Linguistic Risk-Taking: A New Pedagogical Approach and a Research Program

Nikolay Slavkov
University of Ottawa

Abstract

Linguistic risks are situations in which learners are pushed out of their comfort zone to use the target language in meaningful and authentic settings. This article outlines a novel pedagogical and research approach to language learning through linguistic risk-taking. I review the construct of linguistic risk from interdisciplinary perspectives and describe the context, rationale, and development of an innovative initiative for supporting French and English language learning at the University of Ottawa, the largest bilingual (English-French) university in the world. Data from 554 participants collected through a Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport, a tool allowing learners to self-report risk-taking patterns, propose additional risks, and add qualitative comments are analyzed to validate the approach. Avenues for transformation of the tool into a digital app and its relevance to other contexts and other languages are also discussed.

Résumé

Les risques linguistiques sont des situations dans lesquelles les apprenants sont poussés à sortir de leur zone de confort afin d'utiliser la langue cible dans des contextes significatifs et authentiques. Cet article présente une nouvelle approche de la pédagogie et de la recherche concernant l'apprentissage des langues par la prise de risques linguistiques. Nous examinons la notion de prise de risques linguistiques d'un point de vue interdisciplinaire et décrivons le contexte, la raison d'être et le développement d'une initiative innovante visant à soutenir l'apprentissage du français et de l'anglais à l'Université d'Ottawa, la plus grande université bilingue (français-anglais) du monde. Afin de valider notre approche, nous analysons les données recueillies auprès de 554 participants par le biais d'un passeport de prise de risques linguistiques. Cet outil permettant aux apprenants de rendre compte de leurs pratiques concernant la prise de risques, de proposer des risques supplémentaires et d'ajouter des commentaires qualitatifs. Nous discutons également des pistes pour la transformation de l'outil en une application numérique et de sa pertinence pour d'autres contextes et d'autres langues.

Linguistic Risk-Taking: A New Pedagogical Approach and a Research Program

Introduction

The concept of linguistic risk-taking was discussed in the literature some four decades ago by Beebe (1983), and research on it has continued to gather interest over the years (e.g., Cervantes, 2014; Dehbozorgi, 2012; Dewaele, 2012; Gass & Selinker, 2008; Karimi & Biria, 2017; among others). Nonetheless, discussions of linguistic risk-taking have been more sporadic and less extensive than the large body of literature dedicated to language identity, anxiety, Willingness to Communicate (WTC), and motivation, for instance. The purpose of this article is to augment the literature on linguistic risk-taking while relating it closely to other pedagogical, psychological, and social concepts and to theoretical frameworks. I will argue that linguistic risk-taking is both a useful construct and a pedagogical practice that offers broad appeal to language teachers, learners, and researchers in interesting and varied ways; thus, additional and sustained research on this topic is beneficial from theoretical, empirical, and practical perspectives.

Linguistic risk-taking presents opportunities to face and overcome challenges in language learning and associate them with gains and enjoyment. The construct resonates with individuals who have experienced language learning and its common discomforts or anxieties (e.g., making errors, being misunderstood, misunderstanding others, being judged as not proficient enough against a native speaking-norm, feeling awkward about socialization in a new language, not being able to express ideas as easily or fluently in the target language, and so on) but who have also discovered feelings of pride, pleasure, confidence, or competence by choosing to step outside of their comfort zone and use the language they are learning in real life. In addition to feelings of achievement and success, linguistic risk-taking may result in perceived or real proficiency increases because of the extended language practice that comes with actively seeking opportunities to use the target language. That is, linguistic risk-taking may not only be useful from a socio-psychological point of view, but also from the point of view of increasing one's language competence.

With the above background in mind, the rest of this article is organized as follows. I begin by describing the specific institutional context in which the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative was developed (the University of Ottawa, a large English-French bilingual institution in Canada) and offer a theoretical and conceptual overview of linguistic risk-taking and of some relevant pedagogical and psychological concepts. I then report on a study drawing on a tool called the Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport, a tool that serves both pedagogical and research purposes. By analyzing descriptive quantitative patterns and qualitative data in a mixed methods design, I offer a discussion of the benefits of the Initiative (i.e., validity evidence for adopting a linguistic risk-taking approach) and its applicability to other settings and purposes. These include languages other than French and English as well as non-university level populations (e.g., K-12 students). I also mention extended applications of the passport tool to special contexts, such as the case of people who stutter. Overall, I argue that linguistic risk-taking has a strong potential for both making theoretical advances and offering practical benefits to language learners and others.

Background

The Institutional Context and the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative

The Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative was conceived in the larger context of Canada, a country with two official languages (English and French), and more specifically in the context of the University of Ottawa, an institution that espouses and promotes bilingual values and practices.[1] The university offers courses and programs in both English and French, and students generally have a choice as to which language to use for their studies (for a more detailed description of the institutional context see Slavkov, 2020, and Slavkov and Séror, 2019, in English as well as Séror and Slavkov, 2019, in French). In addition, campus services (e.g., libraries, academic advising, registrar's office, sports services, cafeterias, parking services, health services, etc.) are bilingual and agents proficient in both languages respond in the preferred language of the individuals they serve. Paper forms, online portals, and other tools on campus are also available in both English and French. Professors are generally bilingual in English and French as well; some are classified as active bilinguals (i.e., speak, write, read, and comprehend orally both languages and thus are able to teach in both languages) while others are passive bilinguals (i.e., teach only in one language but are able to comprehend the other). This ensures that students can generally submit work in either language and professors would be able to understand and evaluate it, regardless of which language the course is taught in.

It is important to note that even though the institution is bilingual, not all students are bilingual. While some may be highly proficient in both languages, others may speak only one of them, and still others may have a high level of proficiency in one language but only limited proficiency in the other.[2] The institution encourages students to learn or to continue improving their second language by offering language classes and various other programs and initiatives. The campus itself can be a fruitful living and breathing bilingual space where language learners can practice their second language in a variety of meaningful and authentic daily interactions. However, it is also entirely possible to live unilingually and simply follow courses, use services, and conduct daily interactions in only one of the two languages (usually the learner's stronger language) invoking notions such as two parallel monolingualisms (see Grosjean, 1989) or two solitudes (see Cummins, 2008; MacLennan, 1945/2018).

The Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative was conceptualized within the context described above, recognizing that language learners on campus, even if enrolled in specific language courses to improve their second language, may be hesitant to practice that language in real-life; thus, once they are outside of the language classroom, they may choose to remain within the comfort zone of their preferred language (i.e., their stronger language). For example, an individual whose first language is English may study French in the classroom but be reluctant to use it outside the classroom walls.[3] This phenomenon can be seen as counterproductive, assuming that the purpose of language learning is to learn to use a language in real life situations. Therefore, the ultimate goal of the Initiative is to encourage learners to be linguistic risk-takers and take advantage of the numerous opportunities on campus to practice their second language, to become life-long language learners, and to get socialized in organic ways into the target language and community.

At the heart of the Initiative is a tool called Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport (Figure 1). The tool includes a list of linguistic risks that students can take across the entire university campus and sometimes beyond the campus boundaries. A linguistic

risk is operationalized as an authentic everyday communicative act that takes place outside of the language classroom and involves spontaneous and meaningful second language use. Learners may be hesitant to engage in such communicative acts, given the option to use their other language (preferred language/stronger language). However, engaging in such acts amounts to additional authentic language practice and potentially increased confidence, competence, and socialization in the target language.

Figure 1
Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport (Cover Page)

The Passport currently contains over 80 such risks that range from using the second language at the library, cafeteria, or sport services, to applying for a job, speaking to a superior, singing karaoke, or submitting an academic assignment in the second language (i.e., foregoing the right to submit an assignment in the first language). The Passport exists in equivalent versions in French and English, and participants are given the version in the target language they are learning. Explanations of the construct of a linguistic risk and why it is important to take risks in language learning are included. Most risks can be repeated up to three times, which offers learners opportunities for repeated exposure to similar situations or tasks. Learners use the Passports autonomously, outside of class time as a motivational, strategic, and record-keeping tool in their daily language practice. They can choose which risks are appropriate or interesting for them and check them off in the Passport once taken. In addition, learners are asked to indicate whether they perceived each risk as High, Medium, or Low at the time they took it. Sample risks are provided in Figure 2, which represents a page from the main section of the Passport for an English learner (the risks for a French learner are equivalent).

