

Reading Processes of French Immersion Children Reading in French and English*

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Most researchers have postulated that transfer enables children in French immersion programs rapidly to learn to read in English. However, little is known about the nature of such transfer. This study examined the oral reading of French immersion children in first and second grades to compare how they read in English and in French. The sample consisted of 42 first-grade and 34 second-grade students from a French immersion program in which English language arts instruction begins in grade 2. Each student read passages in French and in English to produce a sample of oral reading miscues and unaided retellings. Results revealed considerable similarity in how children read in English and French. The major difference involved integration of text-based and knowledge-based information, which was better with English than French passages.

La plupart des chercheurs posent comme hypothèse que le transfert permet aux enfants inscrits dans des programmes d'immersion en français d'apprendre rapidement à lire en anglais. On ne sait toutefois pas grand-chose sur la nature de ce phénomène. Cette étude a porté sur la lecture à haute voix chez les enfants de première et de deuxième années inscrits dans un programme d'immersion en français. Le but visé: comparer comment ces élèves lisent en anglais et en français. L'échantillon comprenait 42 élèves de première année et 34 de deuxième année, tous inscrits dans un programme d'immersion en français dans lequel l'enseignement des arts du langage commence en deuxième année pour ce qui est de l'anglais. Chaque élève a lu des passages en français et en anglais; on a pu ainsi établir un échantillon des erreurs de lecture à haute voix et des façons dont les enfants racontent sans aide ce qu'ils ont lu. Les résultats ont révélé une très grande similitude dans la façon dont les enfants lisent en anglais et en français. Il y avait toutefois une grande différence au niveau de l'intégration des informations basées sur le texte et sur les connaissances, intégration qui s'est révélée meilleure pour les passages en anglais.

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Since the first French immersion class at St. Lambert less than two decades ago, the number of French immersion classes in Canada has grown phenomenally (Carey, 1984). The success of children learning to read in English in these classes has often been attributed to transfer of reading processes and skills from the French to the English language. Genesee (1979) has hypothesized that there are basic reading processes which, once learned, can be applied to reading almost any language. However, little information is available on the nature of the transfer from reading in French to English. This study investigated similarities and differences in the ways first- and second-grade immersion students read English and French.

READING IN DIFFERENT LANGUAGES

Most research into French immersion reading has studied success achieved by readers in French immersion classes on English-language reading tests at various grade levels (Edwards, 1976; Genesee, 1978; Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Swain & Lapkin, 1981). These studies generally showed that, after an initial lag in reading English in the primary grades, immersion students achieve at least as well as their peers in English programs after approximately one year of instruction in English language arts.

A few studies have sought to determine what specific knowledge children use in reading, or the nature of processing during reading. Kendall, Chmilar, Shapson and Shapson (1984) compared the performance of children in French immersion and English classes when reading English passages at the end of grade 1. They found that while there was both facilitation (children using single consonant sounds) and interference (in decoding digraphs like "sh" and "ch"), children also had acquired skills generic to both languages (blending sounds). Cziko (1980) analysed the oral reading miscues of three groups of grade 7 students reading a French narrative. Pupils with least instruction in French relied more heavily on graphic information and less on contextual information than did students who had either been instructed in French immersion from grade 1 or were native French speakers. In another study of seventh-grade students, Cziko (1978) presented students with anomalous and meaningful passages in French and found that they developed control over the syntactic system prior to control over the semantic system. In a study of grade 3 children reading in English, Dank and McEachern (1979) showed that French immersion students used a higher percentage of grapho-phonetic, syntactic, and semantic information than did their peers who had been instructed in English. Since Kendall *et al.* (1984) and Dank and McEachern (1979) had their subjects read only in English, and Cziko (1978, 1980) had his subjects read only in French, inferences about transfer would be risky.

The study reported here used two techniques to gather data about reading processes of children reading in French and in English. The first, miscue analysis, is based heavily on the work of Goodman and his co-workers, who provided a theoretical framework for analysing oral reading miscues in which reading was viewed as an active psycholinguistic process that "involves constant interaction between the reader and the text" (Goodman & Burke, 1972, p. 13). Goodman (1970) outlined three types of cuing systems used during the reading process: the grapho-phonetic system, the syntactic system, and the semantic system. Miscues are interpreted according to the reader's use of each of these cuing systems and provide a "window into the reading process" (Goodman & Burke, 1972, p. 15). Miscues have been variously coded, but many investigators use a theoretical framework similar to Goodman's (Clay, 1968; Biemiller, 1970; Weber, 1970; Au, 1977, etc.). Even those who have critically examined this type of analysis (Wixson, 1979; Leu, 1982; Allington, 1984) recognize its insights on "reading processing" (Leu, 1982, p. 436).

