Not Truly, Not Entirely … *Pas comme les Francophones*

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In this study, I investigate how French immersion students in two junior high schools in Alberta see themselves in Canadian society. The data come from three years of ethnographic research that included classroom observations and 94 interviews with students, teachers, administrators, and parents. This study shows how French immersion students do not belong to either legitimized group in Canada; they develop their own bilingual world and identities, which are not recognized in Canadian soci-ety. I argue for inclusion of all learners of French with varying linguistic and cultural competencies in schools and workplaces so they can contribute to Canadian political, so-cietal, and social spheres.

Key words*:* French immersion, bilingualism, Canadian society, inclusion, language policies

Dans cette étude, l'auteure analyse comment des élèves en immersion française dans deux écoles intermédiaires de l'Alberta se perçoivent au sein de la société canadienne. Les données proviennent de trois années de recherche ethnographique, incluant des observations en classe et 94 entrevues avec des élèves, des enseignants, des adminis-trateurs et des parents. L'étude explique pourquoi les élèves en immersion française n'appartiennent à aucun de deux groupes de langue officielle du Canada; ces élèves développent leurs propres monde et identité bilingues, qui ne sont pas reconnus dans la société canadienne. L'auteure prône l'inclusion de toutes les personnes qui appren-nent le français avec divers niveaux de compétences linguistiques et culturelles dans les écoles et au travail afin qu'elles puissent apporter leur contribution aux sphères politiques, sociétales et sociales au sein du pays.

Mots clés : immersion française, bilinguisme, société canadienne, politiques linguisti-ques

The establishment of language policies and the recognition of the two official languages of Canada have led to increased opportunities to learn French (Martel, 1997). In Alberta, French was not permitted as a language of instruction until 1968. In the 1970s, in response to the Official Languages Act, funding for bilingualism from Ottawa, and demands from the middle-class population, the province of Alberta started French as a second language programs in public and Catholic schools (Behiels, 2005). At that time, the goal for the French immersion program was to allow students to become functionally bilingual, learn subject content equivalent to that taught in the English-language mainstream program, and better understand the culture of Francophones [1] (native speakers of French). However, after several years learning the language, many French immersion students do not perceive themselves as belonging to either official linguistic group and they are not recognized as bilinguals in Canadian society.

Today in Canada, Anglophones and Francophones — native speakers of English and French—who continue to dominate the social and political spheres, are protected under the Official Languages Act. The Act, which was passed in 1969 and revised in 1988, recognizes English and French as the official languages of all federal institutions in Canada. The discourse of official bilingualism is a dominant one. Many people believe that to be part of one of the language groups, one has to speak as native speakers do or at least be recognized by the members of the ethno-community. Some researchers have argued that French immersion students have their own way of speaking (Calvé, 1986; Lyster, 1987). For Mougeon and Rehner (2005), French immersion students use their oral skills to communicate between themselves and their teachers but, in real-life settings, they have challenges to use their language with native French speakers. Blommaert (2005), as I will discuss later, has argued that a great deal of variation occurs among native speakers in any ethno-community, so that, although bilinguals are different from native speakers of a language, they could be considered members of the community. To understand the issue of identities and bilingualism in the changing

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[1]   For the purpose of this paper, I use the term Francophone for native speakers of French. However, this term gets complicated because of this question: who in Canada is a Francophone?

Canadian context and how students in French immersion see themselves as part of the Canadian society, I conducted sociolinguistic and ethnographic research in two French immersion junior high schools in Alberta, interviewing students, parents, teachers, and administrators about their perceptions of the students' place in Canadian society. In these changing times in which heterogeneity and multiplicity prevail, French immersion students have a role to play as legitimate members in the future of the bilingual and multilingual Canadian society.

