

**LINGUISTIC REPRESENTATIONS OF ANGLOPHONE
STUDENTS ATTENDING A SECONDARY SCHOOL IN
BRITISH COLUMBIA**

by

Nicole Renée Terrillon
B.A., Simon Fraser University, 1998

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APPROVAL

NAME Nicole Renée Terrillon
DEGREE Master of Arts
TITLE **Linguistic representations of Anglophone
students attending a secondary school in British
Columbia**

EXAMINING COMMITTEE:

Chair Marianne Jacquet, Adjunct Professor

Diane Dagenais, Associate Professor
Senior Supervisor

Danièle Moore, Associate Professor
Member

Cécile Sabatier, Adjunct Professor, Faculty of Education,
French Programs, SFU
Examiner

Date August 15, 2006



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ABSTRACT

In this research, the teacher-researcher adopts a qualitative methodology to explore the linguistic representations of unilingual Anglophone students taking French as a second language at a secondary school in the lower mainland of British Columbia. Semi-structured group interviews are used to discover the students' representations of the French language, the English language, Francophones and Anglophones. The impact of these linguistic representations on the students' investment in the French language is discussed. Due to the absence of contact with Francophones, students do not have an elaborate reference representation of this cultural community but rather co-construct representations of an imagined Francophone community during the group interviews.

Keywords:

French as a second language; linguistic representations; investment;
imagined communities

To my husband and best friend: Rob Lowey

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

We believe in two official languages and in a pluralist society not merely as a political necessity but as an enrichment. We want to live in a country in which French Canadians can choose to live among English Canadians and English Canadians can choose to live among French Canadians without abandoning their cultural heritage (Trudeau, 1968)

1.1 Background

In 1969, Canada became a nation with two official languages: English and French. Since passing the first *Official Languages Act* (1969), the Federal government has sought not only to protect but also to promote both languages throughout the country. One of the Federal government's primary means of promoting both languages is through education; Canadian children and youth have the opportunity to learn French or English as a second language in their elementary and secondary schools. The Federal government supports and encourages the learning of the country's two official languages because, "knowing both official languages enriches the lives of Canadians and helps us understand one another better. The Canada of tomorrow is being built in the classrooms of today" (Department of Canadian Heritage, 1999). In 2003, the Federal government revealed that as a part of its *Action Plan for Official Languages* (Government of Canada Privy Council Office), it wishes to double the number of bilingual Canadian youth by the year 2013. As the government sees it, young Canadians who speak both French and English will reap economic as well

as cultural benefits. However, despite the government's efforts to promote knowledge of both official languages as an important and enriching experience, learning a second language does not appeal universally to all students.

Some of my students, for instance, have told me that they are taking French as a second language not because of interest in the language but rather to satisfy university entrance requirements. In British Columbia, hereafter referred to as BC, certain universities require students to have a Grade 11 language course as part of their admission requirements (UBC admission requirements, SFU admission from BC and Yukon secondary schools). Although Federal government discourse asserts that knowledge of both official languages is important for the future of young Canadians, as a French teacher in BC, I cannot help but wonder if my students would agree with this claim. Aside from helping them meet university entrance requirements, do students believe that knowledge of the French language will be a key asset in their future?

In 2003, I taught French as a second language, including French 11 in a secondary school in the lower mainland of BC. The school was relatively small, having less than 1000 students in grades eight through twelve. Due in part to its smaller size, the school offered few choices when it came to second languages classes. In grades eight through ten, the school offered only French as a second language. In grades eleven and twelve the school offered both French and German as a second language. Since most of the students at the school began learning French in elementary school, many of them decided to take French right through to Grade 11. Additionally, some students opted for French because they

believed that learning German would be extremely difficult. Not all of these students were interested in learning French and some claimed that they did not even like French.

It seemed to me that there were two primary reasons for these reactions to the French language. First, students were frustrated by the lack of choice of second language classes. Since the school offered only two second language classes, students did not necessarily have the opportunity to learn a language in which they were interested. Second, students did not see the value of learning French in BC. Living far from any francophone community, they did not have the opportunity to use or practice their French outside of the classroom.

Indeed, I have had students tell me that Mandarin or Japanese would be more useful as a second language in BC. These students indicated that they had no interest in visiting francophone countries or regions. They claimed to have no interest in meeting Francophones or learning about francophone cultures. On very rare occasions, I have even had students claim that they had no desire to learn French because francophone Canadians were separatists who disliked English-speaking Canadians. Since they claimed to have no desire to travel, knowledge of a second language seemed valuable to them only if it helped them get a job in BC. Some students argued that knowledge of an Asian language would be more useful in this context.

Some students have also expressed the idea that it really is not necessary to learn a second language at all since everyone speaks English. They asked me: Why take the time to learn a second language for travel when, in every

country in the world, there are hotel, store and restaurant employees who speak English? They also asked: Why take the time to learn another language in the hopes of landing a good job when everyone else has to learn English to be able to succeed in fields such as business and IT?

Indeed, according to my professional experience, some students are aware of the dominant position that English currently holds in the world. As Breton (1998) explains, English is the current *lingua franca* in many regions of the world. “*Lingua franca* denotes any language which is employed as a common vehicle of communication by people of different languages” (p.24). While they have probably never heard the term *lingua franca*, some students are aware that people all over the world learn English as a second language in order to communicate with others. It seems that certain students may have little interest in learning, not only French, but all second languages because of their representation of their first language. They see English as a language of power and importance that everyone needs to know. These anecdotal observations from my professional experience led me to develop an interest in systematically examining students’ linguistic representations in my master’s research.

Linguistic representations, or representations of language, of speakers of language and of the teaching of language, have been the object of many studies in Europe. According to Moore (2001), a representation is an image that one holds about something or someone elaborated through discourse and other forms of communication. Representations influence behaviours. With respect to second language learning, for example, the effort that students put into learning

the second language will be influenced by their representations of that language and of the speakers of that language.

Within the context of this research I explored the linguistic representations of a group of Anglophone students studying French as a second language in a secondary school in BC. My purpose was to discover:

1. What representations did students have of the French language?
2. What representations did students have of Francophones?
3. What representations did students have of the English language?
4. What representations did students have of Anglophones?

1.2 Theoretical Lens

The theoretical perspective adopted in this study will be discussed at length in Chapter Two. In this chapter, a brief overview is provided.

1.2.1 Representations and Language Learning

According to European sociolinguists (Castellotti and Moore, 2002; Matthey, 2000; Moore, 2001; Py, 2000) representations are characterized by three interdependent features; they are elaborated through communication, they reconstruct reality and serve to organize it. Representations are complex because they are at once dynamic, stable, shared and individual. Representations are never neutral but rather value laden (Perrefort, 1997). When it comes to second language learning, Py (2000) signals that the representations learners hold of the target language, of native speakers of the target language

and of bilingualism are important factors in their success or failure in learning the language.

Py (2000) further notes that representations are culturally and locally specific. As Perrefort (1997) explains, the representations that learners develop of a language and of another cultural group are formed and influenced in part by the cultural and linguistic the history of the learners' community.

Given that the Federal government wants to increase the number of young Canadians with a working knowledge of the French language and has made this goal part of its official language action plan, it is germane then to discover what representations students in BC currently have of the French language and of native speakers of the French language. It is equally relevant to consider their representations of the English language and of native speakers of the English language given that these representations may influence their representations of the French language.

The task of doubling the number of bilingual youth in Canada falls to those in the education system. Cavalli (1997) argues that the success of a linguistic policy depends, in part, upon the representations of all those involved in or affected by that policy. However, she further argues that the representations of those implicated at the school level are of particular importance since schools are responsible for the implementation of the plan. Given the cultural and local specificity of representations (Py, 2000), in order to successfully carry out this portion of the Federal government's *Action Plan for Official Languages* (2003), educators in BC need to be aware of their students' representations.

1.2.2 Investment in Language

Clearly, learners' representations affect the investment that they are prepared to make in learning a second language. As Norton (2000) explains, learners invest in a second language because they believe that the language will allow them to access symbolic or material resources. For example, learners who have a particularly positive representation of language X and of native speakers of this language may choose to invest in learning this language in order to be able to travel to the country, interact with the people and explore the culture. On the other hand, learners may choose to invest in language X because they anticipate that knowledge of the language will yield increased opportunities for higher paying employment. Norton adds that whether for symbolic or material reasons, language learners expect a good return on their investment; the resulting benefits must be worth the effort spent learning the language.

1.3 Methodological Approach

In this research project, I adopted a qualitative methodology and relied on group interviews to gather information on the representations held by students at my school. While various methods can be used to access the representations of a particular group, researchers often use group interviews (Pepin, 2000; Gajo, 2000). Muller and de Pietro (2001) signal that analysis of interactions occurring within a group discussion reveals changes to and elaborations of the participants' representations.

Group interviews are also particularly well suited to conducting research with adolescents. First, they allow them to express their opinions and ideas orally in group interactions. In my experience, students enjoy expressing their ideas in small group discussions because everyone gets the opportunity to speak, they enjoy challenging and supporting each other's claims and they do not have to write anything down. Second, this method prevents students from feeling interrogated or "put on the spot" in individual interactions with an adult researcher.

The students I interviewed were unilingual Anglophone students who were taking French 11 with a colleague in my school as well as those who had just finished taking French 11 with me. Initially I had decided against interviewing my own students because I did not want my students to feel that their grade in my class would be affected by the opinions they expressed during the interview. Since our school was organized according to a semester system however, I simply waited until the end of the semester when I no longer taught them French to interview this group of students.

1.4 Epistemological Perspective

I adopted an interpretive epistemological perspective for this study (Savoie-Zjac and Karsenti, 2000). I wished to allow the representations of students to "emerge" as they explained, in their own words what they thought of French, English, and of native speakers of these languages. The participants themselves defined the key concepts (Francophone, Anglophone). The results of

this case study are not generalizable since they describe representations in one particular school.

1.5 Overview

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework of this research. I introduce the construct of representation and present research conducted by European sociolinguists on the relationship between linguistic representations and language learning. Norton's (2000) theory of learner investment in language is also presented in greater detail. Research on the representations that second language learners develop of native speakers is also explored. Finally, in an effort to understand the linguistic representations that second language learners develop when they have little to no direct contact with native speakers, Anderson's (1991) construct of imagined communities is outlined.

Chapter Three outlines the methodology of my research. I present the context in which the research took place followed by an explanation of the manner in which the research was conducted. Chapter Four presents data on students' representations of the French and English languages while Chapter Five presents data regarding students' representations of Francophones and Anglophones. I discuss conclusions drawn from my research and propose ideas for future research in Chapter Six.

CHAPTER 2: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

First developed as a concept in social psychology, social representations are now of interest to various “socio-compatible” disciplines (Gajo, 2000). Most notably, European socio-linguists have done extensive research on representations (Gajo, 2000; Muller, 1998; Pepin, 2000; Serra, 2000) as have Canadian education researchers who publish in French (Dagenais, 1994; Jacquet, 1992; Laplante, 1996). In an effort to fully outline and explain the concept of social representation, the first part of this chapter will present the construct from the perspective of social psychology and then from a sociolinguistic perspective.

2.1 Social Representations According to Social Psychology

According to a collection of essays by French social psychologist Moscovici (2000), recently translated into English, representations are a framework of beliefs, values, ideas, images and practices shared by a particular community or society. Representations serve two primary purposes. First, they enable people to conceptually organize reality and make it comprehensible. Representations allow us to transform something that is unfamiliar into something familiar. We create representations in order to understand and have a sense of control over our world. Second, representations facilitate communication among members of a community “by providing them with a code for social exchange and a code for naming and classifying unambiguously the

various aspects of their world and their individual and group history” (Moscovici, p.12).

Formed through communication, representations are dynamic and mobile (Moscovici, 2000). Once formed, representations “circulate, merge, attract and repel each other and give birth to new representations while old ones die out” (p.27). Constructed by and transmitted through language, representations are elaborated upon and changed over time. These changes can take place rapidly or slowly over generations. Current representations are the elaborations and transformations of the representations of previous generations.

According to Moscovici (2000), representations are generated by two processes: anchoring and objectifying. Anchoring is the process of classifying and naming a new idea or new information. We name and classify new information so that it can be integrated into our existing representations. When the new information is integrated, our existing representations are modified. As we classify new information and place it in a category, we also name it. We name things in order to be able to talk about them. Once a person or thing has been named, it can be described. The person or the thing now has particular characteristics, traits and qualities which make it distinct from other persons or things. Objectifying is the association of an abstract idea or concept to an image. Linking an idea or concept to an image makes it more comprehensible, thus facilitating social communication.

Representations are not neutral or value-free according to Moscovici (2000). In order to be classified and placed in a category, every person, idea or

thing must be evaluated and labelled. The process of creating representations through classification and naming does not allow for neutrality because in order to be placed in a category, everything must be assigned a positive or a negative value. Consequently, as Moscovici explains, our representations reveal our values and beliefs about society and human nature.

2.2 Social Representations According to Sociolinguistics

According to sociolinguists who have recently borrowed and adapted the construct of social representation developed initially by social psychologists, individuals and groups create representations of people, things and events through communication (Moore, 2001). As Gajo (2000) explains, representations are formed, circulated, made and unmade in and for a particular social environment. Representations serve to make this social environment visible and comprehensible. Matthey (2000) points out that whereas within social psychology, representations are seen as being cognitive and somewhat more implicit in nature and more stable, within sociolinguistics they are viewed as emerging and transforming within a particular verbal interaction.

As Gajo (2000) further explains, representations can either be pre-constructed or they can be co-constructed. Pre-constructed representations exist within communication and are for the most part implicit and stable. They are diffused within a particular community and are shared, recognized and or recognizable by that community. Co-constructed representations are representations that are created for and by communication. They are explicit and dynamic because they are negotiated and proposed during a particular social

interaction. Similarly, Py (2000) distinguishes between what he refers to as reference representations and representations in use. Reference representations come from memory and are recognizable to members of a particular community. Representations in use are representations that are formed and evolve within a particular interaction.

This distinction can be illustrated by the following example: Canadians' representation of the United States. This representation, shaped in part by the media, Canada's historical and political relationship with the United States and its geographic proximity to this country, is composed of beliefs, ideas, and images about the United States. Although this representation is not held by all Canadians, it is still recognizable to most Canadians because it is a "pre-constructed" or "reference" representation which exists within the collective memory of Canadian society. During a social interaction between members of the Canadian community, this representation of the United States could be called upon. Although it is not necessarily accepted by all members of the community, the representation is still familiar and understood. On the other hand, a representation of the United States could also be "co-constructed" within a particular social interaction between members of the Canadian community or between a member of the community and someone from outside the community. This representation would emerge and be elaborated upon while "in use" within the interaction.

