

A PILOT STUDY TO EVALUATE THE WRITING SKILLS OF  
FRENCH IMMERSION STUDENTS AT THE GRADE NINE  
LEVEL IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

CENTRE FOR NEWFOUNDLAND STUDIES

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PAULA CORBETT









A PILOT STUDY TO EVALUATE THE WRITING SKILLS  
OF FRENCH IMMERSION STUDENTS AT THE GRADE NINE LEVEL  
IN NEWFOUNDLAND AND LABRADOR

by

© Paula Corbett

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## Dedication

This thesis is dedicated to my dear mother, late father, and my children Paul and Tara without whose inspiration this thesis would not have been possible.

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The writer would like to extend sincere gratitude to her thesis supervisor, Mrs. Joan Netten for her consistent guidance, understanding and support throughout this project. Without her invaluable professional assistance this thesis would never have been realized.

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## Abstract

The writer has evaluated the level of student writing in French immersion at the grade nine level in Newfoundland and Labrador.

Three research questions provided the basis for the study. They were as follows:

1. How proficient are students when using the written skill?
2. Do discrepancies exist between different geographical areas, ie., rural, urban and francophone?
3. Are there differences between the performance of females and males?

The data consisted of a delimited pilot population of 64 student writing samples where the students were asked to write a letter to their principal suggesting one way in which the school could be improved. The 64 profiles were then assessed in six different writing categories and a mark rendered for the writing level attained in each category.

Statistical analyses were conducted on the data and the results were discussed.

It was found that students performed best in the categories of effectiveness (getting the message across) and vocabulary use. Grammar and spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization were the categories in which the students performed only moderately well and sociolinguistic performance

and organization of information least well.

Regional differences in performance did exist. Urban students tended to perform better than either the rural or francophone regions and females outperformed males; males only approached the female rating in the category of sociolinguistic performance, although males actually outperformed females in the urban area in the categories of grammar and organization of information.

The thesis concludes with a series of recommendations for French immersion education and further research.

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## CHAPTER I

### Introduction

Immersion programs first began in 1965 with the introduction of a French immersion class at St. Lambert, Quebec. A group of anglophone parents decided that the core French program would not adequately prepare their children to become proficient in French and function in the working language of Quebec. They exerted pressure on the public school system to offer a program in which the curriculum would be taught in French. The theory supporting the concept of immersion was simply that if students were offered a program where the medium of instruction was French then, in time, they would learn the second language ( $L_2$ ) simultaneously and consequently while learning the curriculum. This theory was based on what many of the French children in the community were doing in order to learn English.

The aim of the French immersion program was for students to become proficient in French at no expense to their first language ( $L_1$ ) or to academic achievement. However, concern on the part of parents and educators soon became evident since they were uncertain how well students would learn French in an academic environment where  $L_2$  was the medium of communication, how well the curriculum would be mastered and whether students would continue to progress in their first language.

Evaluations become very important as a means of assessing

the success of early French immersion classes. Students' mathematical and science skills were tested and compared to the skills of English L<sub>1</sub> students. Having tested for nine years in French immersion, Swain and Lapkin (1982) found that students performed as well or better than those taught in English, even though the French immersion students were tested in English and French had been their language of instruction. English L<sub>1</sub> skills were also tested since some parents and educators were concerned that first language literacy skills might be affected by the late introduction of English at the primary level. Genesee (1978) and Swain (1978) found that after one year of having introduced English into the primary curriculum, French immersion students performed as well as their counterparts in the English stream. In some cases they outperformed the English students on certain aspects of English skills, when tested on standardized tests of English achievement (Swain, Lapkin & Andrew, 1981).

Other studies on French immersion students' English language skills have indicated that although there is an initial lag in their performance of English for certain skills (ie., spelling), French immersion students tend to be stronger in other areas, such as originality and later they equal the performance of their peers in the English system (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Parents of French immersion children, themselves, were surveyed and asked if they felt their children's English

language development suffered at the expense of French immersion. Eighty percent of parents responded negatively. The communicative effectiveness of French immersion students in grades one and two was also studied by Genesee, Tucker and Lambert (1975) and it was found that French immersion students were actually more communicatively effective than their peers in the core system. Genesee et al. suggested that this might be a result of the students' experience in the second language classroom which could contribute to their sensitivity to the needs of the listener (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Second language skills of the French immersion students have also been assessed. In every study where the L<sub>2</sub> performance of the French immersion students was compared to the performance of students in core French, French immersion students excelled. When comparing French immersion students to native speakers, Swain and Lapkin (1982) found that after five to six years in a French immersion program, students performed at the 50th percentile on tests of listening and reading. However, students did not attain native-like proficiency in the productive skills--speaking and writing--as noted by Adiv (1981), Genesee (1978a), Harley (1979, 1982), Harley and Swain (1977, 1978) and Spilka (1976).

In summary it appears that there is no negative effect on English first language skills orally, and following the introduction of English into the French immersion curriculum, French immersion students catch up on reading and writing and

sometimes surpass their peers in the English system. Students are more communicatively effective in French than core French students and are strong in the receptive skills of listening and reading. Their productive skills, however, of speaking and writing are weak.

The fact that students do not attain native-like proficiency may not be as negative as it appears since the comparison of French immersion students to native speakers may be an unrealistic, somewhat invalid assessment of students' performance. Students in a French immersion academic environment do not have enough occasion to develop native-like skills in speaking and writing since their opportunity to use the language is limited. Second language experience outside the classroom--in an anglophone milieu--is almost non-existent. Comparisons based on the skills of a native speaker tend to emphasize the errors which students make. Evaluation based on what may be realistically expected from students, given their French immersion experience, might be more fair and helpful.

The focus in a French immersion program has shifted somewhat from bilingualism to communication. Evaluation of students in the program is based on how well they can communicate and for most evaluators, in this and the preceding decade, evaluation of a student's performance has centered on the student's level of competence in four major areas: grammatical competence, discourse competence, sociolinguistic competence, and strategic competence (Canale, 1981). Communi-

cative competence can be loosely defined as a combination of these four broad categories. Savignon (1983) defines communicative competence as "the expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons or between one person and a written or oral text" (p. 249).

A student is considered to be communicatively competent when she/he can convey meaning and when the level of mistakes in the communication does not interfere with overall comprehension. The role of accuracy is less important than getting the message across.

Immersion programs in Newfoundland and Labrador began with the introduction of the first early immersion class in St. John's in 1977. Its history paralleled that of the Quebec and Ontario programs. Immersion continued to grow in enrolment and numbers of start-up classes and, in time, evaluations of the program and student performance were initiated. Similar results were found in Newfoundland and Labrador as were found in studies of students' performance in Quebec and Ontario. Netten and Spain's (1982, 1983) provincial findings concur with those nationally, that is, that the receptive skills of listening and reading were of native-like proficiency. However, the productive skills of speaking and writing have not been evaluated in Newfoundland.

### Research Questions

School administrators, parents and Department of Education officials are curious to know the level of written skill development for French immersion students in the province and therefore the writer would like to investigate the following questions:

1. How proficient are students when using the written skill?
2. Do discrepancies exist between different geographical areas, ie., rural, urban and francophone?
3. Are there differences between the performance of females and males?

An attempt to respond to the following questions is inherent in the study:

1. What is the level of communicative ability of students in French immersion when using the written skill?
2. What is the level of grammatical competence of French immersion students when using the written skill?
3. Are there differences between French immersion programs provincially?
4. Are there differences between females and males in French immersion when using the written skill?

Results of the study can help in assessing how effective French immersion programs are as well as assisting the Department of Education in the development of improved programs. Results will also help to understand whether there



are regional or gender differences in French immersion programs that should be guiding administrators, teachers and parents in making decisions about French immersion programs.

### Limitations of the Study

The study is intended to identify the level of writing proficiency for French immersion students at the grade nine level. Since the writing sample is small the results will be somewhat less generalizable to other populations. The data was collected provincially, therefore the results are related to Newfoundland and may well be influenced by characteristics of students, teachers, curriculum and expectations in this province. However as a pilot study it will provide some information about the written skills of the French immersion students, which may be useful in curriculum development and instruction.

### Definition of Terms

**Anglophone:** A person whose mother tongue is English.

**Communicative Competence:** The expression, interpretation and negotiation of meaning involving interaction between two or more persons or between one person and a written or oral test (Savignon, 1983, p. 249).

**Communicative Effectiveness:** Ability to convey meaning with relative accuracy.

**Core French Program:** The subject of French taught for a

specific number of hours in an academic year.

**Curriculum:** A specified fixed course of study in a university, academy, school or the like (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1980).

**Data:** Something given or admitted; some fact, proposition, quantity or condition granted or known, from which other facts, propositions, etc., are to be deduced (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1980).

**Discourse Competence:** Mastery of how to combine and interpret forms and meanings to achieve a unified spoken or written text in different genres by using (a) cohesion devices to relate utterance forms (e.g. pronouns, transition words, and parallel structures) and (b) coherence rules to organize meanings (e.g. continuity, sequencing, proportion, consistency, and relevance of ideas (Canale, 1981, p. 6).

**Francophone:** A person whose native tongue is French.

**Grammatical Competence:** Mastery of the language code (verbal or nonverbal) and thus concerned with such features as lexical terms and rules of sentence formation, pronunciation/spelling, and literal meaning (Canale, 1981, p. 6).

**Immersion:** The use of a language other than a child's home language as a medium of instruction (Cummins, 1978, p. 1).

**L<sub>1</sub>:** First language; the dominant language learned as a child.

**L<sub>2</sub>:** Second language; another language acquired following

native language.

**Language Proficiency:** Language competence (Savignon, 1983, p. 246). Also considered the ability to use the language (Savignon, p. 308).

**Native Speaker:** A speaker who learned the language as a first language or simultaneously.

**Percentile:** A value of a statistical variable which divides its distribution into 100 groups having equal frequencies (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1980).

**Pilot Study:** A test operation (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1980).

**Primary:** School level ranging from grades one to three.

**Productive Skills:** The skills of speaking and writing.

**Receptive Skills:** The skills of listening and reading.

**Sample:** A small part or quantity of anything intended to be shown as evidence of the quality of the whole (The New Webster Encyclopedic Dictionary, 1980).

**Sociolinguistic Competence:** Mastery of appropriate language use in different sociocultural contexts, with emphasis on appropriateness of meanings (Canale, 1981, p. 6).

