

Chapter 2 – Literature Review

Introduction

How can online second language acquisition be enhanced by exploring language learning and delivery through the learners own cultural context and knowledge of their first language? Current research suggests that there have been significant changes in language learning and delivery to enhance second language acquisition. Original principals and practices, which consisted of drills and repetition, and grammar rules, have been revised to provide second language learners with pertinent personalized content and practice methods, which encourages understanding and production, that can be used in authentic situations. In British Columbia, second language learning includes skill-based competencies to support second language learners. This research will hopefully show that learners can benefit from second language learning, through 21st-century competency-based learning skills, as well as understanding their own language and culture.

Background to Traditional Second Language Learning

According to Germain and Netten (2012), modern languages were introduced in schools following classical languages such as Latin and Greek. These languages were taught through grammar studies and translations. Learners were exposed to “vocabulary, verb conjugations and grammar rules and applied this knowledge to the translation of passages from the target language to their first language, and vice versa” (p. 88). Learners acquired some knowledge of the second language but were lacking in communications skills. As research continued, language teaching progressed into a more communicative approach to support learners in getting skills in oral communication and not just in grammar and words. The extensive research of language learning in Krashen (2009) supports this theory. He states that “We need to provide enough

input so that they can gain the linguistic competence necessary to begin to take advantage of the informal environment, the outside world” (p.76). This statement also reflects the learner's ability to become aware of the cultural similarities and differences to oral communication. Tache (2014) also refers to the traditional approach to language learning by stating: “Language teaching for most of the 20th Century was heavily influenced by the ‘grammar-translation’ of the 19th Century, which involved learning a new word or grammatical structure, translating it into your native language and memorizing it” (p. 2).

Currently, BC’s Core French (n.d.) language curriculum states that by learning a second language, learners should not be practicing drills but should be active participants in learning the target language. The curriculum specifies that “Developing linguistic and intercultural competencies increase students’ ability to understand and communicate effectively with people across Canada and around the world” (p.1).

The relevance of these important discoveries lay in the progression and positive changes for language learning and teaching. These advances support learners in acquiring more than the knowledge of language components as well as underline the importance of skill development to effectively communicating outside of the boundaries of the classroom.

Challenges to Language Learning

While teaching a second language, there are certain characteristics teachers look for to ensure learners are progressing in the target language. According to Kuehn (2019), learners will be more successful with the language studied if the following practices are applied:

- engaged in the activities and lesson
- practice regularly

- are not afraid to attempt the target language
- willing to learn from their mistakes
- look for language patterns
- consider meaning and not just memorization
- demonstrate self-confidence.

In online teaching of a second language, the teachers need to find methods to ensure that students are also demonstrating the above-named characteristics but in an online setting. Betts (2019), the author mentions that “online education can be very text-driven, it is important that faculty integrate diverse communication strategies into online courses to engage and connect students as active participants” (p. 13). She continues to specify the importance of understanding the meaning of communication and to consider all its facets while teaching online. According to Collison, Elbaum, Haavind, and Tinker (2000) in Betts (2009), “in the virtual world, there is no body language from which the instructor can gauge the interest of the participants and, consequently, adjust the tone or pace of the presentation” (p. 1). When learning a language, many visual cues are important to be able to understand the message. If these cues are not well recognized this could hinder the communication between participants and confuse the learning of the message.

Providing accurate pedagogy and teacher knowledge around language learning is vital to successful language learning.

“It is an ultimate irony that in order to promote understanding across cultures, English teachers must teach not English as it is spoken by monolingual nationals, but English as a social semiotic system that mediates between global form and local thought, national and transnational interpretations of history, collective and individual apprehensions of reality.

And they have to accept that their view of the value of English might not be the same as their students' views" (Kramsch & Hua, 2016, p. 17).

Language teachers have to consider many aspects of language in order to have students fully experience language learning as well as allow for their own views do not interfere with their program delivery. According to Brown (2009) in McNeill (2016), he states that "students seemed to prefer a grammar-based approach, whereas most teachers favored communicative methods; significant differences also occurred in areas such as target language use, error correction, and group work" (p.5). The author explains that teachers need to educate their students around the importance of understanding structural components to language and their need to recognize them while learning a second language. This also proves to be true for face to face and online learning, especially where students are more independent and need to be responsible for their learning. (Blake, 2011, 2014 in McNeil, 2016)

Pushing Language Boundaries

As education in the 21st century focuses on learners' individual needs and skills, this changes the way we approach language teaching and learning.

"How can we understand language that contains structures that we have not yet acquired?

