# THE NEUROLINGUISTIC APPROACH (NLA) FOR LEARNING AND TEACHING FOREIGN LANGUAGES

## *Theory and Practice*

## Claude Germain

# The Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) for Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages

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*Theory and Practice*

By

Claude Germain

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The Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) for Learning and Teaching
Foreign Languages: Theory and Practice

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pratique* provided by Claude Germain.

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# FOREWORD

Twenty years already! It was the spring of 1997 when my colleague Joan Netten and I began our discussions about the best way to improve the state of French-as-a-second-language learning among Anglophone schoolchildren in Canada. Over time, the *Intensive French* (IF) curriculum we designed, developed, and gradually implemented across Canada's provinces and territories changed shape. When it was implemented at China's South China Normal University (SCNU) for young Chinese university students enrolled in a specialised French-language programme, it became known as the *Neurolinguistic Approach* (NLA).

Soon after, as the NLA spread to neighbouring areas in Asia (Taiwan, Hong Kong, Japan), an increasing number of stakeholders in the area of learning and teaching second or foreign languages (L2/FL) expressed the desire to learn more about the origins of this new approach for adults. Pressure grew for the publication of a work, accessible to all, which would set out the foundations of the NLA as well as its results.

To celebrate the NLA's 20th anniversary, that work has now been produced and is in your hands.

Over the years, Joan Netten has had to concentrate primarily on the evolution of IF among young students in Canada, while I have focused increasingly on the implementation of the NLA at the adult level and in an international context. While recognising her role in the NLA's evolution, I am the sole author of this book.

The present work is first and foremost addressed to current L2/FL teachers, as well as to students of language education pedagogy, future language teachers, and future second-language teaching theorists. I hope that it will also interest language-teaching theorists, as a fair number of the issues addressed are liable to call into question many "received ideas", particularly about the *relationships* between language learning and language teaching.

The book is divided into four major parts. Two of these are geared towards researchers, students in language teaching, and experts in second-language teaching interested in the approach's theoretical foundations (Chapters 1, 2, and 3) as well as in the results obtained (Chapters 7 and 8). Two other parts are more directly addressed to language teachers interested in the approach's pedagogical applications (Chapters 4 and 5)

and the NLA's origins and implementation, in Canada, as well as in Asia, and elsewhere in the world (Chapter 6).

Broadly speaking, the two more "theoretical" parts frame the more "practically" oriented parts (the second part [Chapters 4 and 5] and the third part [Chapter 6]). The latter are presented in a *Frequently Asked Questions* format and include graphics and illustrations to facilitate understanding.

It should be noted that in the more practical parts of the work, the questions answered in the *Frequently Asked Questions* are those that I have most often been asked, either by students in language-education programmes or by teachers at conference lectures I have given or training sessions I have facilitated in various countries. As I formulated my answers for this book, I realised that, in the second and third parts, I could no longer use quite the same writing style I was used to. For instance, the constant use of *text boxes* may prove as disconcerting to some readers as it was for me when I began writing this book. These boxes allowed me to occasionally offer useful complementary information about the development of my ideas, as well as anecdotes, testimonials from teachers, tips and tricks, transcriptions from videos, and so forth. I also determined that frequent recourse to illustrations and figures taken from the large number of slides I have used over the years in presentations on the NLA would make certain parts of the book not only more attractive, but also more accessible.

*The Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) for Learning and Teaching Foreign Languages* is thus both "scholarly" and "non-technical," and will, I hope, provide food for thought for all.

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— David Bel, Director of the French Department of the South China Normal University (SCNU), who enabled the NLA to be launched in China, with the constant support of the faculty's Dean, Wu Jianli (Amy);

— the FFL (French as a Foreign Language) teachers of the French Department of the South China Normal University (SCNU), as well as their many students whom I've had an opportunity to observe in the classroom twice yearly over a six-year period;

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— the 30 student teachers who participated in the NLA training session organised by Olivier Massé in Tokyo, Japan, in March 2015, for their numerous pertinent questions;

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— Clément Beaudoin, President of Myosotis Presse, for rising to the challenge of publishing, in French, the first book on this topic: *L'approche neurolinguistique (ANL) : Foire aux questions* (Myosotis Presse, 2017);
— my partner Louise, for her endless patience and unfailing understanding.

Apologies and my thanks also to all those whom I may have forgotten to mention.

# NOTE

While the Neurolinguistic Approach (NLA) for the teaching of second and foreign languages may be applied to all language-learning classroom situations, the numerous examples of student work provided in the discussion that follows come mostly from French-as-a-second/foreign-language classrooms. The NLA's principle of authenticity makes it primordial that such examples genuinely illustrate the issues that can arise in the classroom, and as the NLA was originally developed for and applied to learning French at the school level, FSL/FFL classrooms naturally presented the widest pool of examples to choose from.

These examples of original student work are accompanied in the text by English translations which attempt to provide equivalent errors to those found in the original French.

Unless otherwise indicated, translations of quotations from sources published in languages other than English have been provided by the translators. Any errors or omissions in the translations are the responsibility of the translators.

# ABBREVIATIONS

The following abbreviations are used throughout this book:

L1          First or dominant language

L2          Second language

FL          Foreign language

DELF       *Diplôme élémentaire de langue française*: a certificate provided after successfully passing a French language exam. The DELF assesses language proficiency based on a scale developed by the CEFR.

CEFR       Common European Framework of Reference for languages

NLA       Neurolinguistic Approach

IF          Intensive French: refers to a French-as-a-second-language program delivered in a number of schools in Canada. The program offers up to 300 hours or second-language instruction during a five-month period of the school year

# PART ONE

# THEORETICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE NLA

Firstly, it is important to mention that in second-language pedagogy, all research begins with an issue from the field. In the late 1990s, the issue from the field with which we were faced was that of the low levels of *communicative skills* shown by the majority of Anglophone Canadian schoolchildren learning French (with the exception of those in French Immersion classes). We consequently needed to examine both theoretical and foundational scholarship to discover potential solutions. In other words, we needed to delve into the *relevant* data from the various disciplines involved in language pedagogy.

After a while, it became clear that the greatest difficulty needing to be addressed was the lack of an adequate relationship between acquiring/learning a language and the ways in which it was taught. To a large extent, it seemed to us that this difficulty could be ascribed to the fact that the multiple disciplines involved in language learning/teaching existed in highly compartmentalised silos. We therefore focused our attention on the various disciplines providing *links* between what is known about how L2/FLs are acquired/learnt and how they can be taught. It was at this point that the then-new area of neuroscience research struck us as potentially being able to shed new light on how we might conceptualise *relationships* between L2/FL acquisition/learning and teaching strategies used in the classroom.

