The Role that English Plays in Ontario Core French Classrooms

By

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Abstract

Although Canada considers itself a bilingual (English and French) country, only 11.3 percent of Ontarians considers themselves capable of carrying a conversation in French. Students in Ontario schools are required to study French between Grades 4 to 9 in one of three programs: Core, Extended or Immersion French. While Extended and Immersion French can take advantage of an immersive language environment, Core French classes must balance both English and French in the classroom, despite the Ontario Ministry of Education requirements for French to be the language of communication in the classroom. This study aims to answer the question how a small sample of Canadian Core French teachers, utilizing English in the classroom, is an example of effective scaffolding in a language learning environment. Data were collected through three semi-structured interviews with core French teachers working in the Greater Toronto Area who instruct students from Grades 4 to 12. Analyzing the interview transcripts reveals these teachers used English to scaffold learning in a variety of ways, as it builds upon prior language knowledge students possess from their mother language. This study recommends that the Ontario Ministry of Education revisit Core French policies and the role of grammar in language teaching pedagogy.

Keywords: Core French Pedagogy, mother language, teaching practices
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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.0 Research Context and Problem

Canada honours a part of its history by recognizing two official languages: English and French. All students across Ontario are required to study the French language throughout their junior and intermediate schooling and at least one year of senior schooling (Government of Ontario, 2014). There are three different streams that a student can enter that determine the length and depth of instruction they will receive in the French language. As detailed in The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 written by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b), the French Immersion program is designed for students who do not speak French in the home. Students are expected to be instructed in French for a minimum of 50 percent of the total instructional hours at each grade level from 1 to 8. Students in the immersion program must receive a minimum of 3,800 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). The Extended French program begins at Grade 4 and allows the students to experience a minimum of 25 percent of their total instructional hours in French. Students in the Extended French program will receive at least 1,260 hours of instruction in French by the end of Grade 8 (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b). The Core French program is mandatory for all Grade 4-8 students in English-language elementary schools. Once a student enters Grade 4, they will begin to receive French language instruction. By the end of Grade 8, students will have received a minimum of 600 hours of French instruction (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 15).

With such an intensive focus on teaching and promoting the French language in Canada, one would think that many Canadians identify themselves as bilingual, capable of speaking both English and French. However, according to Statistics Canada (2011) only 11.3 percent of the
population of Ontario or 1,438,785 people, identify themselves as capable of carrying a conversation in French. This low percentage of people who can be thought of as bilingual is troubling considering the positive language used to promote the benefits of studying French as a second language in school. As stated by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b):

> The ability to speak and understand French allows students to communicate with French-speaking people in Canada and around the world, to understand and appreciate the history and evolution of their cultures, and to develop and benefit from a competitive advantage in the workforce. (p. 6)

The Ministry of Education expects its graduates to be a step above the rest when it comes to the workforce, but with only 11.3 percent of Ontarians able to speak both English and French, is it a failure of the teachers, the ministry or both?

On a further note, the same curriculum document also goes on to state:

> Knowledge of an additional language strengthens first-language skills. The ability to speak two or more languages generally enhances cognitive development, as well as reasoning and creative-thinking skills. It also enhances the student's confidence as a learner, facilitates the learning of additional languages, and contributes to academic achievement...second-language[sic] learners tend to be more divergent thinkers, with improved memory and attention span. (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013b, p. 7)

I am wondering, is it enough to simply expose a student to a second language, or is it as vitally important for them to learn it in order to develop benefits as a language learner? The Ontario Ministry is quite clear in their vision for the French as a second language program, they expect students "to communicate and interact with growing confidence in French, while developing the
knowledge, skills and perspectives needed to participate fully as citizens in Canada and in the world” (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). In order to do this, each stream of the French as a second language program, immersion, extended and core, must strive to provide the very best instruction possible. As Turnbull and Arnett (2002) have concluded, there is a near consensus that teachers should aim to make maximum use of the target language. Immersion and Extended French programs meet that endeavor by providing instruction in French for subjects in addition to the French language. The key focus should be on the Core French program and its possible inadequacies, for example, not being able to provide the same exposure to the French language to achieve the ministry's vision.

Ellis (2005) firmly believes that if the only exposure to a foreign language students receive is in the context of a limited number of weekly lessons based on a textbook, they are unlikely to achieve high levels of proficiency in the language. Thus, it stands to conclude that Core French teachers should be taking advantage of every tool they can to promote learning for their students in the limited number of class time, 600 hours by Grade 8, available to them.

While these tools include using a student’s common language (L1), which in this case is English, this is not to suggest that the majority of a Core French lesson should be conducted in a student’s L1. As Butzkamm (2011) has noted, the monolingual approach to foreign language instruction derives much of its force and appeal from the counterproductive, haphazard, and time-consuming way the L1 is so often employed by teachers with low confidence. In fact, less skilled teachers will regularly fall back on the L1 in order to more easily conduct a class (Butzkamm & Caldwell, 2009). However, this misuse of L1 in the classroom does not mean there is not a proper use, as Butzkamm (2003) believes that measured use of L1 in a logical manner, which scaffolds upon language rules the students already know, can be an effective pedagogy.
Both extremes of the foreign language classroom, mostly L1 instruction and instruction conducted only in the target language (L2), will not provide students with the optimal environment for language acquisition. Although, with proper pedagogical instruction, foreign language teachers can use the L1 as a tool which can give the fastest, surest, most precise and most complete means of accessing the L2 (Butzkamm, 2003). In fact, the evidence presented by Butzkamm (2003) calls into question the monolingual approach and opens up new teaching methodologies. He believes that with judicious use of L1, and with properly implemented techniques, language learning can be twice as efficient as instruction that ignores the students’ native language (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 38).

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the practices of Core French teachers who utilize the proper use of the common language (L1), usually English, in the foreign language classroom. While many Core French teachers may struggle with a classroom that uses the target language (L2) exclusively, there are effective strategies to utilize the L1 in the classroom (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). However, an overreliance on L1 in the classroom will cause the instruction to possibly become non-effective. For this reason, it is imperative that Core French teachers learn the correct balance between L1 and L2 usage in an ideal foreign language classroom. It is also essential to gauge how Core French teachers value the usefulness of L1.

A further purpose of this research is to report and share practices that Ontario Core French teachers are using that take advantage of the benefits of L1 use in order to scaffold preexisting knowledge and foster language learning in their students. By doing this, their practices can be disseminated and therefore inform the instructional practices of more teachers and support them
in their teaching of the Core French curriculum. It is my hope that these findings may also support teachers in developing students who exhibit the benefits of a second language learner.

Students who excel in the foreign language classroom tend to have increased mental flexibility, improved problem-solving skills, a better understanding of aspects of a variety of cultures, a greater awareness of global issues, including those related to the environment and sustainability, and expanded career opportunities (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013, p. 6). With an improved pedagogical approach to French as a second language, Ontario Core French teachers will be closer to producing students who will become lifelong language learners which stimulates their personal growth and be active participants as world citizens. This open-mindedness will allow properly educated Canadian students to help usher Canada forward as a member of the global community.

1.2 Research Questions

The primary question guiding this study is: How is a small sample of Canadian Core French teachers utilizing the common language, English (L1), in the classroom that is an example of effective scaffolding in a language learning environment? Sub-questions to further guide this inquiry include:

- What role does L1 play in the classroom for these teachers?
- How do these teachers balance the use of L1 and the target language, French (L2), in the classroom?
- What are the situations that occur during class that have benefitted most from using L1 and what situations have they found where it is best to avoid it?
- How can Core French teachers structure their pedagogical practice so that students can use L1 without discouraging the use of L2?
This project also aims to raise awareness of the academic research into the ways that L1 can be employed in the foreign language classroom so that it helps to scaffold known key concepts of language and apply it towards the L2.

1.3 Background of the Researcher

Having spent eight years teaching English as a foreign language in Japan, I developed a deep interest in the theory behind eliminating the common language (L1) usage in the classroom and using the target language as the language of instruction. During my schooling growing up, I participated in the mandatory Core French classes and found that English was used far too much in the classroom. My abilities as a French speaker were not stretched or challenged enough to graduate my schooling with a strong grasp of the language. However, having grown up speaking English, Cantonese and now Japanese, I truly believe in the benefits of being multilingual as it pertains to the mental and social development of a learner.

Although I currently speak three languages, I still would not consider myself an eager language learner. I believe that my brain is able to process science and math much easier and find languages challenging to learn. Despite that, I can personally see how learning other languages teaches understanding, encourages patience and fosters open-mindedness. The most beneficial aspect of becoming multilingual is the ability to see things from another perspective. Many languages are grammatically and tonally constructed in a way so that there is a certain emphasis on a particular part of speech. An example of this is the placement of verbs in the English sentences versus Japanese sentences. While English is a subject - verb - object language, Japanese is a subject - object - verb language. This difference in the placement of the verb often changes which part of the sentence that language appears to value more than others. In Japanese, for example, the subject and object can be omitted from a sentence, and a grammatically correct sentence can consist of
only a verb, but still convey a complete meaning. Understanding this difference, which I could only truly comprehend after learning to speak the language, has helped me to be more empathetic and thoughtful as a student of education.