The answer to this apparent paradox is that we use more than our linguistic competence to help us understand. We also use context, our knowledge of the world, our extra-linguistic information to help us understand language directed at us" (Krashen, 2009, p.21).

The most recent research around language learning according to Germain and Netten (2012) states that “The Neuro-linguistic Approach (NLA) to second/foreign language (L2/FL) acquisition is a new paradigm for the teaching/learning of communication skills in an L2/FL in the school system” (p. 92). Through their research, the authors have studied the influence of neuroscience on education by comparing the research of Paradis (1994, 2004, 2009), Ellis (2011), Segalowski (2010) as well as Vygotsky (1962). (p. 86) Germain and Netten (2012) explain that the NLA approach is based on two components of effective communication: “implicit competence (the ability to spontaneously use the second language) and explicit knowledge (the conscious awareness of how the language works, grammar rules and vocabulary)”(p. 92). The authors have further identified that in order to improve Core French programs, there are five basic principles which need to be applied to the pedagogy of language acquisition in communication skills. These pedagogical terms are:

- the creation of implicit competence - acquisition of an internal grammar;
 - the primacy of oral development - use of a literacy-based pedagogy;
 - the focus on meaning rather than form - use of a project-based pedagogy;
 - the authenticity of language and communication situations - creation of authentic communicative situations in the classroom;
 - interaction between students in the classroom - use of interactive teaching strategies
- (p.93).

The above-mentioned principles are directly related to BC’s Core French (n.d.) language curriculum. The curriculum recommends the following goals to allow learners to meet the language skills needed to achieve 21st-century learning and benefiting from current language learning:

- use French as a form of self-expression
- communicate with purpose and confidence in French
- explore a variety of French-language texts
- appreciate the interconnectedness of language and culture
- expand their understanding and appreciation of other cultures
- deepen their understanding of their first language and of their own cultural identity
- understand the educational, travel, and career opportunities that acquiring an additional language offer
- foster an appreciation of learning languages (p.2).

This new pedagogy of language learning allows for learning to be more individualized. In order to achieve these goals, learners will need to step out of the old language learning model which was restricted to grammar and rules of language and explore language outside those boundaries. By using their environments, gaining knowledge of their own language and culture as well as others, exploring face to face or online communities to connect with others to practice the target language in authentic conversations, accessing videos and photos to learn about languages around the globe, are a few ways language learners can enhance their language learning experience as well as be supported at their level to ensure a beneficial language learning experience.

New BC curriculum. In British Columbia, the New Curriculum for all subjects includes a focus on student engagement and allows for control over their own learning while developing skills and competencies for success. The curriculum provides opportunities for personalized

learning, flexibility, and choice as well as high standards. Largely, the curriculum specifies that educators need to provide learners with a curriculum that is “learner-centered and flexible and maintain a focus on literacy and numeracy while supporting deeper learning through concept-based and competency-driven approaches.” to support learning (p.2). These elements support 21st Century learning by offering concept-based learning and encourages student engagement in authentic tasks which connect learning to the real world.

BC’s New Core French Curriculum (n.d.) also includes competencies as part of their language curriculum. The document specifies that not only do learners benefit from learning a second language; which benefits them in education, travel and career opportunities; but learners “develop an understanding and appreciation of other people, cultures, beliefs, and ways of life, while also developing a deeper understanding of their own culture and personal identity” (p.1). As students learn French, the curriculum encourages the development of essential competencies which relates to life long learning skills such as critical thinking, creative thinking, and communication.

“For example, learning an additional language is known to enhance students’ learning and literacy in their first language, as well as contributing to their overall cognitive development. As they learn to communicate clearly and effectively in French, students gain transferable skills and processes that contribute to their proficiency as communicators in their other language(s)” (p.2).

CEFR (Common European Framework of Reference). The CEFR, known as the Common European Framework of Reference, is the “ development of common standards in language teaching, learning, and assessment” (CASLT, 2013, p.1) for second language learners. This framework consists of an “Adopts Action-oriented Approach & Principles:

- communication (emphasis on language activities)
- contextualization (focus on language use in formal and informal situations)
- positive teaching, learning, and assessment ('can do' instead of 'can not do')
- clarity and transparency (description of clear language learning outcomes)
- learner autonomy
- life-long learning" (CASALT, 2013, p.1).

Learners also progress through levels of proficiency. There can also be sub-levels within the six levels.

