


## Counterbalancing form-focused and content-based instruction in immersion pedagogy

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Friday, October 17, 2008  
*Immersion Education:  
Pathways to Bilingualism and Beyond*  
St. Paul, MN

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## Counterbalance?

- “A power or influence that balances the effect of a contrary one”
  - The New Shorter Oxford English Dictionary*




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## Counterbalanced instruction

- integration of content-based and form-focused instruction
  - frequent shifts in learners' attention between form and meaning (Lyster, 2007)
  - creates variety that stimulates interest and increases depth of learning (Lightbown, 2008)
- orients learners in the direction opposite to what they're used to in order to balance their awareness of learning both language and content (Skehan, 1998)

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## Lack of counterbalance in immersion



- Focus on language and focus on content are not counterbalanced in many immersion classrooms.
  - Incidental asides:**
    - main emphasis is on content with reference to language only incidentally as the need arises by chance
  - Separate language instruction:**
    - a traditional approach is adopted in language arts classes to analyze the L2 out of context
- Such non-integrated approaches have been used to explain the lack of continued growth in students' proficiency in the immersion language (e.g., Harley et al. 1990).

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## Counterbalanced instruction

- Teachers need to counterbalance content-based instruction and form-focused instruction across three key areas of immersion pedagogy:
  - Instructional input (Part 1)
  - Student output (Part 2)
  - Classroom interaction (Part 3)


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## Part 1: Instructional input

- Teachers need to counterbalance the types of input students are exposed to:
  - content-based input**
    - conveys subject matter made comprehensible by teachers to ensure comprehension
  - form-focused input**
    - enhanced so that students notice linguistic information in content-based input

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## Making input comprehensible



Immersion teachers:

- modify their speech
  - by emphasizing key words or phrases
  - by using lots of repetition, paraphrases, and synonyms
  - by pausing between phrases (wait time)
- use lots of visuals and gestures
- ensure predictability and repetition in instructional routines

(e.g., Met, 1994)

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## Metalinguistic awareness for noticing enhanced input

- Developing metalinguistic awareness helps students to notice linguistic information in content-based input.
- By virtue of learning two languages, students are already developing metalinguistic awareness that teachers can draw on.
- Metalinguistic awareness can be further developed through noticing and awareness activities.

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## Noticing activities

- Draw students' attention to problematic L2 features contrived to appear more **salient** or more **frequent** in oral and written input.
- **Input enhancement:**
  - typographical enhancement
    - COLOUR CODING
    - Italics
    - BOLD FACING
  - increased frequency

(Sharwood Smith, 1993)


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## Awareness activities

- Encourage students to engage in some degree of language analysis or reflection through:
  - rule-discovery (inductive) tasks
  - opportunities to compare language patterns, including L1-L2 contrasts
  - metalinguistic information

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## Noticing past tenses in French (Harley, 1989)



**Noticing activities**


- Students read a legend about a werewolf.
- The text was enhanced so that past tense forms were frequent and their meanings were made salient by the narrative:
  - *Un jour, Marie-Rose a décidé d'aller dans la forêt pour ramasser du petit bois... Sans s'en apercevoir, elle s'aventurait plus avant dans la forêt quand, soudain, elle s'est rendu compte qu'il était tard...*
- Students had to locate the different past tense forms in the legend and hypothesize about their different meanings.

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## Noticing past tenses in French (Harley, 1989)

**Awareness activities**

- Students compare pairs of pictures, one depicting a completed action and the other depicting an incomplete action, labelled appropriately:



Il dégringolait l'escalier.  
(He was falling down the stairs)




Il a dégringolé l'escalier.  
(He had fallen down the stairs)

- They then illustrate their own sentences to contrast completed and incomplete actions, labelling them appropriately.

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## Noticing second-person pronouns (Lyster, 1994)



### Noticing and awareness activities

- Students analyzed sociolinguistic features in dialogues extracted from *Le Cave* (a French translation of the novel *Wilted* by Paul Kropp)
  - "*J'm'excuse d'avoir dit une grossièreté. J'sais qu'**vous** devez être mécontent... Mais un des gars m'avait lancé une gomme à effacer derrière la tête, et ça m'a échappé— **vous** savez c'que c'est. Et j'travailais réellement à mes maths. ... J'sais c'que **vous** pensez, mais c'était pas comme ça! ... Alors **vous** comprenez, je...*"
  - "*Calme-toi, Danny. Ce qui me préoccupe, ce n'est pas tant **ton** langage ni ce que **tu** gribouilles, mais...*"

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## Making language fit

Have you ever been told off because you didn't use the sort of language that an older person expected? Can you give an example?

