Bibliographie annotée

**MacIntyre, P. D., Burns, C., & Jessome, A. (2011, spring). Ambivalence about**

**communicating in a second language: A qualitative study of French immersion students’ willingness to communicate. *The Modern Language Journal*, *95*(1), 81-96. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1540-4781.2010.01 141.x**

***Mots clefs*:** Junior high boys, French immersion, ambivalence, willingness to communicate,

comfort speaking, perceived competence, error correction

***Objectif de l’article*:**

The objective of this study was to investigate various situations where junior high French immersion students speak French with regards to their willingness to communicate (WTC).

**Résumé:**

There are many facets to this study; however, I am focusing only on the results pertaining to the situations in which students reported more or less willingness to speak French. MacIntyre, Burns, and Jessome (2011) were surprised to find that the responses of the students could not easily be analyzed as planned, because the students’ responses as a group showed ambivalence. For example, comments showed that students were both willing and unwilling to communicate in the same area, depending upon other factors. MacIntyre et al. (2011) found that there are subtle differences in each learner and situation that must be taken into account. Of interest to my study are the various examples of feedback that enumerate the situations where French is (or is not) used, and why (or why not). The underlying factors throughout appeared to be feelings of linguistic self-efficacy, feelings of relatedness to peers, and a sense of autonomy.

Self-efficacy was often mentioned as an important factor. In classes where the teacher and other peers were seen as encouraging students showed higher WTC. This relates to the finding that students are more willing to communicate in the immersion classroom than in the hallway where they risk peer judgement. Students reported feeling more comfortable when asked to help someone with weaker language skills, and uncomfortable outside of school with Francophones who may judge their French. Other students, however, felt more willing to speak French with family and outsiders.

Willingness to speak French in class was also connected to feelings of belonging to peers. Students felt comfortable speaking French because everyone was participating with the same class procedure of speaking French. The same was true with families who speak French regularly; the students felt a connection to the group and therefore were willing to speak.

An interesting phenomenon noted by MacIntyre et al. (2011) was that of the students using French in order to exclude others. Speaking French outside of the classroom allowed students to talk about others without being understood and allowed them to exclude others from their group. Students reported using French to prevent parents from understanding conversations as well. MacIntyre et al. (2011) note that this behaviour of social exclusion may be an adolescent trait and therefore less seen in adults.

Autonomy is another factor that came up in several situations. Students reported resentment at being forced to speak French, particularly when told to speak French outside of the classroom. This resentment was expressed by boys in particular. Reactions to teacher directions to speak French showed much ambivalence. For some, the WTC was higher because they felt the sense of appropriateness to speaking French where instructed. For others it was as affront to their autonomy.

In conclusion, MacIntyre et al. (2011) observe that while willingness to communicate is usually researched as an “internal attribute” (MacIntyre et al., 2011, p. 93). It was only through trying to analyze their data through this presumption that they discovered the ambivalence in their data, and thus was born the need to look at each situation separately, taking into account social factors as well as individual differences. The authors suggest that future studies might “take into account moment-to-moment dynamics within the social situation and the key role played by the communication partner” (MacIntyre et al., 2011, p. 93).

**Méthodologie:**

This was qualitative study of 100 French immersion students in grade 1, 8 and 9 at a dual track Canadian school. 48% had some family who spoke French. Students participated by first filling out a questionnaire on reason why a second language is beneficial. They then kept a diary for 6 weeks. In the diary they were to document situations where they spoke French (at or outside of school). Students were asked to provide 6 entries, although this number was not mandatory.

Responses were typed verbatim and categorized under ‘most willing to communicate’ and ‘least willing to communicate’. While analyzing these responses MacIntyre et al. (2011) noted that there were many factors that prevented such a simplified categorization, and they reorganized the responses under the categories of teachers and peers, error correction and mentoring, control motives, perceived competence, family and friends, and media usage.

**Pertinence pour les objectifs d’études que vous avez choisis:**

I have read several of MacIntyre’s studies and have annotated one study on willingness to communicate, anxiety and perceived competence among junior high French students. This study adds relevant precisions to the topic: firstly, it focusses on French immersion students aged 12 – 14, and secondly, it lists precise situations where these students felt more and less willing to communicate. Also useful is the fact that MacIntyre et al. (2011) give direct quotes from the open responses of the participants, many of whom are boys. There are several elements that stands out as relevant to my research. Firstly, boys report resentment at being forced to speak French, and this has a large effect on their willingness to speak French. The concept of the importance of autonomy has appeared in other research as well. Secondly, adolescents are sensitive to judgement by their peers, and will be more willing to speak French when they feel safe from judgment. They may also use French as a way to exclude others from their conversations. This is a phenomenon that I have observed in my own experience as an educator. Thirdly, student reported both willingness and unwillingness to communicate to strangers outside of school. With increasing opportunities for Canadian youth to speak French with tourists and immigrants in their home town and with residents while traveling, this is an important factor investigate further.

References

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