactions. Language learning is not so much an investment in the target language as it is an investment (and an awareness of the investment) in ideologies and representations of such a target language and culture (Byrd Clark, 2009). For me, the notion of investment is one that conveys a more complicated (and at times, contradictory) construction and, as mentioned above, necessitates a more inclusive account for ideological processes, discourses, representations of language, culture, and identity/ies, personal significations, engagements, and interdisciplinarity. In the upcoming data analysis, I shall note how the participants in the present study invested in different ideologies, representations, and conceptions about French as well as how and why these investments were meaningful to them.

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[6]   The names Norton and Norton Pierce, as they appear throughout this article, belong to the same researcher, Bonny Norton. Her earlier work is also listed under the name Pierce.

CONTEXT: INVESTING IN REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGES AND CITIZENSHIP IN CANADA

For 40 years, Canada has been represented as an officially bilingual and pluralistic country, but this period is a relatively short amount of time, considering that the instruction of languages (French and English) in Ontario dates back to the early 1800s. In Canada, *how* language is represented is important. Because of the *how,* these representations have had an impact on nation-building because such representations of language are directly tied to the paradoxical and contradictory discourse of the Canadian state, most notably the framework of official bilingualism (English-French). This discourse is tied to nineteenth- and twentieth-century models of homogeneous, authentic nationalism (Heller, 1999; Skutnubb-Kangas, 2006), which put forth the dominant ideology that languages are bounded wholes that are linked to the construction and reproduction of a homogeneous community (i.e., one language, one people).

But languages are not bounded wholes, and neither are the people who are part of a community straightforwardly homogeneous (Rampton, 1995). Contradictions and paradoxes are further revealed in the discourse to achieve equity through Canada's *Official Languages Act* (1988) and the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* (1985) because the government is trying to balance how to maintain individual rights (universalistic), at the same time setting up a pluralist framework to give recognition to both multicultural groups and English and French minority communities (particularistic), thus recognizing the specificity of the cultural and linguistic community to which individuals belong. However, recognizing difference can become problematic because an individual may belong to several cultural and linguistic communities (Quell, 2000) and more importantly, not all groups are perfectly homogeneous (Marcellesi, 1979). That said, many individuals find themselves in a perpetual tension between self-chosen, invested identities and the attempts of others to position them differently. This tension between a dominant ideology of national homogeneity and actual heterogeneity has important implications in liberal states for multilingual identities and social justice (Blackledge & Pavlenko, 2001). I noted this tension unfolding in my analyses of the responses of participants in the present study.

RATIONALE: WHY ITALIAN CANADIANS?

Because I was permitted to observe many different classrooms during my research, I could not help but notice the many self-identified Italian Canadian students in the midst of training and completing their teacher candidacy in French. Upon speaking with these youth, I found their interests and investments in French illuminating and important to share, particularly with respect to integration in a pluralistic society.

To date, very little research has looked at how and what kinds of decisions Italian Canadian youth make about French language learning or multilingualism. My observation is significant because Italian Canadians represent one of the largest ethnic communities in Toronto, as well as within Ontario. According to the 2001 census (Statistics Canada, 2001), the highest concentration of Italian Canadians is found in Ontario (781,345) and in Toronto itself (429,690). Even with the continuing immigration from Asia, Africa, and the Middle East, Italians are listed as the seventh largest community group in Canada (Giampapa, 2004). Italians as an ethnic and immigrant group in Canada continue to undergo rapid change: they experience increased social and economic mobility in an urban, globalized world (Byrd Clark, 2009). In the following data samples, I have noted that my participants' investment in French was multi-dimensional, ideological, complex, and at times, overlapping (meaning they can be multiple – intertwined or interconnected, occurring at the same time). These findings have salience for FSL because they demonstrate the need for more interdisciplinarity within the field and perhaps a change in name or acronym.

FRENCH LANGUAGE EDUCATION IN ONTARIO

Currently, within Ontario, there are three main options (or programs) for acquiring French-English bilingualism (of course, there are always options within the options). The first program is Core French, which is referred to as French as a Second Language. According to the Ontario curriculum guide for Core French (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998), Core French is mandatory from grades 4 to 8 for all students in English-language elementary schools, and by the end of grade 8, students must have accumulated 600 hours of French instruction. Individual school boards have the authority to adapt the provincial expectations

if their Core French program starts before grade 4. In some cases, students can begin Core French in grade 1 or kindergarten (Lapkin, 1998). At the secondary level, students are currently required to take Core French until grade 9; after that Core French becomes an optional subject. The goal of Core French is to develop students' basic communication skills in French (Ministry of Education and Training, 1998, 1999).