As we examined research in the various disciplines that contribute to second-language pedagogy, the neurosciences yielded up Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (1994, 2004, 2009). Over time, the neurosciences provided us with five major lessons or conceptual data models which all struck us as *pertinent* to our goal of improving results in acquiring/learning languages.

The first chapter deals with the five lessons or teachings that provided us with the foundations for the development of the neurolinguistic approach (NLA). Building on these theoretical foundations, we devised the five fundamental principles of the NLA; these are discussed in the second chapter. In order to highlight the originality of the NLA, in the

third chapter I compare the approach to some others, in particular the action-oriented approach advocated in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001). It is worth noting that we designed the NLA in 1997 and began to test it in the classroom in September 1998, some years *before* the CEFR was published.

# CHAPTER ONE

# FIVE LESSONS FROM THE NEUROSCIENCES

This chapter deals with the five lessons that we drew from the neurosciences in order to improve L2/FL learning/teaching in school settings. These lessons constitute the theoretical basis for the NLA. Our approach builds on data produced by recent research in cognitive psychology, particularly the neurosciences, as well as the design of an approach in the development of literacy[1] skills specific to L2/FL, all from a neuroeducational[2] perspective (as we will see in detail further on).

The neurolinguistic approach (NLA) is a new paradigm, that is, a new way of conceiving the relationships between appropriating (acquiring and/or learning) and teaching a second or foreign language (L2/FL), which aims at creating optimal conditions, in a classroom setting, for spontaneous communication and successful social interaction.

The NLA was developed by two Canadian scholars: Claude Germain, a Francophone Québécois, Emeritus Professor at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) and Emeritus Professor at the South China Normal University (SCNU), and his Anglophone colleague Joan Netten, Member of the Order of Canada and Honorary Research Professor at Memorial University of Newfoundland (MUN).

## First Lesson: The Absence of a Direct Connection between Declarative Memory and Procedural Memory

Our principal neuroscience reference source is Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (2004). We should note, however, that ten years earlier, he had already introduced the major elements of his theory in an

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[1] *Literacy* is here defined as the ability "to use the listening, viewing, speaking, reading and writing strands of language(s), and other ways of representing […] to think, learn, and communicate effectively" (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador, 2002). For a more elaborate definition, see next chapter.

[2] By *neuroeducation*, we refer to the study of cerebral mechanisms as applied to education.

important chapter entitled "Neurolinguistic Aspects of Implicit and Explicit Memory: Implications for Bilingualism" (Paradis 1994), which he contributed to Nick Ellis's collective work *Implicit and Explicit Learning of Second Languages*.

Paradis introduces his neurolinguistic theory with a fact long known to psychologists, namely the distinction between two types of memory: declarative memory and procedural memory.

Declarative memory deals with facts or conscious knowledge: for instance, recalling what we ate for breakfast, the name of Canada's capital, a grammatical rule, etc. Procedural memory, on the other hand, is the memory involved with skills, such as the ability to swim, to drive a car, to speak, to communicate or interact with language, etc. (see also Contreras Asturias 2016).

Any explicit or conscious knowledge is sustained by declarative memory; any implicit competence or unconscious skill is sustained by procedural memory.

However, the main fact revealed by the empirical data provided by scans of the human brain is *the absence of any direct connection between the two types of memory*. According to Paradis, in language, as in any other cognitive activity, there is no direct connection between declarative memory and procedural memory.

This, at least, is what is revealed by the research Paradis discusses, which looked at bilingual individuals suffering from Alzheimer's disease and bilingual individuals suffering from aphasia (difficulty in forming sentences). In the first case, it is declarative memory that is affected, while morphosyntax (which relates to procedural memory) is unaffected. In the case of those suffering from aphasia, the reverse was essentially true: morphosyntax was affected, while ability to use skills linked to declarative memory was retained.

Brain scans of both the Alzheimer's patients and the aphasia patients reveal that completely different neuronal mechanisms are affected by their respective conditions.

To illustrate how an aphasic person's language troubles can manifest themselves, here is the transcription of a video extract of a conversation between an adult aphasic patient (A) and his therapist (T):[3]

T: *Tell me what was this thing with your leg, last week or the week before.*

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[3] Source:https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=f2IiMEbMnPM&list=PLtUz1usdFE0 uU_PwD1WNsE0uO6NJIvOug

A: *eh… no good… eh… ache… and… eh… eh… eh… eh…* [long pauses]*… knees… and ankles… eh…*
T: *What did you do about it?*
A: *eh… home… doctor… and… legs… eh… eh… walking… no good…*

As can be seen, this aphasic person can only use vocabulary words (verbs, nouns, adjectives), without any hope of forming statements that are syntactically acceptable: *no good, ache, knees, and… ankles, home, doctor, and… legs, walking, no good…* Brain scans of this aphasic patient would show that it was the neuronal systems associated with his procedural memory that were affected. His declarative memory, however, remains intact.

## An Anti-Chomskyan Position

This means that Paradis's position (2004) is resolutely anti-Chomskyan. According to Chomsky (1965), the brain includes a *Language Acquisition Device* (LAD), that is, a specific mechanism for language acquisition, pre-programmed by universal grammar and distinct from all other types of cognitive activity.

Many neuroscientists, by contrast, Paradis among them, hold that language works like any other human cognitive activity. It follows that there is no LAD, no genetic mechanism containing a universal grammar.

## Declarative Memory is not transformed into Procedural Memory

However, though procedural memory and declarative memory call on discrete neuronal systems, it does not follow that declarative knowledge can *transform itself* into "procedural knowledge." This is in fact the subject of debate among cognitive psychologists. On one side, some (such as Griggs, Carol and Bange 2002) believe that even if these two types of memory call on discrete neuronal systems, there might nevertheless be a *transformative* process allowing declarative knowledge to become procedural knowledge. Those who hold this position do not hesitate to speak of "knowledge proceduralisation" or know-how.

Paradis, on the other hand, contends that declarative knowledge *cannot transform itself* into procedural knowledge and, on this basis, refuses to speak of procedural knowledge or knowledge proceduralisation, which, according to him, would be a contradiction in terms, or even an impossibility. Rather, what happens is that metalinguistic knowledge is acquired in parallel, by dint of hearing and using a language structure to

which one has paid attention (Paradis 2009). Paradis's position is therefore completely different from the preceding one.

For instance, in the case of a patient suffering from aphasia, one can state that explicit knowledge is not transformed into an implicit competence, that is to say a skill underlying spontaneous communication. Otherwise, one might suppose that, if there existed a *direct connection* between these two discrete neuronal systems and a *transformation* of the knowledge associated with one into that associated with the other, this would mean that what can be learnt can affect what is acquired, and vice versa. It would be as if knowing the explicit rules of grammar would, ipso facto, allow one to use them unconsciously. We know, however, that they can only be used explicitly and in a controlled manner.