SOCIAL AND HISTORICAL CONSTRUCTION OF BILINGUALISM AND LINGUISTIC IDENTITIES

Studies in French immersion have focused on (a) the effects of immersion on learning French as a second language; (b) the effects on English, the L1; (c) the effects of learning a second language on other school subjects; and (d) the cognitive and social influence of learning a second language on immersion students, including special needs students (Genesee, 2003, 2004; Rebuffot, 1993). Some scholars are studying multilingual students in French immersion and their willingness to maintain their heritage languages (Mady, 2008). Others have studied immigrant students' language practices at home and at school (Dagenais & Day, 1999; Dagenais, Day, & Toohey, 2006). Although some studies have examined the language practices and language socialization of French immersion students, few have discussed how bilingualism and linguistic identities are constructed from historical, social, and political discourses, and how French immersion students' view of themselves relates to these discourses.

In the context of educational settings, Heller and Martin-Jones (2001) suggested that researchers should consider for whom it is legitimate to speak, learn, and use a specific language in schools. Here, to be *legitimate* means to be accepted by others in the group when you speak their language. Heller and Martin-Jones advocated for an examination of the language issues and values that determine what variety of the language is spoken and is considered good and appropriate, and how these issues and values are connected to social, economic, and political interests. I use this notion of legitimacy not only to study language use and learning in schools, but also to formulate the question, for whom is it legitimate to

speak French (and with what competency of French?) and English or to be bilingual in Canadian society?

Blommaert (2005) argued that native speakers are often regarded as the ideal members of any ethno-linguistic community. In spite of the diversity of most urban populations in the world, a static notion of ethno-linguistic identity persists, whereby one person is thought to belong to only one language community or ethnic community. Blommaert suggested that the discourse of a homogeneous language in a specific group or community is used to demarcate a common identity. That discourse will construct a group identity (who is part of the group), and categorical identities (who is not part of the group). For this author, some of these discourses could be built by the State or organized with reference to the State. Blommaert stressed the importance of examining ethno-linguistic identities in relation to the State, because the State has great control over not only access to symbolic resources, but also their interpretation and their values. In this article, I propose to examine linguistic identities and bilingualism in light of the official bilingualism discourses, in which bilingualism is regarded as two monolingualisms as I shall note in the next section.

Gajo (2000) elaborated on the concept of social representations to understand how peoples' linguistic practices are connected to their views about society. He maintained that representations are usually social because they are shared in groups and are known to or recognizable by members of each group. According to Gajo, the pre-constructed social representations of any social manifestation are usually found in discourse. Pre-constructed social representations are generally stable and pre-organized and often institutionalized, unlike co-constructed social representations, which typically are negotiated in interactions and undergo changes in the course of the interactions. Through a discourse analysis of pre-constructed and co-constructed representations of bilingualism, I will show that students, teachers, and parents produce and reproduce a monolingual representation of bilingualism, which is often related to a larger discourse regarding for whom it is legitimate to speak a specific variety of French in Canada.

A study of bilingualism and linguistic identities requires an examination of the micro dynamics of languages, which will facilitate an un-

derstanding of their macro realities. This sociolinguistic stance is defined by (a) Gumperz's (1982) interactional sociolinguistics, which is the analysis of immediate and local phenomena; and (b) critical sociolinguistics (Heller, 2002), whereby the "description and analysis of specific language practices of historical and socially known moments are linked to a description, an interpretation and an explanation that takes into account social dynamics on a larger scale, both in the social and physical space" (p. 9). The framework of the present study is also defined by (c) the sociolinguistics for change (Auger, Dalley, & Roy, 2007; Dalley & Roy, 2008), in which social dynamics are explicitly discussed and utilized for change in schools and other public institutions. An ethnographic approach that combines interviews and classroom observations allowed me to consider what people are saying every day, and helped me to link what they said to the social context in which they operated.