The second option, French Immersion (Makropoulos, 1998) is also a French as a Second Language program. However, immersion is a more intensive program than Core French because students are immersed in French for at least half (50%) of the school day, thereby having half their school subjects taught exclusively in French. There are several types of immersion programs (early, middle, late as well as full or partial). There is an additional FSL program called Extended French, where students receive 25 per cent of their total instructional time in French, thus, a minimum of 1260 hours of instruction in French by the end of grade 8 (Ministry of Education, 2001). Again there are options within options because both of these FSL programs can begin at the junior or senior kindergarten level.

The third option, established under Charter 23 of the *Charter of Rights and Freedom* in 1982, is l'école de langue française (Labrie & Lamoureux, 2003), or a francophone school (also referred to as French as a First Language), which constitutionally guarantees minority language educational rights to French-speaking communities outside Québec, where all subjects are taught in French. English is offered as a core subject for approximately 50 minutes a day (this can vary).

Each option produces its own possibilities and constraints, although each program's goal is to teach French in a universal, objective, standardized way. Nevertheless, the distribution of resources (in this case, access to a certain kind of French instruction) is unequal across and among the programs throughout different school boards and regions. For Ontario schools, this inequity raises the questions of what kind(s) of French should be taught and how this program relates to the teaching of other languages, notably English. Another question is how should the learners be treated: (a) as native speakers of the national "mother tongue" variety, (b) as second language learners, or (c) as bi-multilinguals with multiple attachments? According to Heller (2003), these questions concern the

emergence of a new understanding of language, not as an index of identity in the service of building some kind of collectivity or a nation state, but rather as a commodity with exchange value in the new globalized economy.

METHODOLOGY: "UNE ETHNOGRAPHIE À GÉOMÉTRIE VARIABLE"

My approach, which complements and informs the theoretical positioning of this study, is referred to as an ethnographie à géométrie variable (Byrd Clark, 2008a, 2009) because of its tri-dimensional approach, combining critical sociolinguistic ethnography, reflexivity (Aull Davies, 1999; Byrd Clark, 2008a, 2008b, 2009), and discourse analysis (Fairclough, 1995; Labrie, 2002; Lamoureux, 2007). I also draw upon critical ethnography (Goldstein, 1996) because it connects and problematizes social and linguistic practices as part of larger socio-historical and political processes that shape and transform the positions that youth hold within multiple terrains (e. g., home, school, friendship networks, or media representations). Similar to Fairclough (1995), I am interested in the dialectical relationship of language and social practice as well as the use and investigation of discourse as a social phenomenon, connecting linguistic communicative acts with social processes by examining the relationships between social structure, discourse patterns, power relations, and ideologies. However, I am careful to be self-reflexive of my own choices and selection of data or instruments. Therefore, my use of a sociolinguistic critical ethnography, combined with reflexivity and discourse analysis, opens up the discussion, permitting the revelation of the multi-faceted, contradictory, and complex representations of being and becoming a multilingual, creating spaces to discuss fuzzy boundaries and ambiguous identities.

Data Collection and Multiple Sites

I have drawn the data for this article from a larger corpus that I collected for my doctoral dissertation, a two-year, interdisciplinary, sociolinguistic ethnography, entitled *Journeys of Integration in Canada's Pluralistic Society: Italian Canadian Youth and the Symbolic Investments in French as Official Language* (Byrd Clark, 2008a). In my dissertation, I examined the mean-

ing of multilingualism for self-identified Italian Canadian youth pursuing the study of French language and literature courses in university and also participating in a postsecondary teacher education program for those who wish to become teachers of French. I collected data during an 18-month period (from January 2006 to July 2007) among three sites: two university campuses and one teacher education program. However, having said that, I collected data in multiple sites (at the participants' homes with their families, at peer networking sites with their friends, via e-mails) employing multiple field methods (observations, interviews, focus groups, and popular culture sources including video production). As such, I investigated language learning investments in French as official language and the overlapping discourses of *italianità* (what it means to be Italian), citizenship, multilingualism, and worldliness in Toronto and the Greater Toronto Area (GTA). For the purpose of this article, I draw primarily on the data from seven participants' interviews.