## Indirect Influence of the Declarative on the Procedural

It should be noted that in the normal course of language use, the declarative may indirectly influence the procedural. One has only to think of what happens when, in an everyday conversation, we suddenly use the wrong word. For instance, let us suppose I want to say, "Yesterday evening, we went to the theatre," but instead I say, "Yesterday evening, we went to the cine–" interrupting myself in the middle of the word "cinema." In such a case, I might say, "Oops! I mean, to the theatre." This "Oops" can only come from what Krashen (1981) called a sort of *monitor* (or *piloting*) in our brains that supervises, so to speak, everything we say.[4] And given the extreme speed of one's verbal flow, this sort of mistake is quite understandable.

But in such a case, it must be agreed that conscious knowledge has an indirect influence on the unconscious ability to communicate. This underscores that when using language, recourse to conscious knowledge presupposes the pre-existence of a skill.[5] There is therefore no question of a *connection* between an unconscious skill and conscious knowledge.

From this point of view, the dual originality of Paradis's theory resides in its demonstration that, firstly, there is no transformation of conscious knowledge into unconscious skills and, secondly, that human language

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[4] This does not mean that the NLA is simply an application of Krashen's theory. To learn about the important distinction between the two approaches, see the next chapter.

[5] Moreover, as Paradis (2004) remarks, it is always possible for the implicit to be made explicit (as in linguistic studies, for instance), but this never involves the *transformation* of the implicit into the explicit.

functions in the same way as any other non-linguistic human activity, such as, for example, swimming.

## Learning Cannot be Transformed into Acquisition

That which is *conscious*, Paradis specifies, cannot become something *unconscious*, just as *knowledge* cannot become a *skill*, and that which is *explicit* cannot become an *implicit competence*. These involve completely discrete neuronal mechanisms, one of which cannot transform itself into the other: (conscious) *learning* cannot transform itself into (unconscious) *acquisition*, nor become an acquisition. The salient parts of Paradis's argument, which was first introduced in his *A Neurolinguistic Theory of Bilingualism* (2004), were developed in more detail in his *Declarative and Procedural Determinants of Second Languages* (2009).

In order to further distinguish the nature of these two memories, it is important to note that neuroscience research strongly suggests there is as great a difference between procedural memory and declarative memory as there is between a *process* and a *product*.

If one is wondering what sort of process is involved in procedural memory, it is, in a sense, a set of *patterns* or traces left in the brain by dint of frequent use. Looked at this way, procedural memory consists of *regularities* rather than *rules*. These regularities are like *patterns* or "pathways," rather like a path in a field created by passing numerous times in more or less the same spot (as is so well shown in the great Impressionist artist Monet's painting reproduced below).

According to Paradis (2004), frequent use of verbal language is required to develop implicit competence. "What serves as input for implicit competency is the frequency with which particular linguistic constructions are encountered, irrespective of their surface form" (Paradis 2009, 80). Nick Ellis (2011) also supports this point of view.[6]

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[6] Nick C. Ellis is a specialist in language acquisition and a professor of psychology and linguistics at the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, United States. He has served as publisher for the prestigious American journal *Language Learning*. (He must not be confused with Rod Ellis, an internationally renowned British specialist who is also recognised in the area of language acquisition.)

## The Development of Implicit Competences:
## A Process and Regularities

Procedural memory



Claude Monet, *Wheat Fields* (1881)
https://www.flickr.com/photos/7208148@N02/4177752801/

*Fig. 1-1*

Furthermore, when it comes to language, declarative memory seems to be more of a product allowing the storage of vocabulary and verb conjugations, as well as *formal rules* such as grammar rules.

**In summary**, the following can be learnt from Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism:

- Implicit competences, underpinned by procedural memory, and explicit knowledge, underpinned by declarative memory, are two discrete aspects of neuronal functioning;
- There is no direct connection between the two;
- Explicit knowledge cannot *transform* itself into an implicit competence;
- Declarative memory is like a *product* made up of facts (vocabulary and verb conjugations) or *rules* (like grammar rules);
- Procedural memory is like a *process* made up of *regularities* due to the frequent use of language structures leaving traces or *patterns* in the brain.

## Second Lesson: The Complexity/Flexibility of the Brain and Two Neuronal Mechanisms: conscious (*vocabulary*) and Unconscious (*lexicon*)

The brain is a very complex instrument. For instance, contrary to what was once thought, there is not a language "centre." The brain's complexity can be illustrated by examining certain brain scans. These reveal, as one would expect, that visual information does not follow the same pathways as aural information when reaching the brain. Clearly this implies discrete neuronal connections, which means that when a word (for instance, *hammer*) is heard, it does not activate the same neuronal circuits in the brain as it does when read, spoken, or even thought—as brain scans reveal (see Fig. 1-2). This explains why we cannot necessarily recognise a word (such as *table*) in its written form, even if we are able to use it orally. Likewise, even if we can read a word (like *table*), we cannot necessarily spell it.



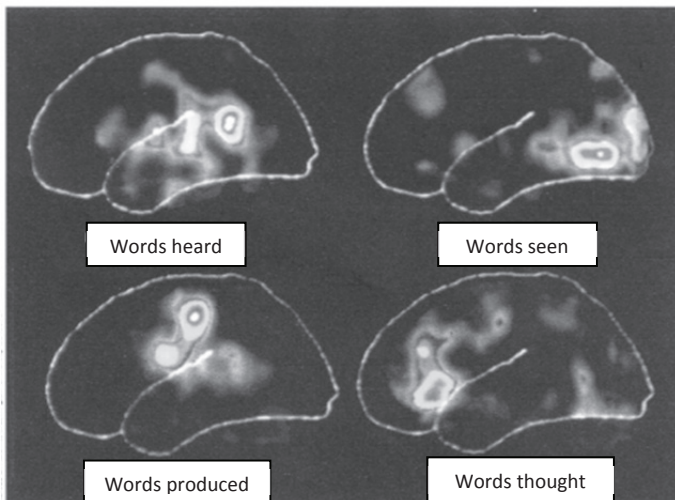*Fig. 1-2—Source: Damasio and Damasio 1997, 13*

It should be mentioned that the brain is not merely complex, but also highly flexible; it is neither frozen in time nor entirely genetically determined. Current research indicates that the brain's structure is continually evolving as people learn and interact with their environment. This is "one of the most fundamental discoveries of modern neuroscience,"

according to Masson (2015a).[7] For instance, thanks to magnetic resonance imaging (MRI) techniques, empirical research has demonstrated that as learners learn to read, their cerebral activity gradually shifts from the front of the brain, the seat of attention, concentration and short-term memory (in the prefrontal cortex[8]), to the top and then the back of the brain (reaching areas that specialise in such learning), due to the automatisms being created: "This has the effect of freeing up the prefrontal cortex, and thus diminishing cognitive overload," Masson explains (2015a).