**Standardized Test:** A test which is developed for national use and measured against a national average.

**Strategic Competence:** Mastery of verbal and nonverbal strategies to compensate for breakdowns in communication due to insufficient competence or to performance (Canale, 1981, p. 6).

## CHAPTER II

### Review of the Literature

The thesis is based on three areas of research: (a) French immersion evaluations; (b) Goals of French immersion instruction-communicative competence; and (c) Development of testing instruments.

Swain (1984a) states that:

Immersion education has two goals--to foster the development of high levels of second language proficiency; and to do this at no expense to mother tongue development, cognitive growth or academic achievement. These goals are accomplished essentially through the teaching of academic content in the second language. (p. 196)

Although there have been a small number of assessment models for communicative competence developed since the 1980s, there have been few that are practical for teachers to use as an assessment for their students. Questions of validity and reliability have also been a consideration in testing communicative competence since it is more difficult to adhere to measurements of validity and particularly of reliability when testing communication. It is possible for example to design a test for either productive skill that is valid by making it situational and having the student use the language in

context--such as writing a letter--to test their communicative ability.

However, to develop a test that is reliable is more difficult since testing for communication is, to some extent, subjective. The problem of reliability can be addressed, partially at least, by developing a marking scale for the test based on proficiency levels and attaching proficiency level descriptors that are developed by the test designer. When testing communication, it is essential to remain cognizant of exactly what is being tested, whether it is listening, speaking, reading or writing; that is, use of the language in context.

Research on French immersion has been ongoing at The Modern Language Centre, OISE, since 1970. It has been found that although the receptive skills of listening and reading are native-like by about grade six (Swain & Lapkin, 1981), the productive skills of writing and speaking are much weaker. One reason for this may be that students spend the majority of their time listening and reading rather than interacting in their second language. The students' productive skills then, and speaking in particular, have many non-native features in them (Harley & Swain, 1978; Harley, 1982). It would seem appropriate, therefore, that any evaluative instrument that is developed for the productive skills should be based on communicative competence rather than native-like accuracy. This would be a more realistic goal. Davies (1989) and Noonan

(1991) concur. If we remove the native speaker as the yardstick by which L<sub>2</sub> learners are measured we can get on with the process of L<sub>2</sub> learning without the demands of native-like proficiency. Language learning becomes more accessible and the "goals more worthwhile" (Noonan, p. 4).

The development of an instrument to assess communicative competence has been very difficult, particularly because of problems with reliability (Carey & Cummins, 1984; Heike, 1985; Day & Shapson, 1987). Assessment procedures based on discrete point items or grammatical/spelling errors are no longer dominant since the goal of any second language program is communication, involving all four language skills--listening, speaking, reading and writing--in a communicative format. Assessment should reflect the features of communicative language teaching, and all skills should be tested in an integrative, interactive format.

In the early eighties tests were designed that were more communicative and based on authentic contents but they were in a multiple-choice format (Lapkin, 1984).

There are few examples of tests--or even of test item formats--on which teachers can base their own evaluation procedures. The result is that even with an effective communicatively-oriented teaching program, the tests given to assess performance tend to emphasize the learner's knowledge of separate grammatical points--simply because they are the

kinds of tests and test items that exist. The circle is a vicious one: if students are given such tests, then they will want to be taught in a way that ensures they can pass the test. This ends up defeating both the teachers' and students' goal, which most frequently is to help the students to be able to actually use the target language in everyday communicative events. If a major goal of the program is that the students, be they children, adolescents or adults, will be able to communicate effectively, then the testing procedures should reflect this and so also should the scoring criteria. (Swain, 1984b, p. 7)

The sequence of evaluation in communicative competence has developed chronologically during the past decade. If we look at the research of Bartz (1979), it is clear that his assessment model of communicative competence is based on a point system of grading in five categories: fluency, comprehensibility, amount of communication, quality of communication and effort to communicate.

Valdman and Moody (1979), who developed the Indiana University French Communicative Ability Test (IUF CAT), use an eight point scale for appropriateness (maximum of three points), well-formedness (three points), and fluency (two points). The IUF CAT places more emphasis on grammatical accuracy than on communication as does the Bartz model. Waltz

(1980) states that both these assessment models "improve reliability by breaking down a large point value system into smaller, more specific ones" (p. 59). He emphasizes that "it is easier to assign two or three points for grammatical accuracy or message delivered than eight points for a general impression" (p. 59).

Canale (1981) states that:

Evaluation within a communicative approach must address new content areas such as sociolinguistic appropriateness rules, new assessment formats to permit and encourage creative, open-ended language use, new test administration procedures to emphasize interpersonal interaction in authentic situations, and new scoring procedures of a more manual and judgemental nature. (p. 2)

He outlines the characteristics that any good test must possess, the specific conditions that a good communicative test should satisfy, suggestions for making tests of communication more practical and the results more generalizable, and some comments on test development and use.

Wesche (1981), in an article entitled Communicative Testing in a Second Language, offers suggestions for the assessment of communicative competence. She states:

If we aim to evaluate the communicative abilities of second-language learners and speakers, we need



to test all levels of competence simultaneously. And to do this, the language and the tasks that we use in our tests must have the characteristics of "real" language in use. (p. 553)

She defines the characteristics of language tests as the following:

1. All tests are samples of behaviour.
2. They must have validity, feasibility and reliability.
3. They should be interesting and not provoke undue anxiety. (p. 554)

Wesche (1981) identifies three models of communicative testing already developed, notably those of Richterich, Munby and Carroll; however, she finds that Munby's model in particular is extremely complex and therefore unpractical. The Royal Society of Arts Examinations in the Communicative Use of English as a Foreign Language, is a communicative test which assesses the written skill, and others, at three different levels--basic, intermediate and advanced. It is based on a combination of Carroll and Munby's work and can be used as a basis for anyone in the test development field. This series of tests was designed to assess the foreign student's degree of English skills necessary to "operate independently" (p. 565) in an English milieu. The tests are based on authentic tasks and the writing test specifically requires the examinee

to complete personal information forms, address envelopes, answer letters and leave brief messages. The scoring criteria for writing includes accuracy in the completion of forms as well as range and complexity of the language employed.

Omaggio (1983), in a text entitled Proficiency-Oriented Classroom Testing, found that a discrepancy exists between the communicatively oriented classroom and the types of tests used to measure the degree of language proficiency. Included in her work are examples of tests which evaluate all four skills and which she feels are communicative and naturalistic. She bases her testing on three criteria: function, context and fluency and emphasizes that teachers need to apply these criteria in the development of their tests.

Swain (1984b), in an article entitled Teaching and Testing Communicatively, bases her testing on three principles:

1. Start from somewhere
2. Concentrate on content
3. Bias for best. (p. 9)

That is, (a) the test should be based on some communicative testing theory; in Swain's case Canale's (1981) theory of communicative competence; (b) the test needs to contain content which is motivating, substantive, integrative and interactive in nature; and (c) everything possible should be included to elicit the learner's best performance. She

states, "Scoring procedures should reflect the use or uses the tests are intended for and the theoretical framework which initially guides the tests' construction" (p. 16).

Because immersion is based primarily on comprehension and content rather than production and form (Swain, 1981), students tend to be weaker in the areas of speaking and writing. Bialystok's (1981) data on grammatical performance indicates that grammatical accuracy on formal tasks does not transfer to informal tasks. That is, students who may well understand grammatical rules and be adept at high levels of grammatical performance on certain tasks are unable to perform proficiently in free or informal situations where grammar must be used in context spontaneously as in conversation or written discourse. Krashen's (1978) findings concur with Bialystok's. Krashen's monitor theory suggests that grammar acquisition, where rules are taught and learned, only serve to monitor the speech or writing of the second language learner and can only be used when the learner is focusing on the form of the interactions and not the content, and only when the learner has the time to apply the rules (Swain, 1981, p. 8).

Bialystok (1981) describes linguistic knowledge (grammar) both as implicit and explicit knowledge. The learner must use a combination of implicit and explicit knowledge to varying degrees depending on the level of performance and the learner's internalization of the language, as well as how readily it can be produced. Implicit knowledge implies the

level of knowledge the learner would already know about language in general from  $L_1$  and the intuitive sense she/he has about  $L_2$ . Explicit knowledge is more cognitive in nature and includes knowledge that is learned more formally about the language in an academic environment.

Since students in an immersion situation must concentrate on content as well as rules (Swain, 1981), it is not surprising perhaps that they cannot automatically incorporate all the rules into their language output.

Cummins and Swain (1986) and Saville-Troike (1984) all found that grammatical proficiency was as dependent on  $L_2$  exposure to the language in the environment as it was to academic achievement in the classroom. Context-embedded grammatical  $L_2$  skills (language used in context such as a conversation with peers where there are many clues and gestures used) develop primarily through  $L_2$  exposure, whereas context-reduced grammatical proficiency is more dependent on cognitive attributes of the individual. "The fact that French immersion students tend not to develop native-like patterns of French grammatical skills in either written or oral modalities can be accounted for by their limited opportunity to interact with native French speakers" (Cummins & Swain, 1986, p. 211). These researchers predict that grammatical proficiency is more closely related to cognitive factors as the students mature.

Sociolinguistic and discourse competence are less dependent on  $L_2$  environment and are more closely related to

the academic setting. In the context-reduced mode (an academic environment in which interaction is limited and contextual clues, in the form of gestures, facial expressions and the like, are less relevant), these competencies are more closely connected to student attributes and transfer knowledge from  $L_1$  (Cummins & Swain, 1986).

Spelling and accent have also been addressed by Spilka (1976) and found to be related to cognitive features and academic instruction while punctuation and capitalization are related to  $L_1$ , since there is a transfer that occurs between language on conventions which are closely related across languages.

Sword (1984), in an article entitled The CLWYD Graded Objective Scheme, developed a communicative test for the high school level. The written skill was evaluated by having the student write a letter from a similar stimulus letter in English. A second part to the letter included questions to which the candidate could reply. A basic mark was awarded for each task provided the candidate communicated effectively. Accuracy of grammar and spelling were taken into account only if they interfered with communication. Merit marks were awarded for greater levels of accuracy or additional initiative.

