

## PREVIOUS TWO-WAY IMMERSION STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD ETHNICITY AND CULTURE: A PILOT STUDY

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It is high time we begin to treat language skills as the asset they are, particularly in this global economy. Anything that encourages a person to know more than one language is positive-and should be treated as such. Perhaps we should begin to call the learning of a second language what it truly is –“bi-literacy”.

(U.S. Secretary of Education, Richard Riley, 2000)

### 1. Introduction<sup>2</sup>

The study of attitudes in relation to second language learning has been of much interest to researchers over the last five decades. After an initial interest in the role social-psychological factors play in the acquisition of a second language, researchers became less interested in “debating the importance of affective variables” and more in looking “for new and improved ways to measure these variables” (Snow *et al.*, 1984: 24). In this respect, the research on social-psychological variables in second language acquisition has taken two main directions. On the one hand, researchers try to establish the influence of attitudes on motivation and the relationship between different levels of motivation to success in learning a second language. On the other hand, researchers want to determine the extent to which bilingual education influences and changes attitudes. This study will address the second question in relation to two-way immersion education (also known as two-way bilingual in the U.S.), by attempting to measure the influence of bilingual schooling (Spanish-English) on such things as attitudinal dispositions to foreign language speakers and ethnically different people.

Since the design and implementation of the first immersion program in Montreal in 1965, many others have been an important source of data for the study and evaluation of language acquisition and its relation to attitudinal factors. Lambert & Tucker (1972) conducted a seven-year longitudinal study of the St. Lambert Program in Montreal to

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assess the effect of immersion schooling (in this case, English-speaking children being taught subject matter in French) on the linguistic, intellectual, and attitudinal development of immersion children. The results of this evaluation showed that schooling conducted in a second language had no negative effects on the children's cognitive development or on their level of proficiency in subject matters, English and French, the latter being significantly superior to the level of non-immersion English speaking children. In addition to this the students developed a positive attitude both towards the English ethnic group (their own), and to the French ethnic group (that of the target language), unlike the students in the control group, who felt more ethnocentric. This study also confirmed that attitudes toward one's own ethnic group and others affect language learning. To check these results, Lambert and Tucker conducted other similar studies in the United States and the Philippines, which showed the same basic results with slight variations depending on cultural context.

In 1972, the first immersion program was established in the U.S., following the Canadian model: the Culver City Spanish Immersion Program (CCSIP). In 1975, Waldman conducted a study on attitudes in the CCSIP. The Cross-Culture Attitude Inventory and the Matched Guise procedure were used to measure ethnocentricity among Anglo immersion and non-immersion children. Although both groups of students proved to be ethnocentric, exhibiting negative attitudes towards Mexican Americans, the attitudes of immersion children towards Mexican Americans were not as negative as those of non-immersion students.

Also, in evaluating ethnic identity, Cziko, Lambert & Gutter (1979) used multi-dimensional scaling to measure stable features of attitudes. When comparing French immersion and regular students in Canada, both groups showed a similar level of ethnocentricity, but immersion children tended to perceive themselves as closer to French-Canadians. Although differences were not significant, this seems to point out that bilingual training in enrichment programs of the "immersion" type (such as the two-way bilingual programs in the U.S.) tends to reduce the distance between the ethnic group of the native language and that of the target language.

Several studies carried out in Canada and the U.S. have found a shift in ethnolinguistic attitudes between early and late grades in immersion programs. Genesee (1983) showed that early graders (K-3rd) in the French immersion program had more positive attitudes toward the ethnic group of the target language than late graders (4th-

6th). The reason proposed to explain this phenomenon was the lack of social contact of immersion students with French-Canadians, a necessary condition for maintaining positive attitudes over time. Day (1980) obtained similar results in a different study, although the shift in attitudes this time took place between kindergarten and first grade. Snow (1979) also found a shift between lower and upper grades when she measured the attitudes of Spanish immersion children toward their Spanish speaking abilities.