While my studies of French as a foreign language exhibited the improper use of L1, my experiences as a foreign language teacher led me to believe that there is a correct balance that can be struck between the common language and the target language in the classroom. I also believe that this well-balanced approach can help foreign language classrooms foster better language learning.

1.4 Overview

This research project is organized into five chapters. Following this chapter, I will review the literature in the area of common language usage in the foreign language classroom focusing on teacher pedagogy, curriculum documents and best practices in Chapter Two. In Chapter Three, I will describe the research methodology including data collection methods and procedures, as well as information about the participants, and strengths and limitations of the study. In Chapter Four, I will report and analyze the research findings identifying themes based on the qualitative findings. Finally, in Chapter Five, I will discuss the significance of the findings and make recommendations for future avenues of research. A comprehensive list of references and appendices are found at the end.
Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I review the literature in the areas pertaining to foreign language (L2) classrooms, secondary language acquisition and pedagogical theories and practice. More specifically, I review the curriculum policies in place for foreign language classes and consider how different institutions in Hong Kong, the United Kingdom and South Korea dictate how foreign language classes should be taught, and the ongoing debate regarding the balance between L2 and native language (L1) in the classroom. Next, I consider institutional pedagogical practices for a foreign language class as they pertain to the Ontario classroom delving into the evolution of foreign language instruction pedagogy. Finally, I overview some of the best practices for L1 usage that have been suggested, tested and implemented. I specifically examine the idea of strategic use versus compensatory use, to foster a language learning environment and therefore improve additional language acquisition.

2.1 Foreign Language Classroom

Many educational curricula worldwide include the study of a foreign language, including Canada, as it plays a vital role in the developmental growth of students. According to the Ontario Ministry of Education in The Ontario Curriculum, French as a Second Language: Core French, Grades 4-8, Extended French, Grades 4-8, French Immersion, Grades 1-8 (2013b), in addition to strengthening students' ability to communicate, learning another language develops their awareness of how language and culture interconnect, helping them appreciate and respect the diversity of Canadian and global societies. Similarly, the Department for Education in England (2013) lists their reasons for studying a foreign language as a liberation from insularity and that it
provides an opening to other cultures. A high-quality languages education should foster pupils' curiosity and deepen their understanding of the world.

When looking at countries where English is considered the foreign language of study, some still seem to trumpet the benefits of studying a second language rather than promoting the benefits of studying English as the foreign language specifically. For example, in Hong Kong, the study of English as a second language "paves the way for independent and lifelong learning and effective communication of knowledge, ideas, values, attitudes and experience" (Curriculum Development Council, 2004, p. 4). While in South Korea, their curriculum is written with clear unambiguous language regarding the purpose of studying English. The National Curriculum Information Center (2007) explains that English plays an important role in communication and helps form a bond between people of different native languages. However, the curriculum document still mentions the global benefits of language learning as they believe the ability to communicate in English will act as an important bridge connecting different countries, and will be the driving force in developing South Korea by forming trust among various countries and cultures (National Curriculum Information Center, 2007).

2.1.1 How policy dictates language learning in Hong Kong, UK, and Korea

The importance that countries place on learning a second language cannot be argued, however by looking at their curriculum documents, one can see slight variations on how they expect teachers to structure their classrooms. In Hong Kong, teachers are urged to create a language-rich environment which incorporates the use of English in all English lessons and beyond. The Curriculum Development Council (2004) states, "teachers should teach English through English and encourage learners to interact with one another in English" (p. 5). It is clear through this language that the Hong Kong government expects their teachers to use as much English (L2)
as possible and the teachers’ and students’ common language (L1) be used as little as possible. In the same way, South Korea’s policy of teaching English through English was born in 1999 with the vision of English being the only language used in elementary and secondary school English classes (Jeon, 2008). This is a fairly common sentiment in foreign language curriculum documents where there is an emphasis on using the L2 over the L1. On the other hand, there are some countries that have seen the benefits of L1 usage in the classroom, an example of this is the United Kingdom whose recent revisions of the National Curriculum documents show a gradual shift in policy to include the measured use of the mother tongue (Meiring & Norman, 2002). These three examples draw similarities with curriculum documents in Ontario which express that French, the target language, should be the language of communication and instruction, but leave the pedagogy and methodology to the teachers. This will be discussed further later.

2.1.2 Balance of L1 versus L2 in the classroom

The issue of balance that teachers should seek between using the target language and using the student's first language in the foreign language classroom is quite controversial (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). While Turnbull and Arnett (2002) concluded that there is near consensus that teachers should aim to make maximum use of the target language, there is an ongoing debate that discusses the differing opinion on the role the L1 can perform (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). Traditionally, cognitive second language acquisition theory (e.g., Polio & Duff, 1994) and communicative language teaching (e.g., Edstrom, 2006; Turnbull & Dailey-O’Cain, 2009) have provided evidence supporting a foreign language classroom that is taught with the L2 only. Recent studies have challenged this traditional theory and actually sidestep the issue of if L1 has a place in the foreign language classroom, but whether it should be fostered in the classroom (e.g., Cook, 2001), limited (e.g., Turnbull, 2001), or controlled in a consistent manor such that L2 acquisition can be supported.
by well thought-out use of L1 (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). In fact, this discourse can be seen in part when looking over the curriculum documents for the French as a Second Language program in Ontario.

2.1.3 Policy in Ontario

_A Framework for French as a Second Language in Ontario Schools_ states that schools should "establish that French is the language of communication in French as a Second Language (FSL) classes and that students are expected to interact with each other in French" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 18). This seems to clearly state the role of English, the L1, in the FSL classroom. However, the document also states that teachers should focus on what students can do (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), which acknowledges the different rates at which students in Ontario learn French as a foreign language. Teachers have historically used a wide variation of instructional approaches to implement the Ontario curriculum as found in a 1998 study by Calman and Daniel, however, despite arguments advocating for maximizing the L2 use (Turnbull & Arnett, 2002), Canadian Core French teachers continue to find it difficult to maintain French as the language of instruction in the classroom (Salvatori, 2007). It is interesting to note that even though instructional approaches contribute to student performance, there has been a lack of recent, comprehensive research investigating and/or comparing instructional approaches in the Ontario elementary Core French context (Grades 4-8) (Lapkin, Mady, & Arnott, 2009, p. 18).

2.2 Secondary Language Acquisition

In the Ontario Core French classroom, students have limited exposure to the new language. By allowing French to become the language of communication and instruction, it aligns with some general principles for successful foreign language learning. Ellis (2005) advocates for this because successful instructed practices require extensive L2 input, through both oral and written sources
in order to maximize the exposure to the L2. This input is important for developing the highly connected implicit knowledge that is needed to become an proficient communicator in the L2. While this can be an effective strategy for some students, others, such as Klapper (1998) argue that slower learners of a foreign language are often frustrated by the total exclusion of L1 which can lead to resentment and the build-up of affective factors that are known to be the enemy of effective foreign language learning. In fact, according to Macaro (2000), a learner's L1 is the language of thought for all but the most advanced learners and so it may "enrich associations and reduce memory constraints" (p. 173).

Successfully instructed language learning also requires opportunities for students to use L2 so they are not entirely dependent on comprehensible input. Swain (1995) theorised that using the language, or output, allows learners to test out hypotheses about the target language grammar through feedback they obtain when they make errors. It helps to automatise existing knowledge and helps learners develop a "personal voice" by steering conversations on to topics they are interested in contributing to. This opportunity to interact with others is another key principle identified by Ellis (2005). The contributions to language acquisition through input and output both occur in oral interactions. Ellis goes on to state that both computational and sociocultural theories of L2 acquisition have viewed social interaction as the matrix in which acquisition takes place. These interactions are not just a means of "automatising existing linguistic resources but also for creating new resources" (Ellis, 2005, p. 40). It is incredibly important to provide students ample opportunities to experience this, especially in the Core French program, as the classroom generally is the only chance for students to experience the target language. Ellis describes opportunities for students to experience and use the target language along with plenty of scaffolding as two general characteristics that are important in classroom interactions that lead to language acquisition.
However, he also identifies four key requirements for an "acquisition-rich classroom" (p. 40). Ellis argues for creating situations for language use that have meaning to the students, providing opportunities for learners to use the language to express their own personal ideas, helping students participate in activities that are slightly beyond their proficiency level, and offer plenty of opportunities that allow students to utilize the language in a complete way: tasks that require listening, speaking and comprehension at the same time (p. 41).

2.2.1 Evolution of foreign language pedagogy in Ontario

The first approaches to foreign language pedagogy stem from the teachings of classical languages. According to Lightbown and Spada (2006) the Grammar Translation Approach (GTA) began to appear in schools in the 19th century. The main objective of this method was to train students to read literature in the target language. Teachers would often begin with vocabulary lists and have the students find the equivalent word in the L1. The lesson would then be supplemented by explicit teachings of related grammar rules. Through the study of these foreign words and grammatical constructs, students were able to acquire reading and writing competency, but not necessarily oral communication skills. Astonishingly, this method of teaching is still popular in countries such as Japan where self-perceived instructor levels cause them to fall back upon this pedagogical approach (Morita, 2015).