Serra (2000) explains that representations evolving within a particular social interaction are elaborated and interpreted by the interlocutors through

explicative, justificatory and narrative types of discourse. For instance, an interlocutor will share a personal experience as a means of supporting or refuting a particular representation. The introduction of this personal experience can be used to justify or further explain the representation or it can serve to illustrate either the representation's validity or its inconsistency.

2.3 Representations and Investment in a Second Language

Representations influence not only social interactions but also conduct (Castellotti and Moore, 2002; Moore, 2001; Billiez and Millet, 2001). Since representations influence behaviours, the representations that second language learners have of the target language, of native speakers, of the countries in which the target language is spoken and of language learning are of particular importance in the study of second language learning. These representations can influence various behaviours such as the amount of time and effort a student is willing to spend learning the target language. As Py (2000) notes, the representations that learners have are key factors in their success or failure in learning the target language. Indeed, feelings, emotions, attitudes and positive or negative associations with the second language play a pivotal role in a learner's desire to learn a second language (Perrefort, 1997).

Dabène (1997) explains that a language's image, the way in which it is perceived, represented and valued has an impact on the investment that learners make in that language. Communities and individuals make judgments about the value of a particular language according to economic, social, cultural, cognitive and affective criteria. The assessments based on these criteria come together to

form what Dabène refers to as a language's informal status: the images of the language in circulation within the community. When it comes to second language instruction for children and adolescents, a language's informal status influences behaviours such as whether or not parents decide to enroll their child in a second language class. A language's perceived status also has a direct effect on the expectations and attitudes of second language learners, and as a result, the effort they are prepared to put into learning the language. The more highly regarded or valued a language is, the greater the investment learners are prepared to make. As Dabène notes, the level of investment that learners make in a language is influenced by their image of that language.

This link between the representation of a language within a particular community and a second language learner's level of investment in that language is illustrated in Perrefort's (1997) study on the representations of 420 French students studying German as a second language. The students revealed that many people in their families and community considered German to be a harsh, vulgar and even menacing language that was difficult to learn. This representation, which was formed by those who lived through the occupation of France during the Second World War, had been passed to, shared with and transformed by those born long after the war. This representation impacted the students' ability and desire to learn German because they began to see German as a difficult language that was not desirable to learn. Many of the students felt as if they had to justify not only their interest in the language but also their level of proficiency.

As Perrefort (1997) notes the opinions that people express about a language contain automatically a judgment of the speakers of that language. In the context of Perrefort's study, since the German language was devalued and viewed negatively within the community, the speakers of the language were also devalued. Perrefort explains that in attempting to learn German, the French students were attempting to construct not only a new more positive representation of the German language but also a new identity for themselves as young French and German speaking bilinguals. However:

Les tensions entre tradition et innovation, entre loyauté sociale et linguistique et changement identitaire à travers la langue allemande ont été trop fortes pour certains et ils ont soit abandonné le cycle, soit les études d'allemand, soit ils sont restés jusqu'au bout, mais sont devenus progressivement monolingues ne s'exprimant plus qu'en français. (Perrefort, p. 58)

The representations in circulation within the students' families and community influenced the students' linguistic practices (Perrefort, 1997). Many of the students stopped studying German while others, although continuing with their studies, stopped speaking German. In both cases the students stopped investing in the German language.

Indeed Perrefort's (1997) study illustrates the extent to which the representations that learners have of the target language and native speakers of the target language, can impact the investment they are prepared to make in the second language. As Norton (2000) explains, language learners invest in a second language in order to acquire symbolic and material resources that will increase the value of their cultural capital. Norton defines cultural capital as "the

knowledge and modes of thought that characterize different classes and groups in relation to specific sets of social forms” (p.10). Symbolic resources include things such as friendship and education while material resources include things like money and real estate. Learners expect the return on their investment in the target language to be proportionate to the amount of effort they expend learning the language.

Norton (2000) further explains that the concept of investment is different than the concept of motivation envisioned in social psychology because of the way in which language learners are conceptualized. Motivation is seen as a personality trait of a “unitary, fixed and ahistorical language learner” (Norton, 2000, p.10). The language learner is not seen as an ever-changing person whose identity and way of perceiving the social world is constantly being constructed and reordered. According to Norton:

The notion of investment, on the other hand, conceives of the language learner as having a complex social history and multiple desires. The notion presupposes that when language learners speak, they are not only exchanging information with target language speakers, but they are constantly organizing and reorganizing a sense of who they are and how they relate to the social world. Thus an investment in the target language is also an investment in a learner’s own identity which is constantly changing across time and space. (p. 11)

Given that language learning involves the reframing of ones identity, and given that value judgments made about a particular language contain automatically a judgment of the speakers of the language, it is not surprising that the investment learners make in a language is affected by their representation of that language.

2.4 Representations and Second Language Learning

Second language teachers need to be aware of the representations that learners and their community hold of the target language, of native speakers and of the countries in which the target language is spoken. As previously indicated, these representations can have a significant impact on language learning (Dabène, 1997; Perrefort, 1997; Py, 2000). Indeed, as Castellotti and Moore (2002) note, representations can either help or hinder language learning. They signal the need to understand the representations at play so that appropriate teaching strategies can be undertaken. Similarly Cain and de Pietro (1997) claim that if second language instruction does not take into account learners' representations, they could become an obstacle to learning if they are based on negative views of the target language and language speakers. Given the important role that representations play in second language teaching and learning, second language educators need to understand not only the learners' representations but also the social and historical context in which they were formed. As Cain and de Pietro remark, language learning never takes place in a neutral context.

An international research project, organized by the United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) was conducted on the representations of second language learners in France, Bulgaria, and Switzerland (Muller and de Pietro, 2001). The purpose of the research was to discover what images the students had of the various countries whose languages they were learning. The results of the study conducted in French-speaking

Switzerland in particular have been examined by European researchers (Cain and de Pietro, 1997; Muller, 1998; Muller and de Pietro, 2001). The participants were 700 French speaking primary and secondary Swiss students who were learning German as a second language. The research was intended to reveal the students' representations of Germany and the German language. The main research method used was word association. The students were provided with a prompt and were asked to quickly write down the first five words they thought of. The students were then asked to attribute a connotation to each word using one of the following symbols: +, -, =.

Muller and de Pietro (2001) found that there was a significant link between the students' tendency to attribute negative connotations to Germany, with a belief that learning German was hard and with dislike of the subject. Thus, the research established a link between the representation that language learners have of the country in which the target language is spoken and their experiences learning the language. Cain and de Pietro (1997) note that these experiences, including how difficult learners find the language and their level of success in learning the language, help shape the representations that learners develop of the country in which the target language is spoken. As has been explained, linguistic representations impact language learning. Likewise, experiences learning the target language affect the linguistic representations that learners develop.

The research further revealed that the French-speaking Swiss students had a rather negative image of Germany (Muller, 1998). Indeed, the Swiss

students' representations of Germany and of learning German were more negative than the representations held by students in other countries. In fact as Muller notes, the proximity to German-speaking Switzerland was an important variable in the students' responses. The French-speaking Swiss students who lived in the bilingual regions near the German-speaking region of Switzerland were the ones who were harshest in their view of Germany. Muller hypothesizes that the close proximity to German-speaking Switzerland made some students feel threatened. The students' negative representation was understood as an attempt to establish symbolic distance between themselves and the German-speaking Swiss. According to Muller, this representation of German-speaking Switzerland shaped their representations of Germany and the German language.

The results of the UNESCO project in Switzerland, led Muller (1998) to conduct another more comprehensive and qualitative study on the representations of French-speaking Swiss students. The purpose of the study was twofold. First the researchers hoped to better understand the formation of the students' representations and they wished to further explore the implications of these representations for language learning. Second, the researchers wished to make students aware of their representations and help them understand how representations emerge in socio-historic context. This portion of the research involved the implementation of a series of classroom activities designed to make the students aware of their own representations. Results from the research were published by Muller (1998) and Muller and de Pietro (2001).

Muller's (1998) research is relevant to my study for a number of reasons. First, the research participants and the context are similar to those in my study. The European research was conducted in order to discover the linguistic representations of secondary (Gymnasium) students, studying a second language in a classroom environment and my study documents the linguistic representations of secondary students in BC. Second, the results of the research further underscore the connections between representations and language learning and this relationship is also explored in my study. Further, although my research project did not involve the implementation of a series of activities designed to make students aware of their representations, as did Muller's, this portion of the research informs the discussion chapter of my thesis.

2.4.1 Representations: Languages in Contact

Muller's (1998) study took place in three secondary classrooms in Bienne, Switzerland. Bienne is Switzerland's only officially bilingual town (German and French). Eighty-four students between the ages of sixteen and seventeen participated in the study. The research methods included a survey, word associations, classroom observations and semi-directed interviews with the students and teachers.

In general, the students in Bienne found the German language to be difficult with a complex grammatical structure. They did not consider German to be a soft, musical or warm language and many of the students felt that it was not a pleasant language to listen to. On the other hand, the students agreed that

German is both a rich and useful language (Muller, 1998). Muller notes that the students' word association activity revealed two interesting phenomena. First, the students tended to associate the target language with the country in which the target language is spoken. When asked to write down the first five words which came to mind when they thought of the German language, students often wrote down words that related specifically to Germany: most notably words relating to food and war. Second, German was also strongly linked to the area of learning. German was seen above all as a school subject and not as a language used to communicate with real people in the real world (Muller).

Muller (1998) also notes that in general, the students had a negative albeit incomplete representation of Germany. They viewed Germany as an unknown country situated far away. Many of the images which the students associated with the country were images related to World War II. Muller further reveals that the participants tended to shift negative associations with German-speaking Switzerland onto Germany. For instance, when a teacher told some of the participants that students in France and Bulgaria enjoyed studying German, one of the students replied by saying that those students did not have to live next to Germans. Of course, the students in Bienne did not live in close proximity to Germany but German-speaking Switzerland. The students' transferred their negative representations of German-speaking Switzerland onto Germany. Muller refers to this phenomenon as a "shifting" of representations between Germany and German-speaking Switzerland.

To better understand and situate the students' representations, Muller (1998) also conducted group interviews with some of the participants. The interview questions dealt with the participants' experiences learning German, their personal experiences with Germany, and the relationship between French and German-speaking Switzerland. The interviews were set up in a discussion format to provide the participants with the opportunity to explain argue and share their different points of view. This format allowed Muller to see how the participants' representations were actualized and co-constructed during a social interaction.

As Muller and de Pietro (2001) explain, these interviews underscored two particular dimensions that characterize representations. First, representations serve as a means of establishing one's identity. While attempting to define the language and the thinking of the German-speaking Swiss, the participants in the study were defining how they saw themselves; they were establishing their own identity. Second, representations are dynamic and situated in a particular context. During the interview, the participants' first established their differences from German-speaking Swiss people. Eventually however, the participants elaborated and expanded upon their representation of German-speaking Swiss. A new category of German-speaking Swiss, having more in common with French-speaking Swiss, was co-constructed during the interview to classify younger and more urban German speakers and to differentiate them from older German speakers living in more rural areas (Muller and de Pietro). As Muller and de Pietro note, this elaboration of and change in the participants' representations

would not have been revealed through a research method such as a word association activity.

2.4.2 Acting on Representations

Realizing that negative representations were circulating and affecting the learning of German by the French-speaking Swiss students, Muller (1998) designed a series of classroom activities that targeted the students' representations. As Muller and de Pietro (2001) explain, the purpose of the activities was not to eradicate the negative representations, nor was it to change them into more positive representations. The activities were designed to allow the students' representations to emerge and to provide the students with the opportunity to understand the relative and contextual nature of representations in the hopes that they would become aware of the ways in which they represent themselves, others and the world. Three classes at a school in Bienne participated in the activity. The interactions that took place during these activities were observed, taped and analyzed.

Analyzing the interactions, Muller and de Pietro (2001) found that many of the students realized that words and their connotations do not represent reality but rather representations of reality. Many students also became aware of their own "socio-centrism", their tendency to attribute positive values to members of their own group while attributing negative values to outsiders. While the activities led the students to some positive insights, Muller and de Pietro indicate that they also led to three problematic and unforeseen results. First, the students

developed new stereotypes about other cultural groups. Second, certain existing stereotypes were reinforced and last, some of students began to justify the existence of such stereotypes (Muller and de Pietro).

While representations are malleable and can therefore be acted upon and perhaps modified so as to not be an obstacle to language learning, attempts to do so should undertaken carefully. As we can see from the study in Bienne, even the most well intentioned and well developed attempt to simply make students aware of their own representations can have unfortunate and unanticipated results. Although second language teachers need to be aware of their students' representations so that they can devise appropriate strategies to act upon these representations, it is somewhat naïve to expect that negative representations will necessarily be transformed into more positive ones.

2.4.3 Representations: The Absence of Contact

As we have seen, the French-speaking Swiss students' representations of Germany were shaped by their representations of German-speaking Switzerland. Indeed as Muller (1998) notes their negative representations of German-speaking Swiss were “shifted” onto Germans. These representations were formed in a situation where the learners found themselves in close proximity to native speakers of the target language. Their representations of these speakers became associated with all native speakers of the language. As Cain and de Pietro (1997) remark, proximity to native speakers of the target language does not necessarily lead to positive representations.

Not all language learners, however, find themselves in a situation where they have direct contact with native speakers of the target language. This is certainly the case for students learning French in BC. Students in this province do not live in close proximity to any large francophone communities. In a context such as this, when learners do not have contact with a country, region or community in which the target language is spoken, what representations do learners develop of the target language, of speakers of the target language and of regions in which the target language is spoken?

As has been previously stated, the French-speaking Swiss students saw German as a school subject and not as a means of communicating with real people. Muller (1998) explains, “...l’image de l’allemand n’est pas celle d’une langue parlée dans un univers contemporain, mais celle d’un objet qui a finalement pris les autres caractéristiques d’une autre matière scolaire” (p. 120). This is not particularly surprising given that, as Castellotti and Moore (2002) explain, second language learning often takes place in an academic setting. Students do not find themselves in contact with native speakers of the language but rather find themselves in a classroom surrounded by other would-be language learners having contact with only textbooks and language tapes. This representation of a non-existent target language speaker is further reinforced if the learners are not able to participate in activities such as cultural exchanges which would put them in contact with native speakers (Castellotti and Moore). As Castelloti and Moore explain, students who do not have contact with native speakers of the target language develop a type of “blindness” and “deafness”

toward native speakers of the target language; they do not really know what they are like.