Participants

I have chosen to look at seven participants not only because they were highly articulate and reflective of their language learning experiences, but also because they represented multiple positions in how they self-identified and located themselves within the discourses of multilingualism and identity. First, although all positioned themselves as Italian Canadians, how they identified themselves was different. Some struggled with the contradictory nature of being Italian and Canadian at the same time, while others claimed to be half Italian, relying more on their Canadian identities. Second, despite various social constraints, Monica, Maverick, Tina, Timmy, Vanessa, Lucia, and Anna Maria [7] were all seeking professional careers by participating in a pre-service university French program in Toronto, designed for students who wished to become teachers of French. They invested in French language acquisition although the reasons why they were invested and how they came to be invested in French were also diverse (e.g., influence of family members, teachers, high grades, job opportunities). Finally, although they had varied ling-

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[7]   These names are self-chosen pseudonyms.

uistic, cultural, and educational experiences, all had overlapping identities, and by that I mean they were included and excluded at different spaces and different times. Their data produce an emerging discourse on the multidimensional value of French (linguistic, cultural, economic, and symbolic) as well as positioning French/English bilingualism as an identity marker of what counts as multilingual and multicultural Canadian citizenship locally, globally, and trans-nationally.

DATA ANALYSIS AND OVERLAPPING THEMES

The samples that I share in this article reflect this multidimensionality because many of the participants invested in French language education with the hope of attaining a teaching job, and what I refer to as "the next best thing" [8] (see data samples) as well as gaining access to continued social, geographical, and economic moblity. For many of them, French was a highly marketable and valuable tool. However, their investments in French went beyond economic interests because many participants had both a personal affinity and attachment to representations of the French language and culture and a belief that French/English bilingualism positioned them as an identity marker of what counts as a Canadian citizen. In the following data samples, I have noted that some of the youth invested in French to gain access or membership to an ethnolinguistic group, while others tried to please their parents, obtain recognition as being special, different, as possessing a talent. A few positioned French and learning French as a "neutral space," a space where they could be free of conflicting parental expectations and where they could have equal footing with other Canadians learning French.

   From the interview data, I present certain overlapping themes that reflect and provide insight to reconceptualize ways of thinking about language, identity, and policy. The themes are (a) Investing in French as a Symbolic Capital [9], (b) French as the "Next Best Thing," (c) Conceptions of Competence and Accent, and (d) Problematic Categories. These themes are interconnected and highlight in particular how the participants desired to position themselves and how others positioned them in

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[8]   The next best thing refers to the next best thing to teaching Italian, in this case.

[9]   A very valuable and prestigious resource.

relation to Canadian citizenship and the development of linguistic repertoires. Because of the complexity in analysing these data, I have provided a discussion of the data presented for each theme.

Investing in French as a Symbolic Capital and Conceptions of Canadianness/Canadianité

In this first section, I demonstrate the relationship between language, ethnic identity, and citizenship. When I asked the participants why they were interested in teaching French, all unanimously exclaimed that being bilingual in English and French would offer them more career opportunities and access to increased social, geographic, and economic mobility. Interestingly, English for the participants had an assumed position. In other words, they did not seem worried about their access to this particular resource. French, as symbolic capital, held significance for them, a valued commodity in the globalized economy, marking someone as an idealized Canadian. Italian, on the other hand, was positioned as an additional language, not assigned as high a value in the linguistic market because Italian programs continue to be phased out from local school boards in the GTA. Although the participants echoed dominant mainstream voices, they were both aware and unaware at times of how their ideological investments juxtaposed their very real heterogeneous social realities. By looking at what they had to say, I note that the youth were aware of the competitive linguistic markets, and although their investments were ideological (i.e., based on how they had come to see and view things in the ways that they did), they were equally personal and meaningful.