Building upon the GTA came the audiolingual instructional method. It formed mostly as a reaction to the limitations produced from focusing on grammar and translation and it redirected the instruction to focus more upon the oral elements of language (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Rising in the early 20th century, but falling out of favor by the 1960s, students would listen and speak the target language aiming to improve their pronunciation skills (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Despite the repeated practice with listening and speaking the language, students taught this way
were still limited in their ability to use the language to communicate (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). This seemed to be the case because students would often be given short conversations to memorize and act out without necessarily understanding the context or meaning of what they were saying. Students also tended to develop bad habits from erroneous speech as the style emphasized learned expressions rather than spontaneous speaking (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Clearly these instructional approaches produced very few students who were capable of foreign language comprehension or fluency. As Lightbown and Spada (2006) explain:

Learners receiving audiolingual or grammar-translation instruction are often unable to communicate their messages and intentions effectively in a second language. Experience has also shown that primarily or exclusively structure-based approaches to teaching do not guarantee that learners develop high levels of accuracy and linguistic knowledge. (p. 143)

With fluency and communicative competence a goal for foreign language instruction, a method that focused on providing learners with opportunities to use the language in a meaningful way was adopted and coined the "communicative approach" (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 31). Advocates of this approach believe that mistakes are a natural part of the language-learning process and that communication of meaning should be central, with less emphasis on language form (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Classes would be structured around communicative activities such as asking for information, expressing likes and dislikes, describing, inviting, promising, or apologizing, functions that one would need to know to get by in a foreign language (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). When students struggled with correct words, "contextual cues, props and gestures were used to help communicate meaning," (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 32).
This foreign language pedagogy highlights the instructional values that Ellis (2005) deems necessary but some would argue, like Puren (2006) that it does not fully meet the diverse needs of language learners. The communicative approach usually builds language units based around themes such as, history, travel and the environment, which are often not relevant to the students. A new approach, called the action-oriented approach, strives to teach language through real-life tasks (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a, p. 32). According to the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a), students participate in language activities that closely match tasks they might face in everyday life. The activities are thusly open-ended and require students to use a variety of skills and knowledge, often requiring oral and/or written interactions between students. The Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a) concludes, "Grammar is employed as a tool to enhance oral and written communication skills and is taught within the relevant context" (p. 32).

The key to these last two approaches is the notion that language is acquired most effectively when it is learned for and through communication (Lightbown & Spada, 2006). Netten and Germain (2005) expand on this idea by stating that using strategies that focus on language use (modelling, using and correcting) in spontaneous communication throughout the lesson, without previous practice of vocabulary or form, is an example of highly effective teaching. Through such studies, education institutions have come to believe that the communicative approach and the action-oriented approach have produced a paradigm shift in the way language is taught (Piccardo, 2014).

2.3 L1 Use in Theory and Practice

With the action-oriented approach built upon the communicative approach, Core French teachers in Ontario possess a useful pedagogical model by which they can teach French as a foreign language. However, while French is to be the language of instruction, personal experience has
shown that almost all teachers use some L1 in their instructional practices (Lapkin, Mady & Arnott, 2009), and teachers often have different reasons for why they use L1 in the classroom (e.g., de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009; Littlewood & Yu, 2009). Teachers most often utilize L1 in three main situations, establishing constructive social relationships, including the use of humour (de la Campa & Nassaji, 2009), communicating complex meanings in order to ensure understanding and/or save time, and maintaining control over the classroom environment (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). Each of these instances of L1 use regularly facilitates a better functioning foreign language classroom, nevertheless, there are strategies teachers can use which can focus and reduce the instances of L1 in the class. Teachers should be cautious when creating their secondary language learning environment as Butzkamm (2003) remarks that lessons taught completely in the target language are certainly possible, however "true monolingual learning is an impossibility" (p. 31). Students build upon the existing skills and knowledge that they have learned in their mother language. Butzkamm (2003) argues that the L1 is silently present in students, even when lessons are conducted in the L2. He goes on to suggest that "successful learners capitalise on the vast amount of linguistic skills and world knowledge they have accumulated via the mother tongue" (p. 31). The L1 plays a vital role in scaffolding prior knowledge, for example, there is no new concept or idea associated with learning vocabulary in the target language, students will inevitably link new words in the target language with words already known. Butzkamm (2003) goes further by saying, "rather than reconceptualise the world, we need to extend our concepts, with any necessary cultural adjustment or refinement" (p. 31). For students learning a new foreign language, as is the case with Core French students, encountering the meanings of new words automatically involves connecting them with their mother language until the L2 has established itself as the internal language of thinking (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 31). Until that happens, the teacher's job is to assist students as they
"self-scaffold" instead of ignoring or even trying to suppress those connections that occur in their brains (Butzkamm, 2003, p. 31).

2.3.1 A framework for a principled approach

The three situations described in the previous section in which teachers most often use the common language (L1) and the resultant subsequent utterances of L1 can be further divided into two categories (Littlewood & Yu, 2009). The first category is compensatory use of L1, which is most often observed as a reaction to students not understanding someone speaking in the target language and when communicating instructions pertaining to classroom management. Littlewood and Yu (2009) call the second category strategic use of L1, which includes planned learning activities, comparisons between L1 and L2 and activity instructions. These uses can be thought of as considered use of L1 for the right reasons. For example, Butzkamm (2003) advocates for the use of the "sandwich technique" (p. 32) for presenting new dialogues. The teacher will alternate between L2 and L1 and back to L2 again in order to help understanding and increase confidence by allowing students to make connections between what is familiar and what is new.

Butzkamm (2003) argues, strategic use of L1 does not aim to take away time for L2 use, but rather helps to establish it as the general means of communication in the classroom. By using L1 with a purposeful focus and controlled way, the teacher develops deliberate tactics which will maximize learning opportunities for foreign language students (Cameron, 2001). Littlewood and Yu (2009) believe it is also possible, with proper planning, to lower the amount of compensatory L1 use and change it into pre-planned strategic use. They theorise that as a teacher learns more about their students and capabilities, they will be able to anticipate the struggles of their students during the planning stages of a lesson and either use L1 in a planned way or develop alternative communicative strategies (Littlewood & Yu, 2009).
2.4 Conclusion

In this literature review, I examined research relating to foreign language classrooms, the evolution of foreign language pedagogy and properly utilized L1 in theory and practice as demonstrated through research. This review emphasizes the extent to which secondary language acquisition research has focused on the use and reason for using L1 in teaching practices and the debate on what role, if any, L1 should play in the classroom. It also raises questions about the guidelines and support the Ontario Government provides its Core French language teachers. One particular concern is whether or not Ontario Core French teachers are putting into practice theories about best uses of L1 to facilitate the growth of students to become life-long language learners.

In light of this, the purpose of my research is to learn what the pedagogical strategies of French as a second language teachers today are, given the framework of the Ontario Curriculum, and discover the awareness and usage of evidence-based practices for L1 for in-classroom instruction. The research will also gauge the instructional approaches of a small sample of Core French teachers today, as they are influenced by pedagogical strategies they come across during professional development. Based on these findings, further analysis will be conducted to evaluate how students improve in language acquisition when teachers identify and adjust their strategic pre-planned use of L1 from compensatory use. I will do this with a qualitative analysis of the experiences and perspectives of three different Ontario Core French teachers.
Chapter 3: Research Methodology

3.0 Introduction

In Chapter Three, I outline the research methodology that was used to study the role of the English language in Ontario Core French classrooms. I start by giving an overview of the general approach and procedures, and include the data collection methods. Next, I introduce the participants, including selection criteria and recruitment, while also describing the sampling process. Following that, I describe the analysis of the data along with acknowledging the ethical concerns that have been taken into consideration. Finally, I discuss the limitations of the study from a methodological standpoint, but also highlight the strengths. The chapter concludes with a summary of the integral decisions and their rationale given the research purpose and questions.

3.1 Research Approach and Procedures

This study of English language in the Core French classroom was completed using a qualitative research approach that included a review of the existing literature as it pertained to the research questions, as well as analysis of data collected from semi-structured, face-to-face interviews with three teachers. While a quantitative research study would examine the breadth of the issues relating to the purpose of the study, one needs to scrutinize the depth of the issues, which a qualitative analysis allows. As Ivey (2012) believes, a qualitative research study not only allows participants to answer the research questions, but also includes the participants’ perceptions, experiences, thoughts and feelings about the questions which are valuable aspects of the answers that would be lost in a quantitative study. The qualitative approach allows me to "preserve the context (of the question and answers) for the data" (Ivey, 2012, p. 319).

The question of "breadth versus depth" is one of the fundamental differences between the two kinds of studies, quantitative and qualitative. It is a common misconception that "breadth" is
what is required to inform insights and conclusions in a study, however, the small sample size of a qualitative study does not mean the data leads to understandings that are less valid. Rather, the sample size in qualitative research is more about creating a rich and meaningful basis from which the researcher can explore the unique perspectives people bring to a particular experience. In other words, qualitative research allows for the assembly of a sufficient and natural model to perform an in-depth investigation, not the complete exhaustion of the entire range of experiences related to the purpose of the study (Cousin, 2013, p. 130). This "depth" is what makes the qualitative approach a suitable one for me, given the research questions and purpose. By diving into the depth of what the three teachers have to say, I will be able to look for patterns in a particular interviewee's answers as well as across the three samples. Through this, layers of meaning and explanation will become evident in a way that a broad sweeping survey would likely not be able to produce (Cousin, 2013).