This would appear to be the case for the students from Bulgaria who participated in the same UNESCO research project as the students from Switzerland. The students in question were studying English and had never been to England. As Cain and de Pietro (1997) signal, the Bulgarian students knew very little about daily life in England however they did express good factual knowledge in areas such as politics and the arts. When asked to describe British people, the Bulgarian students used a wide variety of fourteen adjectives to describe both their appearance and behaviours. Cain and de Pietro comment, “Cette étendue est révélatrice d’une attitude quasi fantasmagorique vis-à-vis de gens dont on rêve sans les connaître” (p. 303). The Bulgarian students were not really describing British people, as they did not really know them; they were in fact describing who they imagined them to be. Their representation was of an imagined British community.

Anderson (1991) explains that in fact all communities are “imagined”. Members of any given community will never know or know of most of the other members of the community yet all of the members have a clear image of the community in their mind; they imagine it. They have a sense of connection to others within the community and they have a clear idea of who is not included in this community. Extending Anderson’s construct, it would seem then that a community can be “imagined” not only by its members but also, although differently, by those outside the community. Further, this outsider’s “imagining” of

the community need not be based on any actual contact with members of the community; it can be solely a product of fantasy based on one's own lack of contact with them. In the context of the Bulgarian students' representation of British people, the fact that they had not been to England and had not met any British people did not stop the students from imagining the British. The representation revealed through the UNESCO study was of a completely imagined British community.

While the Bulgarian students were isolated from England, students in BC are similarly isolated from francophone countries and regions. As explained in Chapter One, despite Federal government discourse and policy promoting the equality of both official languages in Canada, learning French as a second language does not appeal to all students in BC. Linguistic representations affect language learning. Since representations are culturally and locally specific, I decided to examine the representations that students at a secondary school in BC had of the French language, Francophones, the English language and Anglophones.

Elaborated through communication, representations allow communities and individuals to organize reality and make it comprehensible. Representations can exist prior to a particular interaction or they can be co-constructed within a particular interaction. Linguistic representations are of particular importance in second language learning because they impact the investment that learners are prepared to make in the language. Indeed, these representations can either help or hinder language learning.

The representations that learners develop are shaped in part by the social and cultural context. The experience of learning a language in an academic environment can cause learners to view the language as a school subject rather than as a means of communicating with people. Proximity to native speakers of the target language influences the representations that learners develop of the target language and of native speakers of the target language. However contact with native speakers does not necessarily lead to the elaboration of positive representations. When language learners do not have contact with native speakers of the target language, they develop a certain ignorance of this group. They can nevertheless elaborate a representation of an imagined target language community.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

The linguistic representations that learners develop are shaped, in part, by the social, political and cultural context in which they are situated. They are also influenced by the cultural and language history of the learners' community (Cavalli, 1997; Perrefort, 1997); the experiences and ideas of a community's past permeate its present experiences and ideas (Moscovici, 2000). Therefore, a study on the linguistic representations of unilingual Anglophone students in a community in BC should begin with an examination of the sociopolitical context in which these representations are situated. To this end, a discussion on the Federal government's language policy and its impact on Canadian society will be provided in the first part of this chapter, followed by a description of the social and cultural milieu in which the students' representations were formed.

3.1 Policies that Shaped Canadian Society

Adopted in 1969, the *Official Languages Act* gave equal status to the English and French languages in Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2003b). Since that time, the Federal government has endeavoured not only to protect our country's two official languages but also to promote bilingualism and linguistic duality. The Federal government included protection of the country's two official languages in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and established a new *Official Languages Act* in 1988. One of the objectives of this new *Official Languages Act* is to advance the equal status

and use of both languages within Canadian society (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2003b).

To further this objective, the Federal government announced in March of 2003, as part of its *Action Plan for Official Languages*, that it wishes to double the number of bilingual young Canadians by the year 2013. Currently, half of all elementary and secondary students, that is approximately 2.6 million, are learning either English or French as a second language and 324,000 of these students are in French Immersion. At this time, 24% of Anglophones and Francophones in Canada aged 15 to 19 are bilingual. The objective of the Federal government's Action Plan is to raise this proportion to 50% by 2013 and in so doing provide young Canadians with not only cultural but also economic advantages (Government of Canada Privy Council Office, 2003).

Indeed the government considers the two official languages to be “an essential asset for Canada’s future success” (Government of Canada Privy Council Office, 2003, p. 1). In this era of globalization, when interest in second languages is increasing in countries around the world, Canada is considered fortunate to have two official languages of international stature. Access to these languages is “an asset for labour markets and increases the mobility of the individual” (p. 2). Furthermore, bilingualism is viewed as an enriching experience that allows one access to a broader cultural heritage (Government of Canada Privy Council Office).

While the Federal government hopes that this new emphasis on bilingualism will positively shape the future of young Canadians, linguistic duality

has already had a significant impact on their present. The Federal government sees a link between its policy of linguistic duality and Canada's diversity (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2003a). The Federal Government claims that the values of respect and understanding that led to the adoption of the first *Official Languages Act* in 1969 allowed Canada to become a strong and prosperous multicultural nation where diversity is respected. According to official government discourse, having two official languages has allowed Francophone and Anglophone Canadians to develop sensitivity and respect towards each other. Government documents further state that this understanding and sensitivity have helped Canadians accept the many different cultures and languages of immigrants (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2003a). In order to maintain and enhance multiculturalism in Canada, the Federal government passed the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* in 1988. It details the Canadian government's policy to recognize and promote multiculturalism as a "fundamental characteristic" of Canadian society (Department of Justice Canada, 2004). Diversity and cultural acceptance, in addition to linguistic duality and bilingualism, have become defining aspects of Canadian society in official policy discourse.

3.2 The Population of Canada

According to data from the 2001 census, 74.5% of Canadians are English speaking while 24.1% are French speaking. When it comes to bilingualism in official languages, 43% of Francophones are able to speak English, whereas only 9% of Anglophones are able to speak French (Office of the Commissioner of

Official Languages, 2004). At the same time, ethnic and cultural diversity have increased greatly in Canada. The proportion of the population made up of immigrants stands at 18% and the proportion of the country made up of members of visible minorities stands at 13.4% compared to only 4.7% two decades ago (Parkin and Mendelsohn, 2003).

A survey designed by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, *The Globe and Mail*, and the Canadian Research Archive, was conducted by phone in the spring of 2003, in order to determine the impact of diversity on the Canadian identity (Parkin and Mendelsohn, 2003). As Parkin and Mendelsohn explain, Canadians see themselves as an open, tolerant people. The study revealed that while all Canadians tended to be comfortable with ethnic diversity and multiculturalism, young Canadians between the ages of eighteen and thirty were most supportive. For instance, 54% of Canadians would agree that multiculturalism makes them feel very proud to be Canadian. However, when considering solely the responses of Canadians between the ages of eighteen and thirty, this proportion increases to 66%. Younger Canadians are also more comfortable with diversity close-up, such as “including people from different ethnic backgrounds in their communities and . . . in their immediate families” (Parkin and Mendelsohn, p. 3). For example, 67% of Canadians said that they would be comfortable with a close relative marrying someone who is Muslim. Eighty-one percent of younger Canadians, however, would be comfortable with this marriage.

Furthermore, according to the same survey, Canadians of all ages value and take pride in Canada's diversity. Seventy percent of Canadians are proud that different cultural groups can get along and live in peace in our country (Parkin and Mendelsohn, 2003). Ethnic and cultural backgrounds are seen by Canadians as an important part of one's own identity but they are not considered important factors when choosing friends or a spouse. Not surprisingly, younger Canadians are most likely to have friends who come from a different religious, ethnic or cultural background (Parkin and Mendelsohn). In fact diversity and multiculturalism are so much a part of Canadian society that they rank higher on a list of sources of Canadian pride than bilingualism. While 70% of Canadians say that they are proud because different cultural groups live peaceably in Canada and 54% of Canadians say that multiculturalism makes them proud, only 41% of Canadians say having two official languages makes them proud to be Canadian (Parkin and Mendelsohn).

3.3 The Population of British Columbia

BC is a dominantly Anglophone province, with approximately 74% of the population having English as a first language (Statistics Canada, 2001). According to statistics Canada, when it comes to knowledge of Canada's official languages 90% of the people living in BC are only able to speak English. Despite the federal government's promotion of linguistic duality and bilingualism, only 6.9% of the provincial population surveyed by Statistics Canada is able to speak both official languages.

Looking at surveys conducted on behalf of the Centre for Research and Information on Canada, about the attitudes of Canadians toward language and bilingualism, Parkin and Turcotte (2004) find that people in BC seem to value the ability to speak a second language. When asked if, in today's economy, people who were able to speak more than one language would be more successful, 90% of respondents from BC agreed. When asked if they felt that it was important for children in the province to learn a second language, 73% of respondents said that it was important.

However, although they seem to have a favourable attitude toward the general idea of learning a second language, people in BC are not in agreement about which second language is the best to learn. Parkin and Turcotte (2004) further reveal that when asked which second language would be most important for children in the province to learn, 58% of British Columbians chose French. Chinese was selected by 16% of British Columbian respondents as the most important second language for children to learn. In Vancouver, support for Chinese was even stronger with 28% of respondents citing it as the most important second language. Although the support for French as the most important second language for children to learn stood at only 58%, which is the lowest level of support in all of Canada, it does not mean that British Columbians have a negative feelings when it comes to the French language. When asked to respond to the statement, "You wish you could speak French," 73% of British Columbian respondents agreed. It seems reasonable to conclude then that the lower level of support for French as the most important second language for

children to learn has little to do with British Columbian's feelings towards the language, and more to do with immigration patterns, the influence of Pacific Rim countries, as well as the province's location far from any large Francophone population (Parkin and Turcotte, 2004).

3.4 French as a Second Language in British Columbia

Given that BC is not located near any large Francophone communities and given that some in this province feel that other languages are more important for children to learn, one may wonder why young people learn French as a second language in BC. Indeed, students and even a few parents have posed this question to me on several occasions. The Integrated Resource Package (IRP) for French as a second language which sets out the provincial curriculum outlines the reasons and the rationale for learning French in BC. The IRP (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001) states that since approximately one quarter of Canada's population speaks French and given that French is one of the country's two official languages, it is important for students in BC to have opportunities to communicate in French. The document also indicates that the Ministry hopes that in addition to being able to communicate meaningfully in French, students will develop openness to cultural diversity. The IRP lists three positive effects of communicative competence in French: the expansion of career opportunities; the enhancement of learning additional languages and; the development of cultural awareness. Communicative competence in French is seen as promoting positive attitudes toward not only Francophones but also

other cultural groups. It is also seen as enabling students to understand their own cultures better (British Columbia Ministry of Education).

As a part of its Language Education Policy (1997a) the BC Ministry of Education requires that students in Grades five to eight take a second language unless they are:

- identified as having special needs or are receiving English as a Second Language (ESL) services; and,
- unable to demonstrate their learning in relation to the expected learning outcomes of the second language course; or, enrolled in late French Immersion in Grade 6. (BC Ministry of Education)

Because the Ministry of Education wants students to have the opportunity to study languages which are “significant within their communities” School Boards can choose which second languages to offer, however the curricula for these second language courses must be provincially approved. If the School Board does not select another second language, Core French is offered.

The students in my study are learning French in an Anglophone community in an Anglophone province which is located thousands of kilometres from large Francophone communities. People in BC appear to be open to the idea of second language learning, and French is seen as a positive language to know, however it is not necessarily the language which they would say is the most important for young people to learn. The Canadian government values and promotes diversity, multiculturalism, bilingualism and linguistic duality. Students in my study have never known a Canada without the new *Official Languages Act* or the *Canadian Multiculturalism Act*.

3.5 Research Questions

In this context, the following four questions were developed to guide this study:

1. What representation do Anglophone students in a community of BC have of Francophones?
2. What representation do Anglophone students in a community of BC have of Anglophones?
3. What representation do Anglophone students in a community of BC have of the French language?
4. What representation do Anglophone students in a community of BC have of the English language?

3.6 Qualitative Research

To answer these questions, I decided to conduct a small qualitative study.

Qualitative research is a human-centred approach (Palys, 1992) to research in social sciences. It is an approach grounded in the understanding:

...that humans are cognitive beings who actively perceive and make sense of the world around them, have the capacity to abstract from their experience, ascribe meaning to their behaviour and the world around them, and are affected by those meanings.
(Palys, p. 16)

As humans, we construct and give meaning to our experiences. This meaning is rooted in a particular culture and context (Davis 1995, Karsenti and Savoie-Zajc 2000). A qualitative study is one in which the researcher seeks to understand the reality of the participants.

Understanding the reality of participants requires closeness with the participants (Palys, 1992). The researcher must take the time necessary to understand the social and cultural influences on the participants' perspective

(Davis, 1995). Qualitative studies produce results that are dynamic, temporary and contextual because the situation and participants' perspectives continue to evolve (Karsenti and Savoie-Zajc, 2000).

Researchers seeking to illuminate a particular situation or phenomenon through rich, thick description may choose to conduct a qualitative case study (Merriam, 1988). Merriam defines a qualitative study as “an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon or social unit” (p. 21).

One popular method of data collection in qualitative research is the interview. While interviews allow the researcher access to the participants' experiences and the meaning that the participants give to their experiences, they are not without their limitations. The quality of the interview depends in part on the relationship between the participants and the interviewer. There must be a level of trust and closeness between the researcher and the participants in order for the participants to feel comfortable enough to respond fully, openly and honestly. There is also the issue of the credibility of information provided during an interview. Sometimes participants will respond in a certain way in an effort to assist the researcher. Other times their responses will be coloured by the desire to be seen as a good person. They will not respond completely honestly for fear of being perceived in a negative way (Karsenti and Savoie-Zajc, 2000).

For my study, I decided to use a semi-structured group interview format. A semi-structured interview is somewhat flexible. The researcher outlines the themes or topics to be discussed during the interview however the exact questions asked, the level of detail and the interview dynamic changes with each

interview. While I did prepare questions in advance, the dynamic of a group interview meant that each interview was unique. Participants were encouraged to respond not only to my questions but also to the comments of others. This meant that topics that elicited a great deal of discussion in one group were not necessarily discussed at all in another group. Because I wanted to allow the representations of the students to emerge, I wanted a method of data collection that would be consistent while still being flexible.

3.7 The Role of the Researcher

My role as researcher was as the facilitator of the group interviews. My goal was to enable the discussion to flow while also getting the most complete and accurate information possible. To do this, I rephrased questions for the participants when necessary and asked questions to follow up on statements they made. In order to not be viewed as a participant in the discussions or, worse yet, as the leader of the discussions, I sat to the side of the groups.