Swain (1984a), in Large-Scale Communicative Language Testing: A Case Study, adds another principle to her testing format--work for washback. Washback is defined as "the effect

the test can have on teaching practices" (p. 196). To illustrate this point she describes her recently developed evaluation package entitled À Vous La Parole which she designed as a joint project between the Saskatchewan Ministry of Education and the Modern Language Centre (OISE).

The mandate of this contract was the development of relevant, progressive tests of communication. À Vous La Parole addresses the concern of weak productive skills and assesses them from a grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic perspective. The package contains a student booklet, a set of written and oral tasks, and a guide to administration of the materials, including scoring procedures. The central component of the package is a 12-page student booklet entitled À Vous La Parole. Included in this booklet is information about two fictional summer jobs for students 15-16 years old. Also included is information about the requirements for application, the nature of each job, the locations, leisure time activities and living conditions. The booklet contains a partial list of government offices offering summer employment programs for youth, and it encourages students to write for further information about these positions (Green, 1985). Included are four written tasks and two oral exercises. The tasks were designed as tasks in which native speakers would engage. This ensures that the nature of the test is authentic and therefore more meaningful for the student. Swain (1984) states that materials "need to be

motivating, substantive, integrated and interactive in nature" and that they should be designed "for the test-taker not the test-maker" (p. 11). "Having teaching and testing compatible is essential if we expect our students to learn what we teach them" (p. 17).

Although À Vous La Parole is an effective instrument of assessment, it was designed as a testing unit for provincial assessment of the immersion student's communicative performance. It is time consuming and therefore may not be very practical for individual student assessment. Swain (1984) feels its use is quite feasible as an instrument of assessment for program evaluation but may not be as feasible in student evaluation. She suggests it could be used by classroom teachers as a teaching unit through which communicative language performance of individual students could be assessed.

À Vous La Parole is no longer used as an assessment instrument for French immersion programs because of unforeseen problems with its reliability. Since numerical scores were not used, in the assessment of À Vous La Parole, it became impossible to use the instrument for the task it was intended: initially the evaluation of French immersion and French first language minority programs and later the assessment of French immersion programs only. As an instrument for program evaluation each task would have had to be criterion-referenced and cross-referenced against francophone data for reliability. Since the goal of À Vous La Parole was, in part, to assess

French minority language programs the test designers found they neither had adequate time to collect sufficient data, nor in the development of the test did they predict its necessity. In fact, it seemed incongruent with communicative testing theory for them to assign numerical values for competencies of grammar, discourse, strategy and sociolinguistic competence which are global and interactive, not single item testing units.

Now À Vous La Parole is being used as a norm-referenced test for immersion students without cross-reference to native speakers. It is also used as a teaching package for teachers and students of French immersion. In addition, there is currently interest in its use as an instrument for the comparison of data for different immersion programs (Hart, Lapkin & Swain, 1987). However, the difficulties encountered in the development of this project indicate the problems involved in attempting to develop a communicative testing instrument. Some means must be found to assess the degree of communicative competence and attach a numerical value to differing degrees, that is, competence without regressing to a discrete point marking scheme.

The Alberta Department of Education, two years later, began to develop French achievement tests for the sixth and ninth grades, to be administered in June 1986 and 1988 respectively. Innovative in design, they test the writing and reading skills. The students' writing is evaluated through a



story/narrative they write and graded on a five point scale for content, development, sentence structure, vocabulary and writing convention. A criterion is developed for each level from excellent to unsatisfactory and students are awarded a mark from five to zero, based on their performance.

Harley and Lapkin (1988), at the Modern Language Centre, OISE, designed a communicative test for two grade levels, 8 and 12. Each test consisted of four sections: (a) a listening comprehension test; (b) an oral production test; (c) a reading test; and (d) a writing test. Four principles of test design were considered: validity, reliability, washback and practicality. The grade eight writing section included a partial dictation, the preparation of an advertisement for a magazine and the articulation of a brief opinion on a school-related issue. Students were scored on a maximum of three points for each 22 words correctly supplied for the dictation.

An additional maximum five points are given for accurate use of accents and an apostrophe. Each of the other sections is scored for the ability to carry out the requirements of the task with a majority of words in French. Grammatical errors are taken into account only insofar as they obscure the student's effort to convey meaning. (Harley & Lapkin, 1988, p. 6)

Guberman (1988) considered three recent approaches to

error correction (evaluation of errors in written composition) in an experiment at the college level; the traditional approach, where student's writing was evaluated subjectively and intuitively, and not based on any theory of evaluation; the more scientific Ollérienne approach where the total number of faults in the student's composition was subtracted from the total number of words and further divided by the total number of words in the rewritten composition; and the Jacobian approach where the composition was evaluated in five categories: content, organization, vocabulary, language use and structure and read once for each category, for a total of at least five reads. Guberman found that the most effective evaluation approach would be to combine, in a simple and realistic fashion, the best items from each of these three approaches (p. 24).

D'Angelan, Hardy and Shapson (1989), in a national French core study draft document entitled Student Evaluation in a Multidimensional Core French Curriculum outlined options for evaluation in a multidimensional curriculum and current trends in language testing. They state that, "If we wish to encourage communicative language teaching and learning, our student evaluations must emphasize communicative language performance in context" (d'Angelan et al., p. 1).

Again Fraser and Mougeon (1990) developed a test of advanced bilingualism for graduates at Glendon College, York University. All language skills other than the oral component

are tested in an integrative format. Grading is criterion-referenced and the writing is evaluated only for fluency, accuracy and writing expertise. The candidate is awarded a performance level of pass, fail or outstanding (Fraser & Mougeon, p. 725).

Ullmann (1990), in a text entitled Evaluating For Communication, reiterates the communicative philosophy that "language is an integrated whole, ... and that the goal of instruction is the development of the students' ability to communicate appropriately and accurately in specific contexts and situations" (p. 5). She has developed communicative tests at three different learner levels--beginner, intermediate and advanced--to test the receptive and productive skills at each of these levels. To assess the writing skill, Ullmann uses dictation and writing tasks in context. She feels that "dictation becomes a communicative testing technique when the task integrates listening comprehension and writing--when the students must interpret what they hear before they write it down" (p. 29) and that "writing tasks that stress the communicative nature of language require a context that prompts the students to consider the function of the communication and to use an appropriate tone and style" (p. 29). She suggests scoring the dictation in three different ways: (a) exact word (a segment gets a mark if it is transcribed exactly in terms of spelling); (b) phonetic similarity/paraphrase (a segment has to sound similar to the original in order to get a mark);

and (c) conveyance of meaning (a segment gets a mark if it shows that the student has understood the passage).

Ullmann (1990) has developed several task-oriented functions to assess the written skill such as leaving a message, completing a job application, preparing a lost and found ad, expressing an opinion, completing a dialogue and writing a paragraph. She has also developed measurement procedures for the assessment of the receptive and productive skills. Two procedures for the assessment of the written skill have been developed, one entitled Weighted Writing Proficiency Scoring Scheme in which each criterion is assigned a percentage for marking and the other entitled Writing Proficiency Profile in which each criterion is assessed on a descriptive scale for low, fair, good and excellent ratings. In each of these assessment schemes the criteria assessed includes grammar, vocabulary, spelling/punctuation effectiveness, and organization. An additional criterion of overall impression is included in the Writing Proficiency Profile. Ullmann's assessment models appear comprehensive and practical for teachers (given some description is assigned to the global ratings of low, fair, good and excellent in the Writing Proficiency Profile) since they seem to be time efficient and concise in their application.

A good communicative test then should be based on the following:

1. Grammatical, discourse, strategic and sociolinguis-

tic competencies.

2. Validity, feasibility and reliability.
3. Interesting and not provoke undue anxiety.
4. Start from somewhere, concentrate on content; bias for best and work for washback.

To date an assessment model for the written skill in French immersion has not been developed for this province. An initial survey sample of teachers by the writer indicates that teachers are assessing their students' writing skills somewhat differently depending on areas of writing teachers deem important for overall communicative language proficiency. Some teachers weight evaluation of the written skill heavily on grammatical and spelling accuracy while others stress writing style, sentence structure, getting the message across, fluency, cohesion or any combination of these factors. In this type of evaluation the measures used are not particularly valid or reliable across different populations and comparisons are difficult to make.

In the design of this particular study the writer has referred to two broad areas of writing proficiency as they relate to students in early French immersion. That is:

1. What is the level of communicative ability of students in French immersion when using the written skill?
2. What is the level of grammatical competence of students in French immersion when using the written skill?

This survey of the research on the written skill in

French immersion makes it clear that evaluating communicative competence is a demanding and somewhat difficult task. Few models of communicative assessment have been developed, and evaluators and researchers are still attempting to refine instruments for evaluation. There is a need to have more information about written skills of French immersion students in order to better understand programs and there is also a need to assess these skills by communicative testing techniques in order to be consistent with the aims of the programs.

In light of the needs which exist in the evaluation of student performance, two further questions of particular interest in Newfoundland were also investigated:

1. Do differences exist between rural, urban and francophone areas?
2. Are there differences of performance between females and males?

## CHAPTER III

### Design of the Study

Because French immersion has been in existence since 1977 and a shift in its evaluation has occurred from grammar-based to communicative language assessment (Canale, 1981; Swain, 1984), it was decided to assess the written skill of grade nine French immersion students from a communicative perspective, as indicated in Chapters I and II. In order to accomplish this task an appropriate evaluation instrument had to be designed. The assessment would be based on the four levels of communicative competence introduced by Canale in 1981 and later refined by Swain (1981, 1984) that is: grammatical, discourse, sociolinguistic and strategic. Also incorporated into the assessment would be the four principles of test development initiated by Swain (1984), start from somewhere, work for washback, bias for best and concentrate on content.

#### Type of Study

This study is a qualitative, ethnographic study rather than a quantitative one since qualitative data is more appropriate for use in a pilot study and, as the research of Tardif and Weber (1987) suggests, qualitative assessment is complimentary to quantitative when addressing processes in language teaching and acquisition and the ongoing processes in the classroom. They state that, "Because ethnography attempts

to describe a particular social setting or situation, it concentrates on the study of patterns of behaviour and patterns in cultural knowledge from the vantage point of the people being studied" (p. 70). Tardif and Weber are very supportive of less empirical data on language acquisition and state quite clearly that,

Attention to classroom interaction processes and to the ethnography of communication in the immersion classroom could illuminate some of the language acquisition processes at work. Ethnographic or qualitative perspectives may shed some light on the many issues which have not been adequately addressed. (1987, p. 71)

The study is to be a comparative one involving three districts in Newfoundland and Labrador. Data from three different geographical areas was examined to ascertain students' level of writing skill. Overall results were examined as to relative levels of performance in six areas as described below in the section on marking. Results were also analyzed for differences in performance by geographical area and by gender.

