A Review of *French Immersion Ideologies in Canada* by Sylvie Roy

Stephen Davis and Olushola Adedeji

University of Regina

French Immersion Ideologies in Canada, the landmark work of Dr. Sylvie Roy from the Werklund School of Education at the University of Calgary, synthesizes and interprets over 15 years of groundbreaking French immersion research. The author draws from substantive empirical data gathered from educators, parents, and students alike, providing deep insights into the taken-for-granted beliefs and perspectives of such stakeholders. Building on the adjacent theoretical perspectives of Heller's (2011) critical sociolinguistics and Blommaert's (2010) sociolinguistics of globalization, Roy advances the framework of sociolinguistics for change (Auger et al., 2007; Auger & Roy, 2012; Dalley & Roy, 2008) to unpack and dissect the deep-seated discourses and ideologies in French immersion. Whereas Roy's scholarship has important implications for French immersion stakeholders throughout Canada, the researcher is exceptionally gifted at navigating the distinct sociolinguistic context of Alberta. As French immersion educators and emergent researchers in Saskatchewan, we are keenly interested in the author's insightful and illuminating scholarship with respect to the ideologies embedded in such programs, especially as situated within the unique linguistic landscape of the Canadian Prairies.

In the first section of her book, "French Immersion Context," Roy provides a historical overview of French immersion and explores the foundational beliefs within such programs. What is French immersion? For whom was the program designed? Who can learn successfully in this program? The scholar offers a critical and honest assessment of elitism in French immersion, discussing discourses pertaining to students with special learning needs and learners from low socioeconomic backgrounds. Moreover, Roy critiques the pervasive myth that French immersion is suitable only for students with strong English language proficiency, a categorically erroneous and discriminatory perspective resulting in the exclusion of newcomer and Allophone students throughout Canada (Davis et al., 2019, 2021; Galiev, 2013; Mady, 2012, 2015). Roy invites readers to reflect on our underlying assumptions and beliefs about language learning and the extent to which our diverse perspectives and ideas shape French immersion programs.

Subsequently, in the sections titled "Bilinguals and Multilinguals" and "Who is Legitimate to Teach or to Speak French?," Roy explores diverse ideologies pertaining to language, identity, and belonging, discussing the extent to which such ideologies influence the learning and teaching of French as an additional language in immersion programs. How do we define and understand bilingualism and multilingualism in Canada? Who can learn and speak French? Who can truly be considered bilingual and multilingual in Canada? The author questions long-standing concepts of bilingualism, including the framework of two solitudes that compartmentalizes students' languages into discrete categories, rather than a holistic view of languages as integrated systems within learners' diverse linguistic repertoires. Roy discusses the tendency for French immersion students to say, *"Je suis bilingue, mais…"* or "I am bilingual, but…" because they perceive their variety of French as inferior to the language of Francophones. Indeed, the scholar's work illustrates that both native-speakerism – the ideology that native French speakers, especially from France, are the legitimate representatives of French language and culture – and linguistic insecurity (Meyerhoff, 2006) are endemic to immersion programs for educators and students alike. Notwithstanding certain grammatical shortcomings of French

immersion students, Roy argues convincingly for the legitimacy of the distinct language variety of such learners.

In the fourth major section, "Teaching and Learning," Roy explores the pedagogical implications of the aforementioned ideologies in French immersion programs. How can educators simultaneously teach language skills and curricular content effectively? What are the roles of students' first languages in their learning of French? How should English be used in the French immersion classroom, especially in light of the growing linguistic diversity in such programs throughout Canada? Drawing from a sociolinguistics for change perspective, Roy discusses the divergent discourses pertaining to translanguaging in broader contexts of language learning, examining the pedagogical role of students' first languages in the French immersion classroom (Cummins, 2014; Swain & Lapkin, 2013). The author brilliantly illustrates the complex tensions between empowering students to use their first languages judiciously as linguistic resources in the French immersion classroom while also seeking to protect the French language from the dominance of English (Ballinger et al., 2017; Lyster, 2019). Also noteworthy is Roy's appeal to educators to recognize French immersion students as bilinguals in progress, rather than failed Francophones. In this section, Roy challenges readers to reflect not only on our unexamined ideologies, but also on the impact thereof on pedagogies, practices, and policies in French immersion programs.