3.2 Instruments of Data Collection

In most research studies, data is collected through many different ways. Since this study will benefit from interviewees elaborating upon their answers, the data collection method used in this study is a semi-structured interview. Interviews conducted for research studies fall into one of three categories, structured interviews, semi-structured interviews and unstructured interviews. As structured interviews can lead to quantitative data, the choice was between semi-structured and unstructured. However, because there will not be any observations recorded, a semi-structured interview must be used as they are often the sole data source for a qualitative research project (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 315). The semi-structured interview is, as Aleandri and Russo (2015) state, a tool that is moldable and adaptable to the different contexts and different
personalities of the respondents. The wording and nature of the questions allow memories and experiences to be shared without being judged (p. 519).

Since this study looks at the interviewee's own experience teaching Core French in the classroom, and because each teacher has their own individual opinions and pedagogy, the semi-structured interview gives them full freedom to express themselves and to deepen the conversation about a different aspect of teaching French as a second language that was not specifically mentioned in the questions. This sense of conversational freedom is key to obtaining the best set of data possible for this study and the semi-structured interview is the best tool to accomplish this. The one-on-one, face-to-face nature of the semi-structured interview is meant to be a personal and intimate encounter in which open, direct, and verbal questions are used to elicit detailed narratives and stories. The interviewer's task is to obtain that information while listening and encouraging another person to speak (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006, p. 318-319). This study was able to take advantage of the value of personal language as data, where the depth of meaning was important and the focus of data collection was upon gaining insight and understanding (Aleandri & Russo, 2015, p. 519).

3.3 Participants

With the aim of gathering insight on the role of English in the Core French classroom, it was imperative to speak with French teachers working in Ontario. In this section I review the criteria I used to select the participants and examine the areas from which I can recruit willing teachers. Also included are participant biographies describing their current teaching situation and work experience. All names of participants and schools have been replaced with pseudonyms.

3.3.1 Sampling criteria

To choose the teacher participants for this study, the following criteria was used:
1. Teachers will be Core French teachers in a school.

2. Teachers will generally conduct their Core French classes in the homeroom of those classes.

3. Participants will have at least one year of experience teaching Core French.

4. Teachers will have pursued continuing education and professional development for teaching French as a second language.

5. Teachers will currently be working in the Greater Toronto Area.

These five criteria allowed me to find three teachers who were able to answer my research questions in depth. The teachers had to be Core French teachers, rather than French teachers in an immersion or Extended French program, because I wished to assess each teacher's strategies and pedagogy for teaching French when the Core French class is one of the only times students are exposed to French. I wanted each of the teachers to not teach from a dedicated French classroom as I hoped to establish the challenges associated with transitioning into a classroom where the mindset of students was generally affixed in "English-mode". The teachers participating in this study should have enough experience to have established their own style and routines for teaching Core French, they should have a good idea about what works for them and what does not work. They also must have expressed interest in keeping abreast of the current pedagogy relating to teaching in a foreign language classroom as I want them to have prior knowledge about the theories of language acquisition. Finally, I spoke with teachers employed in the Greater Toronto Area in order to maintain a geographical focus.

3.3.2 Sampling procedures

Although maximum variation sampling is one of the most popular approaches for choosing participants because it maximizes the potential for different perspectives in the findings, which many researchers aim for when conducting qualitative research (Creswell, 2007, p. 138), sampling
strategies such as convenience and purposeful sampling were used to choose participants. The reason for this is due to the small-scale nature of the study and the methodological parameters I am working within. As a pre-service teacher and a member of a community of teacher colleagues and mentor teachers, I utilized my existing contacts and networks to locate and find willing participants, which is a representation of convenience sampling. I ensured that the participants were volunteering their time by offering my information to those in my network to give to suitable candidates so that they did not feel pressured to take part in the study.

However, the sampling was not purely one of convenience, potential candidates were narrowed down using the sampling criteria outlined in the previous section, which allowed the sampling to take on a purposeful nature as well. These two approaches together helped me locate teachers I could reach quickly through my connections, but who also were appropriate given the nature of my research purpose.

3.3.3 Participant biographies

Yuki is a French teacher who has been teaching in a Greater Toronto Area public elementary school that includes an Extended French program for one year. She also taught English as a foreign language for two years overseas. She teaches an Extended French homeroom, but also teaches Core French for Grades 4 and 5.

Hayley is a Core French teacher in a Greater Toronto Area public elementary school. She has been teaching there for four years and has helped to develop her own program that meets the curriculum expectations. She has been teaching Core French to Grades 3, 4 and 5 and in the past has gone to each class’ homeroom to teach the subject. This year she has her own room to teach from and the students come to her class to learn French.
Paula has been teaching for 38 years. For 15 years, Paula taught in a school in Eastern Europe and then moved to Canada to teach French as a second language. She has spent the last 23 years teaching Core French at an independent school in the Greater Toronto Area. She currently teaches Grades 8, 9, 11 and 12, but has had experience teaching all grades from kindergarten to Grade 12.

3.4 Data Analysis

In order to produce valid and reliable data that could be used to guide practice (Ivey, 2012), data analysis ideally occurred concurrently with data collection so that through an iterative process (sampling which informs questions), no new themes emerged (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). Interviews were transcribed and the transcripts and notes taken during the interviews were read multiple times in order to flag statements and identify themes that were apparent in the respondent's answers. This process is called coding, and uses the research questions to identify categories of data and themes within the categories. This approach, which is referred to as the "template approach" by DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006), allows the data to speak to findings as they relate to the existing research already discussed in the literature review. Another important aspect of the data that cannot be ignored is the divergent data as it is related to the research questions. This opposing data along with "null data", what participants did not speak to, may reveal significant themes that run counter to my research purpose. These themes can be used to discuss extensions and further research that may be useful to the field.

This approach was chosen because the study is situated within prior research and theoretical perspectives which allows the pre-existing templates or categories to assist in the data analysis process (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006).

3.5 Ethical Review Procedures
Any sort of qualitative and quantitative research faces many different kinds of ethical issues that may surface during data collection in the field and analysis (Creswell, 2007, p. 151). DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) identified four ethical issues which include protecting the interviewee's information, effectively informing interviewees about the nature of the study, the risk of unanticipated harm and the risk of exploitation (p. 319).

By assigning all participants pseudonyms, their identities will remain confidential and any identifying markers related to their school or students are excluded in the data analysis process. Collected data will remain on a private, password protected laptop and will be erased after five years of storage. These extreme measures will be used to ensure the utmost anonymity of the participants as DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) have noted that information shared during a study could endanger the standing of a teacher should confidentiality be breached. Knowing that the responses will remain anonymous may also make the interviewees more willing to be open and honest with their answers (Ivey, 2012).

Care was taken to make certain that participants understood that they would be interviewed and audio-recorded. Along with signing a consent letter (Appendix A) that gives an overview of the study, addresses ethical implications, and outlines the expectations of participation (one 45-60 minute semi-structured interview), participants were informed at multiple instances that they maintained the right to withdraw from participation at any stage during the research study. Participants were allowed the chance to review, clarify or retract any statements made during the interview before or after analysis. This guarantees that the participant was not being misinterpreted or misquoted and also improved the validity of the data collected.

As the research questions would speak to each teacher's individual teaching pedagogy in the French classroom, there was a small risk that the questions may invoke uncomfortable or
emotional responses that could make the interviewee uneasy. In order to reduce this risk, I gave
the questions to be asked in the semi-structured interview to the participants well in advance and
also notified them of their right to refuse to answer any question.

The final concern rested in the potential exploitation of the participants for my own
personal gain. As DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) argue, it is imperative that the research
methodology allows for proper acknowledgement of the contributions made by the participants
which lead to the success and outcome of the study. However, DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006)
also express concerns due to the intimate nature of interview data and the potential for
unanticipated experiences. These ethical considerations should not be seen as firm guidelines but
as a stepping off point that always keeps the protection of the interviewee at the centre of the
ethical standards.

3.6 Methodological Limitations and Strengths

The greatest limitation of a qualitative study is that often they are viewed to be too
subjective and too limited in sample size to be capable of making generalisations (Cousin, 2013,
p. 123). However, that is not the main goal of a study such as this, as previously discussed by
Cousin (2013), it is the "depth" I am searching for, not the breadth. That depth will be explored
with the three teachers I interviewed, but the scope of the research was also limited by the ethical
parameters that were approved for the Master of Teaching Research Paper. The views held by
students on the use of the common language in the French classroom is beyond the scope of this
study and I will be unable to conduct surveys or classroom observations to supplement the semi-
structured interviews. Having a larger sample size that includes other forms of data, be it from
students or classroom observations would assist with the robustness of this study. According to
Cousin (2013), a larger sample size that includes replicable data increases the validity of a study and helps frame it as scientific research (p. 124).