Perhaps one of the most ambitious studies designed to carry out a comprehensive evaluation of French immersion programs is the one implemented by the Ontario Institute for Studies in Education (OISE). Swain & Lapkin (1982) present the results of this so-called “Bilingual Education Project” (a ten-year evaluation project which tackled linguistic matters as well as social and psychological aspects of immersion education) in a book entitled *Evaluating Bilingual Education: A Canadian Case Study*. Leaving aside linguistic and cognitive factors, the students’ ability to adjust to school and their perception of ethnic groups were evaluated in early total, early partial and late immersion programs. When testing for ethnicity, several techniques were used by different researchers. Lambert and Tucker, in their 1972 study, asked French immersion students to rate themselves and English-Canadians on 13 bipolar dimensions such as, friendly/unfriendly, and others. Both the immersion and the comparison groups assessed themselves and English-Canadians favorably. Genesee (1978) used a doll preference technique. He asked students to express their level of identification with dolls which represented various ethnolinguistic groups. All programs tested with this technique (English speaking students in English schools, French schools and immersion schools) showed the same degree of English-Canadian identity. Also, the students were given a multidimensional scaling of social perception to rate themselves and monolingual English-Canadians in terms of their perceived similarities and dissimilarities. A similar technique was employed by Cziko, Lambert & Gutter (1979) with French immersion children to rate monolingual French Canadians, bilingual French-Canadians, Italian-Canadians, English people from England, French people from France, Americans, their teachers and themselves. Although all immersion groups, as well as non-immersion groups, “maintained a basic identity with an English ethnolinguistic reference group” (Swain & Lapkin, 1982: 75), early immersion students perceived themselves as being more French-Canadian than did the other groups.

More recently, Lambert & Cazabon (1994) report that two aspects of the effectiveness of the Amigos Program (a two-way Spanish-English bilingual program in the U.S.) are the students' positive attitudes toward the program itself and their confidence in their language skills in both languages. Landry & Allard (1993), on the other hand, have stressed the notion of 'ethnolinguistic vitality' of the community as a determining factor for the success or failure of an enrichment (i.e., a two-way bilingual) program, underlining the relevance of ethnolinguistic identity and desire to integrate L1 and L2 communities, among other variables, for program success. Other studies that show gain in cross-cultural understanding and in appreciation of the other's culture and language in two-way bilingual programs in the U.S. include Christian (1994), Rolstad (1997) and Cazabon *et al.* (1998), to mention but three.

A final aspect which has captured the attention of researchers within the area of bilingual education and second language acquisition is language maintenance and its relation to attitudinal factors. Although not directly related to the present study, attrition studies are relevant to ours in so far as they analyze attitudes and their research subjects are also high school students who graduated from immersion schools. We shall mention only three studies in this respect. In a 1982 publication, Lambert and Freed deal with the theoretical and practical implications of foreign language loss. Gardner, in the same publication, proposes two hypotheses with regards to second language acquisitions and retention. First, he hypothesizes that since attitude/motivation relates to the promotion of language proficiency, they also relate to language retention. Secondly, he suggests that attitude/ motivation relates to participation in a language related situation and, thus, to language maintenance. In a study on attitudes and language retention, Snow *et al.* (1984) tested a number of graduates of the CCSIP to measure four attitudinal factors, including Language and Ethnic Pride. The global results show that attitudes and motivation are related to retention of the productive skills of Spanish (both written and oral), but not to retention of the receptive skills.

The present study deals with the same kind of population as the Snow *et al.* (1984) study and, although their aims are different, the factors they analyze are not unrelated. This study explores the attitudes of high school students who graduated from a two-way immersion program towards ethnicity and, in particular, to the target language group, and compares them with those of mainstream high school students.

We hypothesize that previous two-way immersion students (PTW, hereafter) will have a more positive attitude towards culture and ethnicity (in particular, those of Spanish-speaking people) than students who never attended two-way bilingual programs (referred to here as mainstream students (M, hereafter)).

## **2. Methods**

### **2.1. Procedures**

Face to face and telephone interviewing was the method of data collection used for the study. The face-to-face subjects were approached and surveyed at a high school campus during the lunch period. Students were first asked if they spoke any language other than English. If their response was “no”, they were then interviewed as part of the control group (eleven students). If they said “yes”, they were interviewed as part of the experimental group only if the language spoken was Spanish and only if it was acquired previously through the Two-Way Spanish Immersion Program (three students). This was a way to ensure that the experimental group consisted solely of native speakers of English who had acquired Spanish through schooling. All control subjects were contacted in this manner.

