
Immersion studies at the University of Ottawa: From the 1980s to the present

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Abstract

This article traces the history of content-based language teaching at the University of Ottawa from its early roots in sheltered and then adjunct courses in ESL and FLS to the current large-scale French Immersion Studies (FIS). It places content-based language learning at the University in the context of somewhat similar initiatives in the Canadian school situation and in some U.S. universities. The writers show how insights gained from the earlier sheltered and adjunct experiences led to development of the pedagogy and administrative support of the FIS. Issues discussed include the training and orientation of language instructors, criteria for selecting discipline professors, challenges students face and institutional support for students. They also address continuing weaknesses of the program.

Key words: French immersion, tertiary immersion, sheltered courses, adjunct courses, pedagogy

Résumé

Cet article retrace l'histoire de l'enseignement des langues basé sur le contenu à l'Université d'Ottawa, et ce depuis ses origines, avec les cours encadrés et les cours associés offerts en français et en anglais langue seconde, jusqu'au nouveau Régime d'immersion en français (RIF). Les auteurs situent ensuite l'approche préconisée à l'Université d'Ottawa dans le contexte plus large d'initiatives à peu près identiques mises sur pied au

Canada et dans certaines universités américaines. Par la suite, les auteures soulignent les leçons tirées de la première expérience et leur impact sur le développement de la pédagogie et des mesures de soutien administratif mis en place par le RIF. Elles poursuivent ce survol en abordant les questions de formation des professeurs de langue, les critères de sélection des professeurs de disciplines, les défis rencontrés par les étudiants ainsi que le soutien institutionnel mis en place. Finalement, les auteures soulignent certaines faiblesses inhérentes au programme.

Mots-clés : Immersion en français, immersion universitaire, cours encadré, cours associé, pédagogie

Introduction

This article recounts the history of the University of Ottawa's (uOttawa) French Immersion Studies (FIS) program over the past 3 decades. This history has two parts, since the FIS, established in 2005, was built on research insights and experience from an earlier "immersion" program begun in 1982 that lasted for some 15 years. This pioneer program was offered in both French and English, taking advantage of the unique bilingual resources of the University.

We begin by presenting the background and context leading to the first program, which was designed for students with solid L2 skills who wished to progress toward high level academic and professional mastery of their second language. Two models were tried, the first being "sheltered" courses, in which special course sections in non-language disciplines, taught by a regular native speaker instructor, were offered to L2 learners along with supplementary course-related language instruction. Later, at higher proficiency levels, L2 learners registered in regular classes offered for native speakers in their L2 in selected disciplines, and at the same time in "adjunct" language classes paired with those courses. We will describe this program's early challenges and successes, research insights, and the reasons for its eventual demise.

The second part of the article focuses on the rebirth of the French Immersion Studies program in 2005 which, with many links to the earlier experience, has been designed, expanded and institutionalized in ways that have so far successfully ensured its viability. The experience to date with FIS will be described and research insights from its first 8 years will be presented.

Context for early post-secondary "immersion" programs

Post-secondary "immersion", a form of "content-based" L2 instruction, is a relatively recent phenomenon stemming from the 1980s in both Canada and the United States. It is based on insights from the emerging field of second language acquisition, and organized around academic courses in non-language disciplines offered in learners' second language as part of advanced language

instruction. It drew on insights and experience from school “immersion” programs for language majority children begun in the 1960s and 70s that sought to create a more “natural” language learning context through the use of a second or foreign language as the medium of school instruction. A further advantage of immersion programs is that they maximize learners’ exposure to the second language by integrating it with something they would do anyway. The spread of these programs responded to political and demographic shifts in both Canada and the United States. These gave increased social and political importance to the mastery of a second language by English-speaking children, or to the maintenance and development of a heritage language. While aimed at language majority children, they shared many features with content-based bilingual education and English second language programs serving language minority citizens and immigrants from diverse language backgrounds, particularly in the United States.

In Canada, passage of the Official Languages Act in 1969 motivated a national effort to find more effective ways of teaching French to English speakers. An important outcome was the development and rapid spread of school immersion programs throughout the country, bolstered by the positive results of the well-researched experimental program in St. Lambert, Quebec, in the mid-1960s. In this program, English-speaking children spent a large part of the school day, over a period of years, studying the regular school curriculum through the medium of French in courses taught by native speakers (Lambert and Tucker, 1972).¹ Starting with kindergarten through grade 6 programs, alternative models with later starting ages and varying percentages of instructional time in each language were developed and offerings were extended through middle school, then through bilingual high school programs (Swain and Lapkin, 1982; Calvé, 1991; Cummins, 1998). Post-secondary French immersion was a natural follow-up for students with strong French language skills, likewise based on the principle of language acquisition through naturalistic exposure and meaningful use but in an academic setting. These offerings by a number of English-language post-secondary institutions tended to involve only a few courses in humanities or social sciences disciplines beyond those available in university French departments, but Canada’s bilingual post-secondary institutions were able to do more (Wesche, 1985, 2000).