Figure 2
Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport: Sample Risks

The list of risks included in the Passport fits well within task-based (TBLT; Ellis 2009; Griffiths and Slavkov, 2021; Long 1985; Nunan 2004; Samuda & Bygate 2008; Willis & Willis 2007) and action-oriented (Council of Europe, 2001, 2018) approaches to language teaching and learning. From the perspective of TBLT, language learning occurs successfully through participation in meaningful language tasks. Over the years, numerous criteria have been established for what constitutes a language task and various categories of tasks have been discussed. Long (1985) states that a task can be any of "the hundred and one things people do in everyday life, at work, at play and in-between" (p.89). This operationalization of task is directly relevant to the list of risks included in the Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport. In addition, since the activities proposed by the passport focus on usage outside of the language classroom, I highlight the experiential element of TBLT, as discussed by Ellis et al. (2019), for example. Importantly, risks are slightly different from tasks, or can be viewed as a special subset of tasks that necessarily involve an emotional dimension. That is, learners become aware of their anxieties, stresses, or fears and seek to reduce or overcome them by focusing on positive aspects, such as the enjoyment, achievement, and happiness experienced through the target language in real life (see Griffiths and Slavkov, 2021 for a more extensive discussion of linguistic risk-taking as related to TBLT).

As far as action-oriented approaches are concerned, common practices include providing learners with specific realistic or real-life scenarios. Under these scenarios, learners are viewed as social actors, and authentic language use involves production, reception, interaction, and mediation as outlined in the descriptors of the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (COE, 2018; see also Germain-Rutherford, 2021, for additional discussion). Linguistic risk-taking is compatible with such approaches as it is anchored in viewing learners as social actors and encouraging them to participate in genuine real-life communicative activities. At the same time, linguistic risk-taking helps learners become aware of and manage their emotions.

Focusing on positive emotions is also an important pillar of the language learning process that linguistic risk-taking is meant to foster.

Returning to the Passport tool, in addition to the list of risks illustrated in Figure 2, slogans countering common myths about bilingualism and language learning are also incorporated. Such slogans aim at building autonomy, confidence, and a set of realistic language learning objectives, consistent with modern language teaching practices. Some of the slogans include the following: *I consider myself bilingual, even if one of my two official languages may be stronger than the other* (this addresses the myth of bilinguals as two monolinguals in one [Grosjean, 1989]); *I am not a native speaker of this language and I am okay with that!* (this addresses the myth that language learners should set native-speaking norms as a target [Cook, 1991, 1999, 2013; Slavkov et al., 2022; among others]); *I am not afraid of making errors; they are natural and normal in language use* (this addresses unrealistic perceived or real expectations for learners, or indeed all language users, that communication must be error-free). In addition to such slogans, the Passport contains self-assessment pages, pages for learner notes and comments on the Initiative, as well as pages where learners can propose additional risks that they have themselves thought of and that are not included in the existing list. The Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative runs over the course of one university semester (approximately 12 weeks); towards the end of the semester learners are able to submit their completed Passports and may win prizes. To be eligible for a potential prize, a learner needs to have taken a minimum of 20 risks of the more than 80 risks listed.[4] A more detailed description of the Initiative, including additional sample pages from the Passport and learner activities, is available in Slavkov (2020) and Slavkov and Séror (2019). A copy of the Passport may also be downloaded from the Initiative's website.[5]

The Passport is not only a pedagogical resource but also a research tool that collects a variety of rich quantitative (usage patterns) and qualitative (comments and reflections) data. Furthermore, the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative involves additional research protocols, such as interviews and questionnaires with both learners and teachers. These are not reported in this article whose primary focus is on the Passport.

The Construct of Linguistic Risk and Broader Theoretical Frameworks

The construct of linguistic risk is not new. As Beebe (1983) remarks, "you take a risk every time you open your mouth in a foreign language, or for that matter in any learning situation where you are called on to perform" (p. 39). Beebe further defines risks as situations in which there is "a choice between alternatives of different desirability" and "possibility of failure" (p. 39). A relatively modest subsequent body of literature exists on the notion of risk as applied to language (Cervantes, 2014; Dehbozorgi, 2012; Dewaele, 2012; Karimi & Biria, 2017; Gass & Selinker, 2008; among others), the focus is often on classroom contexts, typically restricted to spoken interactions, and many aspects of the construct remain underdeveloped.[6]

The operationalization of linguistic risk adopted for the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative is with a classroom external focus and is broader than the one developed by Beebe (1983) in that it includes not only spoken interaction, but also reading, writing and listening contexts. For example, watching a movie in a second language may constitute a risk for a given individual due to the possibility of incomplete understanding of the plot and related discomfort or anxiety created by that. Nonetheless, learning to watch movies in a second language is an important achievement, not only linguistically but also socially and psychologically. By 'sticking it out' and watching an entire movie in the second language, a learner may realize that it is not always

necessary to understand every minute detail of the plot, that it was still enjoyable to watch the movie, and at the end there may be a feeling of achievement and potentially increased proficiency from completing this risk. Having taken such a linguistic risk one time, a learner may be more open and willing to watch movies in the target language in the future as well. In the context of Canada, English speakers who have challenged themselves to watch movies in French and have become comfortable doing so may be more likely to socialize with the Francophone community and engage in other authentic linguistic and social activities in the target language. The reverse may also be true for those who learn English in a Canadian context. This logic applies to multiple situations (not just watching a movie), thus allowing learners to expand the number of authentic domains in which they can use the target language. Adopting this view of linguistic risk-taking, the Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport emphasizes oral interactions, but also includes risks that involve listening, reading, and writing. Thematically, it covers a wide array of domains (everyday activities, leisure, professional, technological, academic, and so on).

The construct of risk developed for this project seeks to de-emphasize the possibility of failure. An important objective in this regard is to position linguistic risks positively, as opportunities for learners to become aware of their emotions associated with certain language tasks that may involve nervousness or anxiety. By becoming aware of and by facing such challenges, learners are encouraged to discover and follow the pleasurable aspects of authentic language use: the feeling of pride, success and accomplishment associated with communicating in their second language and the game-like or even thrill-seeking aspect of targeting language tasks that are 'risky'. The idea of moving away from the concept of failure is particularly relevant in the bilingual university context where the Initiative was implemented. In this context, the potential of communication failure is limited by the fact that learners can always revert to their first official language. For example, if a French learner tries to use English at a service desk and is not able to understand fully the response of the agent behind the counter, the learner can also switch to French in order to avoid communication failure and complete the transaction successfully. The same applies to an English learner attempting to use French in an equivalent situation.

Overall, the construct of linguistic risk captures both the notion of language anxiety and language enjoyment discussed as complementary to each other by Dewaele and MacIntyre (2014, 2016) and Dewaele et al. (2018). Traditionally, research in emotions related to language learning has focused mostly on negative ones. A case in point is language anxiety which is perhaps the most well-studied emotion in language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012a). However, with the advance of positive psychology into the field of language learning (e.g., MacIntyre & Mercer, 2015; MacIntyre, 2021), an effort to move away from negativity and deficiency perspectives is underway and there has been a wave of research related to well-being, enjoyment, interest, and contentment. For example, MacIntyre and Gregersen (2012b) point out that a positive atmosphere in the classroom, coupled with awareness raising and training in specific strategies, can help learners reduce anxiety and improve language learning outcomes. Furthermore, the authors argue that strategies inspired by positive psychology can yield additional benefits such as increased resiliency, community-building, openness to play and exploration, and so on. This would ultimately create facilitative emotional resources for language learning. In a similar vein, the idea of linguistic risk-taking creates awareness of the potential stresses and anxieties that language learners may experience, encourages learners to reflect upon them, and constructs a positive attitude to challenging linguistic and social situations. This is

meant to encourage learners to target linguistic risks in a playful way and to seek pride and joy in taking on such challenges. Linguistic risk-taking is also related to Willingness to Communicate (WTC; MacIntyre et al., 1998; MacIntyre, 2007; MacIntyre & Legatto, 2011; among others) although it should be viewed as a narrower construct (see Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021, for more details).[7]

Three additional pedagogical notions must be mentioned in relation to linguistic risk-taking before describing the study that forms the object of this article: 1) *autonomy* of the language learner, where the teacher does not take a central place in instruction but rather serves as a guide, a consultant, or a motivating force that helps individual learners discover appropriate and continuous language learning opportunities in their journey to becoming independent second/foreign language users (Albero & Poteaux, 2014; Benson 2007, 2011; Gremmo & Riley, 1995; Little, 1991, 1999), 2) *authenticity*, the idea that language learning activities must be based on meaningful real-life communicative situations or experiences (Collentine & Freed 2004; Lantolf, 2000; Lazaraton, 2014; Roberts and Cooke, 2009), and 3) *gamification*, the idea of harnessing fun aspects of various activities to engage learners in meaningful language practice and to unlock powerful learning potentials that may start in the classroom but extend beyond it (Holden & Sykes, 2011; Kapp 2012; McGonigal, 2011; Prensky, 2001).

To sum up, for the purposes of this article, the construct of linguistic risk-taking draws on interconnected views from the theoretical and pedagogical approaches mentioned in this section. These inform the design of the Passport tool at the heart of this project as well as the data collection and analytical procedures of the study that follows.