On the other hand, the methodological strength of a qualitative study lies in the nature of the research questions. Since the answers to those questions invoke deep inquiry, the semi-structured interview allows for the teachers to speak to what they feel is most important when it comes to the topic of French as a second language. The interviewees lend their voices and experiences to the subject of study, so despite the fact that the data was collected from a single case, it can add to the growing collection of "generalised" data. As Cousin (2013) asserts, one can learn much about the "general" from single cases. People often take situations that they are familiar with and add new information to it to form a slightly new group from which they can create generalisations.

3.7 Conclusion

In this chapter I began with an overview of the research approach and procedure delving into the differences of depth versus breadth as it pertains to qualitative research versus quantitative research. Next, I explained the instruments of data collection and how a semi-structured interview would produce data that answered the research questions, but also allowed room for participants to add their own views and experiences. I continued with an introduction of the participants in the study outlining the criteria used to select them. I also described various recruitment procedures and settled upon a mix of purposeful and convenience sampling due to the scope of the study. Following that, I identified the template approach for data analysis which allows me to code transcripts for ease of analysis, while also identifying themes pertaining to null data. Next, I acknowledged and addressed four ethical issues, anonymity and protection of information, keeping participants informed of the nature of the study, reducing risk of unanticipated harm, and
exploitation. Finally, I discussed the limitations and strengths of the qualitative methodology, specifically on the role that depth will play in answering the research questions of deep inquiry. In the next chapter, I will report the research findings.
Chapter 4: Research Findings

4.0 Introduction

In this chapter, I detail and discuss my findings which address the research question, “How is a small sample of Canadian Core French teachers utilizing the common language, English (L1), in the classroom that effectively facilitates a language learning environment?” Data was obtained through three semi-structured interviews conducted with experienced Core French teachers ranging from junior to senior grades. The teachers Hayley, Yuki and Paula, whose descriptions are found in Participant biographies in Chapter Three, provided insight about teachers’ opinions on common language use in the Core French classroom. My findings are organized into five themes: curriculum expectations versus reality, Core French teaching pedagogy, role of grammar when teaching a foreign language, role of English in the Core French class, and value and purpose of foreign languages. I discuss my findings as they relate to each of these themes, examining what was and was not found across interviews, and relate the teachers’ experiences to the literature. I conclude with a brief discussion which summarizes and connects the themes before investigating implications of these findings and considering recommendations in Chapter Five.

4.1 Curriculum Expectations Versus Reality

All three of the interviewed Core French teachers talked about an apparent dichotomy between the curriculum documents put forth by the Ontario Ministry of Education and the practical realities of teaching in a classroom. Each one explicitly mentioned the policy of establishing French as the language of communication in class (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), however, due to various factors, expressed that sometimes this is not feasible. The participants seemed to agree with Klapper’s (1997) assessment that the total exclusion of their mother language often frustrates slower students. Paula says, “…just using French is not enough for the kids, they
feel frustrated.” She perceived that students became frustrated when they could not engage with the content, and Hayley echoed this sentiment when she said, “…with beginning French learners, that [level of French] is not enough for everyone to communicate with.” Yuki, when asked if French was the language of communication and instruction simply said, “No,” elaborating later saying, “Many English students were not motivated to learn French…as a result, English was a tool that I used to bridge the gap.” These three teachers understood the circumstances that often defined the learning environment in their classrooms, the most challenging being the disparate language levels that students entered the class with. Each year, as part of a beginning of the year knowledge diagnostic, a Core French teacher must reassess what level of proficiency their students are at. Paula even expressed concern when new students arrive in Grade 7 worrying that sometimes students, “…don’t even have qualified teachers.” This meant that she often had to start from the basics for the whole class and build up from there. Interestingly, all three participants expressed their opinions of a better way of learning a foreign language, which I will discuss in the next section.

4.1.1 Absence of immersion to motivate learning

What distinguishes Core French from other language learning opportunities in schools, such as Extended French or English Language Learners, is the lack of exposure to the foreign language outside of the classroom. In other words, the three participants lamented the absence of immersion in Core French. As Ellis (2005) advocates for maximum exposure of target language input, often it is not sufficient enough. Speaking of her own experiences, Paula recalled how she had difficulty communicating in both French and English when she graduated from high school with an International Baccalaureate Diploma, but became comfortable and proficient in communication as she used it more. When speaking about her students, “…them learning the
French, but just by hearing and talking in…not even 50 minutes is not realistic. They got home, they will never hear French again. So, it’s impossible for them to develop and understand the language.” She continued, “It’s different from being immersed in the language. If you are immersed in the language, maybe you can learn a language in two years, but completely immersed and very motivated. But not Core.” The realities of the French program do not allow Core students to experience many immersion situations. Core French teachers therefore have to utilize other means and tools to overcome the lack of exposure to the French language.

4.2 Core French Teaching Pedagogy

Teachers often use the resources available to them and adapt their pedagogy in order to accommodate for deficiencies, which in the case of Core French is an immersive language learning environment. The three teachers approach their lessons as Butzkamm (2003) argues for, by capitalizing on the linguistic and world knowledge they have amassed via their mother tongue. Even if any of the three teachers conducted a lesson in French only, truly monolingual learning is impossible (Butzkamm, 2003). Paula understands this and emulates it with her teaching pedagogy, “…you have to teach it [French] through their own language.” In spite of this teaching strategy, Paula stresses that students have to understand the differences between the target language and the mother language:

They have to understand the differences, they have to learn the new sounds, but at the same time, to see the differences between the two languages. In French you have more open vowels, in English you don’t. They have to see the difference.

While she acknowledged the use of English in her teaching pedagogy, she clearly admitted that students could not only rely upon using their English knowledge all the time. To help buoy the differences between English and French, Paula focuses a lot on vocabulary so that it gives the
students the tools they need to express themselves. Hayley agreed with this sentiment, but was also wary of issues that could arise when focused on vocabulary stating, “…they want to have direct translations, with the same word order, etcetera., and so they get frustrated when that’s not the case.” To alleviate some of those frustrations, there needs to be a nuanced balance between the target language and the mother language.

In order to focus on using the knowledge that students have already learned, Hayley specifically designed her lesson plans so that the students could utilize prior knowledge. When asked about trying to maximize the usage of French in her classroom she said, “…I have to design a lesson plan that encourages the students to use the skills they have now in French as opposed to looking up new words in the dictionary to translate their English thoughts to French.” She also commented on how she sometimes encouraged the use of English in her students, explaining, “In group work, I’ve encouraged English because the students might have little tricks that they’ve figured out for remembering grammar points or vocabulary, and I want them to teach that to each other.” This strategy can work very well for students as they exchange ideas between one another as a learner’s mother language is the language of thought (Macaro, 2000), so many students use connections between French and English to develop associations which allow them to process new information.

4.3 The Role of Grammar When Teaching a Foreign Language

By focusing on vocabulary and communication, one particular part of language learning can seem to lag behind the rest, grammar. This is due to the differences between the Germanic origins of English and the Latin origins of French. However, teachers cannot simply teach a new concept without it being inevitably linked to familiar ideas rooted in their mother language (L1). As Butzkamm (2003) theorizes, teachers should extend the concepts from the L1 rather than
reconceptualise the world entirely in the target language. All three teachers used English grammar to assist with teaching French grammar, however, Paula in particular, often found it necessary, but not without its issues, saying, “The problem is grammar...structure is completely different. They have to understand how this structure works in French. I have to show them first in English and then show them the differences between French and English for them to understand.” Hayley also agreed with this statement saying, “We try to establish grammar patterns so students can make connections more easily between English and French.” Since learners will automatically associate new information in the target language with known information in the L1 (Butzkamm, 2003), it is clear that the L1 plays a vital role in scaffolding a new language.

4.3.1 Weak grammar hinders new learning

Paula often found that her students’ grammar was very weak, which meant she had to spend time teaching English grammar first, and then teaching French grammar. If a teacher’s job is to assist students as they use prior language knowledge to scaffold new language learning (Butzkamm, 2003), lessons can become bogged down by extraneous grammar lessons. After 23 years of teaching Core French, Paula was used to the idea of teaching both English and French grammar. She recalled a recent story during the interview:

I was teaching the passive voice. They didn’t understand in English, and they cannot translate because they don’t understand in English what it is. And it’s very difficult for them to use structure in French. So, I generally teach the English structure and then show them the differences.

While she has become used to teaching grammar, she often wondered why the Ontario Ministry of Education has set aside grammar expectations and focused more on communication. The grammar-translation method has certainly fallen out of favour with educators (Ontario Ministry of
Education, 2013a), but Paula feels that there is a critical piece of learning that is missing in English and French education. She explains using an example with students who come from immersion programs:

They understand [oral comprehension] very well. The understanding part is good. The speaking, they speak but with lots of mistakes because grammar is not taught. There is a huge problem with the grammar, they have no idea how to write. So, because they want them to speak only, and they hear it all the time, they are not corrected. And they learn with mistakes, it’s very hard after that to change. So there are expressions like ‘I’m hungry’, and in French you say, ‘I have hunger’, and they keep saying it in English, like an English structure. It’s hard, after so many years of French to change it, because they were allowed to speak like that.

