



fronquêtes

ENQUÊTES SUR L'ÉDUCATION EN MILIEU MINORITAIRE FRANCOPHONE

Francization in a Context of Linguistic Revitalization

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BACKGROUND

The purpose of this article is to analyze the concept of “francization” and linguistic revitalization. Having defined the concept, it takes stock of current research and suggests teaching approaches for more effective second-language learning by young children.

FRANCIZATION AND REVITALIZATION

In order to be entitled to instruction in their own language, members of official-language minorities must meet one of the following criteria: the language first learned in childhood and still understood by one of the parents is that of the minority; the parent attended primary school where instruction was in the language of the minority; or the parent has another child who attended such a school. There is no reference to the language the children speak. Children registered in a French school who do not speak French therefore need to be “francized”, and the process must include the development of their identity and culture.

Research suggests that the declining linguistic vitality of minority communities is attributable to a low birth rate and gradual assimilation. Half the children who qualify for admission to French school go to an English school or enter an immersion program. The other half includes many children who speak little or no French, and such registrations are on the rise.

Research is thus needed to improve our understanding of how French is learned by various groups of children: majority-language speakers attending minority-language schools; those whose mother tongue is French but who have scant exposure to the written language and need to develop their language skills; and immigrant children who speak a language other than an official language.

The ultimate purpose of francization is to reverse the tendency towards assimilation in order to restore vitality to minority Francophone communities. The development of language skills must therefore begin in early childhood, as an integral part of community and family life. The school cannot be effective in isolation, and needs the support of a

community that has a revitalization plan designed to expand the contexts in which French is used.

In order to promote the use of French, the school needs a strong community that can generate situations in which families can foster the use of French in their activities. The school is at the heart of the community but teachers, sadly, feel powerless.

TAKING STOCK

Studies of francization seem to be a rarity in minority Francophone Canada. In 1992, a journal entitled *Éducation et francophonie* published an article on *L'aménagement linguistique, le cas de la francisation*, about language planning and francization. There was scant reaction. Students in re-francization need teaching methods and support tailored to their needs, but studies skirt the issue and rather tend to raise other questions.

In 2002, the CMEC published a directory of provincial initiatives, policies and programs (Francisation: Taking Stock) and a kit for francization trainers. In 2010, the Canadian Teachers' Federation (CTF) published an update: initiatives continued, additional funding was made available here and there, and policies, programs and guidance materials were produced that were based on theories that were recognized but had not been validated in our context. Nine francization teachers from New Brunswick quoted in a study said that they had had little training and were poorly equipped for their task because the initial training program at university offered nothing specific to francization.

TEACHING APPROACHES

Studies of second-language learning depict a variety of situations. Immersion adds a language for students drawn from the linguistic majority. The purpose of programs for immigrant students and minority-language speakers is to teach them the majority language. Francization students, on the other hand, learn a language that is all too often in decline within their community.

A review of the literature on second-language acquisition by children shows that language is a complex phenomenon with five interrelated components. Children develop these simultaneously, whether they are learning one language or two. Should francization practitioners not take this complexity into account, and incorporate these components instead of isolating them?

With regard to English as a second language learning in North America, researchers recommend a holistic approach that provides opportunities for linguistic intake and expression, and stresses vocabulary and the characteristics of the written language. The interdependence of languages is emphasized. A two-way interlinguistic transfer of language skills takes place. In immersion, a connection is observed between phonological manipulation skills in kindergarten and reading ability in English and French in grade 2. Questions remain, however, concerning how and when this transfer takes place.

Multiple literacies are exercises in building meaning, and a distinction must be made between academic literacy and personal or community literacy. Could such a distinction contribute to learning by francization students? Do the new information technologies have a part to play? It may be that by basing their minority-language instruction on unilingualism, French schools are deriving insufficient benefit from the interdependence of languages.

Second-language learning is a lengthy process. In immersion, an initial period of silence is observed as the students use active listening to absorb the vocabulary, syntax and morphology of the target language. They then try to express themselves.

The acquisition of language knowledge requires oral communication, cognitive and study skills. In the learning of an additional language, oral communication skills are acquired fairly quickly in social settings, but cognitive and study skills take longer to develop; their acquisition requires extensive exposure to the literacy-related aspects of language. It is not unusual, unfortunately, for people to assume that once oral communications skills are acquired, students can function in the classroom without further support. In developing writing skills, an approach that opts for the comprehensive development of language skills might be preferable, since a strategy that incorporates both oral and written language skills seems to produce more positive results.

The goal of francization is both personal enrichment and the reacquisition of a lost identity. How are we to induce five-year-olds and their parents to give meaning to learning that is an integral part of the process of revitalizing a language

community? apprentissage imbriqué au processus de revitalisation langagière de la communauté?

CONCLUSION

Section 23 of the 1982 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrines the right to education in the minority official language. The exercise of that right has led to the development of a network of schools in 29 Francophone minority school boards across Canada. The primary factor in linguistic revitalization through minority-language instruction, namely the establishment of an educational infrastructure and institutions, is well under way.

However, the demographic data tell us that the infrastructure is inadequate. If only half the students eligible for admission to French schools actually attend, the potential remediation offered by section 23 remains out of reach. Moreover, many of these eligible students are not French speakers and stand in need of francization.

School authorities develop francization initiatives and invest human and material resources to ensure optimum linguistic development for their students. Despite these many initiatives, numerous questions remain unanswered. Not all such initiatives are coordinated, and not all are research-based. In short, the schools are aware of the need to provide francization services and are doing the best they know to meet that need, but there should be a reliance on research. The first call for research in this area dates from 1992.

It would be helpful to conduct a longitudinal survey to profile linguistic development in students who are starting school and do not yet speak French. With the development of such a profile, we would gain a better understanding of how such students should be guided from the educational and instructional point of view.

The role of the family and the community must also be taken into account, as must the importance of combining francization services with linguistic revitalization efforts. Studies documenting community and family initiatives and observing how they support students' linguistic development would also provide helpful guidance. Such studies could support the work of the teachers and the educational system.

French-language educational institutions were established to resist assimilation. Research into francization will put us in a better position to support the efforts the schools are making at the community level. There is a need to further our knowledge in this area: time is short.

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to read the full survey (in French) : www.ctf-fce.ca/frenquetes



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