#### Sample Population

Entire classes of early French immersion students at the grade nine level in each of three school districts were asked



to submit a writing sample for assessment, specific details of which will be discussed later in this chapter.

Districts offering French immersion in Newfoundland are not numerous, and only in those districts offering these programs for a considerable number of years are these students at the grade nine level. The geographical areas covered by these programs are quite distinct. Therefore, it was decided to select one class of French immersion students from each of the three district areas--rural, urban, and francophone. French classes are generally small and not yet numerous at this grade level. The total number of protocols collected was 64. Protocols were distributed as indicated in Table 1.

Table 1

Number, Location, and Gender of Sample

	Male	Female	Total
Rural	5	11	16
Urban	8	14	22
Francophone*	7	19	26
Total	20	44	64

\*In this table and the following discussion the term "francophone group" refers to Group C, the French immersion anglophone students who are living in a francophone milieu.

Since a number of factors vary according to region, it was anticipated that results amongst districts might differ. Teacher qualifications, parental and student attitudes, community attitudes, and environment, all influence the performance of students in French immersion (Lambert & Tucker, 1972; Bibeau, 1982; Hammers & Blanc, 1983). In addition, there is a well-known tendency for performance in rural areas to be lower than that in urban areas.

#### Design of the Instrument

Because the focus of French immersion education is communication, assessment of the students' writing was based on a communicative format. The instrument design for the assessment was a letter students were asked to write to the principal of their school, suggesting one way in which they felt the school could be improved. It was assumed this would be a topic of interest for grade nine students and that they would find it motivating, thus eliciting the student's best response. The letter was integrative in content since it had a particular focus and included all aspects of communicative competency. It would be interactive as well, since students were given the opportunity to express and defend their own opinion concerning a particular issue or problem in the school where they could see a need for improvement. Thus the testing format used possessed validity.

Specific instructions were given to the students; a copy

of the instructions to students is included in Appendix A as well as a copy of teacher directions. Identical instructions were given to each of the three groups surveyed to ensure that each group would be tested in the same manner. This procedure ensured reliability.

Instructions were given to elicit the best students' response, that is, they were instructed to consider their writing style, to write on the given topic, and to be attentive to spelling and organization of the text. Students were free to ask questions about the instructions of the letter and teachers were to ensure that students understood the directions clearly after having read them orally to the class. Thus the testing procedure used adheres to Swain's (1984) testing principles for elicitation of the student's best response.

Students were then given a specific amount of time to write the letter (30 minutes). They did not have access to dictionaries or other reference materials. The test was implemented during the month of May; therefore, students were nearing the end of the intermediate grades and had had 10 years of experience in French immersion.

The use of a student letter as an assessment instrument satisfies the construct of validity since all students are asked to perform the same communicative task under identical conditions. The instructions for the letter places it in a certain context and students know exactly what is expected of

them. Their communicative or linguistic knowledge can then be assessed on a communicative format for grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies, since any productive skill--speaking or writing--encompasses each of these competencies to a greater or lesser degree (Swain, 1984). Bialystok (1981) reaffirms this position: "...communicative competence may be considered as one aspect of language proficiency; specifically it refers to that aspect of a learner's proficiency which permits that learner to interact fluently and effectively through the language for instrumental purposes" (p. 31).

Students' knowledge of grammar, their knowledge of appropriate tone, their knowledge of organization in writing and their ability to circumlocute in the language when they experience difficulty with it (that is, find another way of articulating the message) help to explain what is meant by grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic competencies. What then followed was the development of a marking scheme to assess these four underlying competencies.

#### Marking Scheme

A marking scheme, as illustrated in Appendix B, was adapted from Ullmann's (1990) Writing Proficiency Profile and developed as the model of assessment for the 64 writing profiles collected. Student writings were scored on a low, fair or good rating in six categories: grammar, vocabulary

use, spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization, effectiveness (gets the message across), organization of information and sociolinguistic performance. A proficiency rating was developed for each category, outlining performance criteria for each level of either low, fair or good and the student writings were evaluated accordingly. A copy of the definitions of the categories is included in Appendix C.

The measurement construct of reliability was therefore addressed since the same rating scale and proficiency levels were used for each student. Although there is an inherent level of subjectivity when using a global rating scheme, communicative performance does not lend itself well to the more empirical measurement formats of discrete-point or multiple choice items since the focus of communicative competence involves imparting a message in a comprehensible and accurate manner insofar as inaccuracy does not interfere with meaning. The intent is to allow the students to show what they can do and how they can function in the language.

For consistency, all student profiles were marked by the writer in one category, for example, grammar, before beginning the next category. Each category of grammar, vocabulary, effectiveness, spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization, organization of information and sociolinguistic performance was assessed according to the developed proficiency levels for low, fair and good. A mark of one was assigned a low rating, two for a fair rating and three for a good rating.

To enhance reliability of the assessment, five (inter-raters) were also provided a random sample of 10 student writings (six of which were identical for each and four of which were different), the proficiency levels and score sheets and requested to rate independently the writing profiles. The inter-raters were asked to assess the student profiles in each category separately, reading all profiles once for grammar, followed by vocabulary, spelling, effectiveness, organization and sociolinguistic performance.

Each of the inter-raters has had considerable experience in teaching French as a second language and evaluating students' communicative performance. Inter-rater number one and five are school board French program coordinators in Newfoundland and Labrador and both have been involved with French immersion education for approximately 10 years. Inter-rater number three, a French immersion consultant at the Department of Education for Newfoundland and Labrador, had previously taught immersion programs for several years. Inter-rater number four had also been a school board program coordinator and is now a French teacher and inter-rater number two is a French assistant involved in education for bilingual programs at the Faculty of Education, Memorial University of Newfoundland. Results indicated an acceptable degree of agreement in the evaluation of the student samples by the various evaluators.

### Analysis of the Data

Only student numbers were used as identification for each writing profile. Neither the students's name, school, district or gender was apparent either to the inter-raters or the writer.

As described previously each protocol was assessed for each category and a rating given of low (one point), fair (two points), or good (three points). The ratings for each category were then summarized by percentage of responses in each category. In addition, mean scores were calculated for each category. Results were also examined by making comparisons between groups. Comparisons amongst the results for the three geographic areas were made as well as comparisons between male and female performance for each of the districts and for the province as a whole. These comparisons were also based on percentages of students in each category and mean scores for each category for each of the groups being compared.

### Limitations of the study

Although three distinct areas of the province were chosen for assessment and certain conclusions extracted from the data collected, the writer does not wish to infer that these results can be applied too strictly on a provincial or national level.

The sample is relatively small; only three districts were

chosen for assessment and only at the grade nine level for early French immersion students. However, the study can help to determine how students write and what may be expected of them with reference to writing at the end of the intermediate grades. The results will render some ideas as to the strengths and weaknesses of grade nine French immersion students in the different geographical areas, as well as giving an indication of overall performance in the province. Provincial performance tends to be similar to national performance, as has been indicated in evaluation studies. (See Netten & Spain, 1982).

In addition, this is an ethnographic study. To some extent, at least, the assessment procedure is subjective; therefore, it is difficult to generalize provincially or nationally. However, valuable and pertinent information may be extracted from this study as the following chapter on the results of the data indicate. Such findings can be used to assist in developing some understanding of attainable proficiency levels for French immersion students at the end of the intermediate grades and in determining areas where programs may need study or improvement.



## CHAPTER IV

### Results of the Data

#### Introduction

In this chapter the results of the data are given and discussed. Results of the comparisons by group are reported in tables. Overall comments will be given with reference to the data followed by a summary. Comparisons will then be made between the three geographical groups followed by comparison of female/male overall results. Female/male comparisons are then reported by geographical group. The chapter concludes with a summary of the findings.

#### Overall Results

As indicated in Tables 2 and 3, the majority of students performed well in the categories of: effectiveness (getting the message across), 67 percent (2.67); and vocabulary use, 52 percent (2.52). However, the majority of students performed only moderately well in the categories of: grammar, 42 percent (2.39) and spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization, 33 percent (2.33). Sociolinguistic performance, 25 percent (2.17) and organization of information, 47 percent (2.08) were the categories in which the students performed least well.

Although few students performed poorly in most of the categories, 39 percent of students performed poorly, and 14 percent only fairly, in the category of organization of

information. Fifty-three percent of students did not attempt to organize their information, stay on topic or use paragraph form to the extent that comprehension was affected.

**Table 2**

**Mean Raw Scores of Regional Groups and Total Population**

	Total			
	Group	Group A	Group B	Group C
Grammar	2.39	2.31	2.59	2.27
Vocabulary Use	2.52	2.44	2.86*	2.27
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	2.33	2.13	2.41	2.38
Effectiveness	2.67	2.63	2.77	2.65
Organization of Information	2.08	2.00	2.36	1.88
Sociolinguistic Performance	2.17	2.06	2.14	2.27*
Total Mean	2.36	2.26	2.52	2.29

\*Differences significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 3

Overall Results--Three Groups Combined

Category	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	2	3	35	55	27	42
Vocabulary	0	0	31	48	33	52
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	43	67	21	33
Effectiveness	0	0	21	33	43	67
Organization of Information	25	39	9	14	30	47
Sociolinguistic Performance	5	8	43	67	16	25

Students performed only moderately well in the categories of grammar, with only 42 percent rated as good, and spelling/ accent/punctuation/capitalization at 33 percent. Although only 33 percent of students rated good in the spelling/accent/ punctuation/capitalization, their deficiencies were in the areas of spelling and accent; punctuation and capitalization were generally strong.

Errors made were generally typical of what has been

previously described in studies of immersion students inter-language. Grammatical mistakes such as inappropriate verb endings and omission of the infinitive as in Item 45, "Nous commencent ..." and Item 43 "... les personnes de l'école peut met ..." were frequent. Gender also presented a difficulty, as in Item #42 "(name of school) est un bon école mais (name of school) peut être plus belle si il y a un cafeteria dans l'école." There were also several spelling and accent mistakes such as Item 45 "argument" and "vraiment" or Item 59 "les athlets".