The Study

Rationale and Research Questions

This study is part of a larger ongoing project. Previous work has reported in more detail on the conceptualization of the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative (Slavkov & Séror, 2019), on the implementation of the Passport specifically in French as a Second Language (Rhéaume et al., 2021), on learner self-assessment questionnaires (Slavkov, 2020), and on informal language learning (Cajka et al. 2023). The goal of the current study is to focus on the Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport as a data-generation tool and report on some learner patterns attested in the number and types of risks taken by both English and French learners, on the new risks that they have proposed through the Passport, and on qualitative comments. The rationale for analysing and reporting such data is three-fold: 1) to evaluate the usefulness of linguistic risk-taking as an innovative pedagogical approach to second language learning; 2) to offer research-based insights for the continuous development of this pedagogical Initiative at the University of Ottawa; and 3) to share knowledge and experiences with a broader audience that may wish to explore similar approaches grounded in the concept of linguistic risk-taking in a variety of contexts around the world.

The broad research questions that this article seeks to address are as follows:

RQ 1: Do usage patterns reported through the Passport tool offer validity evidence for linguistic-risk taking as a useful approach to language teaching and learning?
RQ 2: Does the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative encourage language learners to use the target language outside of the language classroom?

RQ 3: Does linguistic risk-taking offer new and enjoyable aspects in the language learning process?

RQ 4: Does linguistic risk-taking entail strategic opportunities to raise awareness of and reflect on the discomforts and anxieties related to second language learning and use?

Participants and Methodology

The 554 participants on which this study reports were enrolled in French or English as a second language credit courses offered by the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute of the University of Ottawa and participated in the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative, which operates cyclically each semester.[8] The period covered in this article consists of five semesters of approximately 12 weeks each. Table 1 offers details about the number and target language of the participants for each semester.

Table 1
Participants

	English Learners	French Learners	Total
Semester 1	27	45	72
Semester 2	36	68	104
Semester 3	60	58	118
Semester 4	54	62	116
Semester 5	81	63	144
Total	258	296	554

The Linguistic Risk-Taking Passport was distributed at the beginning of each semester to all students in several English and French as a Second Language credit courses along with instructions on how to use it as a supplementary activity outside of classroom learning. Since the courses were taught by different professors, the individual approach to the tool varied. Some had a more hands-off approach where learners were left on their own to decide if and how they wanted to use the Passport, and there was no structured follow-up in class. Others integrated linguistic risk-taking awareness-raising into classroom activities and included in-class reflections on student experiences with the Passport (e.g., logs, journals, social media posts, and other activities) or assigned risk-taking as homework to keep learners accountable for their use of the Passport. At the end of the semester, all participants who had used the passport could submit it to their teachers, although only those who had completed at least 20 risks were eligible to potentially win a prize. Once the Passports were collected, the data were entered into a database with quantitative patterns and qualitative comments.[9]

In terms of quantitative patterns, the following data were entered: number of risks taken per participant, number of repetitions for each risk taken (for most risks the Passport allows up to three repetitions)[10], perceived level of risk for each risk taken on a high-medium-low scale (HML), proposed number of risks by learners (i.e., risks that were not included in the Passport but learners proposed and took), and self-assessment questionnaire data (not reported in this study, but see Slavkov, 2020). In terms of qualitative data, learners were given the opportunity to write comments about the risks listed on each page of the Passport; additional pages at the end of the Passport were also available for further general comments and reflections. The qualitative data were subject to a cyclical coding process (Saldaña, 2016) whereby basic preliminary labels were first

assigned to the data and subsequently changed, re-assigned, merged, or split until a list of categories was created. Drawing on Saldaña's description of how data can be themed, category labels such as short words or phrases were turned into themes, also drawing on additional guidelines for thematic analysis (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003; Boyatzis, 1998; Braun & Clarke, 2006, 2012). The qualitative analysis software *NVivo 12 Pro* was used for both coding and analysis of the data (see Gilbert et al., 2014). Two researchers worked collaboratively in coding, cross-checking each other's work, and discussing discrepancies until reaching consensus in a qualitative decision-making approach without relying on quantitative inter-coder reliability measures.

   The results of the study are reported in two stages (Results Part I and II) below.

Results Part I: Number and Types of Risks Taken, Usage Patterns, and Proposed Risks

   Over the course of the five semesters, learners reported taking a total of 27,410 risks. Of these, 10,706 were taken by French learners and 16,704 by English learners. This is not commensurate with the proportions of English and French learners in the participant sample and indicates that English learners appear to have taken a higher number of risks than French learners on average: mean number of risks per English learner was 65 (median = 55) vs. 36 (median = 30) for French learners.

   In terms of types of risks, the top 10 most frequently taken risks for the English and French learners are reported in Table 2.

Table 2
Most Frequently Taken Risks

Rank	French Learners	# of times taken	English Learners	# of times taken
1	62. I listened to 5 songs by Canadian artists in French.	430	68. I watched a YouTube video in English.	460
2	40. I sent a text message in French.	403	40. I sent a text message in English.	457
3	68. I watched a YouTube video in French.	400	62. I listened to 5 songs by Canadian artists in English.	437
4	55. I received a bilingual email and read the English part.	380	6. I ordered food on campus in English.	427
5	37. I sent an email to a uOttawa professor in English.	379	25. I made a phone call in English.	404
6	46. I read a news article in English.	332	66. I watched a movie or a show at home in English without subtitles.	398
7	24. I spoke English to a friend with whom I normally speak French.	328	45. I read a book or a magazine in English.	396
8	42. I submitted a class assignment or a paper in English.	328	46. I read a news article in English.	395
9	54. I used uoZone, Google Apps or Virtual Campus in English.	318	54. I used uoZone, Google Apps or Virtual Campus in English.	394
10	7. I spoke to a loved one in English.	270	37. I sent an email to a uOttawa professor in English.	380

There is a degree of overlap in the most popular risks between the two populations (six of the top 10 risks are the same for both populations). Another important observation is that most of the risks in Table 2 (7 out of 10 for the French learners and 9 out of 10 for the English learners) are situations that involve media or technology, a finding that reflects the era of digital natives (Prensky, 2001).
To further analyze the types of risks taken, all risks were categorized by the skill involved (oral interaction, listening, speaking, reading, and writing). Figure 3 reports the distribution of risks by these categories across the corpus.[11]

Figure 3
Percentage of Risks Taken by Skill
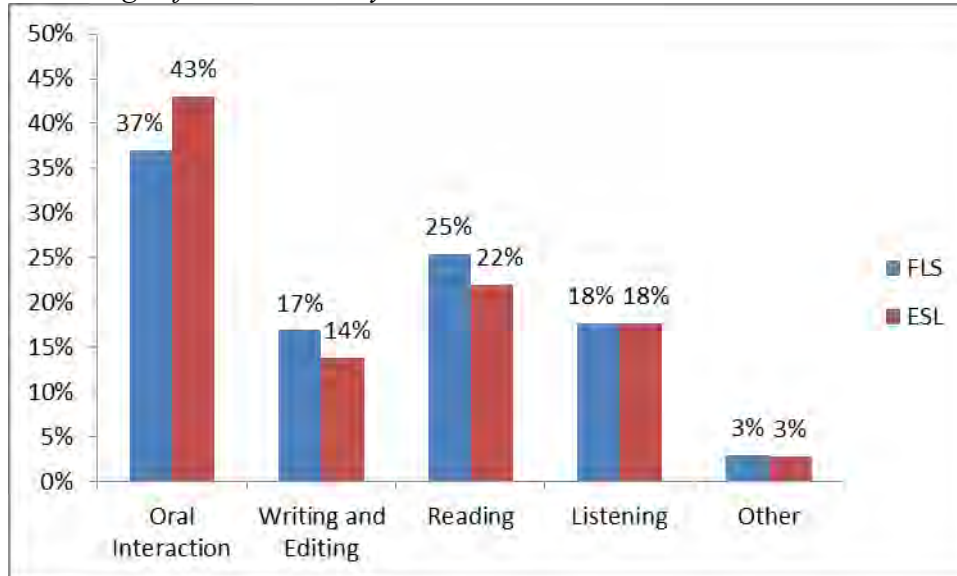
As indicated, ESL and FLS learners took comparable types of risks, with the spoken interaction category having the highest proportion.[12] While linguistic risk-taking as a concept can apply to all skills and domains, depending on the individual learner, one of the goals of the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative was to emphasize authentic oral interactions, since they may be particularly difficult to accomplish in a classroom setting. The data indicate that this objective was achieved.

In terms of how learners perceived each risk they took (i.e., high, medium, or low) at the time they checked it off in their Passports, Table 3 reports the distribution of these perceptions for the two groups of learners (French and English). As indicated, most risks taken were judged as low: 10,389 (38% of all risks taken). This is particularly obvious among the English learners (43%).