## Conscious Mechanism (*Vocabulary*) and Unconscious Mechanism *(Lexicon*)

Another aspect of Paradis's distinction between cerebral mechanisms is that drawn between *vocabulary* and *lexicon*. For Paradis, *vocabulary* is made up of all the explicit correspondences between *meaning* and *sound* (or written word), as found in the dictionary (2004, 247). A speaker's conscious knowledge of a word's *meaning-sound* association can be demonstrated by their ability to point to a house when asked to show a house. This therefore represents a piece of *conscious* knowledge, sustained by declarative memory. The object pointed to is the word's *referent*.

By *lexicon*, Paradis means all of the correspondences between *meaning* and *implicit grammatical properties*, as much on the phonological level as the morphological or the syntactic. For instance, in some languages, gender—whether masculine, feminine, or neuter—is one of a noun's grammatical properties. Used in a sentence, a word constitutes a lexical element endowed with its own implicit grammatical properties. This distinction is equally valid for verbs: whether a verb is transitive or intransitive is part of its implicit grammatical properties.

Note that Paradis's distinction is fully in line with a recent trend in cognitive linguistics dedicated to *construction grammar*, which now insists on the syntax-lexicon continuum rather than their separation; this is why one sometimes sees discussions of *word syntax*.[9]

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[7] Steve Masson, founder of the Association pour la recherche en neuroéducation/ Association for Research in Neuroeducation (ARN), which publishes the online scientific journal *Neuroeducation*, is a professor in the Département de didactique/ Education Department of the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQAM).
[8] See Fig. 1-3 below.
[9] To learn more about this trend in cognitive linguistics, see Hoffman and Trousdale (2013). For a synthesis in French of this current, see Mathieu (2003); more recent sources include Legallois and François (2006) and François (2008).

**In summary**, the neurosciences teach us that:

- the brain is highly complex: neuronal connections are discrete, according to the various sensory organs involved (sight, speech, etc.);
- the brain is highly flexible; it is not static;
- according to Paradis, it is important to distinguish a conscious mechanism (*vocabulary*) from an unconscious one (*lexicon*).

## Third Lesson: Focusing on the Meaning or on the Task to Develop Implicit Competence

To ensure that implicit competence is developed, Paradis explains, it is necessary to turn one's attention away from the language form by concentrating either on the meaning of the messages formulated when accomplishing a task or concentrating on the task to be accomplished. What is conscious does not transform itself into something unconscious. Concentrating on language forms (something conscious) means the unconscious has little chance of being developed. Hence the importance of concentrating either on the meaning of the formulated messages or on the task to be accomplished: "attention can then not focus on all relevant parameters (phonology, morphosyntax, the lexicon) at the same time. If attention is selectively concentrated on one of these aspects, the others must necessarily wait" (Paradis 1994, 400).

**In summary**, a third lesson to be drawn from Paradis's linguistic theory is that

- to develop implicit competence, one must concentrate on *something other* than the language form, thus either on the meaning of a message formulated while accomplishing a task or on the task itself.

## Fourth Lesson: The Importance of "Transfer Appropriate Processing" (TAP) and the Limbic System's Role

A further neuroscientific dimension, especially in cognitive psychology, is called "Transfer Appropriate Processing" (TAP). What does this refer to? According to Segalowitz (2010), the brain records data with all their context, whether this is a linguistic context such as a sentence or an extralinguistic context such as gestures, mimicry, etc. In other words, the more the context in which a language is used resembles the context in

which it was learnt, the greater the odds that the user's communication abilities will rise to an adequate level. All the evidence suggests that this is why it is easier to later locate the data in the brain, by referring to the contextual similarities.
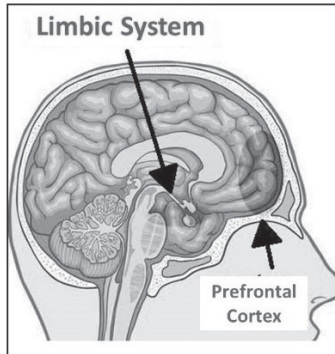


http://www.democritique.org/Cerveau/Syst%C3%A8me_Limbique.svg.xhtml

*Fig. 1-3—Source: Geschwind and Levitsky, 1968*

Moreover, as Paradis notes, neuroscientific research shows that the desire to communicate—in other words, the starting point for any verbal communication—is ruled by the limbic system. Without the desire to communicate, or pleasure in doing so, there is an absence of motivation.

Thus, the usual approach to learning an L2/FL—one centred on knowledge, verb conjugations, and grammatical rules—provides practically no emotional reaction related to pleasure or to the desire to communicate, and the limbic system is not activated. Conversely, when what is communicated is a real, authentic message, the limbic system is much more likely to be activated, increasing the motivation to communicate. It is this motivation that allows the limbic system to be activated.

**In summary**, a fourth lesson the neurosciences teach us is that:
- to develop implicit competence, *learning contexts* must be similar to the *usage contexts*, both orally and in writing (TAP);
- activating the limbic system requires a desire to communicate.

## Fifth Lesson: *Intake* and Individual Cognitive Benefits of Social Interaction

The term *interactions* refers to reciprocal actions between two or more learners during which there is a simple exchange of information. The interactions are qualified as *social* if they take place in a context where one individual's actions can influence the actions of another (as is the case in discussions about completing a project).

Establishing social interaction as a key principle of the NLA is doubly warranted, firstly by Vygotsky's model of the links between social interaction and individual development ([1934] 1985), and secondly by Paradis (2004, 2009) and Nick C. Ellis (2005) and their ideas on the role of social interaction.

### The *Individual* Cognitive Benefits of *Social* Interaction

As is well known, the great Swiss psychologist Piaget showed, in the context of his genetic psychology, that a child's cognitive development involves successive stages, from the concrete operational to the hypothetico-deductive, with various other stages in between ([1963] 1980). This is common knowledge.

What is less well known, however, is what explains the transition from one stage to the next: might it simply be an internal development process, not involving any external influence? In other words, according to Piaget, there would be little effect by social interaction on the cognitive development of an individual. Social development and individual development would evolve in parallel, without influencing each other.