University immersion, like other forms of content-based second language

¹The substantial contribution of Canadian immersion programs to French and foreign language education around the world was not their “newness” but rather the painstaking and comprehensive longitudinal tracking by researchers of the implementation and outcomes of early programs that confirmed their effectiveness and gained wide coverage in the literature.

instruction, involves the concurrent learning of disciplinary content through the medium of the student's second language and related language instruction whose curriculum is determined by the linguistic demands of the discipline course (Wesche, 2010). Ongoing language development—in this case involving new discipline-related vocabulary and complex academic discourse—occurs as learners focus on understanding the meanings conveyed by instructors and through course materials. While strong receptive abilities are viewed as both crucial for content mastery and as the basis for development of speaking and writing abilities, all come into play, with productive abilities being increasingly important in higher level courses. Also desirable is form-focused L2 instruction at all discourse levels, based on the actual needs of students for success in their discipline studies.

Early post-secondary English initiatives

English as a second language (ESL) programs

While Canada was focusing on French language offerings for Anglophones, parallel content-based ESL initiatives were more prominent in the United States and in a number of Canadian post-secondary institutions to prepare non-native speakers of English for academic studies, and bridge them into credit programs. There is a vast literature on such programs which is well summarized in several places, for example Brinton, Snow and Wesche (2003). Such programs shared basic features with post-secondary immersion and the foreign language initiatives discussed below that distinguish them from traditional language instruction. These include:

- dual learning objectives, for both content and language (not always compatible with one another);
- a content-driven L2 curriculum (requiring instructor flexibility and some knowledge of the disciplinary content);
- enhanced motivation for L2 learning (i.e., for success in immediate discipline studies, and generally for longer-term personal and career interests);
- pedagogical adaptation and other support to mitigate language difficulties of learners (adapted discourse, presentation, materials, and evaluation methods);
- orientation into a new “discourse community”(requiring “academic” proficiency in the L2).

Foreign language initiatives

The 1980s and early 1990s also saw collaborative cross-disciplinary initiatives at the post-secondary level between foreign language departments and liberal arts or social sciences programs. These were mainly in the U.S. and driven by the goal to motivate and prepare students for a more globalized world, as well as the failure of traditional language teaching approaches to lead to functional L2 mastery for most students. Such initiatives faced strong institutional challenges, including cross-disciplinary issues such as diverging goals, governance, funding, and academic recognition for teaching and research by disciplinary professors (Kruger and Ryan, 1993).

In contrast to ESL programs in English-language institutions, a major problem was finding willing instructors, fluent in the foreign language, and prepared to teach a university course in their discipline in that language. Access to adequate textbooks, library and other resources in that language was also problematic. The widespread concern of foreign language departments about declining enrolments and the related availability at that time of major public and private funding from foundations such as the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education (U.S. Department of Education) and the National Endowment for the Humanities helped stimulate these initiatives in a range of institutions. Even with outside funding, however, most efforts depended very heavily on committed individuals and supportive administrators and were most successful in institutional contexts with an ongoing emphasis on cross-cultural issues and understanding.

These efforts were extremely varied, depending on local interests and resources (Wesche, 1993).² In some, links were established between foreign language departments and faculty members in humanities departments around courses in which foreign language texts, films and other original sources could enrich offerings, or with social science departments around courses dealing with international issues or programs preparing students for international careers. One approach, “foreign language enhanced discipline instruction”, tried in different forms at Earlham College (Jurasek, 1988) and Binghamton University (Straight, 1997), offered supplementary activities such as foreign language readings and discussion sections in given courses—often led by international teaching assistants. A second approach was credit “foreign language newspaper seminars” involving weekly discussions of a given foreign language newspaper subscribed to by students. These were offered for a number of years in several languages by the University of Minnesota area studies program (Metcalf, 1993). More ambitious were “foreign languages across the

²The Krueger and Ryan collection (1993) presents interesting case studies of a variety of foreign language programs from that period, some of which are still ongoing.

curriculum” (FLAC) programs, serving area studies or humanities programs. An early program at St. Olaf College (still ongoing) involved collaborative sheltered courses in different languages, and the possibility of field trips or semesters abroad in a given language (Anderson, Allen and Narváez, 1993). The Monterrey Institute tried various ways of integrating study possibilities through foreign languages in its graduate international policy studies programs preparing people for international careers in government, the private sector and non-profit organizations. They were able to require multiple courses in a foreign language, building on pre-requisite proficiency required for admission (Baker, 1993). Finally, multi-year programs in specific fields, such as the University of Rhode Island’s long-lasting International Engineering program leading to an internship in a German company, have demonstrated how an excellent niche program involving immersion in a specific language and subject area, leading to post-graduation employment, can continue to thrive (Grandin, 1993). This program is still ongoing and now involves China (Wen Xiong, 2012).

