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of anglophone and allophone university students**

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**The French-as-a-second-language Learning Experience
of Anglophone and Allophone University Students***

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Abstract: To compare the French-as-a-second-language learning experience of anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 63$), demographic and background information, self-evaluations, data on language anxiety, and final grades are analyzed for 250 students taking first-, second-, and third-year French courses at a Canadian university. It was found that both groups share more characteristics than they differ in the process of learning a second language. More importantly, they experience comparable anxiety levels and their final grades in language courses do not differ significantly.

I. Background

Does the French-as-a-second-language learning experience of university students differ depending on whether they are *anglophones*, i.e., with English as their mother tongue, or *allophones*, i.e., without English or French as their mother tongue? Data collected for a broader study (Coulombe 2000) on the role of affective and cognitive variables in second-language learning provide some insights into answering this question. In the context of language learning, affective variables refer to learners' responses to the learning situation; among others, they include attitudes, anxiety, and motivation. Cognitive variables are linked to the process of knowing; some of them are intelligence, strategies, and aptitude. To our knowledge, similarities and differences between the second-language-learning experience of Canadian anglophones and allophones have not been researched before.

We draw comparisons here between anglophones and allophones on demographic data, on contextual and background information about second-language learning and on participants' evaluations of their experience. We also compare language anxiety levels of anglophones and allophones, language anxiety being one of the most important affective variables involved in second-language learning (Gardner and MacIntyre 1993; Horwitz, Horwitz and Cope 1986; Horwitz and Young 1991), and their final grades.

1.1 Demographic data

Gender and age are two of the demographic variables that have received attention from second-language researchers since they can possibly influence learning. Ehrman (1996) observes that "language courses in [secondary] schools ... are heavily populated by females" (p. 168); we extend this work here by establishing if there are gender imbalances in a large university sample comprising anglophones and allophones who study French.

Concerning age, the debate centres mainly around the differences between children and adult learners – 15 years and older (Ellis 1994). We extend this work by examining whether age differences are present between anglophones and allophones in a university context.

1.2 Contextual and background information

Although it is possible that contextual and background factors influence the acquisition of a second language, such factors have received scant research attention. For example, whether participants take French as a compulsory or an optional course could influence their motivation to learn, and their mastery of French as reflected in their final course grades: committing to a program of studies in French should also increase participants' motivation to do well. Moreover, Ehrman (1996) underlines the importance of a "mind-set that tends to develop after one has learned one or more languages" (p. 171), a mind-set that allows learners to acquire and use self-knowledge and preferred learning strategies that facilitate learning: thus whether or not participants had taken or were taking other language courses may be relevant to issues of anxiety and mastery of French as a second language. Note that data collection took place at a Canadian university where all foreign students must pass an English entrance exam to be admitted. Thus, for some students, second-language learning is in fact third-language learning. In the present research, we examined whether these third-language learners were less anxious and better achievers compared to their second-language peers. As for motivation, Pendakur and Pendakur (1997) conclude that, irrespective of their mother tongue, "Canadians do not learn an additional [third] language to earn money – they do it because they want to" (p. 28).¹

In addition, the Canadian university where data was collected has a foreign-language requirement for admission of students from the home province. It was thus reasonable to expect that a number of university students would have had some French before attending the university.

Contacts with native French speakers, use of media and a sojourn to a French-speaking environment are all aspects of exposure to another culture; Ehrman (1996) claims that the latter "tends to promote openness to the unexpected" (p. 172) and to reduce beliefs that one is the center of the world. More specifically regarding contacts, research shows that linguistic intergroup contacts in Canada have positive effects on adolescents' motivation to learn a second language (Desrochers and Gardner 1978; Hamers and Deshaies 1981). In our sample it is likely that some university students participated in exchange programs before they attended the university.

¹ Using the 1991 Canadian Census 20% database, Pendakur and Pendakur (1997) analyze earnings in Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver as three separate language markets. They find that in all three knowing English or French is better than not knowing either one; that, depending on the market, being bilingual is better than being unilingual in English or French; and that knowing a non-official language rarely improves earnings.