A - Basic User	B-Independent User	C-Proficient User
A1 (Breakthrough or Beginner)	B1 (Threshold or Intermediate)	C1 (Effective Operational or Advanced)
A2 (Waystage or Elementary)	B2 (Vantage or Upper Intermediate)	C2 (Mastery or Proficiency)

(CASALT, 2013, p.1)

The benefits of learners accessing the CEFR resource as a reference for second language learning are:

- “-offers a transparent, coherent, and comprehensive educational framework
- focuses on contextualized language use and communication
- makes learners actively engage in their learning process
- encourages learner autonomy
- values language skills acquired both within and outside school
- fosters positive life-long learning
- sets and describes clear standards to be attained at successive stages of language learning

- makes it possible to attain similar teaching, learning, and assessment standards across languages
- evaluates outcomes in an internationally comparable manner
- allows for the recognition of language qualifications both nationally (inter-provincially) and internationally
- facilitates educational and occupational mobility
- provides a common basis for the elaboration of language syllabuses, curriculum guidelines, examinations, textbooks, policies, etc.
- promotes national and international collaboration and exchange among governmental and non-governmental institutions and actors engaged in the field of language education” (CASALT, 2013, p.1)

This CEFR approach supports the core competencies from BC’s New Curriculum as well as the Core French Language Curriculum goals and rationale. It promotes and supports 21st-century skills for learners in the areas of critical thinking, creative thinking, and communication. It also supports the approach of individualized learning and choice for learners. Combined, the three documents allow for current language practices to be successfully applied to ensure second language learners benefit from language acquisition, cultural knowledge and are prepared for real-world language experiences.

Multilingual approach to language learning. Multilingual learning is not new, according to Aronin (2019). She states that “multilingualism is a specifically human feature and has been characteristic of humans for thousands of years. Language is involved in human evolution in an intricate way and language is a quality distinguishing our species from others” (p. 5). As early people traveled the world, they used their languages and dialects to communicate and enrich other areas along their journeys.

According to the Linguistic Society of America (2012), bilingualism can be explained as “a common human condition that makes it possible for an individual to function, at some level, in more than one language” (p.2). It is to be noted that the learner does not need to be proficient in 2 languages but mostly on a learning journey, or continuum, to language learning which could be evident in their oral, reading, writing and comprehension abilities. This is influenced by their level of exposure and understanding of the target language. Aronin (2019) refers to multilingualism as “the ability of humans to use three and more languages” (p.20). She explains that multilingualism can be viewed in two parts: individual and societal multilingualism. Individual multilingualism applies to an individual's knowledge as societal multilingualism targets the “contexts, circumstances, order, manner and routines of use of languages in different kinds of communities, organizations, and groups” (p.4). She adds that in order to appreciate both forms, “learners regulate their language practices through the way they deal with the language varieties they know, and by introducing additional language varieties into their communal life.” (p.4). Knowledge of one's language and culture thus supports the learning of a new language. The multilingual view of understanding languages is befitting of the new way of thinking of language learning.

In Haukås (2016), the author supports the idea of, the benefits of learners, referring to their first language to support their second language learning as when “learning multiple languages is best enhanced when learners are encouraged to become aware of and use their pre-existing linguistic and language learning knowledge” (p.2).

Culture and language. Kramsch & Hua (2016) also associate language learning to cultural learning and not by solely the learning of the language.

“If culture is now seen as encompassing much larger historical processes - the memories

and aspirations of people who identify themselves not necessarily by their nationality, but by their language variety, their gender, race, ethnicity, age, or occupation - then culture, thus understood, is likely to affect the way speakers of English use the English language” (p.16).

The authors continue to specify that by understanding one's own language and other languages, the language learner will benefit from learning the target language. “English as a global language can be at its most useful as a supplement, not as a replacement, of other local languages; in fact, it needs other languages to grow and change, like any other living language” (p. 17).

When attempting to identify the role of culture while learning languages, many authors provide a variety of perspectives. Nieto (2002) states that “...culture is more than artifacts, rituals, and traditions. In fact, it is becoming increasingly indisputable that culture and cultural differences, including language, play a discernible—although complicated—role in learning.” (p.135). The author specifies that “culture is complex and intricate; it includes content or product (the what of culture), process (how it is created and transformed), and the agents of culture (who is responsible for creating and changing it)” (p.136). It is then important for teachers to understand that culture must not be identified only by holidays, food, and folklore but rather include a consideration for gender, race, age, occupation, ethnicity as well as an understanding of political and historical awareness which must also be included in the definition of culture. (Kramsch & Hua, 2016 and Nieto, 2002).