To provide further data on the reading processes of children in French and English, unaided retellings were also collected in this study. The analysis of unaided retellings rests on theoretical formulations of discourse-processing theorists such as Mandler and Johnson (1977), Rumelhart (1977), and Stein and Glen (1979). This technique has been used not only to describe factors that affect passage difficulty, but also to describe how readers recall ideas from what they have read (Tierney, Bridge, & Cera, 1978; Kintch & vanDijk, 1978; Beebe, 1981). While neither miscues nor retellings provide direct access to reading processes, they do provide bases for inferences about how individuals read. This study used both techniques to infer similarities and differences in the use of print-based and knowledge-based information in English and in French by first- and second-grade readers.

SAMPLE

The sample for the study consisted of first- and second-grade students registered in French immersion programs in two suburban schools in a large urban area. Each school served a broad geographical base. All children included in the study were native speakers of English, and few potential subjects were eliminated on the basis of this requirement. Of the 42 first-grade children in the study, half were female and half were male. Ten had one French-speaking parent. The grade 2 sample consisted of 23 females and 11 males. Four of these children had a French-speaking parent.

In the school system from which schools were selected, children received all of their first-grade instruction in French, and were introduced to English

language arts at the beginning of grade 2. Except for 50 minutes per day spent on English language arts, the remainder of second-grade instruction was in French. Both schools included in the study used *Méthode Dynamique* as the basis of instruction in French language arts.

PROCEDURES

A sample of oral reading miscues and story recalls in both French and English was collected from each subject in late April and early May. *Test de Lecture en Français* (Thomas, 1985), a French informal reading inventory based on *Méthode Dynamique*, was used to collect these data in the French language. Passages were written at levels from preprimer (early grade 1) to high third reader (last half of grade 3) to reflect the vocabulary, sentence structure, and content of that series. Ten questions were developed for each passage, ranging from questions to assess understanding of information explicitly stated in the text, to questions to assess the reader's ability to use background knowledge during reading. Pictures accompanying each passage were based on those in *Méthode Dynamique*. The passages were field tested by having students in first-, second-, and third-grade classes read the passages intact and in cloze format. This helped establish appropriateness both of questions and of passage difficulty at each reading level. It was deemed important to present familiar French material to the children, particularly those in first grade, since instruction at school was the only contact with French for most of them. *Test de Lecture en Français* was selected because its written language was similar to that experienced by these children at school.

The *Bader Reading and Language Inventory* (1983) was used to collect a sample of miscues and retellings in English. Since first graders had not received any instruction in English language arts and since those who were able to read had probably read a wide range of books at home, it was not possible nor considered essential to base selection of this instrument on the children's specific reading experiences. What was considered important was selecting an instrument similar to *Test de Lecture en Français*. The *Bader Reading and Language Inventory* is an informal reading inventory with passages of increasing difficulty beginning at the preprimer level. These passages were either written by Bader or selected from materials that appeared to be typical for the grade level designated. Field testing established appropriateness of content in relation to student interests, equivalence of forms, and the validity of the instrument in determining reading level.

Administration was similar for the *Test de Lecture en Français* and the *Bader Reading and Language Inventory*. Word lists containing 10 words at each reader level, beginning at preprimer, were presented. The highest level at

which the child was able to correctly read all except one word in a list was used as the entry point into passages. The children then read passages orally, told all they could remember about passages, and answered a series of comprehension questions. The children continued reading until they reached frustration level, according to criteria indicated in the test. Frustration level was defined as the lowest level at which children read with less than 90% accuracy or less than 70% comprehension.

When each child finished reading passages in one language, word lists and passages in the other language were presented. To control for order effects, the test was administered to half the children in each grade in French first and to the other half in English first.

Both miscue and recall data were analysed to determine how subjects were interacting with the printed page as they read. Data were analysed separately from passages up to and including instructional level and passages at frustration level, since researchers (Hood & Kendall, 1975; Biemiller, 1979; Kavanagh, 1981) have found that there are differences in miscue and recall patterns at these two levels.