STUDYING BILINGUALS AND THEIR IDENTITIES IN THE CANADIAN CONTEXT

In the Canadian context, research on official bilingualism and language policies has focused on education and federalism (Hayday, 2005) or on Francophone minorities outside Quebec (Cardinal, 2008). The notion of two founding nations has been challenged over the years in disciplines such as political science and sociology (Breton, Reitz, & Valentine, 1981). Some scholars (e.g., Duff, 2007), who have reviewed the political, theoretical, and demographic contexts that justify the support for the use of additional languages in contemporary Canadian society, have shown bilingualism and multilingualism to be cognitively, socially, and linguistically advantageous for children (and adults), as well as for Canadian society. Researchers in the field of sociolinguistics who have conducted studies into bilingualism and group identities in Canada have indicated that Canadians tend to regard bilingualism as the ability to speak English and French as two distinct linguistic systems (Budach, Roy, & Heller, 2003). For example, Heller (1999), who examined the value of bilingualism in one Toronto high school, argued that bilinguals have an advantage over monolinguals in the global economy because they are able to construct relationships with monolinguals in each of the two solitudes.

In the European context, Mondada and Gajo (2001) studied the multiple identities and languages of immigrant students in the *classes d'accueil* (reception classrooms) in French-speaking Switzerland. They found that in spite of the cultural diversity of the students, the teachers used monolingual classroom management and French was the only language valued in the classroom. Bilingualism and multilingualism as resources for learning were not recognized. Mondada and Gajo maintained that scholars view bilingualism in one of two ways. Some regard children in immersion programs as bilinguals with a certain language history, and others think of them as monolinguals learning a second language, so that "depending on one's standpoint and one's points of reference, learners are either individual bilinguals who command considerable prestige or disadvantaged groups of minorities" (p. 242). Mondada and Gajo suggested that one of the major problems with this debate is that it often takes monolingualism as its starting point, which means that "bilinguals are being judged on the basis of criteria developed for and by monolinguals" (p. 242).

Grosjean (2008) maintained that a monolingual view of bilingualism leads to negative self-judgments among bilinguals. Bilinguals are very critical of their language competencies, and many do not actually consider themselves bilinguals. In his research in the field of experimental psychology, Grosjean demonstrated that being bilingual is not the sum of two complete monolinguals but has a unique and specific linguistic configuration. In addition, when discussing cultural identities, he observed that bilinguals have certain traits: they are part of two or more cultures, and they adapt and combine aspects of the cultures involved. He defined culture as the reflection of all the facets of life of a group of people: its organization, its rules, its behaviour, its beliefs, its values, its traditions. In bilinguals' day-to-day life, the two cultures do not usually have the same importance, and some bilinguals do not accept that they are part of two worlds because they are influenced by the categorization of the cultural groups to which they belong. Grosjean believed that bilinguals identify with one culture over another, or they identity with neither culture.

In sum, these studies provide insights into how we see bilinguals and their identities. Particularly in Canada, French immersion students

are often regarded as Anglophones learning French. To date, no other research has examined the complexities of the situation of French immersion students and how these students' identities and bilingualism are linked to the official discourses of Canadian society.

METHOD

Sites

To better understand issues related to learning French in Alberta, I conducted a three-year, ethnographic and sociolinguistic study in two French immersion, junior high schools in the south of the province. The research, funded by the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada (SSHRC), ran from 2004 to 2008. Most of the data was collected between November 2004 and June 2007. Each school had students who had been studying French since kindergarten (early French immersion) and students who had started the immersion program in grade 7 (late French immersion). At the time of my study, both schools also offered regular English programs (some students were in an English only program). I collected data in both early and late French immersion streams. In this article, I will present and discuss data from the early French immersion route because these students were socialized longer in French immersion and their identities might be different from those in late French immersion.

Participants

Two public junior high schools in the southern part of the province of Alberta allowed me to pursue my research for three years in their schools. My intent was to follow the students from grade 7 to grade 9 to study how their ideas about French immersion evolved, and to see, hear, feel, and understand the day-to-day life of French immersion students and teachers. I received ethics approval from the University and the school board to interview parents, students, teachers, and administrators. I also had permission to observe in classrooms. Because the research spanned three years, I had to seek permission to collect data every year from new teachers and new administrators. Some students left French immersion after grade 7. At the beginning of the study, the participants were 12 years old. I interviewed students who agreed to be interviewed,

and parents of some of the students. Both groups had to sign a consent form. I also interviewed teachers, administrators, and two initiators of the program.