In the following examples the wrong kind of language is used.

Scene 1: Boy in bed. Mother is anxious.

How are you feeling, Jimmy love?

The agony has abated Madam, thank you for your kind enquiry.

From: H. Astley & E. Hawkins. (1985), *Using Language* (CUP), p. 25. 14

## Learning grammatical gender in French


- 80% of nouns appearing in *Le Robert Junior Illustré* have endings that systematically predict their gender (Lyster, 2006; see also Tucker et al., 1977).
- L2 learners of French need to have their attention drawn to noun endings that predict grammatical gender, e.g.:
  - feminine endings:
    - ie, -ine, -eine/-aine, -tion/-sion, -té, -se, -ance, -ette, -otte, -ure, -che
    - une bicyclette, une fourchette, une dette
  - masculine endings:
    - in, -an, -age, -of-eau, -eu
    - un couteau, un manteau, un plateau

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## Noticing grammatical gender (Harley, 1998)

### Awareness activities

- Concentration
  - in this memory game, students match pictures of nouns that have same-sounding endings.



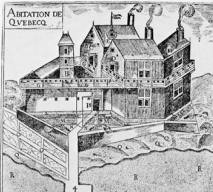
## Noticing grammatical gender (Lyster, 2004)



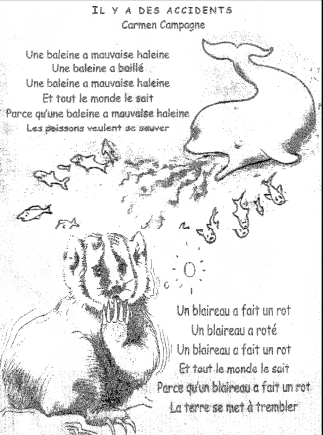
### Noticing activities:

- Endings of nouns in the students' curriculum materials were made **salient** by means of typographical enhancement (**in bold**).
 

Québec ressemblait de plus en plus à \_\_\_\_\_ vrai **village** doté notamment d' \_\_\_\_\_ **deuxième** habitation de Champlain, d' \_\_\_\_\_ **chapelle**, d' \_\_\_\_\_ **magasin** et d'autres bâtiments.



## Noticing grammatical gender (Lyster, 2004)



- Students listen for rhyming words with the same gender in songs.



## Part 2: Student output

- Teachers need to counterbalance the types of output activities students engage in:
  - **content-based output**
    - students use the immersion language in academic tasks to learn subject matter
  - **form-focused output**
    - students use the immersion language to practice using target forms that are otherwise avoided or misused

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## Geography task: Create a continent and explain its weather



### Why?

- To demonstrate understanding of how geographical phenomena affect weather.

### How?

- Students each create a continent, identify its name, and illustrate its geographical features on a map.
- They explain how the various geographical features influence the continent's overall climatic conditions.

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## Science task: Create a perfectly balanced mobile



### Why?

- To understand the relationship between weight distribution and equilibrium.

### What?

- Students each create a hanging mobile made of string, dowel, and objects brought from home.

### How?

- They weigh objects, measure distance, and use algebraic formulae to determine the exact fulcrum points in order to ensure equal weight distribution and a perfectly balanced hanging mobile.

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## Using language to learn content

- Content-based tasks allow students to use the L2 authentically and purposefully for academic purposes
- Goals of content-based tasks:
  - to create opportunities for in-depth understanding and for *learning by doing*
  - to engage learners in *hands-on experience*

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## Shortcomings of using only content-based tasks

- Because of the concrete materials and graphic aids,
  - students are not necessarily pushed to extend their productive repertoire in oral expression
  - students can ignore accuracy and use a narrow repertoire of language

### Ellis (2000)

- *"It cannot be assumed that achieving communicative effectiveness in the performance of a task will set up the interactive conditions that promote second language acquisition."*

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## What is practice?