INTERACTION BETWEEN THE INDIVIDUAL AND THE SOCIAL

Piaget (**1896**-1980)    Vygotsky (**1896**-1934)

Photos by Unknown Authors, licensed under CC BY-ND

*Fig. 1-4*
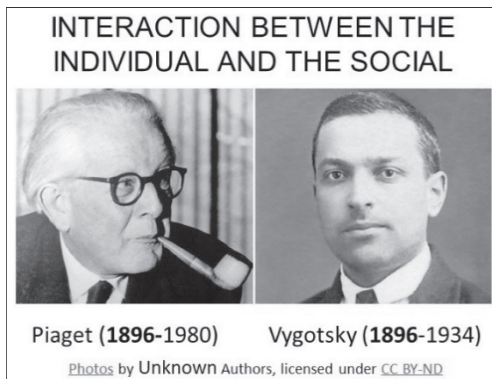
According to Vygotsky ([1934] 1985), however, this is not the case: social interaction, in fact, is what ensures progress from one cognitive stage to the next. Thus, there would seem to be a close link between what happens on the level of social interactions and what happens in the brain of the individual. The direction of the relationship between

the social and the individual would go from the social to the individual. There is even a *causal relationship* between social interaction and individual development.

On discovering this audacious theory of Vygotsky's, we adopted it, for it allowed us to explain how acquiring L2/FL in a school setting could have not only *utilitarian* aims, but also *humanist* ones—and could thereby provide the student with cognitive benefits.

## The Role of Interaction: From *Input* to *Intake*

Another argument in favour of relying on considerable social interaction emerges from the distinction, recognised by most psycholinguists, between *input*, i.e. an interlocutor's linguistic contribution, and *intake* (*what you take in*), i.e. what the listener actually retains and understands from the overall input data uttered by the speaker. In the classroom, the *input* is the same for all learners (that is, everything the teacher says), but *intake* varies from individual to individual.
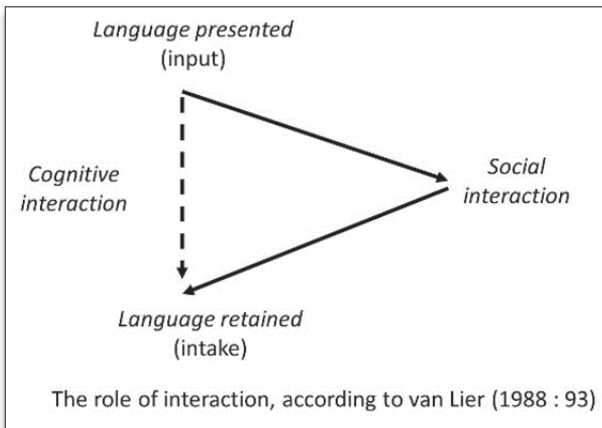


Fig. 1-5

As van Lier suggests (1988), it is probably social interaction that leads to increases in *intake* quantity and improvements in quality, because that is what mediates between *input* (the language introduced) and *intake* (the language retained). This allows us to speak of cognitive interaction between *input* and *intake*.

To get a better grasp of the above, think of a language teacher giving a lecture on a grammatical rule to students who just need to listen and take a few notes. Now imagine a language teacher who, after giving an example of the rule being applied in a written text, asks the students to form small groups and find other instances in the text of a similar construction to the case being studied, and, through induction, derive the rule and its applications. Despite the voluminous language *input* from the teacher, it is probable that *intake* would be much smaller in the first instance (lecturing and using a deductive approach) than the second (demonstrating a practical application and using inductive reasoning).

**In summary**, a fifth lesson from the neurosciences is that
- numerous social interactions are important for improving *intake* quantity and quality.

These, then, are the five lessons drawn from our explorations in neurosciences and which form the NLA's theoretical foundations:
- The absence of a direct connection between declarative memory and procedural memory;
- The complexity/flexibility of the brain and two neuronal mechanisms: the conscious (*vocabulary*) and unconscious (*lexicon*);
- Focusing on the meaning or the task in order to develop implicit competence;
- The importance of "Transfer Appropriate Processing" (TAP) and the limbic system's role;
- *Intake* and the individual cognitive benefits of social interaction.

It is from these neuroscientific lessons that the NLA gradually developed around five fundamental principles, discussed in the next chapter.

# CHAPTER TWO

# THE NLA'S FIVE FUNDAMENTAL PRINCIPLES

This chapter presents and explains the NLA's five fundamental principles, highlighting each one's links to the theoretical bases drawn from the neurosciences, particularly Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (2004). This is followed by a table summarising the links between the principles and their neuroscientific origins, as well as, more specifically, the links between Paradis's theory and the NLA. Finally, we consider neuromyths.

Beginning in the late 1990s, my colleague Joan Netten and I eventually formulated the following five fundamental principles governing the NLA:

1. Two grammars, internal and external;
2. Literacy and the pedagogy of the sentence;
3. Emphasising meaning and using a project-based pedagogy;
4. Authenticity;
5. Social interaction.

## First Principle: Distinguishing between Two Grammars, Internal (Implicit Competence) and External (Explicit Knowledge)[1]

Our approach places very strong emphasis not on ONE single grammar, as is usually done, but on TWO grammars that must be acquired/learnt: an implicit, unconscious grammar (for verbal communication), which we call "internal grammar," and an explicit, conscious grammar (for written language), which we call "external grammar." Given that the internal grammar is a skill that can only call on unconscious, implicit processes, it is sustained by procedural memory. External grammar, meanwhile, consists of a collection of conscious, explicit knowledge and is therefore sustained by declarative memory. In other words, internal grammar is *acquired* but external grammar is *learnt*.

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[1] Though the idea of acquiring/learning "two grammars" is ours rather than Paradis's, it stems from his theory.

This may call to mind Krashen's well-known distinction between *acquisition* and *learning* (1981). However, Krashen's position is that *acquisition* is impossible in a school setting. He holds that (consciously) learning grammar may even be harmful to language acquisition: all that is needed, and which is sufficient in itself, is understanding the language thanks to very rich and varied input (or "comprehensible input") of a slightly higher level than the individual's current language (*input* + 1), without any oral production being required. Though the NLA retains the distinction between (unconscious) *acquisition* and (conscious) *learning*, it appears quite possible, contrary to Krashen's views, and as evidenced by learning assessments (see chapter 7), that one can lead a student not only to *learn*, but also to *acquire* an L2/FL, even in a classroom situation (Germain 1993, 243-258).[2]

## Links between Paradis's Theory and NLA

| Neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (Paradis) | | | Neurolinguistic Approach – NLA | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| | | | | Unconscious oral skills |
| **Procedural memory** | IMPLICIT COMPETENCE (unconscious) | = | INTERNAL GRAMMAR [patterns] | |
| | | | | Unconscious representational skills (reading and writing) |
| | | | | Conscious knowledge in oral situations (e.g. self-correction) |
| **Declarative memory** | EXPLICIT KNOWLEDGE (conscious) | = | EXTERNAL GRAMMAR [rules] | |
| | | | | Conscious representational knowledge (reading and writing) |

*Table 2-1. Links between Paradis's neurolinguistic theory and NLA*

## Internal Grammar and Oral Grammar

As can be seen from the table above, what the NLA calls *internal grammar* is seen as equivalent to Paradis's *implicit competence*. Internal

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[2] For other differences between the NLA and Krashen's theory, see the NLA's fifth principle below.

grammar is therefore made up of frequent statistical regularities and is sustained by the unconscious, procedural memory.

