

Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT)

The Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers is a non-profit professional association of over 4,000 members.

Through its research, resources and publications, professional development and advocacy activities, the association plays a significant role in increasing awareness, appreciation and understanding of the importance of second and additional language learning and teaching throughout Canada. www.caslt.org

Official Language and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)

The Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute of the University of Ottawa provides instruction in Canada's two official languages provides instruction in Canada's two official languages. Through its research centre, CCERBAL, it is committed to strengthening and promoting education and research in the fields of teaching, evaluation, and language policy and planning. www.olbi.uottawa.ca

Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada Podcast Series

Prime Candidates for Form-Focused Instruction, by Roy Lyster

Author

Roy Lyster is a professor at the Department of Integrated Studies in Education at McGill University in Montreal. His research focuses primarily on immersion and content-based classrooms, including both observational and experimental studies of teacher-student interaction, form-focused instruction, and corrective feedback.

Summary

Roy Lyster shares some common French grammar challenges that teachers can help their students master through what he refers to as form-focused instruction – which is drawing students attention to particular grammar forms throughout their learning process.

Facts

- One of the most appealing advantages of teaching French through immersion is that students pick up a great deal of the language just by being exposed to it. However, we also know that many features of the French language are simply not absorbed through exposure. Your students in immersion can benefit from having their attention drawn to these problematic features through form-focused instruction
- Form-focused instruction refers to any attempt to draw your students' attention to language and this can be done on the fly during subject-matter instruction. You have a range of form-focused instructional options at your disposal. In addition to corrective feedback, form-focused instruction includes noticing and awareness activities that draw your students' attention to forms that they might otherwise not notice, as well as practice activities that provide opportunities for your students to use forms that might not otherwise occur in regular classroom interaction
- Grammatical gender is definitely worthy of instruction in immersion classrooms. Grammatical gender is difficult to learn through only exposure to meaningful content, because it does not carry much meaning at all. The gender 80% of the nouns could be predicted based on their endings, operationalized as orthographic representations of rhymes. For example, most words ending in *-ette* and in *-elle* are feminine, whereas most words ending in *-eau* and the sound *-an* are masculine.



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Podcast Series

The Bilingualism in a Plurilingual Canada podcast series is an initiative brought to you by the Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI) of the University of Ottawa in partnership with the Canadian Association of Second Language Teachers (CASLT).

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The goal of this initiative is to make current research in second language teaching and learning available to teachers and the general public.

All podcasts from this series can be downloaded from the CASLT and OLBI Web sites.

- Some pronouns in French are also notoriously difficult for second language learners and thus require well-planned instruction. Third-person object pronouns, for example, are tricky, because, unlike English, direct and indirect forms are different and they also come before rather than after the verb. Another difficulty with pronouns in French is the distinction between *tu* and *vous*. Your students need to have their attention drawn to the functions of these second-person pronouns, especially if their primary language makes no such distinction
- The French verb system is especially difficult to master. For example, French makes an important distinction between perfective and imperfective past tenses through the use of the *passé composé* and *imparfait*. Because English makes similar distinctions but in very different ways that preclude any one-to-one mapping between French and English, students whose primary language is English need to have their attention drawn to these cross-linguistic differences. Because these past-tense forms do not occur frequently in regular teacher talk, your students will benefit from lots of opportunities to compare and contrast the different functions of the *passé composé* and *imparfait* in meaningful contexts.

Further Reading

Lyster, R. (2008). Learning French as a second language through immersion. In D. Ayoun (Ed.), *Studies in French applied linguistics* (pp. 3-36). Amsterdam: John Benjamins.

Lyster, R. (2006). Predictability in French gender attribution: A corpus analysis. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 16, 69-92.

Lyster, R. (2004). Research on form-focused instruction in immersion classrooms: Implications for theory and practice. *Journal of French Language Studies*, 14, 321-341.

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