Table 3
Total Number of Risks Marked as High, Medium, and Low[13]

	French Learners	English Learners	Total
Risks Marked as High	2,116 (20%)	2,915 (18%)	5,031 (18%)
Risks Marked as Medium	2,778 (26%)	4,554 (27%)	7,332 (27%)
Risks Marked as Low	3,206 (30%)	7,183 (43%)	10,389 (38%)
No H-M-L value provided	2,606 (24%)	2,052 (12%)	4,658 (17%)
Total	10,706 (100%)	16,704 (100%)	27,410 (100%)

For a different perspective on this variable, a list of the 10 risks most commonly reported as high is provided in Table 4.

Table 4
Top 10 Risks Marked as High

Rank	French Learners	% of times marked as High	English Learners	% of times marked as High
1	84. I used French at the bank.	75%	35. I had a job interview in English.	46%
2	87. I used Google Maps or a GPS in French.	59%	86. I babysat or tutored someone in English.	44%
3	76. I spoke French to a client at my work.	54%	81. I spoke to the doctor in English.	39%
4	39. I prepared a resume or a cover letter in French.	41%	23. I used English to speak to a high-ranking uOttawa official (e.g. at a Dean's office or at a high manager's office).	37%
5	29. I went to karaoke and sang a song in French.	40%	82. I signed up for a webinar in English.	36%
6	22. I applied for a job on uOttawa campus where I will need to use French.	36%	84. I used English at the bank.	35%
7	35. I had a job interview in French.	35%	77. I had a meal with an English speaker and we spoke English the whole time.	35%
8	33. I called a toll-free number (1-800) and chose to be served in French.	34%	22. I applied for a job on uOttawa campus where I will need to use English.	33%
9	23. I used English to speak to a high-ranking uOttawa official (e.g. at a Dean's office or at a high manager's office).	33%	39. I prepared a resume or a cover letter in English.	33%
10	13. I used English at a uOttawa library help desk.	32%	33. I called a toll-free number (1-800) and chose to be served in English.	32%

A relatively high degree of overlap between the two populations can be observed, as six of the ten risks are the same. It is to be noted that most situations are non-academic; in other words, participants perceived authentic daily life situations to be the highest level of challenge in their second official language. An additional observation is that the risks identified in the top 10 include mostly productive skills (oral interaction and writing) rather than receptive skills (listening and reading); the only exceptions were risk 87 and risk 82 which involve listening.

Within the risk repetition patterns, the following trends were discerned: decreasing (i.e., the perceived level of risk decreased on the HML scale with one or two

repetitions) for 17% of the repeated risks; increasing (i.e., the perceived level of risk went up on the HML scale with one or two repetitions) for 5% of the repeated risks; a constant (i.e., the perceived level of risk was the same) for 57% of the repeated risks; a varying pattern (i.e., the perceived level went up and down or down and up) for 21% of the repeated risks. A more fine-grained reporting scale and analysis of this data may be able to better unpack such patterns, but this is left for future work (see also the discussion section).

Turning to the option for learners to propose risks that were not originally listed in the Passport, a total of 435 such risks were proposed over the five semesters, 337 by French learners and 98 by English learners. A sample of such risks is included in Table 5 below. All data are reported in their original form without any language corrections.[14]

Table 5
Sample Risks Proposed by Learners

Proposed by French Learners	Proposed by English Learners
J'ai magasiné à Montreal et j'ai utilise francais au lieu d'anglais "I went shopping in Montreal and used French instead of English."	I called a delivery company about something I ordered
J'ai traduit le francais en anglais pour un ami "I translated the French into English for a friend."	I started conversations with stangers in English at the bus
S'informormer des ingredients/directives d'un produit en lisaent en francais "Consulting the ingredients/directions for a product by reading the French."[15]	talking in an insurance company.
J'ai cree un compte de twitter en francais "I created a Twitter account in French."	Speak to my (French) family in English and learn us some words
J'ai fait 4 presentations de la programme immersion à mon école secondaire en francais "I gave four presentations on the immersion program at my high school in French."[16]	To complain in English
Parlez avec les individus de mon travail benevolat en francias "Talking with individuals from my volunteer work in French."	Have a date and talk English
J'ai aidé et conseillé une amie francophone quand elle a rompé avec son chum "I helped and gave advice to a Francophone friend when she broke up with her boyfriend."	The biggest risk for me is to talk with canadian person and I want to be his/her friend
Reserve un chambre à un hotel à Tadoussac en francais "Reserving a room at a hotel in Tadoussac (QC) in French."	Take a membership at Rideau Theater (English film)
J'ai remplie mon formulaire pour le medecin(?) en francais "I filled out my health questionnaire at the doctor's office in French."	Write a ltter of intention in English for getting a scholarship
Conversations avec mes colocataires en francais "Conversations with my roommates in French. "	I wrote a short story in English

Some of these risks were unique and new to the Passport, while others were variations of similar risks that were already part of the Passport. It is not clear whether learners in some cases proposed risks because they had not read through the existing list

thoroughly, because they felt that the risks they proposed included important new nuances (even if the situation was mostly equivalent with the one described in the Passport), or because they simply enjoyed engaging with the propose your own risk section in the Passport booklet.

        Finally, data about how many risks per person were taken are reported in Figure 4.

Figure 4
Number of Risks per Person
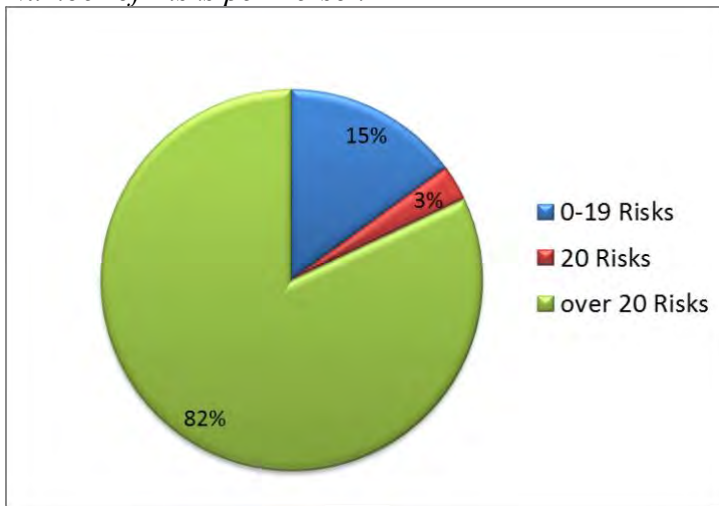
As mentioned earlier, the minimum number of risks required for the Passport to be considered for a prize at the end of the semester was 20. As such, it was important to determine how many learners chose to participate with the "bare minimum" and how many exceeded this goal. Figure 4 indicates that a total of 15% of the total sample (83 participants) did not achieve the goal of completing 20 risks in one semester, 3% (15 participants) completed exactly 20 risks (i.e., the minimum required), and the remaining 82% (456 participants) took more than 20 risks.

        Table 6 unpacks these data further by providing more details about each learner group and the number of risks taken within several range levels. In terms of exceeding the minimum requirement 341 participants (62% of the total sample) took 31 or more risks (about 50% more than the minimum) and 266 participants (48%) took 41 or more risks (about 100% more than the minimum).

Table 6
Number of Risks for French and English Learners

Number of Risks (range)	Number of French Learners	%	Number of English Learners	%	Total	%
0-19	78	26%	5	2%	83	15%
20 exactly	7	2%	9	3%	16	3%
21-30	68	23%	46	18%	114	21%
31-40	41	14%	34	13%	75	14%
41-50	38	13%	23	9%	61	11%
51-60	24	8%	24	9%	48	9%
61-70	12	4%	22	9%	34	6%
71-80	9	3%	24	9%	33	6%
81-90	6	2%	19	7%	25	5%
91-100	6	2%	10	4%	16	3%
101-110	1	0%	12	5%	13	2%
<111	6	2%	30	12%	36	6%

Results Part II: Participant Comments and Reflections

The Linguistic Risk-Taking Passports generated a total of 546 qualitative comments and reflections (345 from French learners and 201 from English learners). It should be emphasized that these were spontaneous and there were no requirements to include comments in the passport and no thematic suggestions or specific questions were posed in the comment spaces. The attested comments and reflections ranged from a single word or a phrase to several sentences in length.[17] Three themes related to the research questions of this article emerged: 1) anxiety; 2) difficulty; 3) enjoyment, new discoveries, and empowerment.