Categories were selected and modified from Goodman and Burke's (1972) system for analysing miscues. Selected categories assess processing of print-based information (graphic similarity), knowledge-based information (grammatical and semantic acceptability), and integration of print-based and knowledge-based information (meaning change and correction). Goodman and Burke's graphic similarity category was simplified so that miscues were coded as having high graphic similarity if half or more of the letters in the miscue were the same as those in the text word. Miscues were rated as "high" in grammatical and semantic acceptability if they were acceptable in relation to the rest of the passage in terms of grammatical structure or meaning, respectively. If miscues significantly changed the author's intended meaning, they were coded as high in meaning change. Miscues were also coded according to whether they were corrected.

Recalls were analysed using Fagan's *Categories for Protocol Analysis* (1984). Children's retellings of passages were divided into clausal units, and each unit was categorized according to the extent to which text information as compared to background knowledge was used. *Text-exact* and *text-specific* recall reflect understanding of single units of text. Recall units were coded as text-exact if they involved verbatim recall of words from one clause in the text, and as text-specific if they were paraphrases of ideas from one clausal unit. Recalls were categorized as *text-embedded* if they combined two or more clauses in the text. The text-exact, text-specific, and text-embedded categories all indicate close attention to textual information. By contrast, greater use of background knowledge is reflected in the *inferential* and *experiential* recall categories. Recall units were categorized as inferential if they

included information generated by the reader to fill gaps in the information provided by the author. Experiential recall units involved elaborations or embellishments triggered by associations with text information but these elaborations were not as constrained by the text as were inferential recall units. A final category, labelled *erroneous*, was used for recall units which did not make sense in relation to either the text or background knowledge.

All miscues and recalls were coded by two bilingual research assistants. Interrater agreement was established between them and one of the senior researchers at from 0.90 to 0.94. Percentages of response in each miscue and recall category were determined for each child in each language. Hotelling t^2 tests were used to compare profiles in English and French, and univariate analyses were used to compare processing on instructional- as compared to frustration-level passages. In addition, achievement data were examined to determine relative performance in the two languages at each grade level.

RESULTS

As Table 1 shows, most children in this study could not read independently in English near the end of grade 1. Only 8 of the 42 children were able to read at preprimer level or higher in English. By contrast, 30 first-grade children were able to read at at least preprimer level in French. However, even late in the school year (late April to early May) 12 first-grade children could not yet perform adequately in French, even at the preprimer level, on passages similar to those being used in class.

The relative superiority of reading performance in French as compared to English was expected, as other researchers had also found lower scores on English than French tests prior to instruction in English language arts (Swain & Lapkin, 1981). What was not expected was the relatively large number of students who had made minimal progress learning to read in French. First-grade results revealed a far greater range in reading levels in English than in French, and none of the children could read in French at a level beyond that presented at the grade 1 level in *Méthode Dynamique*. This is not surprising because few parents were French-speaking, and hence most were unable to read with their children in French.

Results at the end of second grade were quite different. Twenty-eight children could read at at least a preprimer level in both languages, five could read in French only, and one in English only. Hence, most second graders read quite proficiently in both languages. It is interesting to note that they were generally more proficient readers in English than in French, with the average level obtained in English more than adequate in relation to grade placement. However, seven students were still reading in English markedly below the level expected of children at this point in their schooling (they

TABLE 1
*Number of Children at Various Instructional
 Reading Levels in English and French*

<i>Level^a</i>	<i>1st Gr. (N=42)</i>		<i>2nd Gr. (N=34)</i>	
	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>	<i>French</i>	<i>English</i>
Below preprimer	12	34	1	5
Preprimer	8	2	1	2
Primer	20	0	13	0
First Reader	2	0	4	0
Second Reader		2	9	6
Third Reader		0	6	6
Fourth Reader		4		12
Fifth Reader				3
Mean Rdg. Level	1.4	1.4	2.2	3.4

^a Students were tested in French to a high third level reader level and in English to a high fifth reader level.

read at or below the preprimer level). Only two children were reading at or below a preprimer level in French.

In comparing first- and second-grade children, the most obvious difference is in the apparent increase in English reading skills from grade 1 to grade 2. One possible explanation is that once children have learned to read in one language, they learn to read in another much more rapidly because of the similarity of reading processes in both languages. Another possible explanation is that children having academic difficulty are counselled out of the French immersion program at the end of grade 1, leaving only proficient learners in the program. The smaller sample size and the larger proportion of girls in grade 2 may reflect this practice. Since this was a cross-sectional rather than longitudinal study, this second hypothesis could not be tested. The question of generalizability was considered in greater depth, however, and the results are presented in the next section of this paper.