Only 25 of the students performed well in the sociolinguistic category. Frequently students expressed themselves inappropriately in terms of their sociolinguistic performance with the use of the "tu" form when addressing their principal or opening their letter to the principal with an informal tone or attitude. Item 50 is an example of this familiarity where a student introduces his letter by greeting the director "Bonjour M. Directeur, comment ça va? Je suis bien mais j'ai eu un idée a propo de l'école." Item 54 is another example of this familiar tone, "Cher Directeur, Bonjour. Comment ça-va? J'espere que vous êtes heureux aujourd'hui parce que moi, je ne suis pas."

Vocabulary use was one of the categories in which students performed well, with over half (52 percent) attaining the "Good" category. Occasionally in the context of vocabulary a word is used inappropriately as in Item 45 in which "le

principe" is used instead of "le directeur" or "un button" for "un bouton" but generally their vocabulary skills are strong.

Overall some students reached a high level of performance, and occasionally an item was noted for its unique style, or clarity and command of the language as in Item 20:

Vous avez demandé aux étudiants d'offrir leurs idées pour rendre plus agréables leurs vies à l'école. Moi, je pense qu'on aimerait tous être sans uniforme officielle. Sans l'uniforme, on sera tous plus contents et à l'aise à l'école.

or Item 36:

Premièrement c'est trop plât, pas assez d'excitement pour rendre les élèves plus excité(s) au travail. J'ai eu des experience(s) dans mon école passé à Montréal que si on reçoit des jours de plaisir (seulement ou il faut) on est plus déterminer de travailler quand on est supposé parce qu'on a quelque chose en reçu quand on termine nos études, projets etc. ...

#### Summary.

In general students seemed to perform best on getting their message across and secondly on their vocabulary knowledge and use. They performed most poorly on organization of information with some weakness in sociolinguistic performance,

spelling, accent, and grammar. Although French immersion students can use the language they appear to be weak in the more sophisticated mechanics of it.

These results are not unexpected, given the findings of other researchers who have investigated the productive skills of French immersion learners.

### Comparisons of Different Groups

The data was further analyzed by making group comparisons. The first was by geographical area. The data was divided into three groups: A (rural), B (urban), and C (francophone). A rural area was defined as one in which the population of the center was less than 30,000, while an urban area was defined as one where the population was over 100,000. "Francophone" was used to identify an area where there was a visible native French-speaking population living in the center and/or near by. The data was also examined for gender differences, and organized by male and female groups for overall performance, as well as by geographical area.

Table 3 reports the mean scores for each of the categories for overall performance for each of the geographical areas. Reference will be made to this table throughout the following discussion. Percentage of students in each category is reported for each of the school districts, A, B and C in Tables 4, 5 and 6.

Group A (rural district).

Compared to the overall results, Group A and C, the rural areas, performed least well. In five of the six writing categories fewer students were rated as "Good".

The difference in mean scores between the overall results and Group A ranged from  $-.40$  to  $-.20$ . Group A performed best in the effectiveness category rating 63 percent in the "Good" category. Slightly less than one half the students attained the "Good" category on vocabulary. Organization of information was equally divided with 44 percent in each of the categories of "Good" and "Low". Fewer students performed well in the grammar (38 percent), socio-linguistic performance (19 percent) and spelling/accent/ punctuation/capitalization (13 percent) categories.

A very high percentage of students in Group A were evaluated only as "Fair" in the spelling category, 88 percent, and 69 percent fell into the "Fair" category for socio-linguistic performance as indicated in Table 4.

Forty-four percent of Group A students fell into the "Low" category for organization of information and 13 percent for sociolinguistic performance as indicated in Table 4.

Generally the results for Group A are comparable with the overall results in terms of the categories in which they performed best and those in which they performed least well. However, their scores are lower in every category with a difference of  $.10$  compared to the overall results.

Table 4

Group A - Rural Levels of Performance Results

Category	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	1	6	9	56	6	38
Vocabulary	0	0	9	56	7	44
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	14	88*	2	13*
Effectiveness	0	0	6	38*	10	63*
Organization of Information	7	44*	2	13*	7	44*
Sociolinguistic Performance	2	13*	11	69*	3	19*

Total number of students = 16

\*Percentages more or less than 100% due to round-up or round-down of decimal figures.

Group B (urban district).

As indicated in Table 5, Group B (an urban area) performed better in all categories with the exception of sociolinguistic performance. They were strongest in vocabulary use



(2.86) with 86 percent rated as "Good" compared with the overall results, which showed effectiveness to be the strongest category, and the one in which the most students performed best. Group B also performed very well in the organization of information category, 64 percent being rated as "Good". This result may indicate that in this district the concept of organizing information and staying on topic is taught as an isolated skill. What is interesting to note is that 27 percent of students in Group B still performed poorly in this category. Students in Group B performed least well in the category of sociolinguistic performance (2.14) with 68 percent in the "Fair" rating. Spelling/accent/punctuation and capitalization was also generally unsatisfactory (2.14) with most students (59 percent) in the "Fair" category, but performance was better than for Group A.

Table 5

Group B - Urban Levels of Performance Results

Category	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	0	0	9	41	13	59
Vocabulary	0	0	3	14	19	86
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	13	59	9	41
Effectiveness	0	0	5	23	17	77
Organization of Information	6	27	2	9	14	64
Sociolinguistic Performance	2	9	15	68	5	23

Total number of students = 22

Group C (francophone area).

As may be seen in Table 6, students in Group C who live in a rural francophone community performed at about the same level as Group A. They performed best in the effectiveness category (2.65) 65 percent, and secondly in the category of spelling/ accent/punctuation/capitalization (2.38). They were

weakest in the category of organization of information (1.88) 35 percent. In fact, Group C performed least well of all three groups in the categories of grammar (2.27) 31 percent, vocabulary (2.27) 27 percent, and organization of information (1.88) 35 percent.

**Table 6**

**Group C - Francophone Levels of Performance Results**

Category	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	1	4	17	65	8	31
Vocabulary	0	0	19	73	7	27
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	16	62	10	38
Effectiveness	0	0	9	35	17	65
Organization of Information	12	46	5	19	9	35
Sociolinguistic Performance	1	4	17	65	8	31

Total number of students = 26

Other than the categories of sociolinguistic performance (2.27) 31 percent, and that of spelling/accent/capitalization/punctuation (2.38) 38 percent, where they performed best of all three groups, Group C's performance was lower than the overall results. If socio- linguistic performance is not related to L<sub>2</sub> exposure in the environment (Cummins & Swain, 1986), then one might conclude that this skill was taught in the classroom. Attention must also be given in the classroom to spelling/accent aspects of language.

#### Summary of regional groups.

Group B, the urban group, outperformed the rural and francophone groups by a considerable margin. The francophone group performed better than either other group in the sociolinguistic category and in spelling/accent.

#### Comparisons Female vs Male

Females performed better than males in all categories, as is evident in Tables 7, 8 and 9. Their strongest area was in the category of effectiveness (2.80) where 80 percent of students were rated as "Good". The next strongest category for female students was vocabulary use (2.59) where 59 percent of students were rated as "Good", followed by grammar (2.43) with 45 percent "Good" and spelling (2.43) at 43 percent. Sociolinguistic performance (2.20) and organization of information (2.18) were the weakest categories.

Males by comparison performed considerably lower in all categories. Effectiveness was still their strongest area (2.45) with 45 percent "Good", followed by vocabulary use (2.35) and grammar (2.30) with 35 percent "Good". Twenty percent of males were rated as "Good" in the sociolinguistic category (2.10) and only 10 percent in spelling (2.10). Organization of information was also their weakest category (1.85) but females outperformed males by a difference of +.33.

Females outperformed males noticeably in the effectiveness category (+.35) with females rating 65 percent in the "Good" category compared to 45 percent males. Females were also much stronger in the categories of spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization (+.33) at 43 percent compared with their male counterparts at 10 percent and organization (+.33). On organization of information, 52 percent, females were rated as "Good" compared to 35 percent males. In the vocabulary category 59 percent of females were rated as "Good" compared to 35 percent males giving a differential of +.54. The difference between females and males in the sociolinguistic performance category was less (+.10) as 27 percent females were rated as "Good" compared with 20 percent males; this was also true of the grammar category (+.13) where 45 percent of females were rated as "Good" compared with 35 percent males.

Table 7

Mean Raw Scores of Males and Females

	Female	Male
Grammar	2.43	2.30
Vocabulary	2.59	2.35
Spelling/Accent/Punctuation/ Capitalization	2.43*	2.10
Effectiveness	2.80*	2.45
Organization of Information	2.18	1.85
Sociolinguistic Performance	2.20	2.10
Total Mean	2.44	2.19

\*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 8

Male Overall Results--Three Groups Combined

Category	<u>Total 20</u>					
	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	1	5	12	60	7	35
Vocabulary	0	0	13	65	7	35
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	18	90	2	10
Effectiveness	0	0	11	55	9	45
Organization of Information	10	50	3	15	7	35
Sociolinguistic Performance	2	10	14	70	4	20

Table 9

Female Overall Results--Three Groups Combined

Category	<u>Total 44</u>					
	Low		Fair		Good	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	1	2*	23	52*	20	45*
Vocabulary	0	0	18	41	26	59
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	0	0	25	57	19	43
Effectiveness	0	0	9	20	35	80
Organization of Information	15	34	6	14	23	52
Sociolinguistic Performance	3	7	29	66	12	27

\*Percentages more or less than 100% due to round-up or round-down of decimal figures.

Female vs male - group a.

In almost every category (refer to Tables 10 and 11) females outperformed males, their most obvious performance being the +.62 difference on effectiveness. The difference of



mean raw scores in the "Good" rating ranged from +.07 to +.62. Vocabulary and organization were also much higher in the female group with vocabulary carrying a positive difference of .35 and organization of information a positive difference in scores of +.07. The majority of males were only rated as "Fair" in each category.