Her story clearly illustrates what she has identified as a missing piece of the language learning foundation. She accommodates for it through added instruction but feels that it is an unfortunate use of her limited amount of teaching time. In fact, she commented about how the curriculum is structured in a way that emphasizes communication, yet Core French students are not placed in a situation to communicate in French outside of class:

I don’t understand, because it [grammar-translation method] was like that and I don’t know why they’ve changed this idea of using just that language, like being immersed, but they are not immersed in fact, in the language, they don’t listen to the radio…they speak English at home. They are not immersed in the language. And it doesn’t matter how much they speak here, the moment they leave the classroom, they go to another class and they are going to hear English all the time.
Paula does not expect her students to listen to or speak French outside of her classroom, so she must continue to give students the tools they need during instruction, even if it means teaching both English and French grammar. The more deficient students are in their L1, the harder it will be for them to capitalise on their linguistic skills and world knowledge (Butzkamm, 2003).

4.4 Role of English in the Core French Class

As each of the teachers have already expressed, English grammar is used to scaffold new learning in the target language. However, the three participants outlined other scenarios where English played a vital role in their Core French class. These scenarios, including behaviour management, building relationships, and instructions, fall into the three main situations that have been outlined by Littlewood and Yu (2009). Through their comments, it is clear that both compensatory and strategic use of English are exhibited in their classrooms. Paula and Hayley used examples from their teaching practices to illustrate how they fostered the use of English in their classroom, while Yuki presented a more controlled use of English by carefully planning for its inclusion during the lesson. Despite their different approaches, each teacher was able to point to specific examples of their English use and justify their practices with anecdotal evidence.

4.4.1 Creating a safe and comfortable learning environment

Both Yuki and Hayley spoke candidly about the importance of creating a safe and comfortable French learning environment through the use of English. This type of usage would qualify as strategic use of the mother language (L1), as the proper environment will maximize the learning opportunities for students (Cameron, 2001). Yuki found that English could be used in a positive instructional manner as, “…French is generally considered to be a very intimidating subject for many students.” To ease that intimidation, Yuki used English, “…to bridge the gap between students’ feelings of trepidation when learning French.” Through her experience, Yuki
identified areas where she could make her students feel more at ease in a difficult environment. By connecting with her students through English, she also noticed that, “Students feel that the teacher is more approachable when speaking a language they understand.” Hayley echoed that idea when she said, “…we can build relationships more easily and more quickly when able to use English. My rapport with the students outside of the classroom tends to be more positive when I use English in the French class.” Not only do these teachers consider the use of English a good language learning practice, it also serves to help build a community and connection with students that creates a welcoming classroom environment. The benefits of this can be seen when teachers must inevitably deal with unwanted behaviour.

4.4.2 Using English during behaviour management

All teachers have their own strategies for behaviour management, however, some Core French teachers find that they need to interrupt the flow of their lesson in order to deal with inappropriate behaviour. This is why Littlewood and Yu (2009) classify this form of L1 use as compensatory, as the participants did not expect to use English to address the class. Yuki finds behaviour management more challenging in her Core French class because there are more students who come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds as their parents are less aware of the Extended French opportunities available at her school. She says, “When students are being particularly rowdy and uncooperative, I often need to have a chat about their attitudes and responsibilities as students.” Hayley had a similar strategy for class management as she explained:

If a student is seriously misbehaving, it’s important that the misbehaving student, the class, and myself are in clear understanding of what the problem is. We already have limited time as it is, and I would like to immediately set in motion actions for the misbehaving student to correct their wrong and continue with the class.
By taking the time to switch to English, these two teachers found that their expectations for behaviour in the class were made clear, and that there was no room for misinterpretation. This was an important factor for them when choosing the framework of their own class. Hayley would also keep her eyes open for opportunities to teach or reinforce French if the behaviour was related to the current lesson, although she was quick to note that those situations did not happen very often.

4.4.3 Activity instructions due to time constraints

The three participants structured their lessons based on the instructional paradigm recommended by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a); that is, an action-oriented approach that aims to mirror everyday situations that require a variety of skills and knowledge often requiring oral and/or written interactions between students. After an initial presentation of new content, students engage in activities that put into practice the new learning they were given. The teachers indicated that they would use English to deliver the instructions for the activities often citing time constraints as their reason. Paula and Yuki would use the target language initially, but would always translate or confirm the information in English. Hayley, who spoke of more stringent time constraints, would use English to deliver activity instructions quickly and succinctly, saying, “Time always seems to be an issue in the class, so spending too much time on French [instructions]…when I can do it with a few English words always seems like the better choice.” The decision seems to stem from her emphasis on the flow of her lessons. As she moves from one activity to the next, she values the practical application of the language, rather than the oral comprehension of instructions. This lines up with Butzkamm’s (2003) thoughts as he considers the strategic use of the mother language to not take away time from target language use, but rather helps to establish it as a means of communication in the classroom. Due to these deliberate
language learning strategies, Hayley has discovered, as Cameron (2001) did, that it maximized the learning opportunities of her students.

4.5 Value and Purpose of Foreign Languages

One point that all three teachers consistently circled back to was an emphasis on the value of learning a foreign language, even when students were not in a position to understand or comprehend that value. With French classes in Ontario compulsory between Grades 4 and 8, the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b) hopes to strengthen students’ abilities to communicate and develop an awareness of how language and culture interconnect. It is clear, through the curriculum, that the Ministry of Education also wants students to appreciate and respect the diversity of Canada in its present and in its past through the exploration of the French language. Despite that, Hayley expresses her feelings that schools are not doing enough to promote the purpose of French in the Core French program:

…it’s not given as much merit as literacy or social studies. Being in the GTA [Greater Toronto Area] it can be difficult for faculty, students, and parents to see why French should be as important as all other subjects. French isn’t used in our everyday lives here as it might be in other areas of Ontario, so getting that feeling of ‘you must learn this to succeed’ isn’t there. You can attend dozens of universities, get a job, and travel the world without French, so there is a barrier in people’s minds about why we need to learn it.

Due to the learning environment that Hayley teaches in, she finds her students lack the motivation to excel in learning a foreign language. When students are motivated intrinsically or extrinsically, each teacher found that their students would study and learn enthusiastically. Although somewhat rare, this was best demonstrated in a story about one of Paula’s students:
I have, for example, a student, it’s very interesting, she came from China, and she didn’t know English or French and she is taking both of them. Can you imagine? And she went to Quebec for five weeks in the summer, just to improve her French. She is so motivated to learn. She loves it…you have to be very organized, very disciplined in what you are learning, and she’s this type of girl. She knows and she goes home and studies on her own, so the motivation is very high. That’s why she improved so much.

Yuki also echoed this sentiment when she spoke of opportunities for foreign languages at the secondary level, “You may encounter less resistance because foreign language learning at this level is more of a choice rather than a credit they have to learn, as French is in Ontario.” Both elementary teachers in this study found that it could be difficult to motivate students in Core French given the school environment, but have developed strategies to encourage students to become lifelong language learners and active participants as world citizens which are goals set forth by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b).

4.5.1 Culture and diversity through the study of a foreign language

A common approach to increasing students’ interests in a foreign language is through culture, as language often becomes a lens through which students can discover other cultures (Department of Education, 2013). Hayley and Paula spoke of specific examples that highlighted their use of culture when teaching Core French. When asked of the link between language and culture, Hayley said:

I think that language and culture cannot be completely separated, and one cannot truly understand a culture without learning the language. We say we wish to be a
diverse and multicultural society, and I think being that society means we need to learn foreign languages.

Her views are reflected by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013b) in their goals for the French as a Second Language curriculum as they speak of learning about other cultures, and appreciating and acknowledging the interconnectedness and interdependence of the world. Paula takes that global view as well, as she does not limit her students’ exposure to just French Canadian culture: “I teach them about France. I teach also about Northern Africa, the Maghreb countries and so on, it’s interesting for them to know.” By introducing culture through language, both teachers provided global experience to their students and a path by which they could start to expand their understanding of their place in the world (Department for Education, 2013). If students of different cultures can share a common language, they can act as an important bridge and work to develop trust among various countries (National Curriculum Information Center, 2007).

4.6 Conclusion

In this chapter, I described my primary findings regarding Core French teachers’ strategies and practices for using English in the classroom. I found that the teachers who participated in this study believed the expectations laid out by the Ontario Ministry of Education (2013a) were unrealistic given the circumstances that exist in every classroom. They also thought that the goal of being able to confidently communicate was unlikely given the absence of an immersion environment that would promote the use of French. The participants relayed examples about their teaching pedagogy that highlighted their beliefs about utilizing the knowledge students have accrued through the learning of their mother language. Further to this, participants spoke of a deficiency in English grammar that made it difficult to teach structure in French. Even though the three teachers wanted to make use of the prior knowledge, they found barriers to doing so. Despite
this, each participant had specific situations where English fit into their learning environment. These scenarios included behaviour management, giving out instructions, and creating a safe and comfortable space for learning. Finally, the participants spoke to what they believed was the value and purpose of learning a foreign language, and how learning a language opened a window to another culture that could develop into an understanding of different countries and people. Overall, there did not seem to be much difference between the opinions of primary and junior teachers versus those of intermediate and senior teachers, except for one elementary teacher believing students would be more motivated to study languages in high school.