We examined these issues by obtaining background information on second-language learning to establish whether participants were taking compulsory or optional French courses; if participants had taken or were taking other language courses; what high-school French they had completed; if participants had had contacts with French-speakers; if they made use of the French media; and if they had sojourned in a French-speaking environment.

1.3 Evaluations

Since success on the English entrance exam is no guarantee of the successful use of English during the course of their studies, allophones were requested to provide a self-evaluation of their English proficiency. As mentioned above, prior knowledge of one second language is thought to facilitate learning other languages. Furthermore, all participants evaluated their own proficiency in French and their overall French-learning experience; we thought that these evaluations would be respectively congruent with participants' final grades.

1.4 Anxiety and final grades

Researchers in second-language acquisition recognize the importance of learners' "individual differences" (Ellis 1994; Gardner and MacIntyre 1992, 1993; Skehan 1995, 1998). Principally accounting for variations in learning speed and accuracy, these individual differences comprise both cognitive and affective variables. Some of the widely-recognized cognitive variables are intelligence, aptitude and learning strategies, while some of the affective variables include attitudes, motivation, and anxiety. In this paper we focus on language anxiety which is experienced by at least one student in 10 (Coulombe 2000; Horwitz et al. 1986). The literature reports that anxiety in language classes correlates negatively with final grades of university language students enrolled in courses at various levels of difficulty (Aida 1994; Horwitz 1986; Saito and Samimy 1996), and indeed is reported to be one of the best predictors of final grades (Coulombe 2000; Daley, Onwuegbuzie and Bailey 1997; Saito and Samimy 1996). It accounted for 8 to 22% of the variance in course grades.

In summary, with regard to participants' background, we argue that (1) more allophones would be taking or would have taken other second language courses, since they had already learned English for admission to the university. Along the same lines, (2) allophones would deem their English proficiency to be about average, since they had passed the required TOFEL exam to enter the university. Furthermore, with the advantage of a mind-set conducive to making second-

language learning easier for them, it seemed likely that (3) allophones would experience less anxiety than anglophones and that, consequently, (4) they would tend to get higher grades than anglophones. The advantage of the mind-set could however in turn be outweighed by the fact that English, a second language for allophones, is used as the language of instruction in French classes.

II. Method

II.1 Participants

In early 1997, 250 students registered in language courses at the French Department of Simon Fraser University, British Columbia, and participated in our study on a voluntary basis. Language courses are those related to the ability to use French, as opposed to linguistics or literature courses that focus on analysis and description of the language. Francophone students, who were allowed to take third-year French writing courses, were excluded from the study. Of the 250 participants in the original project, 248 specified their mother tongue(s). Nearly one quarter of participants, 61, were allophones. The largest linguistic group among these comprised 26 native speakers of Cantonese or Mandarin, while the remaining 35 shared 21 different languages from all over the world as their native tongues. Ninety-six percent of participants had Canadian citizenship or were landed immigrants.² Other demographic data are presented in Table 1 for participants who have English and those who have neither English nor French as their mother tongue.

Table 1. Demographic information on anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 61$)

Item	Category	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
Gender	Female	140 (75%)*	51 (84%)
	Male	46 (25%)	10 (16%)
Age	18-20	79 (42%)	31 (51%)
	21-23	71 (38%)	23 (38%)
	24 and over	37 (20%)	7 (11%)
Course level	First year	53 (28%)	33 (54%)
	Second year	90 (48%)	22 (36%)
	Third year	44 (24%)	6 (10%)
Program of studies	Undergraduate	177 (95%)	58 (95%)
	Other	10 (5%)	3 (5%)

• Note. For gender, one case is missing for anglophones; $n = 186$.

² Landed immigrants admitted to Canada belong to one of three categories: economic, refugees, or family members. *Canadian citizenship* can be obtained after a minimum of three years of residency in the country. Knowledge of either official language is neither an entry nor a citizenship requirement.