British Columbia's new curriculum has incorporated the First Nations Principles of Learning perspectives into each subject. According to the Curriculum Overview, the Ministry of Education (n.d.) believes that: “integrating Aboriginal perspectives into curricula is to ensure that all learners have opportunities to understand and respect their own cultural heritage as well as

that of others” (p.12). In the Core French curriculum, it is believed that learning a second language, will “deepens learners’ understanding of the important relationship between language and culture and allows students to transcend cultural boundaries and biases” (p.1). This leads to the belief that by looking at our own language cultural background, we gain a greater understanding of other languages and cultures.

By understanding the progression of multilingualism which includes a greater understanding of the implication of culture in language learning in 21st century, as discussed in Aronin (2019) and in other research, the language learner must include the knowledge of their own language and culture, as well as have an appreciation of other languages and cultures, to fully benefit in the learning of new languages.

Exploring Language Learning Online

When considering online learning, students are more independent and are expected to be more responsible as they are not in a classroom where they are monitored by a teacher. Teachers need to provide “strategies and techniques to facilitate online learning and help students exploit the advantages in relation to both independent and collaborative learning” (p.16). (Bennett & Marsh, 2002, in Compton, 2009, p.77) In online teaching, teachers need to practice “community building skills to encourage socialization, active participation and collaboration” (Jones & Youngs, 2006; Hampel & Stickler, 2005; McLoughlin & Oliver, 1999 in Compton, 2009 p.77).

All of these skills are important for students to be socially present and to be able to engage in language tasks which are beneficial to learning a second language. By students working together, teachers can provide rich language tasks to practice in the target language.

The goal of learning a language online is the same as learning in a face to face setting, as in both situations, teachers want to provide a learning experience which will allow the language learner to practice and engage in the target language. They want them to be able to gain confidence in using the target language, in the real world, by also having gained knowledge around culture, as well as with the differences and similarities in languages, around the world. Online learning provides learners with unlimited resources to access while learning a language. Learners can access different parts of the world in just a few clicks. A variety of learning opportunities are available in the forms of videos, communities, chat rooms, pictures, images, google earth, etc. This flexibility provides support for all language learners as they are not restricted to time and place. Tache (2014) mentions smartphones as a tool which support apps that allow learners to access language through gaming. According to Lam, 2000, 2009, 2013; also, Kern, War, and Warschauer, this volume in Kramersch & Hua (2016),

“Research on CMC (computer-mediated communication) in the last thirty years has shown that online communication can enhance both the quantity and the quality of the language produced by language learners, it makes them less timorous to voice their opinions and enables them to make friendships they would not normally make in the intimidating environment of a classroom” (p.12).

Betts (2009), explains how communication in an online setting knows no boundaries. Learners are provided with endless opportunities to communicate.

“Computer-mediated communication (CMC) provides extensive communication channels in online education for interaction through written communication, including email, IM (instant messaging), text messaging, bulletin boards, chat rooms, discussion boards,

listservs, social networking, virtual worlds (MUD, multi-user dimensions; MOO, MUDs Object Oriented; Second Life, etc.), blogging, etc.” (p.6).

Online learning including online language learning knows no boundaries. The online platform provides support for learners of all levels.

Technical Considerations

Tools for language learning. As learners have access to more technology and tools to support them in learning a second language, the five principles to second language learning according to Germain and Netten (2012), the DKU (Do, Know, Understand) elements of BC’s New 21st century approach to learning, the CEFR levels of competencies as well as the First Nations Principles of Learning can all be supported outside of the classroom and in an online setting by accessing tools for learning. Students have access to online platforms to collaborate with others in authentic language experiences, tools to demonstrate their language proficiency abilities in non-threatening ways, as well as access support as needed. Providing safe and comfortable tools allow learners to feel more comfortable in their language learning journey as they can progress at their own pace with the support of their online teachers and peers. Learners can also access resources to educate themselves about culture related to the target language being studied.

Conclusion

Language learning requires more than just learning to speak the target language. The research shows that in order to have language acquisition and understanding, learners benefit by using skills and competencies as well as investigate the cultural aspects of the language to become a bilingual or a multilingual learner. The current BC curriculum requires learners use

skills and competencies to be able to “become aware that they are a part of a rich cultural and linguistic diversity” (Province of British Columbia, n.d.).

By considering a multitude of resources such as new language approaches and current research around language acquisition, the BC language curriculums, the CEFR and First Nations Principles of Learning and online best practice for student learning, language learners can experience rich language experiences and success.

Further research on the level of language learning while considering one’s own language is to be determined. An attempt to provide authentic online language experiences paired with a reflection of learners own cultural background will hopefully enable learners to fully understand and appreciate learning the target language as well as improve their language proficiency.

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