Initiatives such as these, involving integration of language study with other disciplines, were almost invariably popular with students and strongly supported by participating professors, who understood their educational value. However, because they did not fit neatly into institutional organizations, they tended to require not only extra funding, but major ongoing, volunteer efforts by academics and administrators, except in cases where they could be institutionalized as elements of ongoing programs. Post-grant survival also depended on ensured, ongoing funding such as endowments from other sources than departmental or faculty budgets.

More recently, in Europe, the Bologna declaration (1999) with its emphasis on plurilingualism, the standardization of the university diplomas and increased student mobility has led to the rise of new approaches to foreign language learning such as CLIL (Content and Language Integrated Learning) at the primary, secondary and also tertiary levels (Coyle, Hood and Marsh, 2010; Mehisto, Marsh and Frigols, 2008). CLIL, unlike immersion, involves foreign language rather than second language instruction (Dalton-Puffer, Nikula and Smit, 2010) and in practice English is the medium of instruction (Marsh, 2006).

UOttawa sheltered and adjunct programs

The initial uOttawa program, begun in the winter semester of 1982, was one of the first post-secondary immersion or content-based credit programs in North America, and has outlasted many others. It brought special resources to this project as a large, dual-language university that offered a wide range of undergraduate and graduate programs in both French and English with a mandate to promote learning of the second language by undergraduate students. Chief

among these resources was its language institute³ with professional French and English language teachers experienced in teaching university students at all proficiency levels and a significant L2 research and evaluation capacity. Furthermore, Ottawa had a large high school French immersion program sending students to the university. And finally, as Canada's capital, it offered the potential of bilingual careers in government and industry.

Through the 1980s, however, the bilingual uOttawa and its SLI were expending considerable energy and funds on basic French and English courses and examinations to prepare and evaluate not always willing undergraduates for a relatively high graduation requirement in their second official language. The Institute offered an increasing array of advanced L2 courses, but it was nonetheless rare for advanced students—especially anglophones—to move from these courses into French language courses for francophones. This was frustrating for both the administration and the Institute's professional language educators, and different initiatives were taken to encourage more cross-over.

It was in this environment that Krashen, during his 1981 sabbatical term at uOttawa, helped develop his idea of immersion-like “sheltered” university courses in non-language disciplines taught in the learners' L2.⁴ Krashen (1982, 1984) was a strong advocate for creating contexts of meaningful L2 use relevant to the needs of language learners, whatever their age or proficiency level. He recognized that older learners trying to learn complex content through sophisticated, decontextualized oral and written academic discourse needed a solid basis in the L2 from which to progress.

This is different from 5-year-olds, who can much more readily guess their teacher's highly contextualized meanings. But just as in kindergarten immersion, an adapted context is needed to ensure that the learner can make sense of what is said or written in the discipline course. In Krashen's view, in a sheltered context (limited to L2 speakers), skilled instructors would naturally adapt their

³The Centre for Second Language Learning/Institut des langues vivantes was established at the Faculty of Arts in 1968, by the University Senate (Resolution 68-69.120). The name was changed to Second Language Institute/Institut des langues secondes on January 1, 1989. It was responsible for providing students and staff with means for improving their proficiency in the other official language. The Centre also did research in the field of second language teaching, and provided special training to second language teachers. In 2007, the University's Strategic Plan created the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)/ Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme (ILOB) with a focus on language teaching, pedagogical research and official bilingualism.

⁴Krashen had presented this idea the previous year (1980) at UCLA's Second Language Research Forum, and his interest in coming to the University of Ottawa followed a discussion with M. Wesche at that forum about the possibility of setting up such courses there in both English and French.

discourse and teaching activities to the linguistic competence of the students. Learners would thus receive “comprehensible input” that they could understand in context, but that included novel and only partially learned elements as input for new learning (Krashen, 1981). In this way, language acquisition would proceed naturally.

Initial experiment

This led to a collaborative effort by the Institute with the School of Psychology. By the winter semester of 1982 an ideal context for a natural experiment had been found: the two-semester Introduction to Psychology/Introduction à la psychologie course. This course had the University’s largest enrollment with over 600 students and at least 5 sections in each language. As we were to learn, large enrolments were necessary if one were to find enough interested and available students at the right proficiency level for a class. Both English and French classes used the same textbook (in translation) and shared a bilingually presented multiple-choice final examination. The course was challenging, but very well structured, with experienced instructors and exemplary study materials. The head of the School of Psychology offered to teach the English section and found an excellent instructor for the French section. Both also taught sections for native speakers.

An innovation that Krashen thought unnecessary was the involvement of a language teacher, but the Institute insisted on a 15-minute language teaching intervention as part of each 90-minute psychology class. Two experienced language teachers volunteered—never imagining how much work it would be to do all the readings, attend all the psychology classes, provide language points in each class, and support the students in myriad ways out-of-class.