Theme 1: Anxiety

As mentioned earlier, the construct of linguistic risk encapsulates feelings of discomfort, anxiety, and stress along with feelings of enjoyment and achievement. It recognizes that these are natural and normal emotions in language learning, especially when it comes to using the language in real-life situations outside of the language-classroom. A number of comments in the Passport overtly referred to fear, anxiety, nervousness and stress. These were usually in response to a specific risk in the list included in the Passport. In other words, these were situations that learners considered to be high risk and they marked them as such in the designated box; in addition, they felt like providing a qualitative comment explaining why this was high risk for them or emphasizing that this risk was particularly high for them. A sample of such comments follows. All data are reported in their original form without any corrections in grammar or punctuation.

(1)   When I go to order food I always fear I don't know the names of foods and it is really risking for me.
(2)   I sent an email to the university for the code [password] of my email that I had forgotten I was scared to make mistakes

(3)   I am afraid to make error when I want to be clear in my message
(4)   I would love to post often something in English on Facebook but im afraid to make a mistake because all of my friends will read it :(
(5)   J'ai trouvé que j'étais extrêmement nerveuse laissé un message vocal en français! "I found that I was extremely nervous leaving a voicemail in French!"
(6)   C'est plus facile de parler avec un proche parce qu'il ne vous juge pas
"It is easier to talk to someone who is close to you, since they do not judge you"
(7)   E!! Très effrayant
"[In response to risk #42: *Choosing to submit an academic assignment in French instead of English*] Wow!! Very scary"
(8)   Je suis très intimidé en essayant de parler français aux francophones
"I am very intimidated when I try to speak French to Francophones."
(9)   J'ai trouvé quand j'ai essayé de parler francais avec quelqu'un, il avait beaucoup de jugement.
"I found that when I tried to speak French with someone, there was a lot of judgement."

It is important to acknowledge the potential high degree of individual variability and idiosyncrasy that these data might represent. When learners report feelings of anxiety, fear or stress, those are based on a number of individual factors that may vary from one participant to another, and thus the reported results cannot necessarily be viewed as representative of the entire sample of participants. In other words, what constitutes high-risk for one learner may constitute low or medium risk for others (even if they have similar proficiency). In addition, it must be acknowledged that situational factors also add a layer of complexity. That is, even the same learner may rate a given situation (e.g., ordering food at the cafeteria) as low risk at one point (e.g., when they face a supportive interlocutor, when they are feeling relaxed or happy in general at that moment, etc.) and as high risk at another point (e.g., when they face a non-supportive interlocutor, when they are having a bad day, etc.). As such, the qualitative data presented above should be interpreted with caution and may simply be an indication that linguistic risk-taking is able to raise awareness of emotional aspects of language learning and help learners recognize this part of the process rather than a strong statement suggesting that a certain situation is necessarily always anxiety-inducing for a large number of learners. Additionally, some of the learners' comments may not be sufficiently well formulated or explained due to the learners' level of proficiency in the target language. Follow-up studies that involve qualitative interviews will be able to shed more light on the depth of the written comments and allow learners to explain their experiences better. Such studies are ongoing and will be reported in the future.

Theme 2: Difficulty

The second theme is related to the first one in that it describes challenges but was coded as distinct because the comments did not overtly orient to emotions. They referred more directly to the level of difficulty of a situation, without specific reference to fear or discomfort. It should also be noted that difficulty may ensue not only from the type of situation or context but also from linguistic aspects related to the type of task or discourse. For example, watching a movie or a play might be challenging due to the specific vocabulary used, the rate of speech, and the type of discourse that such authentic activities involve.

(10)   beaucoup plus difficile à changer la langue pendant une semaine (contre une journée)
"[In response to risk #47: *I switched the language of my smart phone or tablet to English for one day,* and risk #48: *I switched the language of my smart phone or tablet to English for one day* and risk.] Much more difficult to change the language for a week (as opposed to a day)"

(11)   c'est plus difficle à regarder un film sans soutitres; des gens parlent vite!
"It's more difficult to watch a movie without subtitles; people talk fast!"

(12)   Je sens que si j'essayais d'acheter un billet en francais peut-etre j'arriverais à un autre destination
"[in response to risk #34: *I bought a bus ticket or made other travel arrangements in English.*] I have the feeling that if I tried buying a ticket in French, I would maybe end up arriving at the wrong destination"

(13)   Quand j'ai fais mon mieux, il y avait aussi beaucoup des difficultés pour les gens de me comprendre.
"When I did my best, there still were lots of difficulties for people to understand me."

(14)   [In response to risk #25: *I made a phone call in English.*] English phone call is sooo hard for me! The most frequent qwords I said were 'Pardon!'

(15)   [In response to risk #65: *I watched a movie or a show at home in English with French subtitles.*] It was so hard!

(16)   [In response to risk #67: *I went to see a play in English*] VERY HARD

Theme 3: Enjoyment, New Discoveries, and Empowerment

The qualitative data showed evidence of learners enjoying their participation in the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative, of making new discoveries in terms of authentic activities they could undertake in their second language, and of feeling empowered. Sometimes these comments were expressed with regard to the overall experience of participating in the Initiative and other times responding to specific risks in the Passport or specific situations learners encountered through the completion of a given risk.

(17)   This is a good initiative and I love it and push me to use English (practice) for my good, well done!

(18)   Let the little things in life tickle you

(19)   [In response to risk #63: *I subscribed to a podcast feed in English*] Loved it, I listen to at least one a day (1h long) on my walk to university. Good podcasts: Heath Code, Rise and Conquest, Adulting

(20)   [In response to risk #21: *I used English at the uOttawa bookstore.*] The conversation was kind of relaxed because I had learned what I meant

(21)   [In response to risk #24: *I spoke French to a friend with whom I normally speak English.*] Il était une experience amusant
"It was a fun experience."

(22)   J'ai beaucoup aimé l'idée de cette passeport. Elle m'a permis de faire des choses dans un manière plus amusant et interactif.
"I liked this passport a lot. It allowed me to do things in a more fun and interactive way."

(23)   [In response to risk # 41: *I made a social media post in French.*] J'aimais cette experience
"I loved this experience."

(24)   [In response to risk # 29: *I sang Karaoke in French.*] J'ai chanté Papaoutais à
karaoké.
"I sang *Papaoutai* [popular song in French by the artist Stromae] at a Karaoke
place."

(25)   Ce semestre, il m'est facile de prendre des risques en français puisque 3 des 4
cours sont en français! Cependant, il y avait beaucoup de risques sur cette liste que
je ne serais pas capable de faire en classe, donc c'était amusant de les essayer
"This semester it is easy for me to take risks in French since 3 of my 4 courses are in
French! However, there were a lot of risks on this list that I was not able to do in
class, so it was fun to try them."

(26)   Les risques que j'ai proposé était le plus difficile pour moi!, pendant cette
activité, je me suis rendu compte que j'ai plusieurs occasions de parler français dans
ma vie quotidienne dont je ne profite pas.
"The risks that I proposed were the most difficult ones for me! During this activity I
realized that I had various opportunities do speak French in my daily live that I
wasn't taking advantage of."

(27)   Je vais utiliser quelques risques dans ce passeport afin d'ameliorer ma
competence en Coréen (ma 3e langue)
"I will use some of the risks in this passport in order to improve my competence in
Korean (my third language)."

(28)   [In response to risk #62: I listened to 5 songs by Canadian artists in French.]
JJ'ai cree une liste sur spotify de 500 chansons
"I created a list with 500 songs on Spotify."

(29)   Cette passeport m'a aidé beaucoup à prendre des risques. J'ai une mauvaise
anxiété avec des autres personnes, et quand j'essaye parler en français avec les
autres, je trouve que j'ai moins d'anxiété. J'aimerais dire merci à ma professeure […]
pour me donner la passporte aussie. Madam […] m'a aidé beaucoup avec mon
écriture français et mes discours en français. Grâce à cette passeporte, j'ai décidé
appliquer travailler avec VIA Rail [Canadian Passanger Rail] sur le train parce que
les gens qui travaille sur le train doivent parler et français et en anglais. Cette
passeporte m'a donné la courage pour appliquer.
"This passport helped me a lot to take risks. I have a bad anxiety with other people
and when I try to speak in French with others, I find that I have less anxiety.[18]
[…]Thanks to this passport, I decided to apply for work with VIA Rail [Canadian
passenger rail company] on the train because people who work on the train have to
speak both French and English. This passport gave me the courage to apply. Thank
you. "

(30)   C'est ma vie en francais! Honnetement je le fais pour ce passeport!
"It's my life in French! Honestly, I'm doing it because of this passport!"