Data Collection

I used a qualitative approach involving semi-directed interviews, observations of classroom interactions, and analysis of texts relevant to French immersion.

Interviews. I conducted 94 interviews with students, parents, teachers, administrators, and initiators of the program (see Appendix). I asked the participants about their background, their choice of learning or teaching French, and their challenges and successes. I also asked about their views of bilingualism in Canada, linguistic varieties, and competencies in French. Some of the questions were also related to their learning of French (the best way to learn a second language, which teaching practices they preferred) or, for teachers, how they were teaching French.

Classroom observations. For three years, I observed each classroom once a week for four months per year, and audio-recorded some of the activities in the classes. My research assistants and I collected field notes for more than 200 hours of classroom observations. We focused our observations on language use, discourses on French (and in French), linguistic varieties, teaching practices, and language learning (how students were learning French). We also observed the students outside the classrooms and during special activities such as a school debate.

Data Analysis

I used a discourse analysis approach to understand what people said in relation to who they were and what they had experienced. Using NVivo qualitative software, I organized my data into themes such as identity, social issues, teaching methods, and code switching; and perceptions of native speakers, bilingualism, school, and language learning (Duff, 2008). The demographic data included the students' names and schools, as well as what the students told us about their family history and languages spoken.

FINDINGS

In general, students liked their experiences in French immersion. They usually said that they were bilingual but not to the extent that they would like to be. Many attended French immersion to learn a second or third language and to participate in the ideal of bilingualism of their country. In this section, I present some of the themes that were identified through interviews and observations; these themes provide insights into how students, teachers, and parents regard French immersion students in the context of Canadian society. The first theme focuses on why students choose to attend French immersion. The second relates to the interviewees' views on bilingualism and language competencies. The last theme addresses French immersion identities and *third space*. According to Bhabha (1994), third space is a situation in which two social groups with different cultural traditions negotiate a new hybridity, a common identity that is neither one nor the other. Some authors have used the term *transculturality* (Welsch, 1999) for cultural diversity that arises in a new mode as a transcultural blend rather than a juxtaposition of clearly delineated cultures. The data from the present study demonstrate that French immersion students are bilinguals who are often compared with native speakers of French and English and their identities are not recognized as legitimate in either of the two groups.

Why French Immersion?

French immersion was originally intended to provide opportunities for Anglophone students to learn French and to understand the Francophone culture. The parents that I interviewed had various reasons for sending their children to early French immersion. They saw opportunities for their children to learn a second language and to add to their cognitive, social, and linguistic skills. Several said they chose French because it is an official language of Canada.

I: *Did you ever think that sending her to another school, bilingual school, was [unintelligible] they had Spanish schools [unintelligible]. Maybe not?*

P: *Yes but it doesn't make sense in Canada right? I mean the official languages are French and English, right, so I mean even though there's not a lot of French in Alberta . . . but you're here to learn another language in Canada and it's French, not*

Chinese. I mean that's an important language especially since [unintelligible] or
Spanish. Spanish would make a lot of sense in the States.   (I: Interviewer; P: Par-
ent, 2005)

This parent, born in Ontario, had moved from Ottawa to Calgary 12 years prior to the interview. Although neither she nor her husband spoke French, she wanted her child to learn French because the family might return to Eastern Canada. Although she had a practical reason for choosing French immersion (she mentioned earlier in her interview that she wanted her child to work in Ottawa in the federal sector), she did mention that French is an official language in Canada. For her, it made sense to learn the official languages of Canada, despite the fact that Alberta does not provide many opportunities to use French. Several other parents (especially immigrants) and students also said they chose French because it is an official language of Canada and they wanted to become part of the ideal of Canadian bilingualism—that is, English and French, not Chinese or Spanish. Therefore, it appears that some parents and students ground, in the official discourses, their own choice or at least the reasons why they believe that learning French in Alberta is a good idea.