Table 10

Mean Raw Scores for Males and Females By Geographical Region

	Group A		Group B		Group C	
	F	M	F	M	F	M
Grammar	2.36	2.20	2.57	2.63	2.37	2.00
Vocabulary	2.55	2.20	2.93	2.75	2.37	2.00
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	1.33	2.00	2.50	2.25	2.53	2.00
Effectiveness	2.82	2.20	2.79	2.75	2.79	2.29
Organization of Information	2.27	2.20	2.36	2.38	2.00	1.57
Sociolinguistic Performance	2.09	2.00	2.07	2.25	2.37	2.00
Total Mean	2.24	2.13	2.54	2.50	2.41	1.98

\*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.

Table 11

**Percentage of Female-Male Student Performance by Geographical Region**

		Group A - Rural				Group B - Urban				Group C - Francophone			
		Female 11		Male 5		Female 14		Male 8		Female 19		Male 7	
		No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Grammar	L	1	9*	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	14*
	F	5	45*	4	80	6	43	3	38*	12	63	5	71*
	G	5	45*	1	20	8	57	5	63*	7	37	1	14*
Vocabulary	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	F	5	45	4	80	1	7	2	25	12	63	7	100
	G	6	55	1	20	13	93	6	75	7	37	0	0
Spelling/Accent Punctuation/ Capitalization	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	F	9	82	5	100	7	50	6	75	9	47	7	100
	G	2	18	0	0	7	50	2	25	10	53	0	0
Effectiveness	L	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
	F	2	18	4	80	3	22*	2	25	4	21	5	71
	G	9	82	1	20	11	79*	6	75	15	79	2	29
Organization of Information	L	3	27	0	0	4	29	2	25*	8	42	4	57
	F	2	18	4	80	1	7	1	13*	3	16	2	29
	G	6	55	1	20	9	64	5	63	8	42	1	14
Sociolinguistic Performance	L	2	18	0	0	1	7	1	13*	0	0	1	14*
	F	6	55	5	100	11	79	4	50*	12	63	5	71*
	G	3	27	0	0	2	14	3	38*	7	37	1	14*

\*Percentages more than or less than 100% due to round-up of decimal figures.

#### Female vs male - group b.

In this urban group (refer to Tables 11 and 12) females outperformed males in two categories, vocabulary use (+.18) and spelling/accent/capitalization/punctuation (+.25). In two categories, the males outperformed females; grammar and sociolinguistic performance. The difference in the grammar category was +.06 for males and in the sociolinguistic category +.18. However, in the effectiveness and the organization categories the difference in performance of the male group compared to the female group was not significant. The effectiveness category carried a difference of only +.04 for females and organization only +.02. Males performed somewhat better overall in Group B in comparison to Groups A and C.

#### Female vs male - group c.

In the francophone group, females outperformed their male counterparts in all categories. The difference in scores ranged in the six categories from +.53 for females in the spelling category to +.14 for grammar, organization and sociolinguistic performance. (Refer to Tables 10, 11 and 12)

#### Conclusions - female vs male.

Females and males perform better in the categories of effectiveness, vocabulary and organization of information than they do in grammar, spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization and sociolinguistic performance, as seen in Figure 1. Females

Table 12

**Mean Raw Scores of Female-Male Student Performance By Geographical Region**

	Group A - Rural		Group B - Urban		Group C - Francophone	
	Female 11	Male 5	Female 14	Male 8	Female 19	Male 7
	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean	Mean
Grammar	2.36	2.22	2.57	2.63	2.37	2.0
Vocabulary	2.55	2.2	2.93*	2.75	2.37	2.0
Spelling/Accent/ Punctuation/ Capitalization	1.33	2.0	2.5	2.25	2.53	2.0
Effectiveness	2.82	2.2	2.79	2.75	2.79	2.25
Organization of Information	2.27	2.2	2.36	2.38	2.0	1.57
Sociolinguistic Performance	2.09	2.0	2.07	2.25	2.37	2.0

\*Significant at the .05 level of confidence.



outperform males in all categories, males only approaching the female rating in sociolinguistic performance. Sociolinguistic performance was the weakest category overall followed by spelling and accent.

Only 6 percent of students performed well in all categories, three of whom were female and one male and 9 percent performed well in all but one category, five of whom were female and one male. Organization of information and sociolinguistic performance were the two categories in which students performed most poorly.

### Summary

Overall students performed best in the categories of effectiveness and vocabulary followed by grammar, spelling/accnt/punctuation/capitalization, sociolinguistic performance and organization of information respectively. However 39 percent of students performed poorly on organization, a percentage much higher than in any other of the "Low" categories.

The performance of Group A (Rural) was weaker overall than either Group B or Group C. Group B (Urban) performed better than either of the other groups with the exception of the spelling/accnt/punctuation/capitalization category in which they scored below the overall result. Group C (Francophone Milieu) performed only slightly better than Group A and were strongest in effectiveness and spelling/accept/

punctuation/capitalization.

Females performed better than males in all categories in the overall results, effectiveness being their strongest area. Group A females outperformed males in all categories but one: spelling/accept/punctuation/capitalization. Group B females outperformed males in all but three categories, grammar, organization of information and sociolinguistic performance. Group C females outperformed males in all categories.

## CHAPTER V

### Discussion of Findings and Interpretation of Results

There were five major findings from the data. They are as follows:

1. Students performed best in the categories of effectiveness and vocabulary use.

2. Organization of information results were either "Good" or "Low".

3. Grammar results were lower than would have been anticipated.

4. Students did not perform well in the category of spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization.

5. Sociolinguistic performance was moderate, with students in the francophone group performing best.

Each finding will be discussed in turn.

It is perhaps not surprising that students performed best in the categories of effectiveness and use of vocabulary. Throughout the student's immersion years from kindergarten to grade nine (the grade in which this data was collected), most subjects are taught in the second language. Therefore the French immersion student would be exposed to a rich and extensive vocabulary. As well, many of these students have had other cultural experiences outside of school, such as excursions to Quebec, St. Pierre et Miquelon, interaction with francophones in the community and organized special events.



Effectiveness (getting the message across) is a facility the French immersion student would have developed quite early in her/his  $L_2$  experience. French immersion students have always had to access a variety of resources to communicate with their interlocutor since in their early immersion experience they were quite limited linguistically, and are accustomed to using a variety of communication strategies. The goal of French immersion education is communication and it appears to be attained.

An interesting finding in the data involved the curious results in the organization of information category where the distribution was bimodal. Although 47 percent of students performed well, the second highest percentage rating for organization was in the "Low" column at 39 percent and 14 percent in the "Fair" column. It appears students either do or do not generally organize their information according to standard sentence and paragraph development. This result may well be a function of prior instruction in the classroom. In some systems organization of information may not be emphasized or even taught, whereas in others it may be. With reference to Tables 5, 6 and 7, it is interesting to observe the results of each of the three groups on organization of information. Group A results are fairly evenly distributed between the "Good" and the "Low" ratings with 44 percent of students in each column and 13 percent of students falling into the "Fair" rating. It seems organization of information is taught in

this area but not routinely emphasized, perhaps, since 44 percent did organize their work and an equal number did not attempt to do so. Organization of information is a concept that most students (57 percent) in this district have not mastered. In Group B 64 percent of students did organize their information well, 9 percent fairly well and 27 percent poorly. The reader analyzing this data might interpret that Group B students have been taught the concept of organization and that to some extent it has been mastered since two thirds of the students (64 percent) were rated as "Good". Group C's results were far weaker where only 35 percent of students were rated as "Good", 19 percent "Fair" and 46 percent "Low". These results indicate that students in this district have not mastered the concept of organization and it probably has not been given sufficient attention in the classroom, since students performed so poorly. Since Group A and C both represent rural areas, it may be that organization of material receives more emphasis in urban schools.

Only 42 percent of students performed well in the grammar category. Most teachers, administrators and schools boards would prefer to see more positive results, given these students have had 10 years of immersion and have been engaged in the writing process for nearly as many years. However, there is current support in the literature to indicate that grammatical skills may be developed primarily through exposure and use of the second language in the environment rather than

in an academic setting (Saville-Troike, 1984). This concept is further supported by Cummins and Swain (1984) who found that immigrant students developed grammatical skills in L<sub>2</sub> more rapidly--orally at least with some evidence for other competencies--than students in a French immersion setting because immigrant children have a far greater exposure to the second language, interacting with their peers in their L<sub>2</sub> environment.

"Knowing a form, we claim, does not assure that the form will be used in free situations" (Bialystok, 1981, p. 43). Bialystok (1979) undertook a study to determine the interaction of implicit and explicit grammatical tasks. Her findings suggest that there are two "knowledge systems" called upon for different grammatical tasks--one implicit, the other explicit. This may explain why, on an integrative grammatical task such as the item being measured in this thesis (the writing of a letter to the director), students will display their implicit grammatical knowledge but do not display their explicit knowledge. Because they are concentrating on content, they do not monitor their work and perform the grammatical task explicitly; that is, more correctly with fewer grammatical errors.

Students may know grammar explicitly, that is have knowledge about what is correct grammatically but may not be able to use it communicatively without unlimited time to reflect on its correct application or be able to support the

reasons for the grammatical choice. Bialystok refers to this concept as implicit and explicit grammatical knowledge. In this study, urban students performed better than francophones in the grammar category.

Swain's (1984) work on the design of a communicative-based assessment unit entitled À Vous La Parole suggests that adequate time be given to testees to perform each written task and then additional time given each succeeding day to return to their work and make changes where necessary. Testees are also encouraged to use dictionaries and other reference material and are informed about such items as what the evaluator is testing, what tone to use and suggestions for specific points to include in their work. The concept of offering to the student the best possible opportunity for success, Swain refers to as "bias for best" and it is one of four principles developed by Swain for relevant communicative language testing. What is important for this thesis is the concept of bias for best, since grammatical performance of these students may have been higher had this principle been implemented.

Students did not perform well in the categories of spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization. Spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization are considered by Canale (1981) to be included in grammatical competence but this may still support the reason for these students' poor performance, i.e., although general grammar rules are related to intuitive

factors (implicit knowledge), specific grammar rules such as spelling, accent and the like are related to cognitive factors (explicit knowledge), knowledge that must be taught and internalized (Bialystok, 1981).