The participants in the study sat in desks, facing each other with the tape recorder in the middle. I sat in a desk that was placed to the side and slightly away from the participants. I felt that this physical distance was important in helping me establish my role as facilitator. I was close enough to step in and help the students out or ask a question but I was clearly not the leader of the discussion group. In order to allow their representations to take shape, I wanted the students to talk with each other. I did not want them to speak only to me and perhaps feel pressured to get the “right” answer to the interview questions. I

wanted to provide them with the opportunity to respond to or add to the comments of the other participants.

3.8 Gaining Access to the Local Context

The community in which my study took place is a small, predominantly Caucasian, English speaking suburb of Vancouver. According to the 2001 census, the city has approximately 14,670 residents, 12,245 of whom learned English as their first language. The community does not have a lot of cultural diversity when compared with more urban communities. In 2001 nearly 2 out of 5 residents of the Vancouver metropolitan area were members of a visible minority (Parkin and Mendelsohn, 2003). In the community where my study was situated however, only 1,580 residents were members of a visible minority and 310 residents were Aboriginal.

The secondary school in which the case study took place had approximately 980 students during the 2003/2004 school year. The school offers French and German as a second language and has a small French Immersion program. At the time of the study, there were 190 students enrolled in Grade eleven. There were four Core French classes offered at the Grade eleven level with a total of 94 students.

In July of 2003, I submitted my request for ethical approval of research to the Office of Research Ethics at Simon Fraser University. My application was granted approval by the Simon Fraser Research Ethics Board at its meeting on

September 8, 2003. A copy of the approval letter has been filed at the Theses Office of the University Library.

Toward the end of September 2003, I met with the principal of the school to discuss my intended case study and to ask permission to seek participants from the school. I outlined my research questions, the interview format and the types of questions to be asked of the participants. I also summarized the content of the permission letter to be given to the participants. He agreed to allow the case study to take place in the school.

I chose to conduct my study at this particular school for two reasons. First, it was the school in which I was teaching. As a full time teacher, I felt that this would make it more convenient for me to arrange and conduct the group interviews. Second, I was going into my fifth year of teaching at the school so I knew many of the students and was familiar with the school culture. I felt that this familiarity, this insider's perspective, would assist me in my interpretation of the data collected during the interviews.

Prior to contacting the school district to seek permission for the study, I met with the colleague whose students, in addition to my own former students, I planned on interviewing. I met with her to discuss the possibility of explaining my study to her students during one of their French classes in order to seek participants. In addition to agreeing to allow me to speak to her classes in both semesters, she further offered to take over my classes while I was making my presentation to her classes.

In November of 2003, having the consent of the school principal and the support and consent of my colleague, I forwarded my request to the Deputy Superintendent of the school district. In addition to a brief letter outlining my request, I included a copy of my ethical approval from Simon Fraser University, my participant permission letter and my sample questions. On December 1, 2003 I received permission from the school district to proceed with my case study. A copy of this letter is included in Appendix A.

In January and May of 2004, toward the end of the semesters I spoke to my French 11 class as well as my colleague's classes about my thesis. I explained that, as a part of my Master's thesis I wished to do a study of their linguistic representations and I briefly outlined what a representation was. I further explained what participation in the case study would entail; taking part in a small audiotaped group interview at the school. The students wanted to know if the group interviews would be in French or in English. I advised them that they would be in English.

In order to find Anglophone students willing to participate, I passed out a brief information sheet to the class. All of the students filled in the sheet which asked for their name, age, and some background information. Students willing to participate in the study were asked to indicate this on the bottom of their information sheet. Participants were then selected from this group of students.

The students chosen to participate in the study spoke English as their first language, spoke English at home, and indicated that they were not fluent in any other languages. These students learned French through the Core French

program and had never been in French Immersion. Male and female students of varying ability levels in French 11 between the ages of 16 and 17 were selected as participants. In all fourteen students participated in the study. During the first semester of the school year, four students were selected from each class. During the second semester, three students from each class were selected to participate in the study.

The group interviews took place at the school in the French classrooms. Three of the interviews were conducted during the school day and one was conducted after school. The interviews lasted from an hour to an hour and a half and were audiotaped. The interview questions were written on cards and placed in a pile on the table. The students took turns reading the questions to the group. After a question was read each student answered it. The students were free to discuss the questions, agree or disagree with each other and could make more than one comment for a given question.

I listened to and transcribed all of the interviews myself. A list of the transcription conventions I used has been included in Appendix B. The data gathered from the group interviews are presented in the following chapters.

CHAPTER 4: REPRESENTATIONS OF LANGUAGES

For the purposes of clarity and organization, an interpretive discussion of the data from my study is presented in two chapters. This chapter deals with my students' experiences and representations of the French language as well as their representations of the English language. In the following chapter, I present data regarding my students' representations of Francophones and Anglophones.

4.1 Students' Experiences of French

As indicated in Chapter Two, the linguistic representations that learners develop are shaped in part by the cultural and language history of their community. Additionally, their representations are shaped by their individual experiences (Perrefort, 1997). Having considered the national, provincial, and local context in which the students' representations were formed, it is also important to consider the impact of individual experiences on students' representations. Therefore, in order to situate students' representations in context, I asked them to share their experiences with the French language. The students responded to two question prompts:

1. What is your experience of the French language? In what kinds of situations do you hear it, use it and see it?
2. Before beginning French at school, what was your experience with the French language?

The following excerpt illustrates the type of response given by most of the students.

Carly: I took French from grade eight to grade eleven. And, I don't really use it very often but I see it on packages of things and on shows on TV. That's about it.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, page 1)

Carly's experiences were not unique. Students revealed that their experiences with French were connected to school and various forms of media. In fact, 11 of the 14 participants shared experiences with the French language that were school related. Students were also aware of the French channel, specifically French children's television shows as well as French movies. I had anticipated that many of the students would discuss school related experiences in response to the first question prompt, which is why I included the second question about their experiences with French prior to learning French at school.

Yet, as the following excerpt shows, students' experiences with French prior to school were limited.

Kim: I knew about French because I went to a French elementary school. So even before they started teaching it to us, I knew it was French and I didn't understand it at all.

Carly: I never really had any experience with French before school. Um, I saw it on TV and packages and things but nothing really in person.

(Group interview 2, February 26 2004, p. 3)

Many students like Carly shared that they had little to no experience with French prior to learning French at school. In some cases, they recalled seeing French in the media. Others however, claimed to have had no real awareness of the French language before school. Students, like Kim, revealed that even before they began to study French themselves, their experiences with the language were still school related. Kim shared that she went to an elementary school with a French Immersion program and was therefore aware of the language. Others recalled older siblings bringing home French homework long before they began studying French themselves.

Outside of the school setting, French was at once absent from and yet omnipresent in students' daily lives. As the excerpt below shows, while students saw the French language everywhere, they rarely heard it used in their community.

Beth: Uh - I see it a lot on like --- just, milk cartons or uh, food products.
Um - what do you mean by situations?

Researcher: Um - do you ever hear anybody in the community using it...

Beth: Oh, no I don't hear a lot of it being used. Only in the classroom pretty much.

Rob: Well like, I hear French like um --- I'll be hanging around with my friends and some of them are Immersion kids...(*unintelligible*)

Researcher: So you hang around kids who are in Immersion, so you hear it more --- they're talking in the hallways or...

Rob: Uh, yeah hallways, at home.

Researcher: And other than with your French Immersion friends, do you see or hear French around?

Rob: Not really.

Alice: No, I don't hear it often either. I only started French --- taking French in --- actually --- Grade five, when I moved here. They didn't teach it in Prince George. So, the only time I'll see it is on, cereal boxes --- like food things --- 'cause it's required, and that's it.

(Group interview 4, May 27, 2004, p. 1)

Like Beth, students noticed the French language everywhere on product packaging. However, although they saw the French language all over, students did not have experience actually using or hearing French outside of school. Beth and Alice claimed that they did not hear a lot of French in their community. In fact, Beth said that French was basically only used in the classroom. Although Rob had heard French being spoken outside of school by his friends in the French Immersion program, he did not hear it used by others in his community.

While students like Rob said that they heard friends in the French Immersion program speaking French, other students shared that they sometimes used French themselves outside of school. However, those who did so also revealed that they did not use it for authentic communication with native speakers but rather, playfully with friends. While hanging out with other English speaking friends, a couple of the students claimed that they threw French words

and phrases into their speech. They did this, they said, just for fun. It was not a serious attempt to use or practice their French.

Some of the students, of course, did have other experiences with the French language. Five of the 14 participants had actually travelled to French speaking regions or countries. Two had been to France, one had visited both France and Switzerland and two had travelled to Québec. Yet, when initially asked during the interview to share their experiences of the French language, only 2 of these 5 students spoke of their travels to French speaking regions. The other 3 students talked about their travel experiences only incidentally, later in the interview. It is noteworthy that these students did not immediately associate their trips to French speaking countries as experiences with the French language. Is it possible that for them, French is so closely associated with school that other forms of contact with the language did not count as a legitimate experience?

4.2 Students' Representations of the French Language

In order to access students' representations of the French language, I provided them with a series of question prompts for discussion. The students were not only asked to share their thoughts and feelings about the French language, they were also asked how they would describe the language. In addition, they were asked how they would compare French to other languages and if they anticipated using French in the future.

When students were asked what words they would use to describe the French language, the most prevalent responses were “hard” and “difficult”. One participant even described the language as “mind boggling”. However, in addition to describing French in this way, many also used words such as “fun”, “interesting” and “enjoyable”. It seems that while many had trouble with the language, they nevertheless liked the language when they experienced some success with it.

This following excerpt of a group discussion, for instance, illustrates the students’ thoughts and feelings about the French language.

Mike: Kay, when I’m trying to speak the French language it makes me feel - kinda dumb. I really don’t know what I’m saying that much. And then there’s lots of parts of it that I don’t understand - like the accents. Lots of the endings...

Researcher: So is it the pronunciation that makes you feel dumb? When you’re reading it?

Mike: No I like that. It’s just that - because I don’t understand parts of the words...

Jen: You don’t even know what you’re saying.

Mike: No, not really. *(student reads question from card)* How does it make you feel when you try to write it? I don’t know - bad, in general.

Researcher: Why?

Mike: It's so hard. I don't know anything and it's always wrong. How does it make you feel when you are trying to understand it? Well if I can understand it, it makes me pretty happy. It's like something new right? When I don't get it, that kind of sucks as well. How does it sound to you? On the French tapes that I listen to, I can't understand a thing but when someone speaks it normally and slowly, then I can understand it.

Jen: Like when Mrs. Brown (*the teacher*) speaks it?

Mike: Yeah, yeah.

Melanie: Yeah like when Mme Brown speaks it, it's fine but the tapes are kind of bad. Like (*makes noises to imitate how tapes sound to her*)

Karri: (*laughs*)

Mike: And it's like a different accent and stuff.

Karri: When I try to speak it --- depends where I am. In class I feel almost like I understand it but when I was in France, I did not understand one thing that anyone else was telling me.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 3-4)

Students associated lack of proficiency in French with feelings of incompetence. For example, when Mike spoke about the French language, he recounted feeling “dumb” and “bad” and described French as “hard”. Conversely, he related that when he was able to understand something he felt pleased because it was enjoyable to learn new things. It is essential that teachers recognize how their students feel when attempting to speak, write and

understand French because the students' affective relationship with the language, as well as positive or negative associations, play a pivotal role in their desire to learn the language (Perrefort, 1997).

The previous excerpt also illustrates the way most students described their abilities in French. Understanding spoken French was particularly difficult for them. Given that the teacher was the students' primary model of spoken French, students became accustomed to the way she spoke and were able to understand French when it was spoken by her. French spoken by others however, was incomprehensible. For instance, when Karri went to France, she was not able to understand what people were saying. Moreover, all students remarked that the language tapes used in class, which were intended to imitate authentic speech, were incomprehensible to them. Melanie even demonstrated how the French language tapes sounded to her by making meaningless sounds. Similarly, a student in another interview described oral French as a "big chain". He could not make out any individual words.

In addition to finding it difficult to understand spoken French, students also found speaking French to be very challenging. As Bradley and Kim explained, simply trying to pronounce the language correctly was tricky.

Bradley: Oh it's a lot harder because you pronounce the words differently. Different letters mean different sounds and it's, hard to speak it but, if you just go out there and sort of try - it's not that bad.

Kim: Yeah I agree with Bradley 'cause you just want to go back to your English pronunciation and say it how it sounds in English --- or how it would sound. And I really can't --- I don't think I can speak it out loud that well. All of my --- well most of my friends are French Immersion and they really made fun of us when they came into our French class and watched our videos and our presentations. They said we really didn't know how to pronounce things.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p.4)

Bradley and Kim explained that it was not always easy for students to know how to pronounce the French language. The French language has different sounds than the English language and as Kim pointed out, students would want to fall back on English pronunciation when speaking French. This is understandable given that students had few models of correct pronunciation and limited opportunities to practice their speaking. If these limitations were not enough to make the students anxious about their ability to pronounce French, students like Kim also had friends in the French Immersion program who teased them about their pronunciation.

In addition to pronunciation, speaking French posed other challenges for students. Trying to accurately express even a basic idea while speaking French was difficult. While attempting correct pronunciation, students also had to worry about vocabulary and sentence structure. Although some students felt somewhat comfortable writing in French, none were at ease speaking the language. Students, like Marcie in the excerpt below, explained that spontaneous conversation was challenging.

Researcher: What if somebody was trying to have a conversation with you? How would you feel trying to come up with your own ideas?

Marcie: Um - I don't --- I can't do that as well, because it's not right in front of me, and um - I don't know all the words in French, so you know, I can only say what I know. And hearing other people speak French is -- - is not easy, but like if you find words that you know, you can somewhat grasp what they're saying.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p.6)

As Marcie pointed out, engaging in a conversation was particularly difficult because she did not have anything written in front of her. When attempting to express herself, she was limited by her knowledge of the language and her vocabulary. Marcie further pointed out that spontaneous conversations were problematic because understanding what was being said to her was also difficult. Conversely, as other students explained, when writing in French they had time to think about what they wanted to say and could look up words in the dictionary.

As the following excerpt reveals, even the one student who had actually used French to communicate successfully with a native speaker was still not convinced that he had any competence in French.

Greg: Um, how would I describe the language? Learning it, I find, is repetitive just because we have to go through all of these conjugations over and over. And like, the different words and things - -- that's fine, I can learn them --- but, the ways of conjugating verbs which you'd instinctively know if you actually spoke the language, I think that those are really weird to learn. Especially intuitively because, I can't do --- I can just write them and remember them, but I can't speak them. So, if I had to give the words to describe the actual language - I don't know what I'd use.

Researcher: But it's not intuitive. You would describe it as not intuitive for you.

Greg: Well, just the, various grammatical parts. Like I can get thoughts across, but anybody who's listening to it would be like, "that's not how you're supposed to say that."