Bilingualism and Language Competencies

Students in French immersion considered themselves bilingual, but not *"entirely"* bilingual or *"truly"* bilingual because they did not speak French at the same level as native speakers of French. Students regarded their language competencies in French as not as good as native speakers' competencies; they believed that to become bilingual one has to speak both languages equally well. The parents presented the same discourse.

I: *Do you think your daughter is bilingual in French or what do you think she is?*
P: *Hm. . . . I don't hear the same kind of fluidity [that Francophones have] in her*
       speaking. And even though I think her accent is reasonable, I'm sure if I knew
       French fluent myself, it wouldn't be up to par. I'm sure that you could hear that
       she wasn't . . . she wasn't a native French speaker. And I'm sure there are certain
       [unintelligible] that would be used in certain areas that she wouldn't know about
       and those kinds of things, some slang she wouldn't know about. The teachers aren't
       going to teach the slang stuff. I'm sure it would be noticeable but I think she would
       blend in as well.

I: Do you think she . . . What can she do with the French and English? Like she's
        bilingual . . . Do you consider her bilingual?
P: Oh . . . can you be bilingual after eight years?
I: I don't know.
P: I don't know. I would think that . . . I would guess that more time would be needed,
        more exposure would be needed. I think she could become fluent. (I: Interviewer;
        P: Parent, 2005)

In this excerpt, the interviewer and the parent first co-constructed the notion of monolingual representation of bilingualism and continued with the pre-constructed notion that to be bilingual is to be able to speak like native speakers. The interviewer asked if the daughter were *"biling-ual in French,"* which introduced the notion that both languages should be examined separately. Because of the question, the parent considered her daughter's French ability and compared it to that of native speakers. The parent mentioned that her daughter did not have the same fluidity in the language and would not sound like a native speaker. She also mentioned that slang is an important part of being competent in a language and that teachers usually do not teach slang. The pre-constructed notion of bilingualism in Canada presented in this excerpt may be summarized as follows: To be Canadian is to be bilingual; however, to be bilingual, one has to be part of one of the homogeneous groups of Canada. And if one speaks French, it has to be at a level equal to that of native speakers; that is, one has to sound like a native speaker, use slang like a native speaker, and speak fluidly like one also. However, this mother did mention that her daughter *"would blend in"* or *"could become fluent,"* implying that more practice leads to perfection. I will examine the issue of language use in the next excerpt.

I: Moi ça fait plusieurs fois que je viens vous observer vous parlez quand même an-
        glais entre vous pendant les classes alors pourquoi vous parlez en anglais.
S1:   Eh c'est notre langue maternelle.
S2:   Nous était petit on a juste développé cette langue et on le parle à la maison et de-
        hors de l'école beaucoup plus que dans l'école. (I: Interviewer; S1: Student 1; S2:
        Student 2, 2005)

In French immersion schools, students are encouraged to speak French everywhere in the school. The interviewer asked the question

"Why do you use English?" because she did hear the students speaking English in school. In the above excerpt, the students observed that not only was English their mother tongue, but it was also the language that they spoke most often, inside and outside the school. Thus, if students compare how many hours they speak [2] English and French in a day, they might consider themselves Anglophones rather than bilinguals. In a discussion of the complementary principle of bilingualism, Grosjean (2002) noted that

It is precisely because the needs and uses of the languages are usually quite different that bilinguals rarely develop equal and total fluency in their languages. The level of fluency attained in a language (more precisely, in a language skill) will depend on the need for that language and will be domain specific. (The Complementary Principle section)

The students in the present study used their languages for different purposes in different contexts. According to Grosjean (2008), they are bilingual nonetheless.

Identities

Research conducted in Canada indicates that identity is not static; instead, it is lived through practice (Dallaire & Roma, 2002; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003). French immersion students are different from both Anglophones and Francophones, and many say they are bilingual (Blais, 2003). Teachers and other students in his school considered the student interviewed in the next excerpt as one of the best students in French. Typically, he saw himself as bilingual but compared himself with Francophones.