Punctuation and capitalization were generally strong, which may not be surprising, since there is the possibility of transfer of writing behaviours (Fagan & Hayden, 1988) from English to French in this area. Punctuation and capitalization are also taught in English writing skills and these two conventions are closely related in English and French. Therefore students are reinforced in their use of punctuation and capitalization. Spelling and accent alternately are unique to the specific language learned; there is little if any transfer of behaviours. It would seem that they are separate skills to be learned, without any reinforcement from the other language. Spelling and accent were two areas where students experienced difficulties. Spelling and accent may not be emphasized sufficiently in the French immersion classroom since communication is the primary goal. Instruction may be focusing on content rather than on the mechanics of orthography and accent.

Sociolinguistic performance was also only moderate and comprised the largest percentage of students in the "Fair" category (67 percent). Again this result may be a function of two factors; one, that because of lack of exposure with native speakers generally, other than the teacher, students are not

sufficiently cognizant of rules of politeness in different social contexts, the language used, formal and informal levels of language and so on, and that these rules are not emphasized in class. It is interesting to note that Cummins and Swain (1986) have concluded that discourse and sociolinguistic proficiency "appear to depend less on exposure to L<sub>2</sub> in the environment" (p. 212) which may support the writer's position that unless these skills are emphasized in the classroom they are not integrated in the students' communicative repertoire. If these conventions are not taught students cannot adhere to them. Given the research of Cummins and Swain (1986) the latter is probably more significant since L<sub>2</sub> learners' sociolinguistic performance appears less dependent on the L<sub>2</sub> environment, and more so on its formal instruction in the classroom. Cummins (1980) refers to the integration of sociolinguistic competence as an item he includes in his Basic Interpersonal Communicative Skills (BICS), skills which must be taught. It is, however, to be noted that students in the francophone milieu performed better in this category than either of the other two groups.

One might have expected students living in a francophone milieu to have performed well in the categories of effectiveness, vocabulary and grammar. However conclusions from this data do not indicate this and are inconsistent with the research of Saville-Troike (1984) who found that grammatical skills, at least, developed primarily as a function of

exposure and use of the language in the environment rather than in an academic environment; grammatical skills are further refined at a cognitive level for higher academic achievement. We might conclude that French immersion students do not interact routinely with other francophones and peers in their francophone environment and, since they may have isolated themselves to performing their second language skills in the classroom they may, in this regard, be considered to live in a uni-cultural milieu. Since the students from the francophone milieu have the highest number of students in the "Good" category for sociolinguistic performance at 31 percent, compared to the other two groups at 19 and 23 percents respectively, we can assume that although students may not interact with the L<sub>2</sub> environment outside the classroom, their teacher does. She or he may be a native speaker and/or has evidently taught the sociolinguistic skill in the classroom.

Overall, six percent of students performed well in all categories and 9 percent performed well in all but one category. Eleven percent of students performed well in terms of overall errors which ranged from zero to few faults, although one half of these students constructed a very simple letter. Organization of information and sociolinguistic performance were the two weakest areas for these students, who otherwise communicated very well. These results would appear somewhat low, given these students have been involved in French immersion for 10 years.

Compared to the overall results, female students rated much higher in each category than males. It is interesting to note that the results of female students on grammar and sociolinguistic performance indicate a relatively small number of the "Good" rating (45 and 27 percents respectively); it is only at this level that male students begin to approach the performance of females (35 and 20 percent rated "Good"), although at no level do they actually outperform their female classmates. This result suggests that neither of these skills receives sufficient emphasis in teaching. Grammar and sociolinguistic performances are considered cognitive skills, at the writing level. Although  $L_2$  environment affects grammar acquisition at an implicit level, grammar and sociolinguistic acquisition are more dependent on classroom instruction (Cummins & Swain, 1986) at the more formal writing stage, where cognitive skills are operative.

There is evidence in psychological research to indicate that, due to the difference of operation in right side and left side brain hemispheres, males and females can perform quite differently in their acquisition of language. The female brain develops more rapidly on the left side while males develop more rapidly on their right side. Both groups will further develop both right and left brain hemispheres as they mature (Brothers, 1981).

The speech centre is located in the left brain hemisphere and such skills as word perception, the perception of letters



and speech-related sounds as well as mathematical calculations are all controlled by the left brain. The right brain is more adept at the perception of complex geometric patterns, human faces and non-linguistic sounds, as well as senses of direction and sense of location in space (Kolb & Whishaw, 1985). Right and left brains interact and are consistently involved with all brain functions but some functions--such as language--rely on a particular side and area of the brain.

The structure and function of the brain then may, in part, explain the difference in performance of female versus male in this study. Perhaps the left side of the male brain is not fully developed at the age of these grade nine students (average age 15 years) and for reasons of maturity and, therefore, cognition development, males are simply not as proficient as females in language performance at this level. This is not to infer that, as they mature and the left side of their brain fully develops, they do not equal the performance of their female counterparts.

It is also interesting to note that there are far more females enrolled in the French immersion program of these three groups studied than there are males (69 percent females versus 31 percent males). In each group females outnumbered males by a two-thirds percent margin. Forty-four females were enrolled in French immersion at the grade nine level compared to 20 males. Since these students began French immersion at kindergarten and the decision for enrolment was their

parents', one wonders if parents consider it more important for their daughters to learn a second language than their sons or perhaps that it is more culturally acceptable for them to do so.

The female/male results in Group A were remarkable. In every category except spelling females outperformed males or showed a tendency to do so. Group A is a rural group; culturally there may be a bias against boys pursuing a second language. If so attitude would be a contributing factor in the internalization and performance of males in the L<sub>2</sub> classroom in this community.

In Group B, an urban center, males performed better than in either Group A or C, although females still showed a tendency to outperform males on all but the categories of grammar and sociolinguistic performance. In this urban area there may be less prejudice toward males engaging in the pursuit of a second language, where demographically there are more role models and more professionals speaking a second language, who are male.

Group C is a francophone community but females again outperformed males by a considerable difference in every category. This particular francophone community is comprised of labourers who are role models for their children. It may be that boys do not actually value an education in L<sub>2</sub> and see themselves as different compared to their peers in the core system. There may be an attitude difference in this area as

there may be in the rural area, which could account for the lower performance of males compared to females.

### Conclusions

1. Overall students performed best in the categories of effectiveness and vocabulary use.

2. Forty-nine percent of students performed poorly on organization of information, indicating that the concept of organization in writing needs to be further taught and/or re-emphasized in the classroom.

3. Only 42 percent of students performed well in the grammar category; based on the research of Cummins (1980), Cummins and Swain (1986) and Bialystok (1981), these results suggest that grammar requires more formal classroom instruction.

4. Spelling and accent results were low. These are skills which must also be taught (Cummins, 1980). These skills are primarily cognitive and appear to require more formal classroom instruction.

5. Punctuation and capitalization skills were strong, indicating a possible transfer of writing behaviours from L<sub>1</sub> (first language) and L<sub>2</sub> (Fagan & Hayden, 1988).

6. Sociolinguistic performance was poor overall, although Group C performed better in this category than the other two groups. If we accept the view that sociolinguistic proficiency is less dependent on L<sub>2</sub> and more dependent on formal instruction (Cummins, 1980; Cummins & Swain, 1986), the

reader may assume that the teachers of Group C had formally taught the concept of sociolinguistic performance. This result suggests that more formal teaching of this aspect of communicative competence would be desirable.

7. Overall female students tended to outperform male students in each category. Overall, male students approached the performance of females on grammar and sociolinguistic performance. Low performance in writing for males may be directly correlated to the psychological research of Kolb and Whishaw (1985) and Brothers (1981) on left side, right side brain hemispheres. The larger differences in the more rural areas may be attributed to socialization and academic expectations. It is interesting to note that there are approximately two thirds percent more females enrolled in the three French immersion classes in this study than there are males. It appears parents elect more often to enter their daughters in the French immersion system than their sons.

8. Results by geographical region again showed a tendency for females to outperform males. However, the tendency was most pronounced in the francophone area, and least pronounced in the urban area. Attitude and socialization would appear to be important in explaining the low performance of males in rural areas.

## CHAPTER VI

### Conclusions and Recommendations

#### Overview of Problem and Results

As a brief summary, the writer has thus far investigated the problem, ie., the level of writing skills of grade nine French immersion students. The procedure included the selection of three school boards in three distinct districts (rural, urban and francophone). The grade nine level was selected for assessment. Samples of student writings were collected from all three school boards and rated for their proficiency in the areas of grammar, vocabulary use, spelling/ accent/punctuation/capitalization, effectiveness of communication, organization of information and sociolinguistic performance. A description of each proficiency level was developed and a three point system of 1 = "Low," 2 = "Fair," and 3 = "Good" was used.

Results of the data analysis were reported and conclusions drawn, based on the student assessments and the findings in other research. Overall, students performed best in the categories of effectiveness of communication and vocabulary use. Organization of information was bimodally distributed, with about half the students in the "Good" category and half in the "Low" category. Students in the urban region performed better than those in either the rural or francophone areas. Females outperformed males, although

males performed better in the urban area. Interestingly enough, there are two-thirds more females than males enrolled in French immersion programs in the regions studied. Students in the francophone area outperformed the other groups in sociolinguistic competence. Grammatical competence was relatively weak in all areas and groups.

### Conclusion of Study

In response to the questions asked at the end of Chapter II, the following are the findings from the data:

**1. What is the level of communicative ability of students in French immersion when using the written skill?**

The student proficiency levels for effective communication are reasonably good; therefore, their level of communicative ability at the end of grade nine may be considered satisfactory.

**2. What is the level of grammatical competence of French immersion students when using the written skill?**

Student levels of grammatical competence are considerably lower than those for communicative competence. If we adhere to a definition of competence as the ability to impart a message then the students in this study are communicatively competent. If, however, we adhere to a more rigid definition of competence, whereby a message is imparted with fluency and accuracy, few students are communicatively competent. In a broad definition for competence, which includes getting the

message across with relative fluency and meaning where the level of accuracy does not interfere with comprehension, then students in this study are still communicatively competent. Although they are weaker in their grammar, spelling/punctuation and sociolinguistic skills than they are in vocabulary, effectiveness and organization, the majority of students do convey meaning without decreasing the level of comprehension for the reader.

**3. Are there differences between French immersion programs provincially?**

The rural, urban and francophone regional results differ. Urban students outperform their peers in the rural and francophone areas. These results are consistent with findings on the receptive skills, provincially (Netten, 1991). Students in the francophone area, however, outperformed their peers in sociolinguistic competence, although this result may be due to instruction or example from the teacher in a classroom situation rather than interaction. Teachers in the francophone program are native francophones.