Discussion, Implications, and Limitations

Discussion

Overall, the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative and its Passport generated a rich
corpus of participant usage patterns and qualitative comments. Turning to the research
questions for this study, RQ 1 focused on the patterns attested through the Passport and
whether they offered validity evidence for linguistic risk-taking as a useful approach to
language teaching and learning. The usefulness of linguistic risk-taking as an approach
to language teaching and learning (supplementing classroom instruction) can be seen in

several ways. First, the patterns indicated a high degree of engagement with the tool, and the concept of risk in language learning. Eighty-two percent of the participants exceeded or greatly exceeded the goal of taking 20 risks per semester (recall Figure 4). In terms of types of skills, the usage patterns indicated that oral interaction risks were most common. This is an indication of usefulness for a supplementary activity designed for outside of the classroom because oral interaction skills are best practiced in real life while reading, writing, and listening lend themselves better to classroom instruction and at-home activities.

The linguistic risk-taking Passport is also useful to teachers, as they are able to find out about what kind of activities their students find most challenging outside of the classroom and subsequently tailor classroom instruction to those. For example, the most common risks marked as high by a sizeable percentage of learners (recall Table 4) can inspire classroom activities that can better prepare learners linguistically, strategically, and culturally to engage in such activities in real life. As a concrete application of this idea, the finding that using the telephone is perceived as high risk by learners in real life prompted some teachers at the institution to do phone call simulations and other relevant activities in the classroom (Griffiths & Slavkov, 2021; Griffiths, 2019). The variety of proposed risks by learners, in addition to the existing list of risks in the Passport, can also be viewed as validity evidence for the usefulness of the tool, since it stimulates autonomy and self-direction in language learning. The fact that learners proposed a high number of additional risks is yet another indicator of the engaging nature of the tool and the general approach behind it.

The second research question asked whether the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative encourages learners to use the target language outside the language classroom. This question was addressed by the Passport use patterns which indicating a wide variety of applications that learners found for their second language skills in real life. That is, the usage patterns attested suggest that learners were encouraged by the Initiative to proactively seek authentic situations in their second language as opportunities for authentic practice. In addition, many of the qualitative comments indicated that the Passport opened their eyes to multiple new ways of practicing their second language in real life and gave them a list of opportunities that they had not previously thought of (recall theme three, examples 25 and 26 in particular). Another positive aspect reported by the participants was their level of recognition that many of the activities in the Passport were difficult, but with practice and perseverance they can be completed. In other words, increasing the use of the target language outside of the classroom was seen as feasible to them.

A number of learners reported new discoveries, new activities, and new pleasures in using the second language outside of the classroom. This relates to the third research question, regarding the level of enjoyment associated with the Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative. As indicated in the qualitative comments, some learners overtly praised the Initiative for offering them interesting, fun, and interactive ways of applying their second language skills to real-life situations. Others reported specific risks they found enjoyable while using the Passport and showed enthusiasm for taking them. For example, a learner reported listening to not just 5 songs in the second language as required in the Passport but making a playlist of 500 songs (recall theme 3, example 28). Others reported enjoying social activities or outings with friends in the second language, getting into the habit of watching their favourite movies or sports shows in the second language, and so on.

Overall, the results of this study are strongly related to the literature on positive psychology in language learning (MacIntyre & Gregersen, 2012a, 2012b; MacIntyre &

Mercer, 2015; MacIntyre, 2021) discussed earlier in this article. For example, the qualitative results reported under Theme 3 fit well within the idea that a strategic focus on positive emotions encouraged by teachers or the tools that they use can facilitate language learning and create emotional resources for increased resiliency, community building, and openness to exploration. Learners reported various positive experiences related not only to language learning but also to general well-being and thriving in life. For example, learners reported overcoming anxiety and mustering the courage to apply for jobs that required use of their second language; seeking enjoyment in language learning and using their imagination to expand their strategies and transfer them to the learning of additional languages, other than English and French; and generally trying to "live" in the target language as a result of being exposed to the Passport. This offers evidence of the potential empowering and transformational effects of applying approaches grounded in positive psychology to language teaching and learning, and thus moving away from traditional deficiency perspectives.

With regard to RQ 4, the qualitative data about awareness of and reflection on the discomforts of second language learning offered a number of explicit references to anxiety, nervousness, stress or fear. In some cases, there was also mention of the fact that by taking linguistic risks one can learn to overcome such feelings and turn them into achievements (e.g., theme three, example 29). This suggests that the Passport did offer learners opportunities to develop strategies to reduce or overcome anxiety and that the Initiative can lead to empowering language learning and life experiences. Even just raising awareness of which situations might be stress-inducing with the help of the Passport can be seen as a step towards recognizing negative feelings and working on overcoming them through repeated targeted practice. The quantitative data also offered some modest support for the idea that by repeating risks, anxiety levels may decrease and comfort levels may increase: a decreasing pattern on the H(igh) M(edium) L(ow) scale was attested for 17% of the risks that were repeated in the corpus. However, this pattern needs to be explored further with a more sophisticated self-report scale (i.e., the three-point HML scale used in the Passport can be replaced by a 7-point Likert scale). A digital passport app (see next section) which has already been developed addresses this issue.

Abstracting from the specific research questions, it was found that even though the population of English learners in the sample was smaller than the population of French learners, the number of risks taken by English learners was much higher (by approximately 20%). This finding may seem surprising, but it receives an explanation in contextual factors. Even though the University of Ottawa is a bilingual institution, it operates in an English majority setting (i.e., the city of Ottawa and the province of Ontario where the university is located are predominantly English-speaking). As such, it is much easier and sometimes even unavoidable for English learners to immerse themselves in the English language, whereas French learners have to be more proactive in seeking opportunities to use French. In this sense, many of the situations described in the Passport tool are daily necessities of life in an English majority setting. The implication of this is that that English learners would be exposed to the target language much more frequently and will have more opportunities to take risks and increase their confidence in using the target language. This is also reflected by the higher number of risks marked as low by the English learners (7183) in comparison with the low risks reported by the French learners (3206) indicated in Table 6 earlier.

Implications

The Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative offers several benefits to language learners: it serves as an awareness-raising tool that helps them face their fears and anxieties on the one hand, and discover feelings of empowerment and enjoyment on the other; it also helps learners realize what aspects of the target language are particularly challenging for them and at the same time discover new and creative ways of practicing that language in authentic settings outside of the classroom. The Initiative encourages language socialization and integrating the skills acquired in the classroom into common real-life experiences revolving around relationships with others (friendships, love), professional activities (applying for jobs, scholarships, volunteering), leisure (music, film, theatre, sports), and, of course, media and technology. The linguistic risk-taking approach to language teaching and learning is not meant to replace classroom teaching, but to supplement it, offering an anchor into real-life applications, which can potentially lead to a higher degree of autonomy and life-long commitment to continued language learning. The Initiative was conceived with the hope of exceeding the limited benefits of one-semester language courses common at post-secondary institutions and putting learners on a path to autonomous life-long learning. The implications of this approach can be far-reaching as interested practitioners and institutions around the world can use the experience and the model presented here and design their own linguistic risk-taking initiatives, adapting the passport tool to their individual contexts.

Indeed, beyond the University of Ottawa context where the Initiative was developed, several collaborative linguistic risk-taking projects have been launched with partners across Canada, in Europe, and in Japan (Cajka et al. 2023; Slavkov, 2020). Although originally developed for French and English learners, linguistic risk-taking can be employed in the teaching and learning of other languages, as some of these collaborative initiatives have demonstrated (recall also example 27, where a participant in the Initiative aptly commented on the transferability of the Passport to additional languages). Technological innovations, including the creation of the Linguistic Risk app have also been implemented as a logical next step following the paper passport booklet (Slavkov & Griffiths, in preparation; Roodi & Slavkov, 2022). The digital app offers a significant potential in terms of increasing the level of gamification associated with linguistic risk-taking (i.e., higher engagement) as well as better streamlining of research data collection and analysis.

It should be noted that beyond university level language learning contexts, applications of the linguistic risk-taking approach have also been developed in K-12 school settings and non-university adult language learning settings. Finally, the construct of linguistic risk is also relevant to the rehabilitation and health sciences. A pilot initiative based on the one described here was developed at the speech language pathology clinic of the University of Ottawa and has been used to empower people who stutter (regardless of whether they are monolingual, bilingual, or multilingual) to use their language skills in daily situations that may seem challenging to them. Thus, linguistic risk-taking promises to have impact not only in the field of language learning but also in the field of speech language disorders.

Limitations

It must be acknowledged that the Initiative cannot be viewed as one-size-fit-all. Even though the Passport data did not contain criticisms or reports of negative experiences by learners, other research tools (interviews and questionnaires) have

indicated that a small percentage of participants have found the approach not particularly relevant to their learning style or even called it childish (see Rhéaume et al., 2021). Some learners have also reported participating not necessarily because of their enthusiasm or intrinsic motivation but because of external factors, such as requirements set by their language professor. While such experiences are rare, they need to be acknowledged and mitigated by offering alternative options to learners (e.g., allowing learners to choose not to participate or offering enough flexibility so that learners can find meaningful ways of participation based on their individual objectives and learning styles).