Here is what Monica, Maverick, Tina, and Anna Maria had to say:

Monica: *"Canada is a like a very multicultural and also (pause) um (pause) in terms of **also cause Canada is a bilingual country, right and I think it's important to teach French like I'm very excited about teaching French** and cause I think it's **very valuable** right, **especially cause we're Canadian** you know **if you go overseas people think that we should speak English and French** but that's not the reality because very few people speak French fluently, very few Canadians."*

Anna Maria: *"There's definitely an advantage if you speak French in Canada, you have a definite advantage in terms of getting gov't jobs, teaching jobs, business jobs, even*

*when I open the newspaper and telemarketing jobs, a lot of them say, premium paid to bilingual representatives, and you know what, you get more money . . . in Canada, **that's what they want, they want French . . . but how many more people speak Cantonese?***

Tina: *I **love** school, um I had an easy time at French school . . . I think going to French school **really gives me an edge over people just learning English** . . . **I know it's true for jobs, bilinguals are paid more, more languages opens more doors.** Like my Mom wanted to put me in a Japanese school, but it didn't exist at the time. My 1ˢᵗ year at university I took Spanish and I'm going to take Mandarin next year.*

Maverick: *I believe in a unified Canada, I absolutely do . . . having gone to a francophone school and being part of a linguistic minority, I understand **these** people, and I think English and French should be mandatory for all schools and all kids. . . . I mean I can get a job pretty much anywhere.* (Bolding represents participants' emphasis in their interviews)

Both Maverick and Tina attended Écoles de Langue Française (or French First Language schools), whereas Monica and Anna Maria were both students of Core French programs. Language, in these passages, particularly official French/English bilingualism, is seen as a tool, a very valuable and marketable tool, as well as a marker of a national Canadian identity.

It is interesting to see what French represents for them in relation to their own social realities and experiences of learning French. Although their samples perpetuate nationalist representations of how Canada is projected to the outside world, all participants also highlighted the important value of French in terms of attaining upward economic, social, and geographical mobility. This attitude is particularly evident in the examples with Maverick, Tina, and Anna Maria. Maverick invested in French as a means to get a job anywhere, while Tina believed that she had an edge over others through her investment in French as a commodity and equally invested in the study of additional languages as commodities (i.e., items that can be bought and sold, because her comments reflect the influence of her mother, wanting her to be placed in a Japanese school). Finally, Anna Maria, who, through her use of irony, reflects the social reality in Toronto (which has the third largest Chinese popula-

tion in the world), stated, "They want French, but how many more people speak Cantonese?" It is uncertain who the "they" are in Anna Maria's discourse ("that's what **they** want, **they** want French . . ."); however, these samples indicate that the youth appear to understand the competitive, dynamic, and unequal status of different linguistic capital. The next section further elucidates this awareness.

French as the "Next Best Thing" and Being Unique

You know what, I just found that with French I always did well in it, I don't even know so much when I was young if I liked it, I just knew for some reason I always got high marks in it. I never thought it was because I knew the dialect I just thought oh, I'm actually good at learning French, you know? (Monica, April 2006)

As mentioned earlier, many socio-affective aspects had an impact on the investments of the seven youth, such as the linguistic similarities between French and Italian, or having a passion for a language. However, in this particular section, Monica's and Timmy's discourses reveal their passion for Italian and the economic and social reality of teaching Italian. These passages are linked to Bourdieu's (1982, 1991) discussion of linguistic markets because there seems to be a hierarchy here allowing one form of capital (Italian) to be converted to another (French = teaching job = prestigious, well paid job), the valuing of one over another. But interestingly, the participants here had in some ways appropriated the study of languages for themselves, creating some "wiggle room" (Erickson, 2001), taking an active role in pursuing Italian despite the complex, shifting, linguistic market. In the following quotations, I note the complex choices and multiple conflicting voices of the youth as they negotiated their desires to invest in both Italian and French.

Monica: *I love Italian, Italian is my passion. But you know what are you going to do with it, eh? They are cutting back Italian high school teaching jobs … that is why I am getting two teachables: French and Italian".*

Timmy: *With Italian, there just aren't as many options … Italian, I love it, but what am I gonna do? There's got to be choice … it's easier to do French, you'll get a job, jobs are easier to come by than teaching something else.*

In both Monica's and Timmy's discourses, I found that Italian, or rather maintaining the investment in Italian, was important to them; however, they appeared both aware of the competing job markets and of the stigma of Italian, as Monica signals above, in not being able to find a job teaching Italian. Despite this discourse regarding Italian "starting to diminish more and more," both Monica and Timmy had invested in Italian, and their actions (such as continuing to study Italian, and earning a Bachelor's degree as well as pursuing a teaching degree in Italian) contradict and challenge the dominant voices echoed here, conveying a survival of critical agency (Giddens, 1984) in their choices. In other words, despite what they had heard and what they said, both Timmy and Monica continued to invest in Italian. Yet, Timmy and Monica were aware of the decreasing value of Italian in the GTA, and although they invested in Italian, they did so with caution, and at the same time, invested in French, conceiving that it would earn them a more profitable rate of return.