Researcher: So you feel comfortable enough using French to get across an idea but you know that it's not grammatical.

Greg: Right. So not saying it the way you're supposed to.

Researcher: But you could still use it to get across an idea.

Greg: I think so.

Researcher: So for you French is...

Greg: I don't know.

Researcher: Well it's usable. [You can use it for communication.

Greg: Yeah I can use it] but I wouldn't use it fluently or anything.

Researcher: That's fine. That's how you would describe it. You would describe it as a language that you can use to get an idea across but you can't use it fluently.

Greg: I can't speak it.

Researcher: Do you think if you had a conversation with someone...

Greg: //Well like I can get a --- there's this French boy that was staying at Tanya's house for a week --- a week ago or so I guess --- and I could like, sort of talk with him. And sort of, he could talk back but, for the most part, not very well. Like we could understand things but not very well.

Researcher: Why do you think that is?

Greg: I don't know. I think I don't really have much practice actually speaking it --- like in class we go over the exercises where we just learned the words and stuff but --- I don't know what it's actually like to, talk to someone

(Group interview 3, May 3, 2004, p. 8-9)

Greg insightfully pointed out that school language lessons did little to prepare him to engage in real conversation with native speakers. Although he was able to communicate in French with a visiting Francophone peer, he refused to acknowledge that he could use the French language in a conversation outside of school albeit without fluency. When I suggested that, he was able to use the language although not fluently, he replied that he could not speak the language because he could not make grammatical sentences. Speaking French was thus

associated with mastery of the mechanics of the language, and Greg did not consider that he was able to communicate successfully in French.

Not only did students like Greg consider their abilities in French to be deficient, Karri did not actually consider the French used in Canada to be authentic.

Karri: Well my experience has been not really much in the town but I've been to France and Switzerland and I've heard it there and it's a lot different than it is in Canada. It's actual French. And I haven't been to Quebec yet but I plan to go there to hear that language too.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p.1)

In the above excerpt, Karri referred to the French she heard while in France as “actual” French and added that she would like to go to Quebec and hear “that language too”. Karri, Alice and Chris, who had all travelled to France, commented on the differences between the French spoken in Canada and the French spoken in France. While Chris merely remarked that the French in Canada was different, the two others made value judgments about this difference. Like Karri, Alice from group interview 4 referred to Canadian French as “modified” French.

Paradoxically, while students talked about the differences between English in Canada, the United States and England, they did not establish British English as more legitimate, but merely different. Thus, although they were able to acknowledge that the English language varies from place to place without losing it authenticity, they were unable to apply this knowledge to the French language.

As we have seen, when students described their thoughts about the French language, they primarily referenced classroom experiences and activities. They shared their ideas about the language in relation to school projects, listening activities, grammar exercises, presentations and their teachers. Experiences help shape the linguistic representations that learners develop (Perrefort, 1997; Cain and de Pietro, 1997). Given that most of the students' experiences with the language occurred at school, it is understandable that they would describe French as a school subject to be mastered rather than as a means of communication.

With the exception of a few trips made by some of the students, the participants in this study had not had the opportunity to use French for any authentic communication with native speakers. Since BC is situated far from any large Francophone communities, students did not have the opportunity practice their communication skills with Francophones. They also did not have the opportunity to hear the language being used for actual communication by people outside of a school setting. Instead, students were limited to practicing with other second language learners in the artificial environment of their classroom. As a result, like the students in Muller's (1998) study, the participants in my study did not perceive French as a tool for two-way communication with a real life speaker; they perceived French as a class activity.

The few students who had been exposed to the language in an authentic situation, either when visiting a Francophone region or while getting to know a visiting student from Québec, were ill prepared to use the French language.

Furthermore, these experiences did not improve their abilities and did not increase their confidence in using the language.

Perhaps due in part to the province's geographic distance from Francophone communities and the resulting lack of opportunities to use the French language, students did not see French as a language one needed to know in BC.

Marcie: Um, yeah. I don't think that it's that useful here --- unlike in Ontario, where, you need --- you need to have, some knowledge --- you have to have a certain amount of knowledge, in French, to get a job, at say like, Wal-Mart, in --- in Ontario. It's a lot different here than it is on the East side but --- you know --- it's not as useful here but, it's still good to know.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p.12)

Like Marcie, many students considered the ability to speak French to be a much more relevant skill in central or eastern Canada. Indeed the ability to speak French was considered an almost necessary skill in eastern or central Canada; one would even need it to secure employment at Wal-Mart. Conversely, aside from a vague notion that one needed to speak French in order to secure a job with the Federal government and the belief that it would be useful if one were to work in tourism or at the airport, students did not see it as a necessary or relevant skill for their future employment in BC. As Dabène (1997) explains the status of a language within a particular community is based on economic, social, cultural, cognitive and affective criteria. Students did not consider the French language to have economic value in BC.

In fact, as Bradley aptly put in the next excerpt, very few people in BC actually speak French.

Bradley: Well, I don't think they think that we need to speak it cause, basically ---I went to Ontario last summer, and French is used a lot more out there, than it is here. Like nowhere --- nobody speaks French here but over there you hear people just walking around speaking French, and you're like "Whoa there's lots of French people here." But, people in BC don't think they need to know it because it's like on the other side of the country --- and there's like not --- nowhere near as much French used here as over there.

Kim: Yeah, I think people only use it here, like in school. Like you don't just use it in your conversations. Like even --- like my friends in like, French Immersion classes --- and they're actually in French classes, but they'll be having conversations and talking about their work in English. They get in trouble for it but, they don't speak in French even in French class.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p. 12)

As Bradley explained, while one might hear French spoken in places like Ontario, one was unlikely to hear it spoken in BC. Kim added that in fact people in the province only spoke French at school. She further argued that students were even reluctant to use the language at school. She supported this claim by explaining that her friends in the French Immersion program spoke in English during their classes despite the expectation that they would speak in French.

When asked to consider what they imagined people in BC thought of the French language, the students suggested that British Columbians did not care much about it.

Researcher: What about other people in BC?

Greg: Um - I don't know. I think it's - actually the same because --- like most people in BC don't really speak French. I mean they probably took it in high school or whatever but, other than that...

Researcher: So if I did a survey on the street, what kind of a response do you think I'd get if I asked people what they thought of the French language?

Greg: They'd probably say --- you know --- it's fine, whatever --- but not really caring.

Researcher: It's fine but nobody really cares because it's...

Greg: It's not really prominent around here. I mean it's on all our *(reading from his juice box) fait de concentré* but...

Researcher: Would people be upset if they stopped printing it on things?

Greg: Probably, just because --- you know --- the whole we're Canadian bilingual thing.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 17-18)

Greg also described French as a language that was neither used nor heard in BC outside of school. He pointed out that although French appeared on all product packaging in Canada, it was not widely spoken BC. When asked what

he imagined people in BC thought of the language, he suggested that British Columbians were rather dispassionate when it came to French. They did not dislike it; they just did not give it much consideration. Paradoxically, he believed that British Columbians would be upset if the French language were removed from product packaging because of the “we’re Canadian bilingual thing”. Greg associated bilingualism with Canadian identity. While French is not widely used in BC, bilingualism is nevertheless a defining facet of Canadian identity.

Like other British Columbians (Parkin and Turcotte, 2004), most students, agreed that it was important to learn a second language but they did not all agree that French should be that second language.

Carly: I think that --- I think that we should offer more like, Mandarin and Chinese because I think that there’s a growing population of Chinese people ---and other, Asian descent --- um, moving to Canada and the just --- growing population in that um --- it’ll be more...

Lindsay: Useful.

Carly: Useful. That’s the word. Useful, in the future.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p. 14)

While some, like Carly, felt that an Asian language might be more valuable in BC, others were not so convinced.

Kim: I think we should more --- because we’re Canadian --- then we should have French and English, rather than English and another language.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p.13)

Kim argued that French should be the second language learned by students in BC. Although she had previously claimed that no one in BC used French outside of school, she still proposed that French should be the second language learned by students because “we’re Canadian”. As with Greg from group three, Kim’s representation of Canadians included both official languages. Language is one of the traits that groups and individuals use to identify themselves (Pepin, 2000). Here Kim used English and French to identify Canadians. Learning French as a second language in BC was logical because she considered the language to be a part of Canadian identity. Other students also argued that students in BC should learn French because it was a useful language in Canada. Some felt that it was a good choice of a second language given its worldwide popularity.

Indeed despite describing French as “hard” and “difficult” and despite expressing frustration over their inability to speak, write and understand the language, a number of students still said that they enjoyed learning French. As the following excerpt reveals some even expressed interest in the French Immersion program.

Jen: I wanna travel lots when I'm older. And maybe if my kids take French Immersion or something I'll be able to help them a little bit.

Researcher: Is that something that you're thinking about maybe?

Jen: Yeah 'cause I wish I would've gone in French Immersion cause it would be kind of easier in high school for Fren --- for the language and stuff.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 8)

When asked what role French would play in her future, Jen said that she may enroll her children in the French Immersion program. Representations affect behaviours (Biliez and Millet, 2001; Dabène, 1997; Py, 2000) such as whether or not to place one's child in a French Immersion program. The fact that Jen would consider this possibility for her children suggests a positive image of the language. She also added that she wished she had been in the French Immersion program. This desire to have been in French Immersion also indicates a positive view of the language. Like Jen, others also said that they wished they had been in the French Immersion program or said that they would consider the program for their own children.

Officially, French and English may have equal status in Canada yet in BC French does not have the same de facto status as English. A language's informal status, the images and ideas in circulation within a particular community, influences learner investment in the language (Dabène, 1997). Dabène explains that a language's status can be contradictory; a language can be valued and devalued at the same time by a particular community. When considering students' representations of the status of the French language in BC, it is clear that while students did not value the language for economic reasons, some did

value it for affective reasons. The French language was valued because it was part of Canadian history and culture.

When asked if they thought that they would use French in the future, most participants said that they would use French if they travelled however, one student did not see himself using French at all in the future. Although students explained that French would be useful for travel, they still seemed hesitant about doing so. They also clearly described conditions and limitations for using their French language skills. For some, “a few words” or “simple phrases” were all they anticipated using. One student proposed that she would use French primarily to read things while travelling. Still another suggested that she would use French only if she could sound smart.

Thirteen of the participants also said that they were taking French in order to get into university and most added that if they had not needed to take French to satisfy university requirements, they would not have taken French 11. It appears that students were investing in the French language purely for instrumental reasons to gain access to a post-secondary education. As we have seen, for these students, French was more of a required school subject than a means of communication. Due to their lack of confidence about their proficiency in the language, they did not view themselves as legitimate speakers nor did they see French playing a significant role in their future beyond school. For them, French was considered useful for travel but it was neither necessary nor critical for living and working in BC.

Understandably, the students' level of investment in French was limited. As was explained in Chapter Two, learners invest in a second language in order to access symbolic or material resources that will increase their cultural capital and they expect a good return on their investment (Norton, 2000). Furthermore, the gain must be proportionate to the effort they put in. Given the limited opportunities for students to practice and use French outside of a scholastic setting, and given the French language's status in BC it is not surprising that student investment in French was limited. They believed that the language would only play 2 narrow roles in their future, travel and access to a university education, and neither necessitated a high level of proficiency. Although the students were enrolled in French class, they did not actually think that they were able to use the language. Students did not seem concerned about this lack of mastery however, because they did not imagine that they would really ever need French in BC.

4.3 Students' Representations of the English Language

Given that the students described the French language as "difficult", it is not entirely surprising that, when asked to describe the English language, many described it as "easy". As Greg explained in the excerpt below, speaking English was natural and effortless.

Greg: Well I think in English, so when I speak I'm not actually thinking about it as a language. I'm just, letting words come out and they have meanings and things.

Researcher: Versus?

Greg: Versus French where I have to think about what each word means --- and it's a word and I know that it means something, but I'm not thinking using those words usually.

Researcher: So you're still thinking in English.

Greg: Right.

Researcher: And then you're trying to build something in French.

Greg: And that's a lot harder. But, yeah with English, I'm not actually thinking about the language ever, at all.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 26)

As Greg pointed out, he thought in English. Therefore, when he spoke, his ideas were already in English. He did not have to think about the mechanics of the language. Indeed, students found French to be frustrating and challenging, because they had to work hard to express even a basic idea. They continuously had to think about how to structure what they wanted to say and were limited by the extent of their vocabulary. On the other hand, when speaking English they were able to speak and express themselves without making a conscious effort.

Yet, while the students considered English to be easy to use, they did not actually think of it as an easy second language to learn.

Carly: Um, I think the English language is --- it just seems normal to us 'cause it's second nature. I mean we grew up speaking this like --- we grew up speaking English. And um, I don't know --- when I speak it, it just comes naturally 'cause that's the way I, speak ---- that's what I learned to speak and...

Lindsay: Words just kind of come out of your mouth. You don't think about it.

Carly: Yeah. But I think that if someone else --- like a person who was French --- tried to learn the language, it'd be difficult for them because we have so many different words to describe different things.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p.18-19)

As Carly explained, English was easy because it was her first language and therefore intuitive. Students in all groups argued that English was difficult to learn as a second language. Indeed, many even described English as the “hardest” second language to learn. Students also described the language as complex, inconsistent and confusing. Furthermore, although they found French to be a difficult and challenging language because of the grammar, students claimed that a second language learner, who spoke neither French nor English as a first language, would find it easier to learn French as a second language.

Because they considered English to be easy, some of the students also described the English language as boring. This led me to ask the following question during one of the interviews: If you could have any language as your first language, would you choose English or would you choose something else?

Bradley: No, I probably wouldn't. Cause it's --- I think it's an important language 'cause - English seems to be, used, throughout the world like, Australia...

Carly: Everywhere.

Bradley: ...England and all those other UK countries like Scotland and Ireland, and Wales and - all of North America uses English and --- except Quebec --- and --- yeah it just seems to be like the more universal language throughout the whole world almost. So I think - I would, um, yeah stay with English.

Kim: I'd keep English too. Cause, it's like Bradley said, it's used everywhere else, and a lot of people do learn second languages and --- and I think I'd want --- if I spoke a different language --- I'd wanna be able to speak English too. But English is so hard to learn, for other people trying to learn it --- if you don't grow up with it --- so I'd keep English.

Carly: I'd keep English too. I mean, it's used everywhere. Most places in the world speak English - at some point. And, I just think that, you need to have English because, it's just --- everyone speaks it so I wouldn't give it up. I'd keep it, definitely.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p.20-21)

As the exchange between Bradley, Carly and Kim shows, the students' representation of the English language was closely linked to its status internationally. They saw English as a worldwide lingua franca (Breton, 1998). Not only is English an official language of numerous countries, it is also learned by many people as a second language. The students saw English as a language of power and importance in the world. In fact, Bradley described the language as "important" and "universal". When asked what words they would use to describe the English language, 8 students used the following terms: useful, practical, worldwide, widespread, universal, important and even dominant.