Given the limited number of PTW students encountered during the lunch period, eight additional experimental subjects were identified and contacted by telephone. Their names were obtained from other students and from authorities connected with the local two-way bilingual elementary school. Each interview took approximately five to ten minutes.

### **2.2. Subjects**

Students ranged in age from 14-17 years, mean age was 15.48, and median age was 15. By group, PTW mean age was 15.7, median age was 15.9 and standard deviation was 1.13. M mean and median were 15.4 and 15.07 respectively and standard deviation was .989. Breakdown by high school class level was the following: 11 were grade 9, 2 were grade 10, 7 were grade 11 and 2 were grade 12. Of 22, 9 were male and 13 were female.

### **2.3. Measures**

The survey consisted of a total of 5 questions. All questions were closed-ended so that the total interview was pre-coded on a 5-point Likert-type scale, 5 being the highest possible score and 1 the lowest. Each question attempted to measure the respondents' attitudes towards one or several of the following categories: the Spanish language, the Spanish culture, people of Hispanic ethnicity, and foreigners.

Questions asked the students to hypothetically conceptualize the following five scenarios: going away on a foreign-exchange academic program; accompanying friends to a Cinco de Mayo festival; meeting a person who speaks with a thick foreign accent; having been born into a Spanish-speaking family; and being introduced to a good-looking Mexican (opposite sex) peer. One item, that of being born into the Spanish-speaking family, was taken from an earlier study (Lambert & Tucker, 1972). The remaining four were conceived for the purposes of this particular study.

As stated above, in 14 cases, the student filled out the survey sheet him/herself, and in 8 cases, responses were obtained verbally by telephone. All interviewing took place within a one-week period.

### **3. Results and discussion**

T-tests were performed on overall total points obtained (range 5 to 25), based on 5 point scales ( $N-1=df$ ), comparing the PTW group with the M group. Results were significant at .02 level of significance. The T-score obtained was 2.63.

In addition, T-tests were performed for each of the five individual questions asked on the survey, again comparing PTW students with M students. Results are as follows, listed question by question.

Question 1 was shown to be significant at the .05 level of significance. Obtained T-score was 2.40. Question 2 was also significant at .05 level of significance. Obtained T-score for this item was 2.48. Questions 3 and 4 were not found to be significant. Obtained T-score for question 3 was .754; for question 4,  $T=0$  in which identical scores for both groups were obtained. Lastly, question 5 was significant at .05 level of significance,  $T=2.0$ .

Additional tests were performed to determine whether any differences were significant for each question by sex. None were found. Table 1 (see below) represents all T-scores and mean scores obtained.

The hypothesis tested was that a difference would be found between the attitudes of PTW and M students towards culture and ethnicity (in particular, those of Spanish-speaking people), with PTW attitudes being more positive. For the most part, this study appears to confirm the hypothesis, although not with all survey items. Three of the five items were found to be significant. In this section, the results of each will be discussed individually.

TABLE 1 Questionnaire results: T – Scores and Mean Scores			
Questions	T-Scores	Mean Scores	
		Previous Two-Way (PTW)	Mainstream
Question # 1	T= 2.40*	3.18	2.46
Question # 2	T= 2.48*	3.72	2.45
Question # 3	T= .754	4.18	4.45
Question # 4	T= 0	2.82	2.62
Question # 5	T= 2.0 *	2.82	2.07
Total	T= 2.63**	3.34	2.9
N= 22			
* significant at .05 level of significance			
** significant at .02 level of significance			

Question 1 asked “If you could choose to go anywhere on a foreign exchange program to improve your Spanish language skills, would you...” and the five answer choices ranged from “not want to go at all” to “sign up for a full one-year program”. On a scale of 1 to 5, mean scores obtained for PTW students showed a slightly more than neutral response (3.18) of going on a trial basis, while M students indicated that they would consider going (2.46).