Conclusion

Language learning in institutional settings has been undergoing various changes over the past several decades. Emphasis on communication, socialization, real-life language use, and learner autonomy are a few examples of new thinking in both theoretical and practical respects. More recently, an emphasis on positive psychology and gamification has also entered the scene, in an effort to make the process more rewarding and engaging rather than strict learning for the sake of learning alone. Unprecedented advances of technology, not only in language learning apps, but also in machine translation and artificial intelligence (AI) applications are also having transformative impacts on the field. Within this broader context, linguistic risk-taking represents an innovative research paradigm focusing on the question of how to harness existing theoretical advances and practical applications in making the language learning process less stressful, more successful, and more rewarding to individuals, contributing not only to their skills set but also to their general well-being and quality of life. This new research and development programme is still in its incipient stages, but with several ongoing studies and partnerships already in progress, it promises to inform the field in new and interesting ways in the near future.

Correspondence should be addressed to Nikolay Slavkov
Email: nikolay.slavkov@uottawa.ca

Notes:

---

[1] Canada is often perceived as a bilingual country, but a more accurate characterization would be as a multilingual country with two official languages (English and French) mainly at the federal level. In daily life, in addition to English and French, the Canadian linguistic context

comprises of various languages spoken by immigrant populations and by Indigenous people; the latter have been ignored and marginalized over a long period of time and only recently awareness and recognition of their role and place in Canadian society has begun to emerge. In my opinion this also applies to the University of Ottawa where more work can be done to bring to the forefront the richness and diversity of languages and cultures other than English and French.

[2] Of course, there are many students who may speak other languages, in addition to English and/or French. For the purposes of this article, reference to the second language means the second official language of the individual, English or French. For many, the term second language is problematic as it may devalue or obscure additional languages that multilinguals may have in their repertoires. I adhere to the institutional terminological convention at this university, while acknowledging that second language may not be an accurate term in all cases and appropriate alternatives need to be sought in the future.

[3] The term first language can be problematic in cases where an individual's first language is neither English nor French, in cases of simultaneous bilinguals, in cases of language shift within an individual, etc. (for an overview see Slavkov, 2018, 2016). In this article I use it as a shortcut to refer to the first official language of an individual, which amounts to the dominant or stronger official language.

[4] Some learners may choose to submit the passport even if they have taken fewer than 20 risks (i.e., even if not eligible for a prize), as indicated in the results section.

[5] Linguistic Risk-Taking Initiative Website: https://www.uottawa.ca/about-us/official-languages-bilingualism-institute/ccerbal/research-groups/linguistic-risk.

[6] However, see Atkinson (1957) and a body of later work dedicated to risk-taking in other contexts, not related to language specifically.

[7] The precise relationship between WTC and linguistic risk-taking raises a number of interesting questions, which are beyond the scope of this paper. However, our team is currently conducting an empirical study that administers WTC measures in conjunction with participation in linguistic risk-taking activities and will report on the outcomes in the future.

[8] The courses ranged from beginner to advanced according to an internal institutional scale. The Passport tool was designed to apply across a variety of levels. Pursuing an analysis of the data by learner proficiency level falls outside of the scope of this article.

[9] During the data entry process 21 participants were excluded (not reported in Table 1) since their passport completion patterns suggested mechanical rather than meaningful participation (e.g., checking all risks in the booklet, which is unrealistic within the timespan of a single semester; checking the boxes corresponding exactly to the first 20 risks listed in the passport, rather than taking a variety of risks from the passport; not providing any meaningful qualitative comments). Data from learners who had completed fewer than 20 risks were retained, as long as the patterns and comments appeared meaningful.

[10] Occasionally a risk may not lend itself to repetition (e.g., *I switched the language of my phone to French permanently)*.

[11] The category 'other' was used for risks that were difficult to classify.

[12] These data have to be interpreted with caution since the number of risks in the passport tool is not balanced and the oral interaction risks represent the highest proportion (approx. 50%).

[13] Approximately 17% of the participants chose to report no value on the optional High/Medium/Low scale included with each risk in the passport. This could be due to a mixture of reasons: for example, it could be that they found it tedious to check an additional box for each risk taken, that they did not find the tasks completed to represent risks at all, or that they did not fully understand the instructions for completing the passport. These participants' data are excluded from this table and future improvements in the passport's design are planned to address this issue.

[14] Text from French learners is translated into English by the author of this article. Material in square brackets is inserted by the author to facilitate understanding or provide context. Material in parentheses is original (as used by participants).

[15] This refers to a product with a bilingual label where the learner chose to read the French label.

[16] This refers to a university student doing promotional presentations of a post-secondary French immersion program to high school students who are prospective university applicants.

[17] Longer written reflections were elicited on specific themes and through specific questions using logs, journals, and other assignments as well as through end-of-semester questionnaires. Discussion of these data, however, falls outside the scope of this article.

[18] This comment illustrates crossing the themes that emerged from the data (i.e. anxiety as well as enjoyment, new discoveries, and empowerment). This is a common phenomenon in qualitative analysis.

References

Albero, B., & Poteaux, N. (2014). Enjeux et dilemmes de l'autonomie : une expérience d'autoformation à l'université : étude de cas (T. 3). Éditions de la Maison des sciences de l'homme.

Atkinson, J. W. (1957). Motivational determinants of risk-taking behavior. *Psychological Review*, *64*(6p1), 359–372. https://doi.org/10.1037/h0043445

Auerbach, C. F., & Silverstein, L. B. (2003). *Qualitative data: An introduction to coding and analysis*. New York University Press.

Beebe, L. M. (1983). Risk-taking and the language learner. In H. W. Seliger & M. H. Long (Eds.), *Classroom oriented research in Second Language Acquisition* (pp. 39–66). Newbury House.

Benson, P. (2007). Autonomy in language teaching and learning. *Language Teaching*, *40*(1), 21–40. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0261444806003958

Benson, P. (2011). What's new in autonomy? *The Language Teacher*, *35*(4), 15–18. https://doi.org/10.37546/JALTTLT35.4-4

Boyatzis, R. E. (1998). *Transforming qualitative information: Thematic analysis and code development*. SAGE Publications.

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3,* 77-101. https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706qp063oa

Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2012). Thematic analysis. In H. Cooper, P. M. Camic, D. L. Long, A. T. Panter, D. Rindskopf, & K. J. Sher (Eds.), *APA handbook of research methods in psychology, Vol. 2: Research designs: Quantitative, qualitative, neuropsychological, and biological* (pp. 57–71). American Psychological Association. https://doi.org/10.1037/13620-000

Cajka, S, Griffiths, E., Slavkov, N. & Vetter, E. (2023). Linguistic risk-taking and informal language learning: From Canada to Austria. In D. Toffoli, G. Sockett & M. Kusyk (Eds.), *Language learning and leisure: Informal second language learning in the 21st century.* De Gruyter Mouton.

Cervantes, I. M. (2014). The role of risk-taking behavior in the development of speaking skills in ESL classrooms. *Revista de Lenguas Modernas*, *19*, 421–435. Retrieved [September 15, 2019] from https://revistas.ucr.ac.cr/index.php/rlm/article/view/13952

Collentine, J., & Freed, B.F. (2004). Learning context and its effects on second language acquisition: Introduction. *Studies in Second Language Acquisition, 26*(2), 153–171. https://doi.org/10.1017/s0272263104262015

Cook, V. J. (1991). The poverty-of-the-stimulus argument and multicompetence. *Second Language Research, 7*(2), 103-117. https://doi.org/10.1177/026765839100700203

Cook, V. J. (1999). Going beyond the native speaker in language teaching. *TESOL Quarterly, 33*(2), 185-209. https://doi.org/10.2307/3587717

Cook, V. J. *(2013).* Multi-competence. In C. A. Chapelle (Ed.), *The encyclopedia of applied linguistics* (pp. 3768–3774). Wiley-Blackwell.