For Vanessa, French represented more than a commodity; it was a possession that would render her unique and special, of being seen as "more than an Italian."

Vanessa: *I love Italian, like of course, it's part of who I am, it's my mother tongue (gah) but I don't know, I mean, I've always had this thing for French, I love it, when I hear people speaking it, I just want to stop whatever I'm doing and listen, ah absorb it all in, I-I always wanted to be part of **that** world, I wanted something more … you know I didn't just want to be like you know (short pause) I wanted something more than just to be seen as an Italian from Woodbridge[10] […] **I love the French language even if this is not nice to say even more than the Italian language.** I don't know, I think it's knowing a language, knowing something that not everyone else around me knows and in a way I think it's a bit it has to do with being powerful in a way […] it's something that you have that not everyone else has …* (Follow-up Interview, January 2007, bold indicates emphasis in Vanessa's interview)

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10   Woodbridge is a suburban city located in the township of Vaughn, north of the city of Toronto. In the mid 1970s to 1980s, many Italian families moved from the city of Toronto to Woodbridge. There are stereotyped images and representations that both Italian Canadians and Canadians have when they hear someone is from Woodbridge.

Vanessa's reference to French as a valued possession is intriguing, as something that "not everyone else has" and one that changes how she was seen, imagining that this investment would give her power or access to power that not everyone else had. This understanding also builds upon Norton's (2000) material conception of investment because Vanessa imagined her investment in French would give her a wider range of and access to symbolic and material resources (e.g., speaking with multiple people, different nationalities, being able to communicate) and as such, her investment would equally empower her, giving her recognition of a highly valued resource that she construed not "everyone else has." Vanessa also has an emotional and ideological attachment to speaking French. She states, "I love the French language," positioning language as a unitary, fixed, homogeneous, and imagined entity (because many of the participants here equate the French language as the Standard version associated with France) and yet as something for which she had a passion. French, for Maverick and many other participants, was not "second." However, intertwined with Vanessa's passion is also an awareness (like the other participants) of being able to integrate into the current job market.

Conceptions of Competence and Accent

In this next section, I indicate how investments are ideological in the ways that the participants invested in what they conceived of as legitimate and authentic competence through the kinds of messages they received. More importantly, I discuss how these messages have had an impact on how they saw themselves and their linguistic practices. Many participants saw school/university as a "strategic site" (Marcus, 1986), an imagined, neutral, cognitively enriching place where they could gain the tools and competency needed to acquire "native-like" pronunciation. However, the following examples demonstrate that language learning is far from being neutral, and that language educators need to become more aware and reflexive of their own investments.

Lucia: *[. . .] My goal after four years of university is to not have people realize that I've learned French or that I'm not in the process but that **I know French, that I just know French like I don't want them to be like oh so you know you're learning French,***

eh? Like I want to be able to sound as fluent as possible. (Preliminary Interview, March 2006)

Vanessa*: During my first year at university, I didn't feel like an outcast because we had mostly all grammar courses, but in my second year, I cried every day. I just remember the Chair of the Department was teaching the course, and had put up overheads, I tried taking notes, but I couldn't understand everything . . . compared to everyone else, my French wasn't up to par compared to everyone else even though the professor said I spoke well, "for someone who attended Core French" . . . I thought I was going to quit.*

Monica: *Yeah, I am happy that I speak dialect, but like I would never speak it with my professors, well especially this one professor, I am always really careful when I'm around her, if I ever spoke in dialect, she would correct me and look at me like I was stupid or you know, like I was low class.*

Upon reflection on these samples, I found that, although Lucia invested in school as a strategic site to attain the competence she deemed necessary to become a perfect speaker of French, both Monica and Vanessa struggled and were made aware of the value (or devaluing) of their linguistic repertoires. In some ways, they had to appropriate and "play by the rules of the game" (Thompson, 2005), so to speak, to attain what is ideologically conceived of as legitimate competence. With Vanessa, I am reminded of the disparities and social inequalities that unfold through different French schooling experiences. In this passage, Vanessa felt linguistically inferior and incompetent. She claimed her knowledge, all that she acquired and appropriated – grammar rules memorized and high grades achieved in Core French – had been for nothing because she was now in a space that did not recognize or value this knowledge, this investment in French that she brought with her, and she felt duped and at a loss.