The recognition of the international dominance of English even led some students such as Karri to express intolerance for the maintenance of other languages in BC.

Karri: If you go to a mall or something now, you're walking around, half of the people there aren't even speaking English. They have their own little language and - it kind of bugs me because I want them to have to learn even a couple words of English.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 20)

Karri clearly viewed other languages as “little” and less important than English. Moreover, she would have liked to see speakers of other languages required to “have to learn” English. In fact, she was bothered when she heard them speak another language at the mall. As was explained in Chapter Two, opinions expressed about languages contain judgements about the speakers of those languages (Perrefort, 1997). Karri's intolerance of languages other than English suggests a negative attitude towards non-English-speaking immigrants in BC. In her view, these immigrants are welcome in BC as long as they speak English.

As the students talked about the English and French languages, it became clear that they assessed the value of a language according to economic and affective criteria. As they saw it, languages spoken by more people were more valuable. The students accepted that one would want to be able to speak a widespread or dominant language because knowledge of such a language would allow a person to travel to various countries and may even provide increased job

opportunities. For example, students considered English is to be a business language so they understood why someone who did not speak English as a first language would want to learn it. Students also saw French as being widespread although not on the same scale as the English language. They therefore stated that it was worthwhile knowing some French. While students claimed that knowledge of the French language did not offer any advantages for employment in BC they did consider it to be an asset in another province such as Ontario.

In addition to valuing a language for economic reasons, students also understood why someone would value a particular language that was significant to their culture or heritage.

Mike: I wouldn't say all languages are equally important. I'd say that English is the most important one, by far. And then after that I'd probably -- I don't know what I'd say would be the next important, probably French actually just because it's also known very much around the world.

Researcher: So you guys think that the languages that are the most spoken are the most important?

Students: Yeah.

Mike: Yeah how practical it is.

Researcher: Practical?

Mike: Like learning a language from like some tribe down in like South Africa, it's never going to be used by you. It's completely pointless. So it's not important to you. But something like English or French, it's much more important.

Jen: Unless you spoke it with your family, then it would be important.

Mike: Yeah, then of course it would.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 32)

Mike suggested that English was the most important language in the world, followed by French. He ranked the languages according to how widespread they were. English and French were important because they were spoken in many countries in the world whereas another language spoken by few people would be “pointless” to learn unless it was culturally significant to the speaker.

4.4 Representations, Investment and Identity

The students' experiences with the French language influenced their representation of the language. Their main experience with the language was at school so it is not surprising that they saw French as an academic subject and not as a tool for communication. Their lack of opportunities to develop their language skills meant that the students did not think that French was actually a language they could use. Moreover, they did not consider French to be a language needed for living and working in BC. Their investment was not really in the language but rather in their French class; they needed it in order to get into university.

While most students claimed that they would use French if they were to travel, this seems unlikely given their limited investment in French and their representation of English. The students' considered English to be a "worldwide" and "universal" language. Their opinion that people in most countries of the world speak English, as well as their acknowledged lack of proficiency in French suggest that they would use little or no French when travelling. Indeed most students revealed that they would only use a few words or phrases. If students were to travel to a francophone country, their responses indicate that once they had used up their limited repertoire of words and phrases such as "bonjour" and "comment ça va" they would simply speak English. Moreover, the students anticipated that they would be understood.

Yet, although French was not highly valued for economic reasons, and although it seems unlikely most students would ever use the language for travel, students did not dislike French and some even valued it for affective reasons. They saw the French language as part of a Canadian identity. As we will see in Chapter 5, students were very aware of stereotypes and the way in which cultural groups were represented. When talking about Francophones and Anglophones students explained that Americans are often stereotyped negatively. Could it be that students saw the French language as a means of distinguishing Canadian identity from American identity?

CHAPTER 5: REPRESENTATIONS OF SPEAKERS

As explained in the mandated Core French provincial curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 2001), it is expected that learning French as a second language will lead students to be more open to cultural diversity. It is further expected that students will develop a positive awareness of Francophones and a greater understanding of their own culture. As a French teacher, I was curious to know what representations the students at my school had developed of Francophones and Anglophones while studying French as a second language. In the first section of this chapter, I examine students' representations of Francophones. In the second section, I explore their representations of Anglophones.

5.1 Students' Representations of Francophones

In order to discover what representation the students had of Francophones, the following discussion questions were provided during the group interviews.

1. Who are Francophones?
2. What are Francophones like?

5.1.1 Unawareness of Francophones

Some students had difficulty deciding who they thought Francophones were. Although they all claimed to have heard the term before, they did not have a clear idea as to its meaning.

Chris: Okay. Um - Francophones --- I believe --- are um - people from other countries that speak, French? I believe that's right.

Greg: Anyone that speaks French practically.

Researcher: Anyone that speaks French? Am I Francophone then?

Greg: Sure.

Researcher: I speak French.

Greg: Well, do you like, speak French regularly?

Researcher: I speak it everyday. That's my job.

Greg: That's true.

Marcie: I thought it was, just people who --- I've never been told what it --- what it was so I just --- I just assumed it was someone who, speaks French.

Researcher: Anybody who speaks French at all?

Greg: Well I'm [sure there's some distinction.

Marcie: Fluently. Fluently]

Researcher: Fluently?

Greg: Yeah, that's the --- if they speak French fluently, then they're a Francophone.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 18)

In this exchange we see that the students did not have a clear idea as to who Francophones were. This is not entirely unexpected. As Castellotti and Moore (2002) remark, learners who do not have contact with native speakers of the target language develop an unawareness of them. Here, Chris began the exchange by emphasizing his lack of knowledge. He said "I believe" and phrased his response as a question in an attempt to verify his understanding of who was Francophone. Greg elaborated on Chris' claim, by saying that a Francophone was "anyone that speaks French". In an effort to clarify his definition, I asked if he considered me a Francophone. The question prompted him to seek more information about me. He had not yet provided a clear definition when Marcie entered the discussion. She explained that she was also unsure about who Francophones were because no one had ever explained the word to her. At the end of the exchange however, the students seemed to have elaborated a definition of Francophone; a Francophone was someone who spoke French fluently.

This representation of Francophones did not exist prior to the students' conversation. Rather, it was co-constructed during their interaction. As was explained in Chapter Two, representations can exist prior to a particular social interaction or they be elaborated within it (Gajo, 2000; Py, 2000). Here, the students' representation was proposed and negotiated during the discussion. In

fact, following the discussion in the previous excerpt, the students continued to revise their co-constructed definition of the term Francophone. Marcie noticed a map titled “La Francophonie” on the classroom wall. The map showed French speaking regions in the world. Using the information on the map, the students eventually concluded that Francophones were people who spoke French as a first language.

Later in the discussion when prompted to describe what Francophones were like, Greg responded initially with humour.

Greg: They're like real people, but Frencher. *(group laughs)*

Researcher: So, I know that all you guys have said all people are different but when you think “Francophone”, what do you think of?

Greg: Black and white horizontally striped shirt, cigarette, beret.

Researcher: That's so weird. Bradley said the same thing. *(laughs)* So, seriously, what do you think Francophones are like? Personality wise, culture --- what do you think?

Chris: I'd have to say that they're probably not --- they're probably just like an ordinary person it's just that they - speak another language, like French.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 23)

Greg initially responded that Francophones were “like real people but Frencher”. He then shared stereotypical imagery; black and white horizontally striped shirt, cigarette and beret. Chris attempted an explanation but the

explanation was simply a restatement of the definition that the students had previously agreed on; Francophones were “ordinary” people who spoke French.

As the excerpt below shows, I tried unsuccessfully to get Chris to elaborate upon his idea. My questions did however prompt Greg and Marcie to enter the discussion.

Researcher: French people speak French but they are just like anybody else.

Chris: Mm hmm.

Researcher: Like who?

Chris: Like who?

Researcher: Like are Francophones in Quebec the same as Francophones in France, the same as Francophones in Switzerland?

Greg: No, but Francophones in Quebec are like Anglophones in - Quebec or Ontario or something.

Researcher: Okay. How so?

Greg: Because they're all from the same basic area. There might be like a few differences but - you can't be that, different really.

Researcher: Okay so what are people in those areas like then? - Well think about Canadians. What kinds of things are important to us? What's our culture like? What do you think Canadian Francophone culture is like?

Marcie: Céline Dion yay!

Researcher: Céline? *(group laughs)*

Marcie: Poutine yay! (*laughs*)

Chris: Um - I'm not too sure --- being a Francophone - probably --- I'd probably just have to say they just are --- they're just like a normal person.

Marcie: Like another Canadian?

Chris: Like anyone else.

Marcie: Cause Francophones --- cause there's different cultures --- like one's from Switzerland have - different cultures. Don't they? It's --- it's -- - I've never really met, a Francophone from another country.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 24)

This excerpt illustrates typical student reactions when asked to describe Francophones. Like many other students, Marcie first thought of stereotypical or iconic images; she associated Canadian Francophone culture with poutine and Céline Dion. Previously, Greg had associated Francophones with people in horizontally striped shirts and berets. These images however were acknowledged by the students to be stereotypes and were said in jest. They made the students laugh.

The previous excerpt also shows that students were explicit about their lack of knowledge about Francophones. Chris, for instance, continued to assert his ignorance of Francophones by saying that he was “not too sure” what they were like. Marcie also signalled her lack of expertise by explaining that she had not met any Francophones from other countries. They were reluctant to describe a cultural community of which they had extremely limited knowledge.

While neither Chris nor Marcie seemed confident in elaborating what Francophones were like, Greg did make a clear although limited assertion. Francophones who lived in Canada were like Anglophones who lived in Canada. Speakers use narrative, explicative and justificatory types of discourse to support representations (Serra, 2000). Greg explained why he considered Francophones in Québec to be the same as Anglophones in Québec or Ontario; they were from the same area so they could not really be that different. He later offered the following narrative to further support for his claim.

Greg: Well I met Hugo, who was at Tanya's house and he was some French boy, from Quebec --- he didn't speak English or anything. And he was just like her younger brother, except he would - swear in French when he, lost his videogame or whatever.

Researcher: So, then Canadian Francophones are just like Canadian Anglophones...

Greg: Right.

Marcie: But who speak French.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 25)

Greg's anecdote about Hugo served as a support to his previous claim and as proof of his qualifications to speak about Francophones. Serra (2000) explains that during conversation, a representation is often preceded or followed by statements that highlight the appropriateness of the representation's content. So, while Marcie and Chris stressed how unqualified they were to speak, Greg established his expertise; he had had contact with a Francophone boy. This narrative of his experience served as proof of the validity of the representation he

elaborated about Francophones. Since the boy from Québec was similar to a boy in BC, Greg imagined that Canadian Francophones were the same as Canadian Anglophones but they spoke French.

Like students from this group, others also had difficulty defining the term Francophone. They also looked at the map of La Francophonie on the classroom wall and after some discussion, eventually concluded that Francophones were people who spoke French as their “main” language. This difficulty encountered with the first question had an impact on the students’ attempt to describe Francophones.

Alice: They’re people. They want their cultures respected - but - I have no idea what they are.

Researcher: So you don’t really know what Francophones are like?

Alice: No. Hence our guessing in the previous question.

Beth: Um - I’m with her on that one.

Researcher: Okay, so you have no idea.

Beth: No clue.

Rob: I think a Francophone’s just like any other person, except they, speak French. It’s not like, they, are totally different and alien to...*unintelligible*. I don’t know --- they’re just - people.

(Group interview 4, May 27, 2004, p. 12-13)

Alice and Beth essentially withdrew from the discussion by citing a lack of expertise. They had no idea who Francophones were so they certainly could not

describe what they were like. Although Rob did not stress a lack of expertise as the girls did, like Chris from the previous group he provided a definition based on language. Francophones were “just people” who spoke French.

5.1.2 Co-constructing a Representation of Francophones

As the following excerpt illustrates, many students were reluctant to describe what Francophones were like.

Mike: Okay, I can't answer this question because I've never actually met a real Francophone. You see them in movies right but that's extremely fake. Like if you go --- if you see movies of California and then you go to California, you'll see a huge difference. And I'm sure it's the same thing here.

Researcher: Well what stereotypes have you seen in movies? Or things that you've seen in movies that you think are stereotypes?

Mike: Lots of outdoor restaurants.

Researcher: Lots of outdoor restaurants. So you're saying France...

Mike: Yeah France.

Researcher: And how do Francophones act in these movies that you've seen?

Mike: Kind of cheesy.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 12)

Never having travelled to a French-speaking region, Mike's only experience with French had been at school. Aware of his lack of knowledge, he clarified that the question was impossible for him to answer given that he had

never met a Francophone. As with Greg in the previous group, the first thoughts that came to Mike's mind when asked to describe Francophones were stereotypical images. Mike was careful to explain that he realized that these were stereotypes and were not an accurate portrayal of Francophone life and culture.

At this point, Karri entered the conversation.

Karri: Well I've been to France and I mean sure there's a --- differences with the languages but if you really look at it, some parts of it are basically like Canada. Like the restaurants. Like they have McDonald's there. It's really worldwide and sure they serve different food and serve it differently...

Researcher: Okay but what are the people themselves like...What comes to your mind?

Jen: My parents' friends are Francophone so I've seen them speak really really fast and like --- I dunno. They're the same as us. Dress the same, act the same...

Melanie: Yeah exactly.

Karri: I'm not sure what they think about us but I know that the only difference really is the language.

Jen: I think they --- I dunno --- they really --- I dunno --- I think they really respect their language and respect who they are.

Researcher: What makes you think that they respect their own language and respect who they are?

Jen: Cause --- I dunno --- they really...

Mike: They're still holding out. Everybody else is learning to speak English.

Researcher: They're still holding out...so you're talking about people from Quebec.

Mike: Yeah

Karri: They've kept their own language which is --- shows a sign of pride for their language. And stubbornness.

Researcher: So do you think that people from Quebec are more....

Mike: Stubborn?

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 12-13)

Karri positioned herself as somewhat of an expert with her statement, "Well I've been to France". This positioning allowed Karri to make an assertion about what was, to most students, a virtually unknown country. Most students who shared descriptions of Francophones were very careful to support their descriptions. Karri compared France to Canada highlighting the similarities she saw between the two countries. Jen then built off this assertion. She began by signalling the experience that made her qualified to contribute to the discussion. She then elaborated on Karri's assertion by claiming that Francophones were the same as "us". While she did not clarify to whom she was referring when she said "us", given Karri's previous statement, one can surmise that Jen was referring to English speaking Canadians. Karri then built on Jen's claim when she said that the only thing that distinguishes Francophones was that they spoke French. The students were co-constructing a representation, albeit vague and lacking in detail, of a Francophone.