However, as the table also shows, *internal grammar* is not synonymous with *oral grammar*. This is because, for example, all of the unconscious aspects of reading and writing are also features of *internal grammar*. We may conclude that internal grammar is not merely concerned with oral communication because it also includes certain unconscious mechanisms relating to reading and writing. It should be noted that they are not dominant features: the proportion of unconscious skills is greater in oral than in written communication.

### External Grammar and Written Grammar

Conversely, *external grammar* is not synonymous with *grammar for writing*. All conscious aspects of oral communication (as when a speaker self-corrects or a teacher verbally corrects an incorrect form) are also features of *external grammar*. External grammar does not refer only to written communication, given that it also governs some conscious, explicit mechanisms at work in verbal communication. Here again, it should be noted that conscious knowledge is of greater importance in written than in oral communication.

It should also be pointed out that *internal grammar* is not an exact equivalent to Besse and Porquier's *internalised grammar* (1984, 13): the NLA's *internal grammar* is unconscious and made up of frequent patterns rather than of rules. *External grammar*, on the other hand, is conscious in nature, composed of rules or reflective knowledge of a language's regularities. In this sense, it appears to correspond to Besse and Porquier's *elucidated grammar* (1984, 93).

**In summary**, it is necessary to have the learner acquire/learn not ONE but TWO grammars: an internal grammar (in the form of an implicit competence) and an external grammar (in the form of explicit knowledge).

## Second Principle: Literacy (Primacy of Orality) and Pedagogy of the Sentence (Importance of the Lexicon)

Grammatical rules and verb conjugations, which are notable (though not exclusive) features of written language, are *knowledge*, stored in the declarative memory. On the other hand, communication and social interaction, which are notable (though not exclusive) features of oral language, are *skills* stored in the procedural memory.

## Importance of Orality

As brain scans reveal, the neuronal connections related to writing (e.g. vision or the act of writing) are entirely distinct from those related to orality (speech). Moreover, as we have seen, (explicit) knowledge based on writing/reading *cannot transform itself* into the (implicit) skill of communicating orally.

On a pedagogical level, this justifies the importance the NLA places on oral communication, as an *indispensable* tool at every level of teaching aimed at the acquisition of skills.

## Importance of Written Text

However, the importance placed on oral communication does not imply neglect of the text (read or written). As we will see throughout chapter 5, reading and writing also have an important part to play in developing proper written grammar.

To pursue this, one must call on another source, taken from research in the domain of literacy, which allows us to speak of *neuroliteracy*.[3] By *literacy*, we mean "the ability **to use** language and images in rich and varied forms to read, write, listen, speak, view, represent, and think critically about ideas. It enables us to share information, to interact with others, and to make meaning" (Government of Ontario 2004, 5, emphasis ours).

According to this concept of literacy, which is as valid for the L1 as for an L2/FL, it is a *skill* rather than knowledge, given that it is defined as an *ability to use* the language (Government of Newfoundland and Labrador 2002 and Government of Ontario 2004).

In the specific case of acquiring and teaching an L2/FL, what is required is an *approach to literacy specific* to the L2/FL, which cannot be the same for the L2/FL as for the L1. We should specify that

> this presupposes that the learning goals are communication goals. However, this does not exclude the idea that at more advanced levels, one could have broader goals, whether in the cultural realm, or especially in the intercultural realm or even in literature. With the NLA, we're primarily looking at language in a context where the first goal is to learn to communicate and interact socially. (Germain 2012)

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[3] We adopt this term from Allain et al. (2013, 11).

This leads to two complementary considerations: on the one hand, *the importance that must be given to oral communication* even in reading and writing activities, and, on the other hand, *the order for introducing the verbal and the written* (reading and writing).

## Characteristics of an L2/FL-Specific Pedagogy to Literacy: The Importance of Orality

**In an oral activity**, though this may seem obvious, the time spent on developing oral language as well as on the interactions between learners is considerable, since they must be able to build their internal grammar. This is why it is important to encourage them to use full sentences, on a morphosyntactic level. With respect to the number of model structures that they must use and reuse, all the while adapting them to their own life experiences, these must be limited in number. If there are erroneous responses, these must be corrected in such a way that they develop an implicit competence without errors. (Germain and Netten, 2012b)

**In a reading activity**, when learners cannot manage to express their ideas orally, this indicates that they will not be able to understand a written text that expresses the same ideas (Germain and Netten, 2012b). If students do not first make the links between the words of a sentence verbally, in their unconscious grammar, they will tend to read word by word without being able to grasp the overall meaning of the sentence (e.g. *It's—difficult—to—choose—a—coat*). For beginners, reading also means the ability to recognise in writing what they can already say. This is why any classroom reading activity will be preceded by a pre-reading or verbal *contextualisation* phase.

**In a writing activity**, in order to write a sentence such as *I think you're right*, one must first be able to spontaneously say *I think you're right* in one's mind (or unconscious grammar). Otherwise, a non-English-speaking student is likely to copy their L1's grammar and write *I am thinking that you are right*.[4]

This is why, in the appropriation of a L2/FL, it is important to proceed first with a long *contextualisation* phase, which consists of a preparation done orally. This is done before having the learners write a text. In order to carry out this phase, the teacher asks questions so that learners may use the language structures that they have already acquired orally before they use them in their written text (Germain and Netten 2012b).

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[4] This will have important repercussions for how learners' written productions are corrected, as we will see in detail in Chapter 5 (see text box 5.20).

As reading and writing activities must be preceded by a *verbal contextualisation* phase (in pre-reading and pre-writing), oral communication must always precede reading and writing.

## The Literacy Circle

With respect to the order of presentation of speaking, reading and writing, we have developed what we call the "literary circle": any L2/FL development must begin with oral communication, as we have just seen. But in order to close the literacy loop, so to speak, everything must not only begin, but also end with verbal communication.

**Why must reading precede writing?** So that learners may observe how the language is written, in an authentic context, before taking the risk of writing in that language themselves.