Monica also struggled with her social identity in a similar way. She knew that the professor, who was in a position of power, did not approve of her linguistic variety of Italian, and therefore she knew she must adhere to speaking the standard variety with this professor to "get ahead" (whether that be earning a high grade or obtaining a reference letter).

Problematizing Categories

In this last overlapping theme, I present particular data samples to convey the problematic and contradictory facets of social categories through the lived experiences of Maverick and Anna Maria. Maverick described how other teachers at his school viewed French, while Anna Maria recounted how she was positioned by students during her teaching practicum. Both Maverick and Anna Maria had multiple identities. Maverick self-identified as French Canadian, half Italian and Canadian, whereas Anna Maria did not know how to self-identify. She claimed to be half Italian and half East Indian with conflicting expectations from both sides.

Maverick: *Um, again, I don't know where this came from but ever since I was in elementary school, people used to make jokes, like "**Oh, it's only French, don't worry about it"** and I still see teachers who were probably the kids who somehow, I don't know how it came in their heads to make these kinds of jokes but even the teachers still make them, those kinds of jokes now, and like, well you live in Canada, it's bilingual, [. . .] **And I think a lot of this has to do with Francophone identity in Canada, and kind of Québec, feeling like 2nd class citizens, whenever we try to plan things, like to encourage students more students to sign up for the program, just really trying to show the importance of French, we're not getting the support we need or resources that we need [. . .] I feel like that feeling of that kind of inferiority complex it's so deep inside the Francophone identity.***

Anna Maria: *For teaching practicum, the kids were like, "Miss are you from" – and I said "No, **je suis canadienne.**" They were like "No you can't be Canadian you don't look Canadian," I said "what **looks Canadian?"* (bolding represents participants' emphasis in these interviews)

In the first excerpt, Maverick disclosed the problematic positioning of French (i.e., politically, socially, and historically construed as a "second" language) and how French was positioned at school and viewed by other teachers as something that was not as important, something that they could joke about. He described being frustrated and associated this lack of support for French as a subject intertwined with the positioning of Francophones as second class citizens, as having an inferiority complex, but what he was saying, in part, did underscore an important issue, taken up particularly in Lamoureux's (2007) recent study

about equity for resources and more equitable access to educational op-
portunities (postsecondary) in French, specifically for Francophone stu-
dents making the transition from high school to university. But Maverick
as a teacher of French Immersion, with his heterogeneous position, and
educational experiences of Franco-Ontario schooling, could bring about
change, if he could persist and survive the first couple of years of teach-
ing.

     Anna Maria had conflicting demands and expectations on her
(whether it was from family members, peers, or the social world), and
sought refuge in French, claiming it as a neutral space. However, as I
note in this particular data sample above, there were/are no neutral
spaces. Anna Maria was positioned as a visible minority that was
brought to her attention very clearly while she conducted her teaching
practicum with students at school who challenged her Canadianness and
Canadianité (i.e., what it means to be and look like a legitimate and au-
thentic Canadian and teacher of French, in this case). Through her dis-
cursive practices, Anna Maria drew upon her critical agency and aptly
challenged the students' hegemonic images of what a Canadian looked
like, consciously becoming aware in this moment of the importance of
challenging preconceived notions with her own heterogeneous position
and overlapping identities, thus making "wiggle room" in the teaching
of French as a Second Language.

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

In this article, based on a two-year critical ethnographic study, I have
demonstrated the need to reconceptualize the term, FSL/FLS (French as a
Second Language/français langue seconde) through the voices and ex-
periences of seven, self-identified Italian Canadian youth by looking at
how they socially constructed their identities and invested in language
learning in an urban, globalized world while participating in a French
teacher education program in Toronto. In doing so, I drew upon a dis-
course analysis and reflexivity, employing multiple methods (observa-
tions, interviews, focus groups, e-mails) in multiple sites (university,
home, peer networking sites) to highlight the different conceptions of
what being Canadian, multilingual, and multicultural meant to these
youth and how they positioned themselves vis-à-vis the acquisition of

French as official language. Although each had different life experiences and social backgrounds, I determined that their investments in French were not only ideological, but also meaningful.

Upon reflection, I return to my research questions to organize my discussion of the findings.

(1) How and why do these youth invest in the acquisition of French beyond high school?