The discussion shifted somewhat when Jen said that Francophones respected their language and identity. The students began by talking about France and moved to talking about Francophones in general, without reference to a specific region. Jen's comment moved the conversation to a discussion of Francophones from Québec. The students revealed that they saw people from Québec as proud of their language and perhaps somewhat stubborn. Given that the students did not live near Québec and had not had the opportunity to interact with Francophones from Québec, one wonders how they became aware of Quebecers pride in their language. While it is certainly possible that this understanding was acquired from their family or from teachers they may have had in elementary school, I suspect that it developed in their Social Studies class. The mandated Social Studies 11 provincial curriculum (British Columbia Ministry of Education, 1997b) included the themes of Québec nationalism, bilingualism and Canadian unity.

Because of the ambiguity of the students' description, I asked them to explain what people from Québec were like.

Melanie: They're no different from....

Researcher: So you think they're the same?

Mike: Yeah

Karri: They're people just like us.

Mike: They're just the same. I don't really think the language makes a big difference.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 14)

This excerpt is interesting because we can see apparent inconsistencies in Mike's representation. He began the discussion by claiming that he was unable to describe what Francophones were like because he had never met one. At this point in the discussion however he was confident that there was no real difference between English and French speaking Canadians. He did not even see the language difference as being significant. Serra (2000) points out that during a social interaction representations can evolve in a contradictory manner.

During the discussion, Jen mentioned a video series¹ about Francophones that the students had watched in French class. Melanie explained how the host spent time in different Francophone regions in each episode.

Melanie: No but he goes to like all different Canadians, and like --- from like Ontario and Quebec and other places like that and he talks to them about what they do in their spare time and they do the things that we do.

Jen: Yeah like they play sports. They...

Mike: Go ice skating.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 15)

In this last segment the students solidified their co-constructed representation of Francophones. Having little to no experience with the French

¹ Jeunes Francophones, BBC Educational Publishing 1995

language and culture, the students' representation is really of an imagined Canadian Francophone community. As indicated in Chapter 2, all communities are in fact imagined because individuals will never know or know of most of the members of their community yet they have a clear image of their community in their mind (Anderson, 1991). Here, although the students were not members of the Francophone community they were able to imagine this community by drawing images and ideas from media such as television, movies and even educational videos. Karri and Jen also shared personal experiences with this community. The students' limited experiences led them to imagine that Francophone Canadians were proud of their culture and essentially "like them", except they spoke French.

One discussion group stood out because the students talked about Francophones without first explaining how little they knew about them. None of the students had been to either France or Quebec yet they did not claim to be totally ignorant about Francophones. The following excerpt reveals how these students reflected on the relationship between stereotypes and their image of Francophones.

Bradley: Can I describe the stereotypical French guy?

Researcher: Yeah. Whatever you think.

Bradley: The stereotypical French guy, the guy with the beret with his long cigarette in the long cigarette holder, a black and white striped shirt and some sort of weird capri pant.

(girls laugh)

Carly: Don't forget the moustache.

Bradley: Oh yes! The curvy moustache. Thank you.

Researcher: But you said that's a stereotype.

Bradley: Stereotypical, yeah. That's not like, everybody. That's just a stereotypical French guy you see in like, cartoons or something.

Researcher: Okay. So what do you think they're like?

Carly: I think that Francophones are just like anybody else, who isn't a Francophone. I mean they're just, people. They just speak a different language, that's all.

Researcher: So if they're just like anybody else --- like who?

Bradley: Well I think that Francophones in Quebec are probably just like any other Canadians except they speak French. They probably like hockey. They probably are nice, considerate people --- you know --- generally. Well cause some English speaking people are like total jerks so, some French people are obviously going to be jerks as well.

Researcher: So in what ways do you think we're alike? If you say they're like us, then in what ways are we similar?

Carly: I'm sure they have the same pastimes as us. I'm sure they go to the movies and go to the mall with their friends and all that sort of thing. I mean, that's, what, I like to do so I'm sure that a lot of them are the same way.

Linda: The same hobbies and interests.

Carly: Yeah.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p. 15-16)

It is interesting to note that like the discussion in other groups the imagery that came to the students' minds was imagery associated with France. The students however astutely rejected these stereotypes about Francophones. As Bradley pointed out, his initial description was not reality but a somewhat cartoon-like depiction. Interestingly, when students tried to move beyond this stock of images and tried to imagine what Francophones were actually like, they automatically shifted into imagining Francophones from Québec. I wonder if this was because they were able to more easily imagine the Canadian community as a whole and then extend this imagining to Francophone Canadians specifically.

In the previous exchange, when asked what Francophones were like Carly reiterated that they spoke French. Bradley expanded this idea by imagining that Francophones in Québec were like other Canadians except they spoke French. He explained that Anglophone Canadians were "nice considerate hockey fans" therefore, Francophone Canadians must be as well. Carly expanded upon Bradley's imagining by thinking of activities she enjoyed and surmising that Francophone Canadians probably enjoyed them as well.

In the next segment, Kim supported the representation that had been co-constructed by the group; however she also introduced a new element into the discussion.

Researcher: Kim what do you think?

Kim: I think that Canadian Francophones are like everyone else --- are like the rest of the Canadians --- have the same interests and hobbies and - dress the same and all that stuff. But, I personally tend to think of like, Francophones in France as like, more sophisticated. [I don't know why.

Bradley: More artsy.]

Kim: Yeah artsy. Walking a poodle. *(students laugh)*

Researcher: Do you guys think that people in France are different?

Bradley: Well probably cause it's like, it's a --- it's in Europe. It's a totally different continent.

Researcher: So what do you think they're like?

Kim: The rest of the Europeans. *(students laugh)*

Researcher: Well you said that you thought they were more sophisticated.

Bradley: Probably - probably --- yeah I think so because Europe seems to be more sophisticated place than North America --- like with --- they had the Renaissance there, they had all these different revolutions and, they have more of a history, so I guess, that in itself makes them...

Kim: Yeah, you learn about more, like, Europeans in school than you do about Canadians or, Americans. They do everything over there.

Bradley: They've had more of a history. Yeah.

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p. 15-16)

Kim introduced a new point of discussion when she shared that she thought of Francophones in France as being more sophisticated than Canadians. She did not have a clear sense of why she thought of them as more sophisticated and in fact did not seem to have a clear idea of what they were like at all. When pressed to explain what Francophones in France were like she joked that they were like other Europeans. She used the geographic logic the students applied to describing someone from Québec to describe someone from France. Bradley tried to reason out why Kim perceived people from France as being more sophisticated. In this group description, we once again see how students' lack of experiences with Francophones has led them to co-construct a representation of an imagined community.

Looking at interactions from each of the discussion groups one thing is clear; the students did not have elaborate pre-constructed or reference representations of Francophones. It seems that the students' lack of contact with native French speakers had left them with little more than some stereotypical images drawn from the media. Sociolinguists (Py, 2000; Gajo, 2000) argue that representations can initially take shape as primitive stereotyped formulas that are then reformulated and reworked. These students however completely rejected stereotypes and simplistic imaginings of Francophones. Their representations of Francophones were formed and elaborated during interactions that took place during the group discussions. These carefully negotiated representations were built on limited "expertise" and logic. They tended to focus on the similarities between Francophone and Anglophone lifestyles.

The absence of contact with Francophones did not cause students to have negative representations of this community. In fact like the Bulgarian students described in Chapter Two (Cain and de Pietro, 1997), students tended to have rather positive although vague representations of Francophones. Castellotti and Moore (2002) explain that representations allow groups and individuals to categorize themselves and determine which traits are relevant in distinguishing their identity. Students in this study saw language as being the only significant trait when describing Francophones.

5.2 Students' Representations of Anglophones

Looking at the students' responses, it appears that their reluctance to answer questions about Francophones was due not only to their lack of first hand experience with this cultural community but also due to their unwillingness to try and essentialize an entire cultural group. The excerpt below shows how students pointed out the impossibility and the absurdity of attempting to describe all Anglophones in a meaningful way.

Rob: What are Anglophones like?

Alice: Like Canadian Anglophones? --- or just Anglophones in general, because people's culture is different.

Researcher: So tell me either or, or both. What are Canadian Anglophones like? What are BC Anglophones like? How ever you want to put it.

Alice: Polite.

Researcher: Polite. We're polite?

- Rob: I'm not very polite.
- Alice: Sure you're polite. You'll apologize if you do something that's horrible.
- Rob: I think most people will. I just ran over your dog --- but a Francophone, not being an Anglophone would be like "I'm glad I ran over your dog! I hate dogs" (*students laugh*) - but no. Sure --- Anglophones are just like, Francophones except we speak English.
- Researcher: Okay. So we're not really any different.
- Beth: No. We're all people --- just different languages.
- Researcher: So are we the same as Anglophones in say, England?
- Rob: Well no. We're totally different.
- Researcher: Are we?
- Rob: Well it's like, our cultures. Even though we're like, branched off --- we have lots of different culture. Like, I say truck. They say, lorry.
- Beth: I say tomato, they say tomato. (*pronounced differently*)

(Group interview 4, May 27, 2004, p. 18)

As we can see, the students were even reluctant to describe their own cultural community. Alice immediately sought clarification of the prompt question: What are Anglophones like? When I clarified that they were free to describe any Anglophone community they wished, Alice defined them according to a single human trait; Anglophones were "polite". Rob used humour to reject this idea. His joke underscored his belief that such distinctions were meaningless. As he saw it, the actual difference between Anglophones and Francophones was based on

language. When I sought clarification of his point, Beth supported Rob's claim by saying, "We're all people --- just different languages". When I pressed further and asked if we were like Anglophones in England, Rob responded that we were completely different. He added that our cultures were different and he pointed out that although we spoke the same language we used different vocabulary to express ourselves. Beth reinforced this distinction with an example of pronunciation differences. It seems that while the students accepted the idea of cultural differences, they were uncomfortable with trying to define them in detail and focused instead on language variation.

Indeed the students resisted the prompt questions, often humourously, and deftly deflected my attempts during the interview to access their representations of Anglophones. While the students acknowledged the existence of cultures and cultural differences, they were not prepared to express in a few words what it meant to be a part of a particular cultural community; not even their own. Eventually though, some of them offered a few tentative descriptions of Anglophones. In the following excerpt, Chris shared his ideas about his own cultural community.

Chris: Pretty easygoing towards other cultures and everything.

Researcher: Easygoing towards other cultures? How so?

Chris: That we - accept everybody as, who they are and, accept many other cultures and languages into our country.

Researcher: Okay.

Greg: I don't know. Like there's no defining term for Anglophone, just like other people --- they're all different.

Researcher: But we still have things in common.

Marcie: We all speak English.

Researcher: We all speak English. You don't think that people in BC or people in Canada have certain things that we have in common with each other?

Marcie: We also have many differences with each other. We're not --- I don't know --- people.

Researcher: So everybody is different and nobody has anything in common?

Greg: Well there's more differences than things in common.

Researcher: Do you think? How so?

Greg: Because, even if you say there's like ---okay these three traits which all Anglophones have, every person will also have like a thousand other traits. Okay one of the three traits is that, all Anglophones have two arms except for the ones which don't.

(Group interview 3, May 20, 2004, p. 32-33)

As happened in the other interviews, when a participant offered even a superficial description of what Anglophones were like, another participant pointed out, either explicitly or implicitly that the description was not true of all people. After Chris' description, Greg and Marcie provided similar insights that students in other groups also shared; people are alike and different at the same time. Students were able to articulate the dialectic between homogeneity and

heterogeneity that characterizes social groups. Therefore, they clearly rejected attempts to essentialize an entire cultural community.

Despite their reluctance, students nevertheless proposed some limited descriptions across discussion groups. Students in three of the groups used positive descriptors to define Anglophones as open to diversity and accepting of other cultures. Paradoxically, students also attributed very negative characteristics to Anglophones and were critical of their own cultural community.

Researcher: Okay, how would you describe Anglophones since we haven't got to you yet.

Mike: Handsome.

Girls: *(all laugh)*

Mike: Seriously? Seriously I'd say we're a pretty rude people.

Researcher: Really?

Mike: Yeah I'd really say we are.

Jen: Proud.

Karri: Yeah we're proud of our language.

Mike: Yeah.

Karri: We take no time to learn like --- if we didn't have to take French --- we probably wouldn't have to take it if it wasn't our second language for our country. We wouldn't take it.

Mike: I guess we sort of see that English is like sort of worldwide therefore like our language is the best and everybody else should learn ours but we shouldn't bother learning theirs. Right? I guess that's sort of...

Karri: Snotty, rude, impatient.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 28)

The students in this group described Anglophones as an arrogant group with a sense of superiority. This is interesting because they did in fact see English as being more important than many other languages as indicated in Chapter Four. While they did not mind taking French at school, most of them admitted that they would not have been in French 11 if it were not required for university.

In fact, students in three of the four groups attributed negative traits to Anglophones.

Kim: I think in general Anglophones are like --- I don't know what to call it but they expect everyone else to speak English, and like they don't have to speak other languages.

Bradley: Are you talking about the United States people now?

Kim: No like everyone --- like even in like Vancouver --- where like, probably half of our population is Asian --- yet we have no Asian signs or anything except for like Chinatown.

Bradley: Chinatown yeah.

Kim: We expect just expect them to learn English.

Bradley: There are some places in --- I don't know --- Burnaby --- I've noticed little like --- those malls --- whatever, those strip malls they're called --- they have half their signs in, one language and half their signs in English. I've noticed that.

Carly: I definitely think that Anglophones think that they're more superior, in that they don't need --- like they don't need to learn anything else - -- other people have to learn English. But, I also --- on the same thing --- I also think that, we're more easygoing than a lot of other people would be.

Researcher: So what are English speaking people in Canada like --- or in BC?

Kim: Yeah but we're still different. Like we're all from Canada but --- I know like Canadian people that don't like hockey but yet - we generalize Canadians as all loving hockey.

Bradley: Most of them do. A lot of them do.

Kim: A lot of them don't.

Bradley: But I'm thinking like, the majority of people - do enjoy - I think - a hockey game now and then. Could we agree on that?

Kim: Well I like hockey. I'm just saying...

Lindsay: Um, yeah. I think that Anglophones in Canada are really, like, stereotyped as being like really, really, nice people --- when most of them aren't. And like, Americans are stereotyped as being like, really mean people --- or stupid or --- you know...