**ORAL**
(Internal Grammar)

**READING**
(External Grammar)

**READING**

**WRITING**

According to the NLA, the literacy circle aims to come full circle
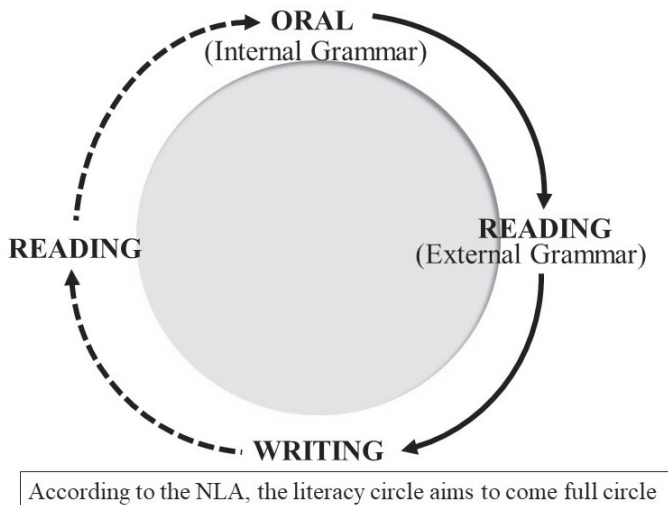
*Fig. 2-1*

To sum up, one may say that the linking is done in the following order: **speaking**, **reading**, then **writing** (focusing consistently on one topic). Then, in order to use the competences acquired in these areas, the learners move on to **reading** the texts written by their partners, then, finally, the teacher and the learners (**orally**) ask questions of the learners who have just read their partners' texts. Thus the circle is closed: everything begins and ends with verbal communication.

Another aspect of Paradis's theory with important pedagogical repercussions on the NLA is the distinction mentioned in the previous chapter between (conscious) *vocabulary* and *lexicon* (unconscious and encompassing its grammatical properties). In order to *acquire* a language's lexical elements, these must be used in a complete sentence, so that the words' grammatical properties can be acquired at the same time. This is why we use a sentence-based pedagogy for oral communication, as we will see in detail in chapter 4.

**In summary,**
- literacy; primacy of verbal communication;
- speaking precedes reading and writing;
- reading precedes writing;
- a sentence-based pedagogy is necessary.

## Third Principle: Emphasising the Meaning of Messages and Use of Project-Based Pedagogy

In reading, the unit of meaning is the paragraph, and in writing, the unit of meaning is the entire text. In the NLA, every section of a teaching unit constitutes a mini-project, so that at the end of the unit, the learners can complete a final project made up of three or four mini-projects. The unit of meaning, in this case, is a mini-project or the final project. It is important for learners to concentrate on the meaning of their exchanges (communicated through language) while accomplishing a task or completing a project, in order to deflect their attention from language forms.

### Project-Based Pedagogy: The Importance of Concentrating on the Meaning of Messages While Completing a Project or Concentrating on the Project Itself

In French Immersion classes in Canada, what is mostly emphasised is the content of the subject being taught. Attention is thus turned away from language forms. In the NLA, emphasis is placed on the messages uttered while completing projects or on the projects themselves. When involving the class in a collective project, the teacher makes sure not to assign a series of disjointed activities bereft of any connections between them. This is why each of the NLA's teaching units uses a graduated series of mini-projects (three or four, depending on the topic) culminating in a final

project. This way, it is possible to have learners use and reuse, in similar contexts, the various language structures that they have just used, thereby creating *patterns* or "pathways" in their brains, that is, as we have seen, in their internal grammar.

These, then, are our reasons for turning to project-based pedagogy as early as 1998 (a few years before it became popular in the CEFR, 2001).

## Project-Based Pedagogy and Intensity

At this point, it is important to insist on the link between adopting a project-based pedagogy and intensity. By *intensity*, we mean a clustering of a few periods into a scheduled block of hours, affording learners sufficient time to use newly acquired language structures with some frequency and to complete their projects. As attested by our numerous experiences in Canadian classrooms, when beginning to teach an L2/FL to young students (10 or 11 years old), it is desirable not only to have several consecutive periods available, but also to increase the number of hours dedicated to language learning.

Even in a non-intensive context, it is possible to apply the NLA, so long as one condition is met. Schedules must be arranged to allow for a minimum of either a single one-and-a-half-hour period or two consecutive periods dedicated to teaching the L2/FL, rather than, for example, a single 45-minute or one-hour period each day or evening. In other words, the "drip-feed" method is not highly recommended. Without a minimal level of intensity, it is difficult for learners to develop and maintain their internal grammar, which is necessary for spontaneous communication, just as it would be essentially impossible for them to complete all the necessary steps to finish their projects in class.
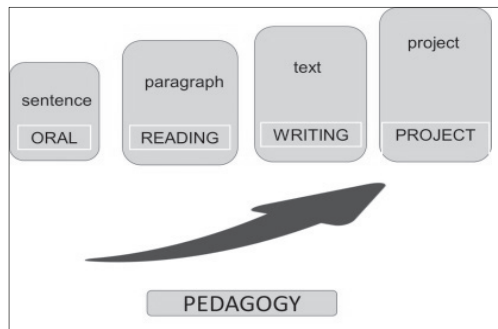


*Fig. 2-2*

**In summary**, the NLA's third principle of concentrating on meaning implies a gradual progression from sentence (when speaking) to paragraph (when reading) and thence to complete text (when writing), leading to a final project—as illustrated in Fig. 2-2.

## Fourth Principle: TAP and Motivation: Authenticity of (Oral) Communication and the (Written) Document

Activating the limbic system is what increases the motivation to communicate in the L2/FL. As Paradis writes, "it is precisely this limbic dimension that has been missing in all language teaching methods" (1994, 407). It is in order to ensure that the limbic system is activated that the NLA places such great importance on the authenticity of communication.

It should be noted that the use of *authentic documents* became widespread in the mid-1970s in the context of the communicative approach then being developed. For our part, while recognising the importance of continuing to use authentic documents in reading activities, as we do, we also believe that it is essential to focus first and foremost on *authentic communication*.

In the qualitative part of our original research into Intensive French (IF), those who were questioned, including school administrators, parents and teachers, mentioned other positive repercussions of IF, particularly an increased degree of confidence and self-esteem. It was reported that shy students finally dared to speak, with ease, in front of other students in the class. They behaved as if they already knew French (Germain and Netten, 2004b).

In these circumstances, it seems appropriate to offer the following hypothesis: the concept of motivation, with which all language teachers are very familiar, may not be a primary concept, but a secondary one, a by-product of self-esteem, itself derived from the desire to communicate, so long as this desire is satisfied.