Involvement of the directors of the School of Psychology and of the Institute ensured a viable set-up and budgetary allowances for smaller than usual courses. The recruiting plan was to invite interested and qualified students to change from their first semester L1 sections to a designated L2 section in the second semester. An announcement was distributed to all students in the fall semester and organizers waited for them to enroll. However, even those with high intermediate or advanced L2 skills and desiring to better them proved reluctant to sign up for an academic course given in their L2, even with the promise of advanced L2 credits and a language teacher to help them. So, personal recruiting by the language teachers, endorsed by psychology instructors, was organized in each fall semester class.

In addition, students were promised that they could return to the L1 class if they wished (none in fact did). The fact that exams were multiple choice and bilingually presented was also helpful. For their part, participants had to promise to do all readings and attend all lectures in their L2. In principle, they

could also study the L1 materials although few reported doing this. In this way, with much support from the Psychology faculty, the first classes were filled.

One of the insights gained relatively early was that a language teacher—either intervening in a “sheltered” class to ensure content understanding or later providing a related academic language class putting more emphasis on productive skills in the adjunct model—was essential, both in the language classroom and as general supporter/organizer/interpreter and intermediary with the discipline specialist. The complex and varied roles to be played by language teachers were far from obvious at the beginning. But through experimentation, analysis and collective reflection over time about what worked and what did not, and from systematic feedback from students in evaluations, their roles in both types of courses and diverse situations were much better understood, providing invaluable guidance to those who followed (Burger, Chrétien, Gingras, Hauptman and Migneron, 1984)

In the immersion tradition, comprehensive research concentrating on outcomes was initiated on the pilot project. The findings were clear and positive and held for both the French and English language sections (Edwards, Wesche, Krashen, Clément and Kruidenier, 1984):

- the L2 students had learned the psychology content well, with exam marks and grades being comparable to those obtained in their first semester;
- they made significant gains on the uOttawa second language proficiency tests in listening and reading;
- their improvement was as great as that of students in well-taught FLS and ESL courses at their level;⁵
- a battery of social psychological scales, including measures of anxiety and self-confidence when using the L2, indicated gains in self-confidence from the beginning of the course, as well as the desire to undertake further study through their L2.

In addition, video recordings of the psychology instructors teaching the same lesson to native speakers and L2 speakers were analyzed and compared to document what kinds of discourse adjustments the instructors made in their presentations to L2 students compared with presentations to L1 students. The adjustments were numerous in both cases, occurring at all levels of discourse, from enunciation to word choice to clause length (shorter) and pause length

⁵In fact, there was a ceiling effect, so that more difficult and nuanced tests had to be designed for subsequent research.

(longer), with supporting pedagogical behaviour including more complete black-board notes. This constituted convincing evidence of both instructors' use of foreigner discourse to enhance their comprehensibility. Interestingly, their emphasis on different kinds of adjustments varied in accord with their respective speech styles (Wesche and Ready, 1985; Wesche, 1994).

The 2nd-semester courses ran for another two years. Following this, a French and an English sheltered history section of "L'histoire du Canada depuis les découvertes/The history of Canada since its discovery" were added. At the same time full-year sheltered psychology sections replaced the one-semester classes. One of the discoveries of this stage was that the academic tasks in History, such as writing short essay assignments, were linguistically more difficult than multiple choice psychology tests. Only higher proficiency students were encouraged to enter the history sections and the language teachers provided support to these students in preparing draft essays. A subsequent three-year evaluation (Hauptman, Wesche and Ready, 1988) found positive results consistent with the first study and ongoing student enthusiasm and instructor satisfaction.

Challenges continued. By 1985, a time of budget constraints and rising class sizes, both departments decided they could no longer afford the smaller sheltered sections. It was no longer possible to "bridge" students into classes with native speakers, but there was a way to at least help higher proficiency L2 users who were willing to cross over, using an adjunct model. From this point on, L2 students were integrated into selected regular courses for native speakers, while also attending separate "adjunct" credit language courses in the L2 tailored to the content and language demands of the discipline courses.

As was soon evident, the adjunct format required a significantly higher entry proficiency level because professors naturally lectured to the native speaker audience, no longer adapting their discourse to accommodate L2 learners. The language teachers began to take a more pro-active role in guiding students' language development. The language classes met 90 minutes per week to allow more time to focus on learners' language issues. Subsequently, other discipline courses were added: sociology, political science, the bilingual physiotherapy program and other subject areas. A third evaluation of the seven adjunct courses given in 1988–89 (five in French, two in English) confirmed the efficacy of the adjunct model (Ready and Wesche, 1992). It provided evidence that students considered certain activities in the language courses more useful than others for language learning and others for content learning. Some activities, such as reviewing main lecture points in the language class, were appreciated for both purposes, demonstrating how language activities, built around disciplinary course language demands and content, provide a supportive interface for students. A more detailed description of the University's sheltered and ad-

junct programs can be found in Burger, Wesche and Migneron (1997).