Consistent with secondary school populations, university French-language learners were mostly female (77% overall; $\chi^2(1) = 73.78, p < .00001$) and under 20 (44% overall; $\chi^2(1) = 28.67, p < .00001$).³

Overall, anglophones and allophones did not differ by gender, $\chi^2(1) = 1.82, p > .17, V = .09$, nor by age, $\chi^2(2) = 2.55, p > .27, V = .10$, although, as their age suggests, allophones were under-represented in third-year courses, and over-represented in first-year courses, $\chi^2(2) = 14.56, p < .001, V = .24$.⁴ A great majority of participants were undergraduates.

II.2 Instruments

Demographic data, background information and evaluations of various aspects of participants' second-language learning were self-reported through multiple-choice and open-ended questions; 5-point Likert scales ranging from "excellent" to "very poor" were used for self-evaluation of proficiency in English and in French, and for assessment of French-learning experience. For anxiety, Horwitz et al.'s (1986) *Foreign Language Classroom Anxiety Scale* (FLCAS) was administered, and final grades were released through a consent form.

The FLCAS has satisfactory levels of validity and reliability, and is widely used. It comprises 33 statements to be evaluated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from "strongly agree" (= 5) to "strongly disagree" (= 1). Examples of FLCAS items are: "I often feel like not going to my language class," "I get upset when I don't understand what the language teacher is correcting," and "The more I study for a language test, the more confused I get." Factor analysis confirmed that for the present sample, as for other samples, a single factor structure was appropriate (Coulombe 2000).

In 1986 Horwitz reported that the range of scores on the FLCAS for a sample of 108 students enrolled in introductory Spanish classes at the University of Texas was from 1.4 to 4.5 ($M = 2.8, SD = .65$). Aida's (1994) sample of 96 second-year Japanese learners, had a range of 1.4 to 4.4 ($M = 2.9, SD = .67$). In our sample of 248, scores also ranged from 1.4 to 4.4 ($M = 2.7, SD = .61$). The similarity in reported anxiety levels suggests that American undergraduates taking

³ χ^2 is used to test the null hypothesis for categorical data; p is the probability of obtaining an χ^2 value as extreme as the one observed in this study, assuming the null hypothesis is true. The p value is not significant if larger than .05.

⁴ Cramér's V is a measure of effect size, corresponding to the correlation coefficient. It can range from 0 to 1.00, where a value of 0 indicates no relationship and a value of 1.00 indicates a perfect relationship.

first- and second-year courses experience anxiety levels comparable to Canadians taking first-, second- and third-year second-language courses.

II.3 Procedure

Data were collected for 11 French-language courses (four first-year, four second-year, and three third-year) in 19 separate classes (seven first-year, eight second-year, and four third-year) during regular class hours. After obtaining informed consent, students completed the self-report instruments.

III. Results

In this section, categorical results are presented first for background and contextual aspects of the language-learning experience, for language anxiety levels and course grades, and then for self-ratings of French proficiency and French-language-learning experience as they relate to final grades.

III.1 Contextual and background information

The French course taken by participants was compulsory for 40% of anglophones versus 18% of allophones, as shown in Table 2. This difference was significant, $\chi^2(1) = 9.47, p < .005; V = .20$. This shows that allophones, who already have a second language, are less keen than anglophones to work towards a degree that includes French courses.

As shown in Table 3, 41% of anglophones and 53% of allophones were taking or had taken a second-language course other than French, and did not differ, $\chi^2(1) = 2.97, p < .09; V = .10$. This does not support our **hypothesis (1)** that more allophones would be taking or would have taken other second language courses. It may however indicate that allophones did not study their own mother tongue at school, most likely because courses about their mother tongue were not offered.

Table 2. Compulsory or optional French course for anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 61$)

	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
Compulsory	74 (40%)	11 (18%)
Optional	113 (60%)	50 (82%)

Table 3. Other second-language course for anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 60$)

	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
Yes	76 (41%)	32 (53%)
No	111 (59%)	28 (47%)

Participants were asked to specify the last high school French completed (French 10, 11 or 12, Français 12 – for immersion, etc.), and were given the option to check “does not apply” since some were true beginners. Answers are presented in Table 4.