It should be mentioned that the high school where this study was conducted for all M and some PTW students has an active foreign exchange program. It appears to be the general consensus to readily accept and welcome foreign students at the school, and informal comments by the students to the interviewers revealed that the foreign students

are quite popular among the local students. This may have accounted for why M students rated the question as favorably as they did, although the difference between the two groups' scores was still significant.

One reason why PTW students were more willing to consider a foreign exchange program may be that they regarded it as similar to their own bilingual experience, whereas for M students, this would be a completely novel experience. However, question one is also a measure of commitment. The latter two answer choices involve serious willingness to going abroad, something that is difficult for many students to visualize doing. Thus, among the PTW students, only one responded with the most highly committed choice (5), and two answered with the next to highest (4). Among the M group, no 5 scores were obtained - only two 4 scores (which served to bring up the mean) and mainly scores of 1 and 2 were given. No scores of 1 were given by PTW students. Thus, the question resulted in good variance, especially between groups. The question did not specify Mexico as the exchange location. It would be interesting to note whether different responses would have been obtained if it had. The idea of foreign travel usually seems to be somewhat inherently attractive to students, and perhaps visions of Spain or South America, possibly viewed as more exotic than Mexico, were responsible for more than neutral scores.

Overall, it is encouraging to discover that PTW students were significantly more willing to participate in an exchange program than M students, although they were not overwhelmingly positive towards the experience. It would also be interesting to have another question included to measure PTW students' general willingness to learn any other language in a foreign exchange program rather than only Spanish. It may be that perhaps the immersion experience encourages willingness to learn additional languages as well.

The second survey question was "If a friend invited you to go along with a group of Mexican friends to a Cinco de Mayo festival, would you ...", and answer choices ranged from "not want to go at all" to "participate voluntarily in activities (singing, dancing)". Scores obtained for this item were significantly different. The PTW mean was 3.72 while the M mean was 2.45, or a choice of almost - "participate in activities" to just over a "consider going" choice (respectively). Again, in this item as with item 1, a good variance of answers was obtained. There were no 5 answers given



by the M group, but mainly 1's and 2's, while no PTW student responded with a 1 choice.

This question measured socio-cultural and ethnicity attitudes, and, unlike the first question, which resulted in a more neutral response by PTW students, this item received a more positive answer. Thus, it is not so much a measure of lesser negative attitudes than that of a more positive one.

The reason for this finding could be partially due to the PTW students' heightened level of awareness of "typical" Mexican celebrations and festivities. Often, the readings used in two-way bilingual programs depict scenarios where the characters engage in typical enjoyable cultural and social events in Mexico and Latin America. Perhaps then, to PTW, a Cinco de Mayo festival is not only non-threatening, but it is also more familiar and more desirable an activity than it may be to M students. For the latter, who would be unable to communicate in Spanish during the festival, the celebration itself is a novel and perhaps intimidating experience, especially to anyone less than out-going in personality. It is also conceivable that M students have fewer acquaintances who are also friendly with "a group of Mexican friends", as survey item 5 may indicate.

The last question (5) involved the social situation of being introduced to "a good-looking Mexican girl or guy". Answer choices ranged from "you would talk to him/her next time you see each other" to "you could consider marrying him/her". Mean scores for this item were low, but did differ significantly: PTW students gave 2.8 and M students gave 2.0 as their answers. Thus, M students could only imagine being friends with the hypothetical good-looking Mexican of the opposite sex, while PTW students could almost generally date such a person. Perhaps a question more relevant to that age group would have included a range of immediate-social activities (i.e. group oriented versus one-on-one in nature) as opposed to this scale's anchor of "marriage".

The same variability trend was discovered for this question as for the first two. Two PTW students gave scores of 5 (or marriage) and none gave a score lower than 2, while M students yielded no 4's or 5's, and gave the lowest score of 1.

The almost neutral score (2.8) obtained by the PTW students is, as hypothesized, more positive than that of the M students, but still is basically low. A possible explanation for this is the negative stereotype that, in Southern California, Mexicans are

considered to be low on the scale of desirable ethnicities, and this item is a measure of someone who is part of a negatively considered group. As the range of involvement in this item includes a higher level than that of item 2, it is understandable that respondents were less willing to commit themselves to the higher involvement answer choices. Yet it is still surprising to find as low an average score as this item produced. Since variance of answer choices was obtained, it cannot be explained by the nature of the item itself.