While the adjunct program was highly successful for learners, a major problem was the low number of students registering. Unless the selected non-language courses were part of a larger program, there was a limited pool of students with high L2 proficiency who could devote two of their five course slots in a semester to the language and discipline course (which was probably an elective for them) as well as fit the courses into their timetable.

Further issues were advertising and how to best make contact with that limited pool of students. In spite of poster campaigns, information sessions for counselors, information in the course programs, and anything else organizers could think of, students who entered the program almost invariably did so through direct contact with former participants, language or discipline instructors, or pointers from the few guidance counselors who knew and actively supported the program. The problem of too few students ultimately proved intractable.

As budgets faced even greater compression in the early 90s and average class sizes continued to grow, the University's decade and a half experiment with "late, late immersion" (Burger, Wesche and Migneron, 1997) gradually came to an end in spite of the program's pedagogical success, a committed core of instructional and administrative supporters, research contributions, insights into academic language proficiency and development, and the program's influence on language education elsewhere. At this point the administrative and financial hurdles to this type of teaching seemed insurmountable.

The current program: The "Régime d'immersion en français"

A decade later, in 2005, the winds of change at higher levels of the University brought about the rebirth of content-based language instruction in French in the form of the French Immersion Studies (FIS) program. The University committed itself to a comprehensive strategic plan for the future — its *Vision 2010* document in which one of the four pillars was "to play a leadership role in promoting Canada's official languages" (University of Ottawa, 2005, p. 5). The FIS was set up to provide expanded advanced French offerings for graduates of elementary and secondary school French immersion. The program also welcomed students who had developed a love for French by enriching their studies with exchange programs, extra courses or work in bilingual environments. The goal was to encourage such students to pursue their post-secondary education partially or even entirely in French, and in this way, to promote advanced French mastery by Anglophone students while allowing fuller utilization of the University's French language offerings.

The FIS has the interest and support of the highest levels of the university administration. It has its own director who reports directly to Central Admin-

istration, and in particular, the Associate Vice-President, Academic. The FIS director can therefore respond directly to requests for immersion courses in interested faculties. While the FIS program is housed with the OLBI, its ongoing budget is independent of that of OLBI or of the Faculties of Arts or Social Sciences. The program is financed at a high level (central administration) because it was established to fulfill one of the University's mission goals as defined in the last two strategic plans: Vision 2010⁶ and Destination 2020.⁷ This budget allows the FIS to thrive and to attract large numbers of students through amenities such as bursaries, trans-Canada promotions and publicity.

Many measures have been and continue to be taken to attract students to the FIS and to foster its success. It offers financial support and diploma recognition to student participants. It is well publicized on the web, in high schools across the country as well as within the French-language associations in Canada. It offers a structured progression of steps to fluent bilingualism through the undergraduate years, including study abroad. In this incarnation, the adjunct model has been followed, with greatly expanded offerings in different disciplines: in the 2012 fall and 2013 winter semesters, a total of 62 French immersion courses were offered in 74 programs.⁸

The French-language support program includes a series of four language courses designed to support sequential progress in academic French. The first emphasizes oral and reading comprehension, the second, oral and written production, and the third and fourth, very advanced oral and written communication courses respectively. Knoerr (2010) describes in depth the immersion learning strategies and pedagogical activities specific for these immersion students, from emphasis on receptive to productive and oral to written skills.

Scholarships provide an important incentive for many students. The French Studies Bursary of \$1,000 is awarded to all full-time FIS students who are taking at least 2 courses in French per term. An Immersion Club, organized by immersion students for students, promotes an *esprit de corps* by providing students with a gathering place on campus and organizing informal local activities as well as field trips to such places as Montreal or Quebec City.⁹

Since 2007, students have had the option of going abroad to do a three-week, three-credit course in French linked to a three-credit multi-disciplinary course where they learn about the history, geography and culture of Lyons, France.

⁶Vision 2010 available at: strategicplanning.uottawa.ca/vision2010/home.html.

⁷Destination 2020 available at: destination2020.uottawa.ca/documents/destination-2020-strategic-plan.pdf.

⁸Available at: www.immersion.uottawa.ca/handbook.php#immersion.

⁹See www.immersion.uottawa.ca/club-dimmersion.php.

Student mentors, chosen from 3rd- and 4th-year immersion students, are available to guide first-year immersion students in their course selection and offer advice to those who request it.¹⁰ In the first and second years of their studies, students may elect to have up to two immersion courses per semester marked qualitatively as either pass or fail and therefore excluded from their grade point average. If students follow the Immersion Program and succeed in attaining a certain level in each of the four skills as measured by the University's Second Language Certification Test,¹¹ they receive a French immersion designation on their graduation diploma.¹² By 2012 the FIS program boasted more than 350 graduates over five years.

Research on the current program

A number of evaluative and pedagogical research studies carried out on the FIS since its inception are summarized below.