I: *Ah c`est bien ça . . . c`est quoi . . . qu`est-ce que c`est le français pour toi?*
S: *Le français pour moi?*
I: *Qu`est-ce que ça représente?*
S: *C`est vraiment un accomplissement académique . . . je peux faire comme il y a bien d`autres personnes qui sont très bons à l`école. Ils peuvent faire beaucoup de choses mais moi je fais ça aussi et en plus je le fais en une autre langue que ma langue ma-*

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2   I mention SPEAK here only. French Immersion students do write and listen to French all day, but they speak more English during the day.

> *ternelle, et puis, alors c`est vraiment comme un accomplissement. Je suis très fier*
> *. . .*

I: *Puis comparé à . . . comment tu te sens face aux Francophones?*

S: *Je sais que je peux pas parler le français aussi bien que les Francophones alors . . . il*
      y a des temps où je parle avec un Francophone mais je me sens . . . « ah . . . je ne
      sais pas la langue du tout . . . », mais ça va. Il y a quelque temps comme ça, mais
      pour la plupart, parler avec un Francophone c`est vraiment intéressant, parce
      qu`ils savent la langue plus bon que moi alors je peux apprendre d`eux, comme
      j`apprend les nouvelles, pas les nouvelles mots vraiment mais une nouvelle façon de
      parler. Je sais pas ce que je veux dire. . . (I: Interviewer; S: Student, 2005)

This student's father was from Africa, and his mother was from
Western Canada. The student liked French and worked very hard to
learn it. In this excerpt, he mentioned that learning French is an accom-
plishment. When asked how he felt with native speakers of French, he
contrasted himself with them and said he liked learning from them. He
also mentioned that *"I learn new words, not really new words but new ways*
of speaking." New ways of speaking mean also new ways of seeing the
world and to be in the world, which is what Grosjean (2008) defined as
the bilingual identity. Later in this interview the student said that if he
learned more vocabulary and became better in French, he could be part
of the Francophonie, *"mais pas comme les Francophones."* In practice, this
student saw himself as bilingual, with a bilingual culture, as indicated
when he said he was learning new ways of speaking. This student prob-
ably also had an African culture – he mentioned that he had traveled to
Africa and that he ate African food and he spoke the language a little
bit—but he never said he identified with African culture. This assertion
demonstrates that bilingualism for students is usually French and Eng-
lish; other languages or cultures in their family are not taken into consid-
eration. The official discourse is strong because being bilingual in Cana-
da is usually speaking English and French.

Identities and Third Space

To be bilingual is to be different from native speakers, and to construct a
space as a bilingual. In French immersion studies, that space is often re-
ferred to as "speaking immersion," which, from my view, is a negative
term as strong as semi-lingualism (Grosjean, 2008). Lyster (1987) demon-

strated that learning French as a second language is not like acquiring a native language competency.

In another interview, a mother expressed her view of who her children were. Both she and her husband were born in Western Canada, and neither one spoke French. Their three children were or had been in French immersion; at the time of the interview, the oldest was in university and the youngest was in grade 9. This mother mentioned the third space that children build for themselves.

I: So did you see a difference in their identity? Sometimes we see this in kids, they would call themselves "Francophones" or . . . Did you see a difference with the three kids? How they feel about French or how they . . . ?

P: I do actually. I think my oldest is a stepping stone to something. Catherine who is the youngest, sees it more as an experience, something to enjoy and be part of, so she's not looking at it long term. I think Janelle's goal is "this will get me a job . . ." "I'll use this for this . . ." I don't think Catherine thinks that far. I think she just enjoys the experience of it right now.

[. . .]

I: So is there . . . I remember . . . in Grade 7, there were girls . . . more cliques I think, compared to this year actually too, so maybe . . .

P: It depends on the year too, I think. I can tell you one thing I really notice, that the kids really do still differentiate between those who are in French immersion and those who are in the English stream, just a bit. In the elementary school, they called them "Englishees" [laughing]. I haven't heard that term recently in Junior High, but they are still making the difference between the two. I don't think they associate with kids in the English program.

I: That's why I'm going back to the identity then. If they call them "Englishees," then who are they?