Bradley: *Gun slinging.*

(Group interview 2, February 26, 2004, p. 26-27)

This segment illustrates two themes that recurred in the student interviews. First, that one cannot really describe an entire cultural community in a meaningful way. Kim, for instance, pointed out that while Canadians are often characterized as liking hockey, this is not in fact true of all Canadians and is therefore not an accurate descriptor. Second, it illustrates the seemingly contradictory depiction of Anglophones which the students did provide. Anglophones were at once open to other cultures, and yet were arrogant and intolerant. Anglophones in BC were accepting of other cultures as long as everyone spoke English. The students accepted tensions and contradictions within groups.

5.3 Students' Reluctance to Describe Cultural Groups

Since the students did not have contact with Francophones they did not have elaborate reference representations of them. Indeed, many students openly expressed their ignorance of this cultural group. They acknowledged that the images that first came to mind when they thought of Francophones were stereotypes that did not accurately depict this diverse group. While the students were able to co-construct representations of Francophones during their group discussions, these representations were extremely limited. The only significant descriptor for Francophones was language; Francophones spoke French.

This reluctance to describe Francophones however was not solely due to lack of contact with them. It was also due to students' unwillingness to try to describe an entire cultural community. This unwillingness even extended to describing their own cultural community. As they saw it, cultures existed. However, they were not prepared to describe an entire community in a few words. What could they say that would be meaningful? The students were very aware of stereotypes and were wary of generalizing about an entire group of people. Although certain Anglophones may have things in common, they are not a completely homogeneous group.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

In this thesis, I have presented research I conducted on the linguistic representations of unilingual Anglophone students taking French 11 in BC. My purpose was to discover what representations they had of the French language as well as their representations of their first language. I further wanted to learn what representations they had developed of Francophones and Anglophones.

Not surprisingly, given the students' experiences with the French language, they saw French as a course at school and not as a language that was actually needed or used in BC. Their investment in French was proportionate to their desired result, admission to university. They took the class but they claimed to have no competence in actually using the language. Interestingly, although the students did not feel that French had economic value in BC some did feel an affective connection to the language.

English, not French was considered the language needed for living and working in BC. In fact, the students saw English as a worldwide lingua franca (Breton, 1998). They claimed English was a language used and understood in most countries of the world, even those in which it was not an official language.

Due to BC's geographic location and the resulting lack of contact with Francophones, the participants in this study did not have elaborate reference or pre-constructed representations of this community. Rather, their representations were carefully co-constructed during the group interviews. Looking at the student

discussions of both Francophones and Anglophones, it is clear that the students in this study were sensitive to stereotypes. While they acknowledged the existence of cultures and cultural differences, they were hesitant to generalize about entire cultural groups.

Indeed, accessing the students' representations of Francophones and Anglophones was challenging. The students used humour and logic to deflect and circumvent the questions I designed to access their representations. Clearly, obvious questions such as "What are Francophones like" will not suffice to discover the representations of culturally aware and sophisticated students.

6.1 Avenues of Future Research

A lot of research has been done in Europe on linguistic representations. While a great deal of research has been done on the linguistic representations that second language learners develop, much of this research has focussed on situations of contact. For instance, studies have examined the representations that French-speaking Swiss students have of the German language and German speaking people (Muller, 1998; Muller and de Pietro, 2001). I found less research on the representations that second language learners develop when there is an absence of contact with native speakers of the target language (Cain and de Pietro, 1997).

While it is only a small qualitative study, my research adds to the literature on the linguistic representations of language learners in situations where there is virtually no contact with the native speakers of the target language. My research

also offers a uniquely Canadian but more specifically British Columbian perspective. At the time of my literature review, I was not able to find any research on the linguistic representations of second language learners in BC. This research may therefore be of interest to other second language teachers in BC and could perhaps serve as a starting point for future research.

The scope of this research was extremely narrow. Only students enrolled in French 11 at one secondary school in BC were interviewed. One avenue of possible future research would be to explore the linguistic representations of students taking French 11 at other schools in this particular school district. Indeed, as a result of my teaching experiences since conducting my research, I would find this to be particularly interesting.

After collecting the data analyzed in this thesis, I went on to teach at two other secondary schools in the district. One school did not have a French Immersion program and offered a self-directed learning environment instead of a traditionally structured school schedule. Among other courses, I taught French at this school. During the year, I heard many students express negative opinions of the French language, more so it seemed than at my previous school. In conversations with students, they also seemed to express more negative stereotypes about French speaking people.

The differences I perceived in the students' representations led me to ask two questions. First, I wondered about the impact of a French Immersion program on the linguistic representations that language learners develop. Do students in a school with a French Immersion program develop more positive

representations of the French language and Francophones than students in a school that does not offer French Immersion? Second, I wondered if the perceived differences in students' representations were related to the learning environment itself. As was explained in Chapter Two, students' experiences learning a language help shape the representations they develop of the language and of native speakers of the language. Perhaps then, the differences I perceived were due to the students' learning environment.

Currently I am teaching in another secondary school with a French Immersion program. Our district has 6 public secondary schools and only 2 of them offer French Immersion. At the district level, it would be interesting to conduct research on the linguistic representations of learners taking French as a second language at secondary schools with and without Immersion programs and then compare the results. This would allow us to get a sense of the representations of students in the district and would perhaps begin to illustrate any differences in the representations that learners develop in schools with and without French Immersion programs.

My research was also limited because only students who spoke English as a first language and considered themselves to be unilingual were asked to participate. Since BC is becoming ever more diverse, both culturally and linguistically, it would also be relevant and indeed necessary to research the linguistic representations of students who already spoke a second language including those whose first language was not English. Would these students have a more positive representation of the French language because of their

knowledge of another language, or would this knowledge have a negative impact on their representations? How would these students view the English language? Would they, as was suggested by the Anglophone students in my study, consider English to be “worldwide” and “universal”? What representations would they have of Francophones and Anglophones?

6.2 The Action Plan for Official Languages

Similar research could also be conducted in other school districts in BC. If enough such studies were conducted, a more complete picture of the linguistic representations of second language learners studying French in BC would begin to emerge. Studies such as mine could inform the Ministry of Education on changes needed to improve the Core French curriculum. In fact, in its *Action Plan for Official Languages* (Government of Canada Privy Council Office, 2003), the Canadian government calls for improvement of the Core French program. The aim of the Core French program in BC is communicative competence in French yet student responses in my study indicate that more needs to be done to enable students to meet this goal. Students found that they were not competent enough in French to actually use it. As Mike said, “I don’t know anything and it’s always wrong”.

Even with improvements to the Core French program, in order to double the number of students in BC with a working knowledge of French, steps need to be taken to increase student investment in the French language. The impact of linguistic representations on language learning is evident. In order for a language policy to be successful, linguistic representations that are helpful need to be

supported and the impact of representations that hinder the policy need to be minimized (Cavalli, 1997). As Muller and de Pietro's (2001) research shows however, such actions must be undertaken carefully. Although representations are malleable, educators would be naïve to believe they could simply transform student representations. In fact, acting on students' representations can have unforeseen and undesired consequences.

While students in my study did not have a negative representation of French, their representation did not promote significant investment in the language. Further, one cannot ignore the influence of their representation of the English language on their investment in French. Although Federal government discourse highlights economic and cultural benefits of bilingualism for Canadian youth (Government of Canada Privy Council Office, 2003), students themselves need to view French as an asset and an enrichment or it is unlikely that many will be convinced to strive for communicative competence.

APPENDIX A: LETTER OF APPROVAL FROM THE SCHOOL DISTRICT

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MAPLE RIDGE - PITT MEADOWS

22225 Brown Avenue, Maple Ridge, B.C., V2X 8N6
Tel: 604-463-4200 Fax: 604-463-0573



December 1, 2003

Ms. Nicole Terrillon
821 Porter Street
Coquitlam, B.C.
V3J 5B9

Dear Ms. Terrillon,

Re: Research Request:
"Linguistic representations of unilingual Anglophone students
attending a secondary school in British Columbia"

Permission is hereby granted to conduct your research project as noted above.

As with all research done in schools, I expect that you will abide and comply with Simon Fraser University requirements with respect to the protection of human subjects.

Good luck with your project.

Sincerely,

A rectangular area with diagonal hatching, used to redact the signature of Dr. Rick Erickson.

Dr. Rick Erickson
Deputy Superintendent

C: S. Sonne, Principal

A rectangular area with diagonal hatching, used to redact the signature of S. Sonne.

WRE:amh

APPENDIX B: TRANSCRIPTION CONVENTIONS

[Beginning of overlap
]	End of overlap
//	Speaker interrupts
---	Rephrasing, shift of discourse or parenthetical adjunction
,	Brief pause
-	Longer pause
?	Upward intonation
.	Downward intonation
...	Speaker is about to continue or trails off
<i>bonjour</i>	Foreign word
<u>that</u>	Emphasis or stress on a particular word
<i>(laugh)</i>	Listener's observation

APPENDIX C: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Why are you taking French 11?
2. What is your experience of the French language? In what kinds of situations do you hear it? Use it? See it?
3. Before beginning French at school, what was your experience with the French language?
4. What do you think of the French language? How does it make you feel when you try to speak it? How does it make you feel when you try to write it? How does it make you feel when you try to understand it? How does it sound to you?
5. What words would you use to describe the French language?
6. How would you compare French to other languages?
7. Do you think that you will use it (the French language) in the future? Please explain why or why not.
8. Do you think that others share your opinions of the French language? Your friends? Your family? Other people in BC?
9. Who are Francophones?
10. What are Francophones like?
11. What do you think of the English language? How does it make you feel when you speak it? How does it make you feel when you write it? How does it sound to you?
12. What words would you use to describe the English language?
13. How would you compare English to other languages?
14. Do you think that others share your opinions of the English language? Your friends? Your family? Other people in BC?
15. Who is an Anglophone?
16. What are Anglophones like?
17. Is it important for people to learn a second language? Please explain.

APPENDIX D: EXCERPT FROM GROUP INTERVIEW ONE

Melanie: Who are Francophones?

Mike: French speaking people.

Jen: Yeah.

Karri: That are native French speaking. It's the first language they learn.

Melanie: Really?

Karri: Yeah.

Jen: *(laughs)*

Melanie: Well I knew they were French people but...

Mike: Plus they have Anglophones as well.

Researcher: Okay so where do Francophones live? When you think Francophone where's the first place you think of?

Karri: Montreal.

Melanie: Quebec.

Mike: France.

Jen: Yeah Quebec.

Melanie: Well all over Canada.

Researcher: Oh yeah you're not wrong. I was just wondering what was the first place that came into your mind.

Karri: The second is France. The first for some reason is Montreal.

Melanie: New Brunswick?

Karri: *(laughs)*

Jen: Yeah that's true.

Melanie: Yeah cause a lot of people speak French there.

Mike: What do they speak in PEI?

(long pause)

Jen: English?

Girls: *(laugh)*

Mike: Really? I thought they...

Melanie: Everywhere they speak French.

Mike: Okay I'll just grab the next card. What are Francophones like?

(long pause)

Researcher: I know that you haven't met every Francophone in the world. When you think of a Francophone what do you think they are like? Personality, what do they believe, what kinds of things do they like, how do they dress even. I don't know, just whatever comes into your mind.

Mike: Okay, I can't answer this question because I've never actually met a real Francophone. You see them in movies right but that's extremely fake. Like if you go --- if you see movies of California and then you go to California, you'll see a huge difference. And I'm sure it's the same thing here.

Researcher: Well what stereotypes have you seen in movies? Or things that you've seen in movies that you think are stereotypes?

Mike: Lots of outdoor restaurants.

Researcher: Lots of outdoor restaurants. So you're saying France....

Mike: Yeah France.

Researcher: And how do Francophones act in these movies that you've seen?

Mike: Kind of cheesy.

Jen: Nuns riding around on bikes. *(laughs)* I don't know what made me think of that.

Karri: Well I've been to France and I mean sure there's a --- differences with the languages but if you really look at it, some parts of it are basically like Canada. Like the restaurants. Like they have McDonald's there. It's really worldwide and sure they serve different food and serve it differently...

Researcher: Okay but what are the people themselves like...What comes to your mind?

Jen: My parents friends are Francophone so I've seen them speak really really fast and like --- I dunno. They're the same as us. Dress the same, act the same...

Melanie: Yeah exactly

Karri: I'm not sure what they think about us but I know that the only difference really is the language.

Jen: I think they --- I dunno --- they really --- I dunno --- I think they really respect their language and respect who they are.

Researcher: What makes you think that they respect their own language and respect who they are?

Jen: Cause --- I dunno --- they really...

Mike: They're still holding out. Everybody else is learning to speak English.

Researcher: They're still holding out...so you're talking about people from Quebec.

Mike: Yeah

Karri: They've kept their own language which is --- shows a sign of pride for their language. And stubbornness.

Researcher: So do you think that people from Quebec are more...

Mike: Stubborn?

Researcher: *(laughs)* Okay, or more proud than the rest of us?

Karri: I wouldn't say more proud. But they are proud of their first language which is French. And some of them may have learned English in school like we have learned French in school but...

Mike: Well I know that I'm proud of being a Canadian over being like an American or something because they get such a bad stereotype and we really don't. Except that we all wear fur hats.

Girls: *(laugh)*

Jen: And that we all live in igloos.

Mike: And that we've got no electricity.

Karri: Well I've heard a lot. We all had our Canada shirts when we went to Europe and everyone kept asking us all of these different questions about Canada --- from like the States. I almost got into a fight with this one woman who tried to tell me that Canada had states and not provinces and she was from the States. And I'm like no, no, no. I know. It's my country.

Mike: Have you ever seen Talking to Americans. It's so funny. Those are the dumbest guys in the world.

Researcher: Okay so what are people from Quebec like? Stubborn we've heard. Proud we've heard.

Melanie: They're no different from...

Researcher: So you think they're the same?

Mike: Yeah

Karri: They're people just like us.

Mike: They're just the same. I don't really think the language makes a big difference.

Jen: They have accents.

(students laugh)

Researcher: Or maybe we do. So do you guys learn a lot about French culture in your French class?

Melanie: French culture?

Karri: I don't really think we've learned much about French culture.

Jen: We watched some videos didn't we?

Karri: Amélie? That's about French culture? *(laughs)*

Jen: I dunno.

Melanie: Which video are you talking about?

Karri: Amélie the French movie...

Jen: Oh no, no, no. The ones on Francophones remember? With the African guy.

Melanie: With the rapping guy?

Mike: With the rapping guy?

Jen: Yeah.

Karri: I wouldn't really say that one's about French culture it's just about some guy rapping in different parts of the world.

Melanie: No but he goes to like all different Canadians, and like --- from like Ontario and Quebec and other places like that and he talks to them about what they do in their spare time and they do the things that we do.

Jen: Yeah like they play sports. They...

Mike: Go ice skating.

(Group interview 1, January 12, 2004, p. 11-15)

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