- engaging in an activity with the goal of becoming better at it
  - DeKeyser (1998, p. 50)
- not something mechanical, involves cognitive effort, and can occur below the level of awareness
  - Lightbown & Spada (2006, p. 39)
- "practice does not make perfect"
  - Lightbown (1985, 2000)
- "but it does make better"
  - Munoz (2007)

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<p><b>Controlled practice activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ elicit the use of specific forms</li> <li>○ develop metalinguistic awareness</li> <li>○ focus on accuracy</li> <li>○ circumvent students' over-reliance on communication strategies</li> </ul>	<p><b>Communicative practice activities</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ open-ended and meaning-focused tasks</li> <li>○ develop confidence and motivation in using L2</li> <li>○ focus on communication</li> <li>○ provide a safe playing field for students to try out communication strategies</li> </ul>
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## Using past tenses in French

(Harley, 1989)



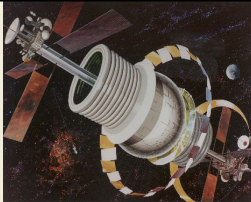
**Communicative practice**

- Students created photo albums to convey childhood memories :
  - brought authentic photographs from home
  - wrote captions describing either specific and completed actions or ongoing and incomplete actions in the past

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## Using the conditional in French

(Day & Shapson, 1991)



**Communicative practice**

- Students play the role of ecologists in the future invited to design a space station where 1000 space pioneers would be able to settle.
- In groups, they collaborate to create:
  - a model of the plan
  - an oral report
  - a written report
  - a newspaper article



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## Using the conditional in French

(Day & Shapson, 1991)

**Controlled practice**


- Students are asked to make scientific predictions:
  - If you put an inflated balloon in the fridge over night, what would happen?
    - the balloon would expand
    - the balloon would deflate
    - the balloon would burst
  - If you put a jar over a plant for 24 hours, what would happen?
    - the leaves would fall off
    - the leaves would turn yellow
    - drops of water would form inside the jar

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## Using second-person pronouns

(Lyster, 1994)



**Controlled practice activities**

- In pairs, students engaged in role plays to give directions, addressing either a friend or an adult stranger.
  - Using the map of Quebec City, you and your partner will give each other directions as you adopt the roles in the contexts described below...
    - You're coming out of the Couvent des Ursulines, rue du Parloir, and an elderly lady whom you don't know asks you how to get to the Château Frontenac.

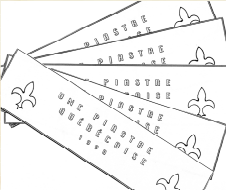
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## Using second-person pronouns

(Lyster, 1994)

**Peer correction**

- Each student begins with 5 tokens.
- If a student uses *tu* in a formal context or *vous* in an informal context, and the partner notices the error, the student has to concede a token.




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### Using grammatical gender (Harley, 1998)

**Controlled practice**

- **My Aunt's Suitcase**
  - each student in turn adds an item to a memorized list of things packed in the aunt's suitcase

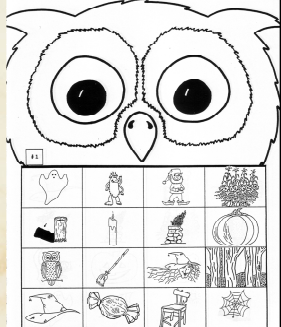
*une robe*  
*une robe et un pantalon*  
*une robe, un pantalon et une blouse*  
*une robe, un pantalon, une blouse et une trousse de toilette*  
*une robe, un pantalon, une blouse, une trousse de toilette et une serviette*  
*une robe, un pantalon, une blouse, une trousse de toilette, une serviette et un chapeau*



### Using grammatical gender (Harley, 1998)

**Bingo**



- To win, students have to name the objects, using correct gender, in the winning row or column they had filled.
- Last row winner:
  - un chapeau*
  - un bonbon*
  - une chaise*
  - une toile d'araignée*



### Using grammatical gender (Lyster, 2004)

**Controlled practice:**

- **Riddles** elicited nouns that students had to produce with the right gender marking
  - I divide the property of two neighbors.
    - What am I?  
[une clôture]
- When I erupt, a hot substance called 'lava' comes out of a crater at my summit.
  - What am I?  
[un volcan]




### Using past tense forms in ESL science experiments (Doughty & Varela, 1998)

**Make predictions then do experiment**

**The ball bounce**


- What is the effect of the type of ball on the distance it will bounce?
  - Predict which ball will bounce the highest:
    - basketball
    - soccer ball
    - rubber ball