Even PTW students are somewhat unwilling to get more deeply involved (“go steady”) with Mexican opposite sex peers, while M students appear clearly against it, as the mean scores indicate. This is not a very encouraging finding, but it is heartening to note the correlation between the higher score and a two-way bilingual program. Perhaps continued efforts and participation in this area truly do reduce such attitudes of prejudice.

The items still not mentioned in this section, numbers 3 and 4 were not found to yield any significant differences between the two groups. Item 3 was intended as a measure of attitude toward another non-identified but foreign ethnicity. It asked “If you met a person who has been living in the States for 10 years and who still spoke with a very thick foreign accent, would you assume that this person is...”, and answer choices ranged from “is dumb” to “is very intelligent”.

The answers given to this question were the exception to the others, which all resulted in more positive scores in the direction hypothesized. In this question however, it is seen that although both groups gave very close responses, it is actually the M group which gave scores which indicate a greater willingness to assume high intelligence from a foreign-sounding person.

Since being administered, this item has been considered not a good one for two reasons. Primarily, it has been realized that the question may be interpreted as measuring undisguised prejudice (“dumb” and “below average” are both negative judgements). Thus, in a survey given face-to-face, respondents would be less likely to admit to being biased in this manner than would those surveyed over the telephone.

The second reason is that in addition to failing to draw significance, variability in the responses to this item was minimal. All scores ranged from 3 to 5 –no scores of 1 or 2 were given– indicating a problem inherent with the first two choices.

Lastly, question 4, adapted from the earlier-mentioned Lambert & Tucker (1972) study, asked, "Suppose you had been born in a Spanish-speaking family instead of the one you have now. Would it feel any different to be in that family than how you feel in the family you have now? Would you feel..." answer choices for this item ranged from "very unhappy" to "happier".

Judging by the complete lack of variance in the scores given, this was not a good survey item. In 19 of the 22 cases, respondents answered with the 3 choice, or "just as happy". It could be that to answer with one of the positive choices is in effect, admitting one is less than pleased with one's own family. If this is true, then the "just as happy" almost unanimous response is unsurprising. In addition, the answer given so often may be a function of not-knowing the alternative. Who can really say what life in another family would truly be like? It may be too hypothetical a situation to imagine for most people.

One last point worth mentioning here is that perhaps saying "Spanish-speaking family" in this item is not equivalent in terms of negative perception to what English-speaking Canadians think of "French-Canadian families" as used in Lambert and Tucker's study. "Spanish-speaking" may be considered more positive than "French Canadian". Thus, perhaps a better term to have used would have been "Chicano family".

In this study then, 3 of the hypothesized 5 survey items were answered in the manner predicted which are encouraging results considering the small sample size.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The findings in this exploratory study appear to support the hypothesis that two-way immersion education has effects on students' attitudes toward ethnicity and culture that go beyond their years at the immersion school itself. The low number of subjects in the study does not allow us to make generalizations, but the results are significant enough to merit further examination. Other limitations of the study are lack of randomness in selecting the subjects, age and grade differences across subjects, and not being able to address effects on attitudes beyond the high school years.

Future projects may consider the following modifications:

1) Survey children at different grade levels within a two-way immersion program. It would be interesting to note first, whether students start out with negative attitudes and then, at which levels attitude changes may occur.

2) Increase the study sample size. The students questioned here were sufficient only to give a taste of the subject matter. The statistically significant differences found on 3 items suggest that the differences are reliable and in the predicted direction. However, similar significant differences reported from among yet a larger sample size would seem more conclusive.

3) Conduct follow-up studies that will provide information about longer-term effects by indicating whether or not PTW students may revert back to an earlier way of thinking, when this is likely to happen, and why.

4) Consider modifications of the individual survey items as suggested earlier in this section.

Since bilingual education has been seriously threatened in California, it is important to document not only academic gains, but also other possible advantages of such programs, such as long-term, more positive racial attitudes on the part of students. In addition, if there are ways of increasing such potential benefits, they should be investigated and implemented.

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