**4. Are there differences between females and males in French immersion when using the written skill?**

There are considerable differences between female and male results. Females outperform their male counterparts in all categories provincially, although in the urban group, males tend to outperform females on grammar and socio-linguistic performance.

### Implications for Newfoundland Programs

Since grammar, spelling/accent and sociolinguistic performances are only moderate and since these skills are considered cognitive in nature (Bialystok, 1981; Spilka, 1976), it is incumbent on the educational system to include more emphasis on them in French immersion programs. Teachers need to be cognizant of the importance of addressing these skills since, if never taught, student levels will remain low, due to minimal exposure to the L<sub>2</sub> environment and the need for further instruction at higher academic levels for explicit grammatical competence (Bialystok, 1981).

Student levels of organization of information are not particularly strong either, since 53 percent of students performed either moderately or poorly (39 percent in the "Low" category). Therefore more attention is required in this area.

Greater emphasis is required for French immersion programs and instruction rurally. The same factors which contribute to lower performance in the rural areas in the regular programs are probably operative. It needs to be determined to what extent size of school, teacher qualifications, educational environment and expectations are influencing levels of performance in the rural program.

Males may not be as aware of the value of French programs as they might be. Some further motivation may be required to have them engage more fully in the program. The consideration of attitudinal differences between females and males may also



be a factor that requires attention as well as the orientation of curriculum materials and instructional strategies.

Where discrepancies exist regionally, these areas need to be addressed as well. Perhaps more resources could be injected into lower performance areas including the assistance of French monitors and/or assistants. The low performance of males has also to be addressed, as well as their low numbers in enrollment.

#### National implications.

If the results of this study can be applied nationally, and to some extent this writer feels they can since the results are consistent with national findings, then more emphasis needs to be placed on the skills of grammar, spelling/accent, and sociolinguistic performance. This will necessitate the revision of programs and perhaps the development of new instructional materials. Teachers will require further inservicing in these areas.

#### Other Considerations

Although the grammatical level of French immersion students is moderate, the level of grammar for students in the English stream reflects a similar pattern. French immersion students' level of grammar is higher than that of students in core French. It is important to be aware of the maturity level of these students. Their intellectual development is

that of a 15 year old with all that this entails, cognitively, socially and emotionally. The question may be asked as to whether grade nine students' performance should be more sophisticated than it is, given their limited exposure to the language (ie., one teacher per grade and very little L<sub>2</sub> interaction elsewhere). Perhaps, in reference to grammatical skills, considerable further investigation needs to be undertaken to determine what realistic levels of proficiency for these students would be. Spelling, accent and socio-linguistic performance will also require attention.

However, it is imperative that students not be compared to native francophones, since to do so places the emphasis more on the errors French immersion students make than it does on what they can actually do (Netten & Noonan, 1991; Davies, 1989). It is inappropriate to do so in any case, since French immersion students simply do not have the same exposure to a francophone environment, are limited linguistically for demographic reasons, and are communicating in a second language.

### Conclusion

This writer feels that the written performance of French immersion students at the grade nine level may be described as moderately good with some reservations. Further attention should be given to the low performance in the areas of grammatical competence, spelling/accent, and sociolinguistic

performance. Attention should be given to the rural areas. The low performance of males is of some concern. The low levels of males entering the system also needs to be addressed.

### Recommendations

Based on the findings in this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. There is a need for French immersion teachers to allocate more instructional time for the integration of grammar, spelling, accent, sociolinguistic performance and organization of information, particularly as they pertain to writing. While the latter competence is not language specific, it does appear to need more instructional emphasis.

2. Swain's (1984a) concept of "bias for best" may be a consideration for teachers when they assign students any task, especially written, to elicit their best possible performance; that is, to allocate an adequate amount of time for the task, allow access to dictionaries and other research materials and designate additional time in the next and succeeding days for student revision of their work. This type of approach may make students more aware of grammatical performance, including spelling and accent aspects of language competence.

3. In evaluating student compositions, the category of spelling/accent/punctuation/capitalization should be divided into spelling/accent and punctuation/capitalization since the

results were so polarized in this study.

4. Further research might be considered for the following:

- (a) to determine the attitudes of parents toward the French immersion program and the reason for their selected enrollment (male vs female);
- (b) to determine the attitudes of boys enrolled in French immersion toward their program;
- (c) to determine the attitudes of girls enrolled in the French immersion toward their program for constructive purposes with that of boys;
- (d) to compare the results of written assessment of French immersion students with those of students in core French and extended French programs;
- (e) to determine if the style and neatness of handwriting influences student rating.

5. This research also suggests that there are three fundamental questions in  $L_2$  acquisition which may need further study:

- (a) role of the teaching of grammar and the extent to which explicit teaching affects level of proficiency in a communicative task;
- (b) view that sociolinguistic performance must be taught and is not affected by participation in an  $L_2$  environment;
- (c) view that grammatical competence is not taught, but

acquired through participation in an environment.

### Further Recommendations

Based on one of Swain's (1984) four principles of communicative language testing, bias for best, the writer would like to suggest the following recommendations to enhance students' performance in writing.

1. An adequate amount of time be allotted for the performance of the desired communicative task.

2. Encouragement for students to re-read and edit their work.

3. An allotment of time be designated the next and succeeding days for further revision of the work.

4. Dictionaries and other resource materials be available to students while they perform their task.

5. Suggestions and points worth mentioning in students' work be offered where appropriate and useful.

6. Emphasis be placed on the status and position of the person when writing or speaking and on the formality and tone desired appropriate for the task.

7. An explanation be given students of what is being assessed so they know what to concentrate on.

8. Encouragement for students to write a first draft of their work and monitor "both the cognitive and mechanical aspects of writing" (Fagan & Hayden, 1988, p. 667).

9. A set of criteria developed and made available to

students to assist them in monitoring their written work (Hillocks, 1986).

10. Canale's (1981) four areas of communicative competence taught students so they understand grammatical, sociolinguistic, discourse and strategic performance; this could enhance their performance in all areas and may particularly augment their weaker areas of grammatical, sociolinguistic and discourse performance.

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**APPENDIX A****Test d'écriture:****Instructions to Students and Teachers**

**Test d'écriture****Neuvième Année****Directives pour administration du test**

Le professeur distribue les copies du test et dit aux étudiants d'écrire leur nom sur les trois pages du test. Il/Elle lit à haute voix les directives sur la première page du test. Le professeur devrait s'assurer que tous les étudiants comprennent ce qu'ils ont à faire, en répondant aux questions à propos du sujet de la lettre, sans néanmoins donner des suggestions sur le contenu ni sur les éléments de forme d'une lettre. Les étudiants doivent comprendre qu'ils ont à écrire une lettre et qu'ils doivent obéir aux règles de style pour cette forme d'expression, et ils doivent comprendre le sujet de la lettre. S'étant assuré que tous les étudiants comprennent la tâche, le professeur leur dit qu'ils ont 30 minutes pour écrire la lettre. Les étudiants peuvent utiliser du papier brouillon; ils ne sont pas permis d'utiliser les dictionnaires. Après 30 minutes le professeur ramasse les tests.

**Test d'écriture****Neuvième Année**

Nom: D

Date: E

Le directeur de votre école veut rendre plus agréable la vie des étudiants et des professeurs à l'école. Dans ce but, il demande aux étudiants d'offrir leurs idées sur le sujet. Votre tâche est d'écrire une lettre au directeur pour lui suggérer UN SEUL changement que vous aimeriez voir dans votre école. Il faut lui expliquer comment effectuer le changement, et aussi justifier votre suggestion en décrivant les avantages d'un tel changement.

Écrivez votre lettre sur les pages suivantes. Faites attention au forme, à l'orthographe et à l'organisation de votre lettre. Vous avez 30 minutes pour compléter ce test.



**APPENDIX B**  
**Writing Proficiency Profile**

## Writing Proficiency Profile

STUDENT NUMBER _____				
	1 Low	2 Fair	3 Good	Examples/Comments
Grammar				
Vocabulary				
Spelling/Accent/Punctuation/Capitalization				
Effectiveness (gets message across)				
Organization of Information				
Sociolinguistic Performance				
Comment:          				

APPENDIX C  
Category Definitions

## Category Definitions

### Grammar

**Low:** many errors; serious errors in use of prepositions, articles, pronouns, verb morphology, subject/verb agreement, sequence of tenses, word order; errors make comprehension impossible.

**Fair:** considerable number of errors in use of prepositions, articles, pronouns, verb morphology, sequence of tenses, word order; errors not sufficient to interfere with general comprehension.

**Good:** few errors; errors do not affect comprehension.

### Vocabulary

**Low:** insufficient vocabulary; repetitious; inappropriate and wrong word used; frequent borrowings (words taken from English although modified in form) or English words.

**Fair:** limited vocabulary; some repetition; words used generally appropriate; few borrowings or English words.

**Good:** rich vocabulary; variety of words used; words always appropriate and specific; rarely a borrowing or English word.

### Spelling/Accent/Punctuation/Capitalization

**Low:** many errors; comprehension affected.

**Fair:** some errors; comprehension not affected.

**Good:** few errors.

**Effectiveness (gets message across)**

**Low:** few ideas; uneven and disjointed text; difficulty in expressing oneself and getting message across; incomprehensible.

**Fair:** several ideas; repetitions and uneven text; sometimes has difficulty getting message across; comprehensible.

**Good:** many ideas; text structured and organized; message clearly understood; no difficulty getting message across.

**Organization of Information**

**Low:** information disorganized; doesn't stay on topic; sentences not in paragraph form; level of disorganization interferes with comprehension.

**Fair:** information almost always organized in a logical sequence; usually stays on topic; relates ideas to central idea or argument; ideas developed in paragraph form; presentation of information comprehensible.

**Good:** information organized and structured; always stays on topic; relates all ideas to central idea or argument; paragraphs well developed; comprehensible and interesting.

**Sociolinguistic Competence**

**Low:** utterances inappropriate to sociocultural context;

tone, attitude, form or other communicative functions (expressions, etc.) familiar.

**Fair:** utterances sometimes inappropriate to socio-cultural context; tone, attitude, form or other communicative functions occasionally familiar.

**Good:** utterances always appropriate; tone, attitude, form or other communicative functions never familiar.