Through their discourse, I have noted that the participants' conceptions of multilingualism, tied to representations of French-English bilingualism, were complex, multi-layered, and at times, intricately overlapped. Although their investments and representations were linked to Canadian nationalism and the new globalized economy, demonstrating how the participants were aware of the competitive and shifting international linguistic markets in defining the value of languages, they were also particularly overlapped with personal attachments to languages infused with their desires to be recognized as unique, special, and different as well as the volition of belonging and claiming membership to an ethnolinguistic group.

(2) How does participants' investment in French have an impact on how they see themselves, or self-represent in different contexts?

The investments in French had an impact on ways of self-representing, particularly on participants' identities as learners and future teachers of French. However, I indicate that these ways of self-representing shifted in particular contexts and through particular interactions. These shifts and fluidity of identities suggest that everyone has multiple identities, and as such command individuals to be reflexive and aware of their own tendencies to label or categorize one another in a static or fixed way. In becoming aware of how micro interactions are linked to macro, institutional level discourses and by looking at how and why individuals make such investments, language educators can, in turn, reflexively look at their own investments and positions in relation to multilingualism, and in particular, French language education. This reflexivity may help them

see the impact of such investments on their students' learning, particularly on how they deliver their programs, how they engage students, and how they navigate policies within their own classrooms.

 *(3)   In what ways, if any, do these symbolic, complex investments have an
        impact on broader and more interdisciplinary conceptualizations of French
        as a Second Language?*

In 1982 and 1983, H. David Stern called for the implementation of a multidimensional curriculum for French as a Second Language (LeBlanc, 1990), a theory that was prolific at the time. However, I argue that the concept/domain of FSL needs to be reconceptualized as multidimensional and interdisciplinary to adequately take into account such symbolic, complex investments in languages and identities as shown in the present study. The participants' discourse and multiple identities here problematize the "Second" in FSL, and challenge this historically constructed label because, as I note later, they expropriated the resources in which they had originally been expected to appropriate, thereby creating some "wiggle room"(Erickson, 2001) or new discursive spaces (Byrd Clark, 2009; Labrie & Grimard, 2002). Through participants' discursive samples, I have indicated the constraints as well as the way languages and language education are presented in the classroom, most observable through the messages that students in classrooms receive and appropriate from them. What is still surprising and of political significance is that French as a second language education continues to function and be reduced to skills training. With the emphasis on the competence/skills model (Chomsky, 1965), language is conceived of as unitary, normative, and determinate practices that people can be trained in, increasing their know-how as one might become more skilled in handling tools. Chomsky's conceptualization of language as the acquisition of applied skills and appropriate behaviours is misconstrued and blinded by objectivism and standardization (Fairclough, 1992). Chomsky's (1965) conceptualization denies that repertoires are plural, variable, and often difficult to define as well as that individuals belonging to a speech community are heterogeneous and, as such, claim multiple social identities and life experiences that are not so clear-cut, taking place through negotiations, struggles, and ambiguous circumstances within diverse, discursive contexts.

This conceptualization of language is uni-dimensional and does not reflect or value the multiplicity of diversity and plurality of individuals' social and linguistic practices.

There is no one right, perfect accent. Educators are constantly faced with complex challenges and constraints within schools. But although they are called upon to adhere to certain ideologies, can they make or still leave open the possibility of some "wiggle room" for being reflexive of the impact that their own investments have upon their students and for challenging the historical, social, political, and economic positioning tied to the label, French as a second language? The participants' voices in the present study demonstrate the need to reconfigure identity, language, and policy. Upon such reconfiguring, one could consider the acronym, French as Official Language/Français langue officielle (FOL/FLO), as a point of departure.

CONCLUSION

In societies and systems of education, where multilingualism is becoming the norm, representing both a tool for local integration as well as for international mobility, it is imperative to examine how and why individuals engage in language learning as well as the impact of their varied engagements vis-à-vis how they come to see themselves and in turn, are seen by others. To conclude, the findings in the present study warrant further study of the impact of globalization and mobility on individuals' everyday life experiences and symbolic investments. In doing so, perhaps such a study could inspire new possibilities for more equitable conditions and the creation of new social categories without boundaries or limits. It is my sincere hope that, like the participants in the present study, educators will continue to create new discursive spaces and "wiggle room" by becoming more aware of social identities and symbolic investments, allowing for more transdisciplinary research and social change that have an impact on policies and practices for a more pluralistic conceptualization of French language education in a globalized world.

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