French Immersion Ideologies in Canada is engaging, thought-provoking, and essential reading for students, parents, educators, administrators, and researchers alike. Simultaneously accessible and complex, this groundbreaking work invites all stakeholders into the critical conversations worth having in French immersion and would serve as an exemplary resource for professional development and higher education purposes. Furthermore, sociolinguistics for change presents a promising and important theoretical perspective for future scholarship. Roy offers the rare and elusive perspective of a scholar who is both intimately knowledgeable and steadfast in her support of French immersion, while simultaneously being deeply committed to challenging such programs to grow and adapt for the future. What have we learned from years of teaching and research in French immersion programs? Where do we go from here? For Roy, the questions are as important as the answers, and we look forward to learning from her inquiry for years to come.

References

Auger, N., Dalley, P., & Roy, S. (2007). *La sociolinguistique du changement: le cas du bilinguisme stéréotypé en classes de français langue seconde et minoritaires.* Stéréotypages, stéréotype : fonctionnements ordinaires et mises en scène. Tome 3, Éducation, école, didactique, 25–36. L'Harmattan.

Auger, N., & Roy, S. (2012). Quelles constructions identitaires des élèves en classe d'immersion? Perspectives comparées: Canada/France.

Ballinger, S., Lyster, R., Sterzuk, A., & Genesee, F. (2017). Context-appropriate crosslinguistic pedagogy: Considering the role of language status in immersion education. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, *5*(1), 30–57.

Blommaert, J. (2010). *The sociolinguistics of globalization*. Cambridge University Press.

Cummins, J. (2014). Rethinking pedagogical assumptions in Canadian French immersion programs. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, *2*(1), 3–22.

Dalley, P., & Roy, S. (2008). *Francophonie, minorités et pédagogie*. University of Ottawa Press.

Davis, S., Ballinger, S., & Sarkar, M. (2019). The suitability of French immersion for allophone students in Saskatchewan: Exploring diverse perspectives on language learning and inclusion. *Canadian Journal of Applied Linguistics, 22*(2), 27–63. https://doi.org/10.7202/1063773ar

Davis, S., Ballinger, S., & Sarkar, M. (2021). "More languages means more lights in your house": Illuminating the experiences of newcomer families in French immersion. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education, 9*(1), 336–363. https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.20015.dav

Galiev, A. (2013). *Official bilingualism and immigrants: Perceptions, experiences and practices* [Unpublished doctoral dissertation]. University of Calgary.

Heller, M. (2011). *Paths to post-nationalism: A critical ethnography of language and identity*. Oxford University Press.

Lyster, R. (2019). Translanguaging in immersion: Cognitive support or social prestige? *Canadian Modern Language Review*, *75*(4), 340–352.

Mady, C. (2012). Official language bilingualism to the exclusion of multilingualism: Immigrant student perspectives on French as a second official language in 'English-dominant' Canada. *Language and Intercultural Communication*, *12*(1), 74–89. https://doi.org/10.1080/14708477.2011.592193

Mady, C. (2015). Examining immigrants' English and French proficiency in French immersion. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, *3*(2), 268–284. https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.3.2.05mad

Meyerhoff, M. (2006). *Introducing sociolinguistics*. Routledge.

Roy, S. (2020). *French immersion ideologies in Canada*. Lexington Books.

Swain, M., & Lapkin, S. (2013). A Vygotskian sociocultural perspective on immersion education: The L1/L2 debate. *Journal of Immersion and Content-Based Language Education*, *1*(1), 101–129. https://doi.org/10.1075/jicb.1.1.05swa