### Using past tense forms in ESL science experiments (Doughty & Varela, 1998)

**Paper airplanes**

- What is the effect of different types of paper on the distance a paper airplane will fly?
  - Predict which type of paper will make the airplane fly the farthest:
    - construction paper
    - folder paper
    - typing paper



### Using past tense forms in ESL science experiments (Doughty & Varela, 1998)

**Components of Lab Report**

- Problem and procedures
- Hypothesis
  - What did you think would happen? (and what did the teacher think would happen?)
    - "I **thought** that the rubber ball **would** bounce the highest."
- Results and conclusions

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## Feedback in classroom interaction

- Designing practice activities that are communicative and that also create obligatory contexts for the use of specific target forms is difficult!
- So instead, teachers can push students in their output as they provide feedback during interaction about content.

**Lightbown (1998):**

- “Work on improving output is better done in the context of more interactive activities...”

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## Part 3: Classroom interaction

- Teachers need to counterbalance the types of interaction students engage in:
  - **content-based interaction**
    - scaffolded exchanges with students that ensure their participation and appropriation of the targeted content (e.g., recasting)
  - **form-focused interaction**
    - feedback that pushes students towards more accuracy and beyond their use of recurring interlanguage forms (e.g., prompting)

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## “Scaffolded” content-based interaction

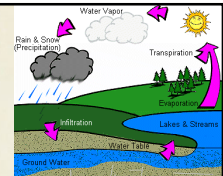
- Scaffolding:
  - “enables a child or novice to solve a problem, carry out a task or achieve a goal which would be beyond his unassisted efforts” (Jerome Bruner)
- Teachers provide assistance to students so they can express meanings that they would be unable to express on their own...



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## The water cycle

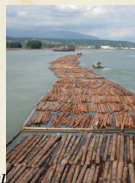
- T: What's a stream again?  
S1: It's like a small lake.  
T: A small lake?  
S1: It's *\*an little\** river.  
T: That's it. It's *a little river*, OK? Because a lake is a, a place where there's water but it's a ...  
Ss: *Like a circle.*  
T: *Like a circle. [...]*



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## The water cycle

- T: What do they do to transport the wood?  
S3: Um, you put the wood in the water and the um, how do you say 'emporter'?  
Ss: 'Takes'.  
T: Takes, good.  
S3: *\*Takes tree to an place and another person who puts the wood\*.*  
T: That's it. So, *they put the wood in the river so it gets transported from one place to another.*



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## The water cycle

- T: Why does she want to warm up do you think? Yes?  
S1: Because *she \*has\* too cold* to go into all the [?]  
T: Because *she is too cold*, OK. Yes?  
S2: *She \*has\* too frightened.*  
T: Because *she is frightened*, yes.



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## Form-focused interaction

- Teachers can draw their students' attention to errors and push them to self-repair, by using **prompts**:
  - Clarification requests
  - Repetition
  - Metalinguistic clues
  - Elicitation

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## Hares



T: The hare. Joseph could you tell us what its means of defence are that you see from this photo?

S1: It runs fast and it hops.

T: It runs fast.

S2: It jump.

T: It jump?

Ss: It jumps.


T: It jumps, from the verb...?

Ss: To jump.

T: To jump. It jumps about. Right, it jumps. Next...

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## Porcupines



T: The porcupine? Sara?

S1: It's the *pin*es on its back, it's ...

T: The *pin*es. Do we say "pin"es"?

S2: The upines.


T: The ...?

S3: The quills.

T: The quills. Very good. The quills.

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## Skunks



T: And so the skunk, what does it do? Karen?

S1: Uhm ... it does ... Well there's *\*a stream of perfume\** that doesn't smell very good...

T: *A stream of perfume, we'll call that a ...?*

Ss: Spray.

T: And the spray smells...?

S2: Stinky.

T: A stinky spray. We also call that [...]

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## Counterbalanced instruction

**Instructional challenge** (Day & Shapson, 1996)

- Calls for more focus on language in content-based instruction may lead teachers to:
  - deemphasize subject matter
  - overemphasize surface features of language

**Instructional counterbalance** (Lyster, 2007)

- Flexible enough to circumvent the problem of overemphasizing language at the expense of content:
  - balances students' awareness of learning both language and content

**Language growth** (Genesee, 1987)

- Continuous growth in the L2 will occur only if there are increased demands made on the learners' language system.

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