Table 4. Last high-school French course completed by anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 61$)

Level⁵	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
12	143 (76%)	26 (43%)
11	20 (11%)	11 (18%)
10	12 (6.5%)	3 (5%)
None	12 (6.5%)	21 (34%)

There were significant differences between anglophones and allophones, $\chi^2(3) = 37.003$, $p < .0001$; $V = .39$. Fewer allophones had had grade 12 (standard deviate – which is similar to a z score – = -4.93), and more allophones reported to have had no high school French (standard deviate = 5.59). This suggests that, as a group, allophones were somewhat less prepared for French at the university level. An equal proportion of both anglophones and allophones, 33%, reported having had personal contacts with a French speaker other than their instructor.

⁵ In Canada the school system is made up of 12 years of study or *grades*. Grade 12 is the year of graduation.

As shown in Table 5, French media had been used regularly by 37% of anglophones and 48% of allophones; these percentages did not differ for the two groups, $\chi^2(1) = 2.18, p > .13; V = .09$.

Table 5. Use of French media for anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 61$)

	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
Yes	69 (37%)	29 (48%)
No	118 (63%)	32 (52%)

There were significant differences between the two groups who had sojourned to a French-speaking environment, $\chi^2(2) = 8.276, p < .02; V = .18$. As shown in Table 6, more allophones reported no trips to a French-speaking environment (standard deviate = -2.21), and more anglophones reported having sojourned in a French-speaking environment for up to one year (standard deviate = 2.87). The two groups did not differ if they sojourned for over one year, with a standard deviate = -.95.

To sum up, French was compulsory for more anglophones than allophones. Fewer allophones had reached grade 12 French, but more of them had no high school French whatever. Fewer allophones had sojourned in a French-speaking environment, and fewer of them had spent up to one year in such an environment. An equivalent number of anglophones and allophones were taking or had been taking another language course. Both groups had had personal contacts with French speakers other than their instructors and used the French media to the same extent. Fewer allophones had sojourned in a French-speaking environment, while more anglophones had done so up to one year.

Table 6. Sojourn in a French-speaking environment for anglophones ($n = 187$) and allophones ($n = 60$)

Duration	Anglophones n (%)	Allophones n (%)
Not at all	91 (49%)	39 (65%)
Up to one year	79 (42%)	13 (22%)
Over one year	17 (9%)	8 (13%)

III.2 Evaluations

With a value of 5 for “excellent”, the mean score for the 63 allophones who rated their own English proficiency was 3.95, $SD = .87$. This means that most allophones in our sample thought that their English proficiency was average to excellent, with only two participants rating their English as poor. This finding does not lend support to our **hypothesis (2)**. The fact that the great majority of participants had Canadian citizenship or were landed immigrants points to the fact that many students may have been born or have resided for an extended period of time in Canada, hence their high English self-ratings.

Participants of both groups rated their French proficiency on a similar scale. Ratings for anglophones ($M = 3.33$, $SD = .69$) and allophones ($M = 2.92$, $SD = .73$) differed, pooled $t(246) = 3.98$, $p = .0001$; $r^2 = .06$, as anglophones rated their French proficiency significantly higher than allophones. Means indicate that most participants considered their French proficiency as average.

Ratings given to the French language-learning experience by anglophones ($M = 3.58$, $SD = .69$) and allophones ($M = 3.59$, $SD = .80$) were essentially identical. Overall, participants thought their learning experience was very good to average.

In brief, most allophones rated their proficiency in English as very good. Anglophones rated their proficiency in French higher than allophones, while both groups rated their language-learning experience in an equivalent manner.

III.3 Anxiety and final grades

The means for language anxiety levels as measured by the FLCAS were 2.75 for anglophones and 2.71 for allophones. Because allophones were under-represented in third-year courses and over-represented in first-year courses (see section II.1), we examined anxiety in a two-way analysis of variance (mother tongue x course level). Contrary to our **hypothesis (3)**, anxiety levels did not differ as indicated by the main effect for mother tongue, $F(2, 242) = 1.68$, $p > .19$; $\eta^2 = .01$, and course level, $F(2, 242) = 1.44$, $p > .24$; $\eta^2 = .01$.⁶

A total of 225 participants, 170 anglophones and 55 allophones, consented to release their final grades. There was no difference between the final grades of anglophones ($M = 2.88$, $SD = .68$) and those of allophones ($M = 2.94$, $SD = .71$), pooled $t(223) = -.52$, $p > .60$; $r^2 = .001$. This

⁶ η^2 indicates the variance for which groups are accounting.

does not support our **hypothesis (4)** that a particular mind-set could account for higher grades for allophones, nor that the advantage provided by the said mind-set could be outweighed by English proficiency, since allophones rated the latter as at least “very good.”