Program evaluations

Two program evaluations (Ryan, Gobeil, Hope and Toews-Janzen, 2008; Ryan, Courcelles, Hope, Buchanan and Toews-Janzen, 2007) of FIS were undertaken in its second year of operation at the request of the University administration to ensure that the program was fulfilling its mandate. Data collected for the study included archival information and a voluntary on-line survey of 196 of the 527 first- or second-year registered FIS students for the 2008 winter term. In addition, four groups were targeted for focus group interviews: FIS students, adjunct language professors, content course professors and program administrators. Overall, the uOttawa's FIS Program was found to be targeting the appropriate students and delivering the program as intended. Students, professors and administrators were generally satisfied with the FIS program and provided supporting evidence that the program was meeting expectations. However, some concerns were expressed.

These, as well as studies done by Burger and Toews-Janzen (2004) and Knoerr (2010), have led to specific recommendations in the area of pedagogy, including the need to strengthen professional development and supervision for adjunct language professors, most of whom were part-time language teachers. The rapid expansion of the program required many new language teachers,

¹⁰See www.immersion.uottawa.ca/mentoring.php.

¹¹The Second language Certification test was designed and validated by the OLBI to evaluate students' level of second language proficiency. Passing grades range from level 2 (almost complete global comprehension; somewhat effective communication) to level 4 (complete global comprehension with very effective communication).

¹²See www.immersion.uottawa.ca/diploma.php.

some not very experienced, and almost all unfamiliar with immersion methodology. The adjunct/immersion courses, by their very nature, are different from regular second language courses. There is not enough time in a 90-minute adjunct course for detailed grammar instruction, usually a major focus in advanced courses, so teachers must be judicious in their teaching of form and use the content to focus on language development.

The immersion pedagogical advisors had to deal with two scenarios: (i) teachers who tried to teach the adjunct courses like regular second-language courses or (ii) teachers who focused too much on content to the neglect of the language. An earlier study (Burger and Chrétien, 2001) had already illustrated an effective way to focus on form in an adjunct course. In this study a language teacher had noticed frequent oral production errors in the use of *peut-être*. The teacher explained the proper use of the adverb and engaged in systematic correction of errors. Lyster's work on the counterbalanced approach (2007) concurs with the integration of content-based and form-focused instruction in an immersion course.

The recommendations of the Ryan et al. reports (2007, 2008) were followed and by 2011, the language teachers were learning to focus more on language and make useful, contextualized grammar corrections. They began to watch for frequent errors by students and seize opportunities for micro lessons on troublesome grammar points while not interfering with the flow of communication.

Pedagogical challenges

A preliminary study by Bayliss (2009) looked more closely into the pedagogy of the adjunct courses. This study, based on a voluntary questionnaire circulated to all the students registered in adjunct courses in winter 2006, found that students believed the approach yielded content mastery as well as solid gains in second language proficiency. However, many students noted problems with tests and other evaluation tasks, challenges with complex readings in some of the courses and difficulties with disorganized professors. The study also noted the reluctance of some subject-matter professors to acknowledge the presence of L2 speakers in their courses and to therefore adjust their teaching style somewhat to accommodate these students:

It cannot be emphasized too strongly how important it is to engage organized lecturers, using well-written textbooks, articles and handouts. This, of course, should be the goal for all university teaching, but it is crucial in a L2 situation where students can choose to take the course in their L1 instead.

(Bayliss, 2009, p. 38)

Bayliss further recommends:

The Institute needs to have more input into the selection of who teaches the subject-matter portion of the course. It is evident from the information gleaned from the questionnaire that some subject-matter instructors were not appropriate in a L2 context. This is something that we had already learned 20 years ago, but in the rush to mount a program, it was ignored in order to move as quickly as possible. (Bayliss, 2009, p. 39)

Six years after this statement about the 2006 immersion program, the issue has still not been resolved. To be positive and effective, the content instructor needs to understand and accept the importance of the program and the teaching philosophy behind it. There must be trust and respect between the content professor and the language teacher, with each understanding the challenges faced by the other, rather than having the language teacher viewed suspiciously as a spy or nuisance in the class. If this recurrent issue remains unaddressed, ongoing resentments and repeated crises can be expected every term. The institution needs to recognize the importance of this problem and to come up with interventions that support stable and trusting relationships between these cross-disciplinary partners.

Student appreciation of different language activities

Three studies (Weinberg and Burger, 2008; Burger, Weinberg, Hall, Movassat and Hope, 2011; Weinberg, Burger and Boukacem, 2012) have focused on the adjunct language courses themselves. The researchers evaluated students' appreciation as well as their perceptions of the helpfulness of different activities in the language course for either learning the content course material or improving language skills. The first and the third were quantitative studies based on a Likert-scale questionnaire while the second was a qualitative study based on focus groups and SAS² (participatory action research theory methods and engaged inquiry) methodology (Chevalier and Buckles, 2008).

Over the five-year period, the students' appreciation of the adjunct language classes showed a slight improvement for the first-level course and a major improvement for the second-level course. In all three studies, it was found that student enrollments in the second-level advanced language course were always lower than in the first-level course.