P: I don't think they have their own identity. They kind of live in this middle world between being totally bilingual and being unilingual. It's like a middle world that you are establishing for yourself, but by the same token, like I said, it happened that a couple of friends, even one recently, about 3 months ago, who has done French immersion all the way up along who was really really [sic) struggling, the parents pulled her out like in February, at Grade 9, out of French immersion . . .

I: Which one was that?

P: Suzie, and Catherine has known Suzie since kindergarten, and you know. . . Someone who's gone from French to English doesn't have that stigma or social distance from [French immersion students], as someone who's never been in French. (I: Interviewer; P: Parent, 2007)

This except is very interesting for several reasons. When the mother referred to the students' not having an identity, I believe that she meant the students were neither unilingual nor totally bilingual, reflecting the monolingualism view of language learning (Mondada & Gajo, 2001). This mother also mentioned the *"middle world,"* which echoes the concept of third space developed by Bhabha (1994). This middle world that the mother saw for her children is exactly the world that is not recognized in Canadian society. French immersion students are different from students in the English stream – *"they called them Englishees"*– but they are not Francophones, which is to speak French as native speakers.

DISCUSSION

Official bilingualism stipulates that French and English are the two official languages in Canada. The two groups – Anglophones and Francophones – possess considerable power in social and political spheres. The goal of official bilingualism is to promote, not common bilingual communities, but two separate linguistic communities. Our study shows that students in French immersion are often viewed critically as not being able to speak French well enough, or as not being totally bilingual. Official bilingualism as a legal institution and as an ideological discourse does contribute to the notion of French and English as separate entities and the social representation of bilingualism as two monolingualisms in Canadian society (Gajo, 2000; Grosjean, 2008).

Why is this discourse still predominant, although scholars and others have presented opposing views about bilingualism for decades? Blommaert (2005) maintained that the State usually has something to say about the allocation of symbolic resources – that is, who and what is valued. From a historical, social, economic, and political point of view, Francophones in Canada had to fight for their rights to survive Anglophone domination. The Official Languages Act was designed to allow a better distribution of resources for speakers of both languages. Anglophones and Francophones both gained from the official discourses. For example, both have access to schooling in their language under Article 23 of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and services are available in French in some regions. Changing the official discourses on bilingualism and multilingualism could conceivably upset the balance

and challenge the position of Francophones, for example with regard to jobs. One of the limitations of this study is that I did not interview Franco-Albertans and bilinguals in French minority schools, who might have presented a very different discourse on bilingualism, cultural identities, and belonging in Canadian society.

The number of bilinguals and multilinguals in Canada is growing.[3] Increasingly, individuals in Canadian society and Canadian schools speak more than one language. Demographics are changing, and more value is placed on bilingual and multilingual competencies. In schools where multiple languages and identities coexist, we should "find ways to embrace and build upon students' prior knowledge, their creativity, their collaborative problem-solving skills, their potential for mastering and manipulating multiple, multilingual semiotic tools, and their desire for inclusion and integration in productive, engaging learning communities" (Duff, 2007, p. 1). The present study has provided further understanding of the social, political, and economic factors affecting bilingualism, with regard not only to local practices in schools, but also to the discursive relationship between local linguistic practices and global social practices.

In Canadian society, the monolingual view of bilingualism dominates; bilinguals are lost between the two legitimate monolingual worlds; the third space or their transculturality is not recognized. In French immersion programs, this view causes a lot of anxiety among students, who believe that they will never speak as well as native speakers. French immersion students are not recognized as legitimate bilinguals because they do not conform to the definition of what it means to be a bilingual in Canada.

The present study demonstrates that the discourse on official bilingualism is still a dominant discourse in Canada. At the same time, it

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[3]   http://www12.statcan.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-555/p13-eng.cfm.   The number of bilinguals and multilinguals is growing. However, it is very difficult to interpret this particular statistic, as the interpretation of what counts as bilingualism and multilingualism varies among researchers and is also quite ambiguous in Census Canada. Even if the number of immigrants in Canada is rising, it is challenging to know which official languages and mother tongues they are using. Thank you to Albert Galiev for pointing that out to me.

has positive implications because it could help improve French immersion teachers', parents', and students' understanding of the historical and social context in which they live. Students could understand why they always compare themselves to Francophones, and they could start to acknowledge their bilingualism, their biculturalism, and all its components. By accepting that they are bilinguals with cognitive and social competencies that distinguish them from monolinguals, they will be more inclined to use their abilities and to gain access to them for various purposes.