The expected negative correlations between anxiety levels and final grades were found to be similar for both anglophones ($r = -.21, p < .01, n = 170$; 95% confidence interval: $-.07 \leq p \leq -.35$) and allophones ($r = -.44, p < .001, n = 55$; 95% confidence interval: $-.20 \leq p \leq -.63$). This is consistent with significant correlations found in other samples ranging from $r = -.24, p < .01, n = 134$ (Saito and Samimy 1996) to $r = -.54, p < .01, n = 32$ (Horwitz 1986). Irrespective of their level of proficiency in the second language, learners who experience language anxiety are less likely to do well in their second-language courses.

Since there were 26 speakers of either Cantonese or Mandarin, the most widespread languages of the People’s Republic of China, amongst the 61 allophones, and since the Canadian West Coast receives many Chinese immigrants, a suggestion was made to explore possible differences between these Cantonese/Mandarin speakers (“sinophones”), anglophones, and others. Separating Chinese-speakers from other allophones did not materially increase the strength of the relation between mother tongue and either anxiety or grades. For anxiety, means for anglophones, sinophones and other allophones were 2.8, 2.9. and 2.6 respectively; $F(2, 245) = 1.68, p > .18; \eta^2 = .01$. For marks, means were 2.88, 2.94, and 2.94 respectively; $F(2, 222) = 0.13, p > .85; \eta^2 = .001$. In light of these findings, differences between sinophones and the other groups were not examined further. Overall, anglophones and allophones did not differ on language anxiety levels and final grades, and the expected negative correlations between anxiety and final grades materialized for both groups.

III.4 French proficiency, French-language-learning experience and final grades

Correlations between French proficiency and final grades for anglophones and allophones were respectively $r = .415, p < .0001, n = 170$ and $r = .245, p < .05, n = 55$. These correlations do not differ significantly, $z = 1.26, p > .20$, therefore our best estimate of the relation is the correlation for the whole sample, $r = .34, p < .001, n = 225$; 95% confidence interval: $.22 \leq p \leq .45$.

For the French-as-a-second-language experience and final grades, the correlation for anglophones was $r = .21, p < .01, n = 170$, and for allophones, $r = .27, p < .05, n = 55$. The correlations are not significantly different, thus our best estimate of the relation is the correlation for the whole sample, $r = .23, p < .001, n = 225$; 95% confidence interval: $.10 \leq p \leq .35$. In sum,

anglophones and allophones did not differ on the relation between self-rated French proficiency, French-language-learning experience and final grades.

A summary of findings in terms of similarities and differences between anglophones and allophones is presented in Table 7 for the four aspects relevant to French-as-a-second-language experience that were examined. The summary presented in Table 7 is discussed in the next section.

IV. Discussion

Our study provides new insights into the experience of anglophone and allophone students enrolled in French-as-second-language courses at the university level. Our study reports that anglophones and allophones share more characteristics than differential attributes. The differences will be discussed first.

Table 7. Summary of findings: similarities and differences between anglophones and allophones studying university French as a second language

Similarities	Differences
<u>Demographics</u>	
◆ Gender	
◆ Age	
◆ Program of studies	
◆ Course level (second year)	◆ Course level (first and third year) – <i>more allophones in first year; more anglophones in third year</i>
<u>Background information</u>	
◆ Other language courses	
	◆ Course as optional – <i>French compulsory for more anglophones</i>
◆ High school French (grades 10 et 11)	◆ High school French – <i>more anglophones had grade 12; more allophones had no French</i>
◆ Contacts with francophones	
◆ Use of French media	
◆ Sojourn in French environment (over one year)	◆ Sojourn in French environment – <i>more allophones had no sojourn; more anglophones sojourned up to one year</i>
<u>Evaluations</u>	
◆ University French learning experience	◆ French proficiency – <i>rated higher by anglophones</i>
<u>Anxiety and final grades</u>	
◆ Anxiety levels	
◆ Final grades	