There has been consistency in our results over the five-year period regarding instructional activities in language courses. The least appreciated activity in 2006 (grammar) reported in Weinberg and Burger (2008) remained lowest while the activities most appreciated, vocabulary and speaking, continued to be the favorites. The three studies have helped us to identify reasons for the lower level of satisfaction of the first-level course students.

At all course levels students find informal grammar correction to be more useful for improving L2 development than for improving content mastery.

Since production is not the focus of the lower level course, their consistent, lesser appreciation of grammar at the first-level course is not of much concern. At the second level where the focus is on production, which requires correct grammar, the improvement in appreciation of grammar teaching is significant. Vocabulary, on the other hand, is important for both comprehension and production. This is recognized in the appreciation that students at both levels express for vocabulary instruction, with a significant increase at the higher level. Students realize that in order to be successful in their discipline study, they have to master the related academic vocabulary. In addition, whatever the year, whatever the level, students liked all types of oral activities. The second-level course students gave a significantly higher rating to speaking and writing activities than the first-level course students, possibly reflecting the fact that the improvement of production skills is not a goal of the first-level course but also recognizing their greater need for these skills as they advance through their university studies.

Listening and note-taking

Other research investigated listening comprehension and note-taking strategies. Weinberg, Knoerr and Vandergrift (2011) developed a series of seven English-language podcasts grounded in metacognitive and L2 listening theory to provide FI students with strategies to enhance L2 listening ability and note-taking skills for academic lectures in French. Student feedback was solicited through weekly questionnaires and a final focus group discussion. Students indicated that they enjoyed the podcasts and found them moderately useful, with those who participated in the focus group discussion showing a higher degree of satisfaction. They made positive suggestions for improving the podcasts such as the use of dialogues between students and experts as well as the introduction of more explicit visual support. These suggestions led to the production of new versions of the podcasts that are now being used.

Knoerr and Weinberg (2013) have analyzed students' reactions to this new version of the podcasts and found that the preferred strategies are listening strategies of the cognitive type. The analyses also show a significant correlation between the popularity of strategies and their perceived effectiveness. In our view, it is important to make immersion students aware of the central role of metacognition in the listening process and to train them in the use of these listening strategies. This should help them better understand their lectures in their second language.

Vocabulary acquisition

Several studies on vocabulary acquisition were undertaken. The first study (Weinberg, Boukacem and Burger, 2012) compared the effects of vocabulary

teaching in two adjunct courses linked to two different discipline courses, History and Law. Differential gains of vocabulary by the two groups, either explicitly taught or incidentally encountered, were the focus of this study. Results demonstrated how different immersion contexts can be and how important it is for the language teacher to adapt teaching to the particular context. In Law, although the vocabulary was challenging, it tended to be recycled regularly as the course proceeded. On the contrary, in the History course, episodic presentation of new topics provided intensive exposure to new vocabulary that might not, however, occur again later in the course. This required more vocabulary instruction from the language teacher.

Another study in the context of the history adjunct course looked more closely at gains in vocabulary acquisition due to explicit teaching versus incidental exposure (Burger and Weinberg, in press). Based on Webb's (2008) classification of contexts, the researchers examined and rated the contexts in which students encountered a sample of forty words in their immersion course. Although a small study, data showed differential outcomes, favouring words taught over words not taught. Results suggested that other factors explained differences in learning and concluded that the history course alone did not provide a rich enough environment for vocabulary acquisition.

Academic integration of students

Ongoing qualitative studies (Lamoureux, 2013; Séror and Weinberg, 2012, 2013), based on data collected through individual interviews and focus group interactions, have explored students' perceptions of the FIS program including the fears and risks associated with participation in the program. There is an element of shock when actually having to cope with doing things in French among native speakers, as opposed to the comfort of sheltered situations that immersion students are accustomed to. The first reaction to a large L2 content course is often negative. Nevertheless, students also identified a number of factors that helped them to overcome these challenges. They appreciated the support structures available as part of the immersion program. They mentioned mentorship programs, partnering activities, the Immersion Club, and a dedicated office where they could go for help. The adjunct language courses allow students to focus once a week with a language instructor on the vocabulary and language elements of the discipline they are studying. Other benefits of the FIS include scholarships, study abroad opportunities, and the credit recognition of the adjunct language courses. Of course, obtaining an immersion designation on their diploma, contingent on reaching certification level, offers immersion students the long-term benefit of a competitive advantage in the Canadian job market. Although studying in French with francophones is not easy, it is an investment that can pay off. Indeed, an important theme found in the discourse of

participants, particularly those who had completed or were about to complete their studies, was the opportunities that had opened up for them as a result of participating in the FIS.

Problematic issues and recommendations

It is clear from both the initial uOttawa experience and the FIS, that to be successful, a program must be tailored to the needs, resources and sensitivities of its particular context. At the same time, immersion programs in quite different contexts face a number of similar issues. All programs can thus benefit from and be encouraged by the experiences of others.