READING PROCESSES

Children included in this part of the analysis obtained an instructional level of at least preprimer in both English and French; a large number of children, particularly in first grade, were eliminated on this basis. Two other second-grade students were eliminated from the analysis of recall data because they did not produce any unaided retellings of passages. Thus, mis-

TABLE 2
*Results of the Hotelling t^2 Test
 for Miscues and Recall Variables*

	<i>French</i>		<i>English</i>		<i>F-Ratio</i>	<i>Pr.</i>
	<i>mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>	<i>mean</i>	<i>S.D.</i>		
<i>Miscue Variable (N=36)</i>						
Graphic Similarity	67.75	30.05	52.25	23.41	1.178	0.342
Grammatical Acceptability	44.75	28.19	53.94	25.33	0.322	0.896
Semantic Acceptability	39.67	28.33	45.67	28.16	0.116	0.988
Meaning Change	62.92	27.18	43.61	25.37	3.839	0.008
Correction	35.08	27.76	35.39	23.06	0.000	1.000
<i>Recall Variable (N=34)</i>						
Text-Exact	32.12	24.79	26.74	17.36	0.159	0.986
Text-Specific	28.54	15.36	34.94	17.80	0.388	0.880
Text-Embedded	12.85	9.41	18.56	11.60	0.924	0.493
Text-Inferential	6.27	10.56	11.91	12.08	0.621	0.712
Text-Experiential	2.27	4.59	2.47	5.47	0.005	1.000
Erroneous	14.35	12.14	4.56	7.63	2.414	0.053

cue data were analysed for 6 first-grade and 30 second-grade students, and recall data were analysed for 6 first-grade and 28 second-grade students. Because there were so few children in first grade with data in both English and French, subjects from both grades were combined for this analysis. The results revealed both differences and similarities in the reading processes used. The results of the Hotelling t^2 test revealed a significant overall difference between English and French passages for both miscue ($F=7.057$; $p<.001$) and recall ($F=8.190$; $p<.001$) data. Because the F ratios were significant, comparisons of performance on English and French were examined further for each miscue and recall variable. These results, presented in Table 2, indicated that specific differences between languages were significant on only one miscue and one recall variable.

For oral reading miscues, scores were slightly higher on French than on English passages for graphic similarity, and slightly lower on French than on English passages for grammatical and semantic acceptability, but these differences were not significant. Hence, the children in this study did not perform differently on English as compared to French passages in their ability to analyse graphic cues or to use their language and background knowledge to predict as they read. It is important to note, however, that this does

not mean the children's competence was equal in both languages. Rather, given reading material appropriate to their linguistic development, the children used print-based and knowledge-based processes similarly in English and French. There was virtually no difference in their monitoring behaviour in the two languages, but there was a significant difference in the extent to which they could maintain the author's intended meaning. They made significantly more miscues which changed the author's meaning in French than in English. Meaning change is an indicator of the reader's ability to integrate graphic cues and knowledge-based information. While the children could process both types of information in French and in English, they had greater difficulty integrating such information when reading French than English.

Analysing results on recalls generated similar profiles across languages for all text-based and knowledge-based categories. The only significant difference in processing between English and French was in the erroneous category. The children in this study recalled less accurately French than English passages. These results are consistent with those on miscues, since a major change in meaning at the miscue stage would tend to result in erroneous recall.

These results generally support Genesee's (1979) notion that there are processes basic to reading which, once learned in one language, can be applied to reading others. He suggests that there may also be "reading skills which are language specific and, therefore, must be learned for each language" (p. 74). This study did not reveal such skills, perhaps because the focus of the study was on basic reading processes rather than on discrete reading skills.

There is a discrepancy between this study's results and those of Cziko (1980). He noted heavy reliance on graphic cues and less on contextual information for students with intermediate competence in French as a second language compared with students who had advanced competence or were native speakers of French. On the basis of individual F tests, he concluded that reading strategies are related to the reader's level of language competence. Less competent language users initially rely more on graphic cues and become more interactive by using both graphic cues and contextual information as they develop greater language proficiency. In the present study, first- and second-grade subjects did not make significantly greater use of graphic cues when reading French as compared to English passages, even though they were less competent speakers of French than English. To explore reasons for the discrepancy between Cziko's results and those in the present study, it was hypothesized that the intermediate students in his study may have been reading material in French at their frustration level. Since all students were in seventh grade and read the same passage, passage diffi-