Our findings that more allophones were taking first-year courses and that more anglophones were taking third-year courses may be a one-time event that could be attributed to the larger context of Canadian immigration.⁷ It may be the case that the influx of Asian immigrants between 1986 and 1996 has influenced reported figures. Further research is necessary to determine whether university enrolment patterns after the Spring semester of 1997 reflect new immigrant movements and continue to impact the pattern of results in second-language acquisition.

We note a few more features. First, more allophones than anglophones were taking French as an optional course. Already having a mother tongue other than English or French may have lessened allophones' need or inclination to take another compulsory language course.

Second, more anglophones than allophones had Grade 12 French. This is not surprising given the admission requirements to this university (grade 11 in a second language) and the possibility of getting credits for beginners courses if one does well on an initial placement test administered by the Department of French. University-bound students in the home province of British Columbia and Canadian schools in general are very well informed of high school graduation and university entrance requirements. Allophones may have devoted their energy in high school to other pursuits involving the mastery of the English language, since more of them declared that they had no French at all.

That more allophones had not been to a French-speaking environment is consistent with the fact that there were more of them taking first-year French courses. Generally people who want to make the most of their travel experience acquire host country language first. It is also possible that, if they travel at all, allophones prefer going to countries where their mother tongue is spoken. This would also explain why more anglophones had sojourned up to one year in a French-speaking environment. Particularly in Canada, exchanges between members of the two official linguistic groups are strongly encouraged in the school system as they motivate second-language learning and foster respect for the other culture.

Self-ratings of French proficiency differed between the two groups, with anglophones rating themselves higher than allophones. In light of the fact that final grades were equivalent for the two groups, this difference may be a cultural one: allophones may tend to be more modest about their own knowledge of a second language. While much speculation can take place to account for differences between anglophones and allophones, the similarities in anxiety levels and final grades certainly are the key findings of our study.

⁷ Prior to study period, an unusually large surge of 50,000 immigrants yearly occurred in British

Learning French with English as the language of instruction did not create higher anxiety levels in allophones. Of course this is consistent with allophones' ratings of their English proficiency from excellent to average. In turn, this indicates that allophones had prolonged or intensive exposure to English, perhaps at school, possibly while maintaining their mother tongue at home, a usual occurrence where parents feel that their children should retain their mother tongue. Further research is required to determine the exact circumstances that surround allophone students' acquisition of English. In fact, Chiswick and Miller (2000) find that the younger the age at migration and the longer the duration of residence, the more practice of the "destination language" male immigrants to Canada have. Given the fact that 84% of allophones in our sample were female, it looks as if their finding could also apply to female immigrants.

There was no difference in final grades of anglophones and allophones. This finding does not lend support to the notion of a "mind-set" that facilitates learning other languages after a first one is mastered, even though the language of instruction, in this case English, was not an added obstacle for learners. It is also somewhat puzzling that overall final grades remain the same when levels of French studies before entering the university differ between linguistic groups (see Table 4). This suggests a need for further inquiry into the relationship between high-school French completed and final grades.

The equivalence of final grades between anglophones and allophones could also be due to the criteria for admission to Simon Fraser University. These criteria may be very sound, in that only very good students with very good English are actually admitted. Replication of this study at other Canadian universities where admission standards and the immigrant influx are different may yield different results.

Although no causal relationship has been established between language anxiety and final grades, the two have been negatively associated in several studies over the last decade. A comparable correlation is also present in our sample, and it adds credibility to our results regarding final grades (see section III.4).

Even though our sample size is large for studies of this nature, simple replication could still prove useful. Other research avenues are however possible. Would comparisons between francophones and allophones taking English-as-a-second-language courses at a francophone university yield results similar to ours? Would we get comparable results for anglophones and allophones taking non-official languages, for example Spanish or Mandarin courses at a Canadian

anglophone or francophone university? These are some of the many questions open to further research.

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