Altogether, these themes articulate why and how each participant uses English in their classroom. Since they use it as a tool to bridge prior knowledge to new knowledge, they believe it plays a vital role in their Core French classrooms. Even though there is a great disparity between the number of years of experience for the three participants, all three have come to similar conclusions about when to use English. The nature of the Core French classroom forces a partnership between the mother language and the target language that when taught by capable and passionate teachers, can lead to a greater understanding of the target language.

Considering the literature, these findings are not that surprising, although they demonstrate a bit of a disconnect between the expectations of the curriculum versus the actual in-class practices of Core French teachers. Studies have shown though (e.g. Littlewood & Yu, 2011), that many classroom teachers use the common language in their foreign language class. Used without purpose, the lackadaisical utterances of English can stunt the learning potential of students (Turnbull, 2001), however when used with forethought and pedagogical reasoning, it can become a formidable tool by which students can scaffold new learning (Butzkamm, 2011). Undoubtedly, research into mother language use in a foreign language classroom will continue to be an important
topic of research given its implications to the French program in Canada and the growing number of English language learners who attend Ontario schools.

The findings of this study will be further discussed in the next chapter, Chapter Five, where I will review the research findings and discuss their implications for the broader community of foreign language learning scholarship, but also discuss how these findings influence my teaching practices. I will conclude with some recommendations for future work.
Chapter 5: Discussion

5.0 Introduction

This research paper began with an overview of the different programs for French education in Ontario: Core French, Extended French, and Immersion French, and noted how learning in an immersive environment is a language learning strategy that two out of the three programs (Extended and Immersion) use in Ontario. The research question focused on how a small sample of Canadian Core French teachers utilizing the common language, English (L1) in the classroom is an example of effective scaffolding in a language learning environment. I examined the pertinent scholarship regarding government policy pertaining to mother language use in a foreign language classroom, effective strategies for teaching a foreign language by exploring the history and evolution of foreign language pedagogy in Ontario, as well as a set of principled approaches aimed to balance the use of L1 versus the target language. Analyzing collected data from semi-structured interviews with three Core French teachers, I found this small sample of teachers used English in their classrooms for various reasons, however their strategies and situations differed among the participants. In this chapter, I provide an overview of the findings that were discussed in Chapter Four and then explore the implications from these findings as they pertain to both the educational community and my professional identity and practice. I finish by describing some recommendations for future practices regarding the use of English in the Core French classroom as well as make suggestions for future educational research.

5.1 Overview of Findings

Each of the three participants acknowledged the Ontario curriculum’s goal of making French the language of communication in the classroom (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a), however these expectations faced a harsh reality in the Core French environment. Due to the
disparate levels of French abilities, the total exclusion of a common language would frustrate and hinder lower-level students. The three teachers surmised that these lower-level students were a product of an environment that did not provide much motivation for the study of French. Since the Core French class was likely the only place where students would hear and use the language, some of them lacked the incentive to become proficient in French.

The participants suggested that one way to make up for the deficiency in immersion was to scaffold lessons using the preexisting language knowledge that students already possessed. By utilizing prior knowledge, such as their mother language, each of the Core French teachers could use a strategy that taught the new language by making connections to concepts students previously understood. This builds upon something students already do on their own when learning new vocabulary.

Besides vocabulary, one of the critical pieces of knowledge students possess from their mother language is an understanding of grammar. Even though the grammar structure is different between English and French, each participant used students’ first language and extended the concepts to new ideas. However, often times students’ grammar in their first language was weak, which caused teachers to teach lessons in English before teaching the target French.

As well, content was not the only area where the three participants used English in the Core French class. Behaviour management, building relationships and relaying instructions were three common examples of English use during lessons. The teachers would switch to English to either maintain a safe and comfortable learning environment or to relay instructions due to time constraints. Both of these reasons are examples of pedagogical practices which foster a strong language learning environment.
Despite the focus on the French language in the Ontario curriculum, the participants found that the value and purpose of learning a foreign language to not be effectively communicated to students. The participants found that many of their students were not convinced of the reasons for learning French in school through their attitude and lack of motivation. The arguments for becoming a better learner and a global citizen might not have persuaded students, however, teaching French as a Second Language afforded teachers an opportunity to offer students a window into different French-speaking cultures. The teacher participants would draw from the culture of not only French Canada, but Europe and Africa as well. Even in Core French, teachers could inspire students to expand their understanding of their place in the world.

5.2 Implications

The study findings have a variety of implications for the broad educational field and for my personal professional identity and practice. The scope of these implications is discussed below.

5.2.1 Broad implications: The educational community

Core French has an incredibly difficult task of teaching a subject to a class of students that do not necessarily understand why they are learning the subject. Immersion and Extended French programs have the distinct advantage of using other classes that are taught in French as encouragement for becoming proficient in the language. Core French students do not share that benefit, and some teachers find that their students lack the necessary motivation to effectively learn a new language. The primary findings from this study show that Core French teachers have found strategies to make up for the lack of exposure to the foreign language through the common tongue, English. This runs completely counter to the Ontario French as a Second Language curriculum goal of making French the language of communication (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). It
creates confusion in Core French teachers as they strive to meet curriculum expectations, but use pedagogy and practice that focuses on using and embracing English, rather than the target language.

Due to the limited time allotted to Core French classes, teachers may find the need to adopt strategies that build upon prior knowledge rather than ignoring it outright (Klapper, 1997). Almost all other subjects approach new material in this same way, as teachers very rarely jump into a brand-new topic without first assessing what students already know. It is curious then, that the guidelines for French programs in Ontario recommend for teachers to adhere to the communicative and action-oriented approach to create the most effective language learning environment (Ontario Ministry of Education, 2013a). These strategies focus on providing students with real-life situations where they promote French communication and rely on the familiarity of the scenario to help scaffold their learning. However, even if Core French teachers were to conduct their classes completely in French by creating effective action-oriented activities that aim to place students in practical communicative situations, it is impossible to prevent students from making connections to their mother language (Butzkamm, 2003). It seems counterproductive to ask Core French teachers to struggle against the natural inclinations of the way some students will want to learn. This may point to a logical pedagogical reason for why Core French teachers continue to use English despite the curriculum guidelines’ focus on French as the language of communication, and may warrant a reevaluation of such guidelines.

Finally, the number of references to grammar found in this study may indicate that the recent shift in focus towards communication may have gone too far. While students may be learning to communicate better, it is possible that they are learning to communicate incorrectly as they lack the accountability of being grammatically correct. The participants do agree with Ellis (2005) that students who have more chances to use the language become more proficient in it,
however the deficient grammar of students in both their mother language and French might be placing limitations upon students’ abilities to process information and learn.

5.2.2 Narrow implications: Professional identity and practice

The findings in this study have reaffirmed my belief that a foreign language class that completely ignores and restricts the use of a students’ first language is one that disregards an important piece of prior student knowledge. For my professional identity and practice, I will continue to pay specific attention to research and scholarship that makes suggestions for best practices regarding the balance between the target and common languages. Although it is unlikely that I will become a Core French teacher, the findings from such scholarship has profound implications on my own teaching practices regarding students who are English Language Learners (ELL).

The circumstances for studying Core French in Ontario and learning English as an additional language are not the same, as ELL have the opportunity to listen to and use English in areas of their life outside of the classroom. However, many of the findings from this study do apply when differentiating lessons for ELL. I will be mindful of situations where “English only” has been used in the past with the misguided goal of language learning and allow for affordances in their mother tongue so that students can use their prior knowledge to scaffold towards greater understanding. I have come to realize that allowing these students to make vocabulary connections to their mother tongue is not a crutch to actual learning, but it can be a useful tool when that knowledge can be used to further develop proficiency in English. As I continue to follow the research on this topic, I will be better equipped to support all the ELL who inevitably enter my classroom in the Greater Toronto Area.
Another element that rose to my attention in this research was the role grammar played in literacy. One needs not only be able to use the proper grammar in their native language, but one also must have an understanding of why and how the grammar functions. For students who understand the grammatical theory in their own language, they will be better prepared to understand the grammar in any additional language they decide to learn. This leads me to believe that if I place more emphasis on grammar in Language Arts that can translate to better understanding and proficiency for students in Core French.

Lastly, my identity as a researcher has been influenced through the implementation of this study. Previously, I had not conducted either a quantitative or qualitative study in my professional career, however, most if not all the scholarly papers I had read were quantitative studies. I began this process skeptical of the types of implications I would find in a qualitative study that interviewed only three teachers, yet I have come to realize the experience of practicing teachers can offer great insight regarding a specific perceived problem in education. That is not to say this study was conducted without its difficulties, and in future research I would take more time in carefully crafting interview questions to elicit distinct and valuable information from participants. I would also be more methodical during the early stages of research to ensure that I understand the issue being raised, where the current scholarship stands on it, and how my research can add to the ongoing discussion.