Power struggles will continue to exist between groups wishing to access resources, but incorporating a different view of bilingualism and multilingualism into the official discourses could allow the inclusion of greater numbers of French speakers in Canadian society. Rather than causing Francophones in Canada to lose their legitimacy, including French immersion students as part of the French-speaking population could increase the official numbers of French speakers, which would in turn permit better services in French and more funding for this official language.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

In this article, I have examined how French immersion students see themselves as learners of French, and whether they feel they are a legitimate group in Canadian society. I used an ethnographic method to collect data in two French immersion junior high schools in Alberta. Using a sociolinguistic framework, I investigated how local linguistic practices inform a more global issue related to bilingualism in Canada. The social representation of bilingualism in Canada is viewed through a monolingual lens. Students, parents, teachers, and administrators of French immersion do contribute to the discourse of bilingualism as two monolingualisms, while knowing that students in French immersion do not meet this criterion. Although French immersion students are bilinguals learning to live with two languages, the discourse of official bilingualism (French and English as two separate languages) is so strong that they believe they will never access the dream of being *"totally bilingual."* Students in French immersion do not have a space in Canadian society as bilinguals. According to essayist John Ralston Saul, "immersion students

get little encouragement, have little contact with other French-speakers, and have little sense of how the language skills they are acquiring connect to a larger Canadian world" (as cited in Fraser, 2006, p. 184). Consequently, some students are constructing a third space, even if it is not recognized in Canadian society. Mueller (2008) wrote that the French immersion program he attended in Alberta :

nurtured me when I was young, gave me a place to learn, to develop skills and abilities that made me who I am today. The program gave me a place to be myself and to call home. I am not a French person, I am not a Quebecer, I am not a Franco-Albertan. I am a French Immersion person, my identity is not with a culture, it is a culture. (p. 39)

What should be done in schools and in society to encourage inclusion of French immersion students in the definition of bilingualism? From the perspective of sociolinguistics for change, this study raises several questions and issues:

1. Students in French immersion think that they do not speak French well enough, or that they do not speak as well as Francophones. How can language educators ensure that teachers, students, and parents understand that one bilingual will never equal two monolinguals?

2. If French language educators inform teachers, students, and parents regarding the potential of bilinguals, students in French immersion will be more eager to learn the language and will practise more. At the same time, their language skills will improve.

3. Students in French immersion could have a voice in Canadian society and could contribute to changing the discourse on language issues, instead of contributing to the pre-constructed social representation (Gajo, 2000) of bilingualism in Canada. They could co-construct a new discourse in which bilingualism is regarded as a complex and valuable linguistic and social ability.

4. For French immersion students to bring about changes and find their place in Canadian society,[4] their bilingualism and culture will

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4   They probably find their place in the Canadian society as Anglophones who used to speak French.

have to be accepted by and included in the legitimized groups, and, as well, French immersion students will have to be considered a legitimate bilingual group at the political level. Blommaert (2005) stressed the importance of the state in constructing an ethnic community. He argued that an individual's practices produce, enact, and perform, not a single identity, but rather numerous identities. In addition, for an identity to be established, it has to be recognized by others (p. 205).

5. Francophones and Anglophones might not want to share power, but more people speaking French and understanding Francophone culture might allow a more egalitarian distribution of resources in the Canadian society. Immigrants and multilinguals understand that they are learning French and English, but this is the topic for another time.

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Appendix
Distribution of Interviews

Interviews	Number of interviews
Students	50
Large group interviews with students	4
Parents	14
Teachers	20
Administrators	4
Others (initiators of the French programs in Westerm Canada)	2
Total	94 interviews