Successful immersion programs depend on many factors, including a large potential student clientele, a program that engages them and prepares them with skills for their future, and mechanisms to encourage and reward student success. A committed, competent core of language and of disciplinary instructors is crucial, as well as academic resources and knowledgeable administrative staff. And as was learned in the University's first program, prioritization of the program by administrators, secure ongoing funding and a firm place for it within the academic programs of the university are all necessary if the program is to flourish and endure over time.

The uniqueness and greatest challenge of immersion lies in the interface between its dual goals of language development and content learning. Certain conditions must be present to ensure mastery in both areas. These include well-taught disciplinary courses and a carefully conceived language component adapted to changing student needs, as well as a clear linkage between the two. This linkage is ensured by the disciplinary and language instructors.

An important issue is identifying content professors who believe in the approach and goals of FIS and are willing to collaborate with the language teacher assigned to that course (Weinberg et al., 2012). Ideally, the orientation of disciplinary instructors should be part of their assignment, and they should also have the liberty to opt out if they are uneasy with the situation — as may legitimately be the case with new or part-time instructors, or those who are unwilling to make any allowances for students with weaker French skills. Immersion administrators need some control over the selection of content professors, particularly after unsuccessful experiences. Even though the language adjunct professors may be very aware of the quality of teaching by the content professors, the FIS program is not allowed to evaluate their teaching due to union rules regarding evaluations and hiring. This lack of ability to identify and recruit willing and able disciplinary instructors is a perennial problem leading to negative perceptions of the FIS program by some of its students and by some content professors.

Language teachers must also be carefully selected. Immersion teaching

is not for novices, nor is it for teachers focused on pursuing a systematic language-based syllabus. It requires experienced teachers who are flexible, able to address linguistic needs as they arise and who can recognize teachable moments when focus on form will be useful for language acquisition. Furthermore, they must be open to learning the content material and be able to identify and respond to language demands placed upon students by the disciplinary discourse and the evaluation methods of the professor.

Another problematic issue lies with the lack of immersion-specific training and qualification requirements for the contract part-time language teachers. Requesting these new teachers to come to unpaid immersion training is a delicate matter. Their contractual obligations must be respected, the training scheduled, and finally the methodology for their teaching explained. While most of the teaching work is done by part-time language teachers, there is still a pressing need to hire dedicated full-time language teachers and professors to be involved with and help manage the FIS program.

Still, some of the initial problems with the language teachers have been resolved. Many have had the opportunity to teach a particular course several times and have therefore been able to familiarize themselves with the content material and to develop language learning material unique to that course.

The FIS, like the earlier uOttawa immersion program, has confirmed the value of immersion for advanced university students' continuing L2 development. However, there are indications that many students would benefit from more instruction on advanced oral and writing skills. Unfortunately, while most immersion students take advantage of the first-level adjunct courses which offer them a transition between high school and university studies, they fail to register in the second, more advanced-level adjunct courses focused on productive skills. This is unfortunate, as they tend to badly lack these skills. Attending lectures, doing reading assignments and small group interaction with native-speaker students contributes to their continuing development of advanced level reading and listening skills, and to greater ease in social interaction. But opportunities to work on advanced academic oral skills (such as making presentations or debates), and particularly writing, are far less frequent, so that ongoing development of these abilities is more dependent on language instruction. A consequence of this is the small sizes of the advanced classes as students fear of getting lower mark if they register in them. The FIS administration needs to consider this issue and to find ways to attract students into these courses. If students without adequate writing and oral skills are to become truly bilingual at an advanced level, they need instruction. In our view, at least one of the advanced courses should become compulsory.

Conclusion

To summarize, some 30 years after the first pioneering courses, post-secondary immersion in French is again well established at uOttawa, this time on a large scale. The program attracts more new students each year, increasing from 247 new students in 2006 to 662 in 2012. The new program has a better-defined role within the University's long-term plan and contains an institutional structure that ensures its long-term viability. This stability should ensure its continued growth and success.

As highlighted by Knoerr and Weinberg (in press), immersion at uOttawa is "an innovation inherited from the past", incorporating many insights from the initial immersion experience. Since its launching, many issues have been resolved and administrative staff and student mentors, as well as increasing numbers of language and disciplinary instructors, have gained experience in this program, improving its effectiveness. Research on the program continues. The early study (Edwards et al., 1984) on the original program demonstrated that the immersion students succeeded as well as or better in their non-language courses than their native speaker counterparts. Evidence suggests similar success for the FIS program. For example, for the 2009 fall HIS-2736, a history course, the average final mark for all history students was 68.8% while the average final mark for all the immersion students was 72.4%. Similar results were found for the 2010 fall history course. Further research should be conducted to assess students' achievements in different disciplines and to compare immersion students with native speakers. This very successful program still offers many opportunities for useful research.

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