5.3 Recommendations

The findings of this study seem to indicate that the Ontario educational community could revisit their policy of French as the language of communication in Core French classes. The frustration that was observed in lower-level students when faced with a wall of incomprehensible language seems to show that a more measured approach to French as a second language can be
taken, one that embraces and builds upon the connections between mother language and target language. This change, along with more access to professional development for Core French teachers, will help to create a set of confident and capable teachers who understand how to work with, rather than against, our natural tendencies to think and make connections to our first language.

Most of the participants in this study explicitly mentioned the amount of lesson time afforded to Core French teachers as insufficient to adequately teach the French language. To address this, I recommend that the Ontario Ministry of Education and the different boards explore the possibility of mandating blocks of time specifically for Core French in the weekly schedule. This would allow for Core French teachers to better utilize their time in class as they can plan for more uniform durations of instruction. Furthermore, I would recommend that Core French teachers find interdisciplinary opportunities to work with teachers of other subjects to allow students to experience and use French outside of the dedicated French period. This recommendation could possibly help inspire students to take a greater interest in the French language, which would motivate students in their studies.

Finally, students in the Core French program could benefit from a deeper foundation in English grammar, so I recommend that students develop a greater understanding of English grammar through Language Arts. The teacher participants in this study believed that a student who had a stronger grasp of grammar in their native tongue would be better prepared to understand the nuances of grammar in another language. This foundational understanding of language allows a learner to quickly apply prior knowledge to new knowledge and use it in spontaneous conversation, which can be an effective method of language learning.

5.4 Areas of Further Research
Considering the findings of this study, an important area for further research is to investigate Core French classes that strictly adhere to the Ontario Ministry of Education’s policy of French as the language of communication. With many studies exploring the current shift back towards a balanced approach to foreign language learning, not many studies have addressed the classes that have fully embraced French. Further analysis can be given to teachers who implement communicative, action-oriented language activities that focus on students instinctively using new knowledge alongside prior knowledge. It is not hard to imagine Core French teachers who employ these types of lessons from time to time, but it would be of interest to track the results of teachers who implement these methods in the majority of their lessons. Investigating these teachers will aid the educational community to better understand effective strategies for teaching foreign languages.

In the scope of my research, I have noticed that many of the studies focus on the use the common language from the perspective of the teacher. Further research into student use of their first language could establish patterns in motivation and self-regulated learning in regards to foreign language learning. Students’ perceived role of the common tongue in Core French would also be an interesting area of further research as their outlooks on teacher use and the usage from other students may offer insight into the advantages or disadvantages as they relate to classroom management, creating and maintaining safe space, and effective teaching pedagogy.

As a final point, further research could be conducted on teacher training and professional development for Core French teachers. These studies could investigate the preparedness of new Core French teachers as well as their confidence in implementing lessons where French is the language of communication. A longitudinal study following their development as professionals may provide insight as to whether or not school boards, the ministry, or individual schools are
doing enough to support teachers in a subject that is a compulsory field of study for all Ontario elementary students.

5.5 Concluding Comments

As a preservice teacher whose teachable is science, it may seem odd that this study investigates Core French teaching pedagogy, however, I became intrigued by foreign language teaching during my eight years in Japan where I taught English as a foreign language. There I encountered hundreds of Japanese citizens whose English abilities would be considered conversational at best. These budding language learners all studied English as a required subject in public education for many years and their overwhelmingly low English skills led me to be concerned about the English-only strategy school boards advocated. In Japan, English is taught four times a week and class time is normally the only place where English is used, which is strikingly similar to Core French in Ontario. While pursuing my Master of Teaching, I was afforded the opportunity to explore the existing scholarship surrounding foreign language teaching and to research how Core French teachers in Ontario are employing English as effective examples of scaffolded language learning. Through three semi-structured interviews with Core French teachers, I found that Core French teachers can use English in a variety of ways to support learning, including scaffolding prior English knowledge to support new French knowledge, classroom management, and quickly explaining activity instructions. In spite of these effective uses of the common language, the Ontario Ministry of Education calls for French to be the language of communication in the Core French classroom.

These findings are valuable since they provide insight into what is occurring in Ontario Core French classrooms and offer suggestions for the educational community to improve upon the proficiency of students enrolled in Core French. Current teachers can use these insights to assess
their own teaching practices and create stronger lessons that scaffold students’ first language knowledge to the target language. Ministries of education can also use these findings to consider their own position on the use of the common language in a foreign language classroom to support teaching pedagogy and student learning. Educational researchers could use these findings as a springboard to further investigate the measured use of the common tongue to scaffold learning for students studying a foreign language.

This study reaffirmed my belief that a “target language only” environment can frustrate students as it decreases their ability to build upon prior language knowledge. However, I still wonder about the proper balance of usage that can bring about the most effective learning environment. Current teaching practices continue to graduate students in Ontario who are not proficient in French, which limits them from bilingual opportunities in the future. French proficiency levels need to improve if Canada wishes to promote itself as a country with two official languages. The findings from this study that focus on a combined input by teachers, schools and ministries of education can help ensure this outcome.
References


Appendix A: Letter of Consent for Interviews

UNIVERSITY OF TORONTO
OISE | ONTARIO INSTITUTE
FOR STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Date: March 31, 2016
Dear ______________________________,

My name is Jonathan Hui and I am a student in the Master of Teaching program at the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education at the University of Toronto (OISE/UT). A component of this degree program involves conducting a small-scale qualitative research study. My research will focus on the role of the English language in the Core French classroom. I am interested in interviewing teachers who have a lot of experience teaching Core French. I think that your knowledge and experience will provide insights into this topic.

Your participation in this research will involve one 45-60 minute interview, which will be transcribed and audio-recorded. I would be grateful if you would allow me to interview you at a place and time convenient for you, outside of school time. The contents of this interview will be used for my research project, which will include a final paper, as well as informal presentations to my classmates. I may also present my research findings via conference presentations and/or through publication. You will be assigned a pseudonym to maintain your anonymity and I will not use your name or any other content that might identify you in my written work, oral presentations, or publications. This information will remain confidential. Any information that identifies your school or students will also be excluded. The interview data will be stored on my password-protected computer and the only person who will have access to the research data will be my course instructor. You are free to change your mind about your participation at any time, and to withdraw even after you have consented to participate. You may also choose to decline to answer any specific question during the interview. I will destroy the audio recording after the paper has been presented and/or published, which may take up to a maximum of five years after the data has been collected. There are no known risks to participation, and I will share a copy of the transcript with you shortly after the interview to ensure accuracy.

Please sign this consent form, if you agree to be interviewed. The second copy is for your records. I am very grateful for your participation.

Sincerely,

Jonathan Hui
Email: jonp.hui@mail.utoronto.ca

Course Instructor’s Name: Dr. Rose Fine-Meyer
Email: rose.fine.meyer@utoronto.ca
Consent Form
I acknowledge that the topic of this interview has been explained to me and that any questions that I have asked have been answered to my satisfaction. I understand that I can withdraw from this research study at any time without penalty.

I have read the letter provided to me by Jonathan Hui and agree to participate in an interview for the purposes described. I agree to have the interview audio-recorded.

Signature: ______________________________________

Name: (printed) __________________________________

Date: ______________________________________
Appendix B: Interview Protocol

Thank you for participating in my research study. The aim of this research is to learn how a sample of Core French teachers utilize English in a French as a second language classroom. This interview should take approximately 45-60 minutes, and is comprised of approximately 21 questions. I will ask you a series of questions focused on what role you feel the English language has in the foreign language classroom. The interview protocol has been divided into four sections, beginning with the participant's background information, followed by questions relating to the participant’s perspectives and beliefs on the role of English and the participants in class practices and finally questions regarding supports, challenges and next steps. I want to remind you that you may refrain from answering any question, and you have the right to withdraw your participation from the study at any time. As I explained in the consent letter, this interview will be audio-recorded. Do you have any questions before we begin?

At the start can you state your name for the recording?

Section A - Background Information

1. How long have you been a teacher?

2. How long have you been teaching French as a second language in Canada?

3. What school do you teach at currently?

4. What grades do you currently teach? Which have you previously taught?

5. Have you always taught Core French?

6. How would you describe the value placed on the Core French program at your current school?
Section B - Teacher Perspectives and Beliefs

7. Is French the language of instruction and communication in your Core French class?

8. Is this an unrealistic expectation of the Core French class?

9. What, if any, do you believe the role of the English language is in the Core French class?

10. What benefits and detriments do you find when you use English in the Core French class?

11. Are there situations that facilitate a better foreign language classroom when English is used?

12. Do you find that English can be used in an positive instructional manner in the Core French class?

Section C - Teacher Practices

13. How do you balance the use of English and French in the classroom?

14. What situations have you found that using English has been helpful?

15. What situations have you found that using English is detrimental?

16. What instances have you used English to support the lesson one time, but later realized the same support could have been done in French, and subsequently used French in future lessons?

17. Has there been a situation where you encouraged the use of English in the classroom?

Section D - Supports, Challenges and Next Steps

18. What challenges do you encounter when designing a lesson where you want to maximize the usage of French? How do you work around those challenges?

19. What support and professional development is available to you concerning the role of English in the French class?
20. What can the education system do more of to support Core French teachers?

21. As a beginning teacher who has an interest in teaching a foreign language, but not French, do you have any advice for me?

Thank you very much for your time and participation in this research study.