Council of Europe. (2001). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment.* Cambridge University Press. https://rm.coe.int/16802fc1bf

Council of Europe. (2018, February). *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages: Learning, teaching, assessment. Companion volume with new descriptors.* Council of Europe. https://rm.coe.int/cefr-companion-volume-with-new-descriptors-2018/1680787989

Cummins, J. (2008). Teaching for transfer: Challenging the two solitudes assumption in bilingual education. In: N.H. Hornberger (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of language and education.* Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-0-387-30424-3_116

Dehbozorgi, E. (2012). Effects of attitude towards language learning and risk-taking on EFL student's proficiency. *International Journal of English Linguistics*, *2*(2), 41–48. https://doi.org/10.5539/ijel.v2n2p41

Dewaele, J.-M. (2012). Risk-taking and foreign language learning. In M. Byram & A. Hu (Eds.), *Routledge Encyclopedia of Language Teaching and Learning* (2nd ed., pp. 598–600). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203101513

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2014). The two faces of Janus? Anxiety and enjoyment in the foreign language classroom. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching*, *4*(2), 237–274. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.5

Dewaele, J.-M., & MacIntyre, P. D. (2016). Foreign language enjoyment and foreign language classroom anxiety. The right and left feet of FL learning. In P. D. MacIntyre, T. Gregersen and S. Mercer (Eds.), *Positive psychology in SLA.* (pp. 215-236). Multilingual Matters. https://doi.org/10.21832/9781783095360-010

Dewaele, J.-M., Witney, J., Saito, K., & Dewaele, L. (2018). Foreign language enjoyment and anxiety: The effect of teacher and learner variables. *Language Teaching Research*, *22*(6), 676–697. https://doi.org/10.1177/1362168817692161

Ellis, R. (2009). Task-based language teaching: Sorting out the misunderstandings. *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 19(3), 221-246. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1473-4192.2009.00231.x

Ellis, R., Skehan, P., Li, S., Shintani, N., & Lambert, C. (2019). *Task-based language teaching: Theory and practice.* Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/9781108643689

Gass, S., & Selinker, L. (2008). *Second Language Acquisition: An introductory course.* (3rd ed.). Routledge. https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203932841

Germain-Rutherford, A. (2021). Action-oriented approaches: Being at the heart of the action. In T. Beaven & F. Rosell-Aguilar (Eds.), *Innovative language pedagogy report* (pp. 91-96). https://doi.org/10.14705/rpnet.2021.50.1241

Gilbert, L. S., Jackson, K., & di Gregorio, S. (2014). Tools for analyzing qualitative data: The history and relevance of qualitative data analysis software. In J. M. Spector, M.D. Merrill, J. Elen, & M. J. Bishop (Eds.), *Handbook of research on educational communications and technology* (4th ed., pp. 221–236). Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4614-3185-5_18

Gremmo, M.-J., & Riley, P. (1995). Autonomy, self-direction and self-access in language teaching and learning: The history of an idea. *System*, *23*(2), 151–164. https://doi.org/10.1016/0346-251X(95)00002-2

Griffiths, E. & Slavkov, N. (2021) Linguistic risk-taking: A bridge between classroom and outside world. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics,* 24, 2, 127-158. https://doi.org/10.37213/cjal.2021.31308

Griffiths, E. (2019). *L'autonomie ne se fait pas toute seule : linguistic risk-taking as a vehicle for communication strategy instruction.* (Unpublished major research paper). University of Ottawa, Ottawa.

Grosjean, F. (1989). Neurolinguists, beware! The bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person. *Brain and language*, *36*(1), 3-15. https://doi.org/10.1016/0093-934X(89)90048-5

Holden, C.L., & Sykes, J.M. (2011). Leveraging mobile games for place-based language learning. *International Journal of Game-Based Learning*, *1*(2), 1–18. https://doi.org/10.4018/ijgbl.2011040101

Kapp, K. (2012). *The gamification of learning and instruction: Game-based methods and strategies for training and education.* Pfeiffer

Karimi, M., & Biria, R. (2017). Impact of risk-taking strategies on male and female EFL learners' test performance: The case of multiple-choice questions. *Theory and Practice in Language Studies*, *7*(10), 892–899. https://doi.org/10.17507/tpls.0710.10

Lantolf, J.P. (2000). *Sociocultural theory and second language learning*. Oxford University Press.

Lazaraton, A. (2014). Second language speaking. In M. Celce-Murcia, D.M. Brinton, & M.A. Snow (Eds.), *Teaching English as a second or foreign language* (4th ed., pp. 106–120). National Geographic Learning.

Little, D. (1991). *Learner autonomy 1: Definitions, issues and problems.* Authentik.

Little, D. (1999). Strategies, counselling and cultural difference: Why we need an anthropological understanding of learner autonomy. Bells: Barcelona English literature and language studies, 10, 17–33. https://raco.cat/index.php/Bells/article/view/102823.

Long, M. H. (1985). A role for instruction in second language acquisition: Task-based language teaching. In K. Hyltenstam & M. Pienemann (Eds.), *Modelling and assessing Second Language Acquisition* (Vol. 18, pp. 77–99). Multilingual Matters.

Macintyre, P.D., & Mercer, S. (2015). Introducing positive psychology to SLA. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching 4*(2), 153-172. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2014.4.2.2

Macintyre, P. D., & Gregersen, T. (2012a). Affect: The role of language anxiety and other emotions in language learning. In S. Mercer, S. Ryan, & M. Williams (Eds.), *Language learning psychology* (pp. 103-118). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9781137032829_8

Macintyre, P. D. (2007). Willingness to communicate in the second language: Understanding the decision to speak as a volitional process. *Modern Language Journal*, *91*(4), 564–576. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2007.00623.x

Macintyre, P. D. (2021). Exploring applications of positive psychology in SLA. In K. Budzińska & O. Majchrzak (Eds.), *Positive psychology in second and foreign language education* (pp. 3–17). Springer Cham. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-64444-4_1

Macintyre, P. D., & Legatto, J. J. (2011). A dynamic system approach to willingness to communicate: Developing an idiodynamic method to capture rapidly changing affect. *Applied Linguistics*, *32*(2), 149–171. https://doi.org/10.1093/applin/amq037

Macintyre, P. D., Clément, R., Dörnyei, Z., & Noels, K. A. (1998). Conceptualizing willingness to communicate in an L2: A situational model of L2 confidence and affiliation. *The Modern Language Journal*, *82*(4), 545–562. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.1998.tb05543.x

Macintyre, P.D., & Gregersen, T. (2012b). Emotions that facilitate language learning: The positive broadening power of the imagination. *Studies in Second Language Learning and Teaching, 2*(2)*, 193-213. https://doi.org/10.14746/ssllt.2012.2.2.4

MacLennan, H. (2018). *Two solitudes*. M. Gnarowski. (Ed.). Macmillan of Canada.(Original work published 1945). https://doi.org/10.1515/9780773553897

McGonigal, J. (2011). *Reality is broken: Why games make us better and how they can change the world.* Penguin Press.

Nunan, D. (2004). *Task-based language teaching*. Cambridge University Press. https://doi.org/10.1017/CBO9780511667336

Prensky M. (2001). Digital natives, digital immigrants part 2: Do they really think differently? *On the Horizon, 9*(6), 1–6. https://doi.org/10.1108/10748120110424843

Rhéaume, M., Slavkov, N. & Séror, J. (2021) Linguistic risk-taking in second language learning: The case of French at a Canadian Bilingual Institution. *Foreign Language Annals, 54*(4), 1214-1237. https://doi.org/10.1111/flan.12561

Roberts, C., & Cooke, M. (2009). Authenticity in the adult ESOL classroom and beyond. *TESOL Quarterly*, 43(4), 620–642. https://doi.org/10.1002/j.1545-7249.2009.tb00189.x

Roodi, F. & Slavkov, N. (2022). Gamification in L2 teaching and learning: Linguistic risk-taking at play. *OLBI Journal, 12*(1), 185-205. https://doi.org/10.18192/olbij.v12i1.6000

Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3rd ed.). Sage Publications.

Samuda, V., & Bygate, M. (2007). *Tasks in Second Language Learning*. Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1057/9780230596429

Séror, J., & Slavkov, N. (2019) Soutenir la prise de risques linguistiques chez l'apprenant langagier. Soutenir la prise de risques linguistiques chez l'apprenant langagier. *Journal de l'immersion*, 41(1), 9-13.

Slavkov, N. & Griffiths, E. (in preparation). The development of a mobile application to promote linguistic risk-taking. The development of the linguistic risk-taking initiative at the University of Ottawa. *Canadian Modern Language Review, 75*(3), 254–272. https://doi.org/10.3138/cmlr.2018-0202

Slavkov, N. (2016). In search of the right questions: Language background profiling at Ontario public schools. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics*, *19*(1), 22–45. https://journals.lib.unb.ca/index.php/CJAL/article/view/22320

Slavkov, N. (2018) What is your 'first' language in bilingual Canada? A study of language background profiling at publicly-funded elementary schools across three provinces, *International Journal of Bilingualism and Bilingual Education*, *21*(*1*)*,* 20-37. https://doi.org/10.1080/13670050.2015.1126217

Slavkov, N. (2020) Where the magic happens: Fostering language learning, bilingualism and multilingualism through linguistic risk-taking. In T. Tinnefeld (Ed.), *The magic of language: Productivity in linguistics and language teaching* (pp. 47-69). Saarland University of Applied Sciences Press.

Slavkov, N., Melo-Pfeifer, S., & Kerschhofer-Puhalo, N. (2022). *The changing face of the "native speaker": Perspectives from multilingualism and globalization*. De Gruyter Mouton. https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501512353

Willis, D., & Willis, J. (2007). *Doing Task-Based Teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.