TABLE 3
*Comparison of Miscues at Frustration
 and Instructional Reading Levels*

<i>Miscue Variables</i>	<i>Mean Reading Level</i>		<i>t</i>	<i>Pr.</i>
	<i>Instr.</i>	<i>Frust.</i>		
<i>French (N=59)</i>				
Graphic Similarity	61.9	63.0	−0.229	0.820
Grammatical Acceptability	47.1	42.1	1.149	0.255
Semantic Acceptability	49.2	34.1	3.242	0.002
Meaning Change	61.6	70.3	−1.994	0.051
Correction	31.7	18.7	3.260	0.002
<i>English (N=41)</i>				
Graphic Similarity	51.8	70.3	−3.820	0.000
Grammatical Acceptability	54.2	50.3	0.769	0.446
Semantic Acceptability	47.9	22.0	5.703	0.000
Meaning Change	44.7	65.0	−4.006	0.000
Correction	37.6	16.5	5.731	0.000

culty may have varied more significantly across groups than language competence. To check this hypothesis, miscues obtained in the present study at instructional and frustration levels in English and French were compared. The results of these comparisons are presented in Table 3.

In both English and French, in most categories there were significant differences between miscues made at instructional and frustration levels. In English, students used graphic cues less and semantic cues more when reading at instructional than at frustration level. They also made fewer significant changes in meaning and more corrections at instructional level. The results on French were almost identical to those in English except that differences on graphic similarity did not reach significance. These results suggested that when children read material adjusted to their reading levels, they used similar reading processes in English and in French. When material was beyond their ability level, the profile of reading processes was different. Thus it is crucial to match reading material to children's reading competence when attempting to make comparisons across languages.

IMPLICATIONS

This study indicates that while average achievement scores in English and French reading are consistent with grade expectations, these averages ob-

sure the range in reading performance evident in both languages. Some children obviously learn to read very well in immersion programs, while others do not. Appropriate research at this time would be a longitudinal study of children in immersion programs to trace development in language arts across time for individual children.

When reading processes are considered, it appears that children read quite similarly in English and French. The major difference involves *integration* of text-based and knowledge-based processes, with children more able to integrate these in English. Hence transfer of basic reading processes across languages is supported. Rather than surface-level phenomena, transfer involves underlying "cognitive processes, such as the use of one's knowledge of the syntactic transitional probabilities of a language" (Genesee, 1979, p. 75).

Teachers need to recognize that there are common processes underlying reading across languages, and to capitalize on such transfer. Rather than treating learning to read in one language as a task separate from learning to read in another, teachers can help children to transfer effective reading processes from one language to another.

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Die meisten Forscher haben als gegeben vorausgesetzt, daß Übertragung Kinder im vertieften Französischunterricht schnell befähigt, Englisch lesen zu lernen. Jedoch ist über die Natur einer solchen Übertragung wenig bekannt. Diese Arbeit

untersuchte die mündliche Lesefähigkeit von Kindern in vertieften französischen Sprachprogrammen in der ersten und zweiten Klasse, um zu vergleichen, wie sie englische und französische Texte lesen. Die Testgruppe bestand aus 42 Erstklässlern und 34 Zweitklässlern eines Unterrichtsprogramms in französischer Sprache, in der der englische Sprachunterricht in der zweiten Klasse beginnt. Jeder Schüler las Abschnitte auf französisch und englisch, um ein Beispiel zu geben für die mündlichen Sprachschwierigkeiten und eigenständige Nacherzählung. Die Ergebnisse zeigten bedeutende Ähnlichkeit auf, wie Kinder englische und französische Texte lesen. Der größte Unterschied bezog sich auf die Integration von Informationen aus dem Text und aus dem eigenen Wissen, die sich in den englischen Textabschnitten besser als in den französischen erwies.

La mayoría de los investigadores han postulado que la transferencia permite a los niños inmersos en el programa francés rapidez en el aprendizaje de la lectura en inglés. Sin embargo, poco se sabe acerca de la naturaleza de dicha transferencia. Este estudio examinó la lectura oral de los niños inmersos en el programa francés en primero y en segundo grado, comparando como leían en inglés y en francés. La muestra consistió en 42 estudiantes de primer grado y 34 estudiantes de segundo grado inmersos en un programa francés en el cual la instrucción de las artes de la lengua inglesa comienza en 2o. grado. Cada estudiante leyó pasajes en inglés y en francés para producir una muestra de las repetidas faltas y errores espontáneos. Los resultados revelaron una similitud considerable en la forma de lectura de los niños en inglés y en francés. La mayor diferencia se encontró en la integración del texto y el conocimiento de la información, el cual fue mejor en los pasajes en inglés que en francés.

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