### Authenticity vs. Simulation and Role-play

By definition, simulation and role-play run counter to our principle of authenticity. We therefore do not recommend the use of these techniques, a major characteristic of the 1970s communicative approach. For instance, we would never ask two students to play the roles of *waiter* and *customer* in a restaurant—because it is very unlikely that the student playing the waiter will ever actually need to use that sort of language in a real restaurant.

In the same vein, we refuse to make students repeat or *collectively* produce a sentence like *For lunch, I had soup*, because it is NOT TRUE for the majority of students. On the other hand, when it is a matter of asking a question, a collective formulation is appropriate, because it is true for everyone—e.g. *What did you have for lunch?* As another example: we will never have a learner say *I go to the library every day* when it is NOT TRUE, that is to say, not authentic for the learner. We do not recommend using this sort of *school-based*, prefabricated sentence, composed simply so that learners can "practice" speaking.

In the NLA, *authentic* is synonymous with what is TRUE, what is real for the person speaking. There is no authenticity in the absence of a close connection with the life experiences of the learner (and of the teacher, for that matter). Learners are encouraged to speak about their jobs, their families, their daily activities, and are asked to give their personal opinions about current events, and so on.

## Focusing on Language Forms: Demotivation

When language classes focus on language forms, through controlled exercises or memorising dialogues, only the declarative memory is called into play. It is therefore difficult to develop the ability to communicate with a certain degree of spontaneity. Conversely, first using the language in authentic communication situations linked to learners' life experiences and interests increases the chances of giving them a genuine desire to communicate and interact on their part, even in a classroom setting. Transfer appropriate processing (TAP) is therefore another reason why the concept of authenticity is so fundamental to the NLA.

**In summary**, in order to ensure that learners are strongly motivated, via an increase in self-esteem, it is important to maintain their desire to communicate, i.e. to activate their limbic system by having them speak of what is *authentic* or real for them.

## Fifth Principle: Social Interaction

Interactions, particularly social interactions, are at the heart of our pedagogical activities, insofar as all teaching units lead to the completion of a relatively important project following the completion of several mini-projects. Concentrating on the meaning while completing group projects in small teams allows for many language exchanges that are liable to

influence the actions of others. It is in this sense that they are interactions of a *social* nature.

## Input: A Necessary but Insufficient Condition

Social interaction is one of the cornerstones of the NLA—and not only because social interactions were fashionable when it was developed. In fact, on this level, Vygotsky's interfunctional model of communication struck us as the most promising approach. Indeed, it is possible to assume from this that it is through social interaction that frequent neuronal connections will be able to anchor themselves, so to speak, in the brain (see also Paradis 1994, 12).

According to Krashen (1981), all *input* must be both varied and rich. In the NLA, the opposite is true, since input consists of a very limited number of model sentences (one or two). As well, in the NLA, *output* is considered essential in the acquisition of the language. *Input* is thus a condition that, while being necessary, is not at all sufficient, as Swain (1985) specifies, but for other reasons.

As well, in the approach that Krashen calls "natural," correction of errors is not a necessity. In the NLA, on the other hand, all errors must be corrected so that the implicit competence of learners more closely resembles that of the target language (Germain and Netten, 2014).

**In summary,** *input* is a necessary but insufficient condition; in social interactions, *output* is essential.

## Links between the NLA and its Sources

Following this discussion, it seems appropriate to put these facts together in order to better illustrate the links between the NLA's principles and its neuroscientific sources.

| Authors | Neuroscientific Theoretical Foundations | FIVE NLA PRINCIPLES |
|---|---|---|
| Paradis and N. C. Ellis | • Distinction between implicit competence/explicit knowledge: two memories <br> • No direct connection between the two and no transformation of one into the other <br> • Developing implicit competences: a process and regularities | 1. Distinguishing two grammars, internal (implicit competence) and external (explicit knowledge) |
| Paradis | • The brain's complexity and flexibility: discrete neuronal connections depending on the various sensory organs (eyes, speech…) <br> • Conscious (*vocabulary*) and unconscious (*lexicon*) mechanisms | 2. Literacy (prioritising of orality) and pedagogy of the sentence (importance of the *lexicon*) |
| Paradis and N. C. Ellis | • Concentration on meaning or on the task to develop an implicit competence | 3. Emphasising the meaning of messages and use of project-based pedagogy |
| Paradis and Segalowitz | • Transfer appropriate processing (TAP) <br> • Limbic system participation required for motivation and successful communication | 4. TAP and motivation: authenticity of <br> • communication (verbal) <br> • the document (written) |
| Vygotsky, Paradis, and N. C. Ellis | • Influence of social interactions on individual development <br> • From *input* to *intake* | 5. Social interaction |

*Table 2-2. Links between the NLA's five principles and their neuroscientific sources*

# The NLA and Neuromyths

As we have just seen, the five principles that govern the NLA are founded on the neurosciences. It seems appropriate therefore to situate the preceding remarks in the broader context of neuroeducation.

## The NLA and Neuroeducation

Generally speaking, *neuroeducation* refers to the study of brain mechanisms that are involved in education. The aim is thus to improve teaching thanks to a better understanding of how the brain works. Neuroeducation is a discipline considered likely to bring to light new aspects of learning. This is what is revealed in an important 2007 European work entitled *Comprendre le cerveau: naissance d'une science de l'apprentissage* (*Understanding the Brain: Birth of a Science of Learning* [CÉRI: Centre d'études et de recherches internationales 2007]). The following year, an article entitled "Naissance de la neurodidactique" ("Birth of Neurodidactics") appeared in the journal *Le Français dans le monde* (Huc and Smith 2008). Since then, the term *neurodidactics of languages* has become prevalent in discussions that deal with second-language education.

We can therefore say that the NLA falls under the broad umbrella of the recent *neurodidactics of language*, which is itself an element of *neuroeducation* overall. What is interesting to note is that having recourse to the neurodidactics of languages inevitably leads one to rethink most of the models proposed in the past for organising the major concepts that prevail in language teaching pedagogy, as we will see in the next chapter (under "Revised Conceptual Framework for Language Teaching").

For the moment, we shall restrict ourselves to trustworthy, empirically verified results drawn from brain studies concerning language, seeking to avoid the all-too-easy trap of *neuromyths*.

## The Four Most Common Educational Neuromyths

The term *neuromyth* was coined in 1980 and is used to define mistaken beliefs about how the brain functions when it comes to learning. In order to identify neuromyths in the educational field, Dekker et al. (2012) and Howard-Jones (quoted in Masson 2015b) carried out surveys on the subject among teachers in various countries. The four most common neuromyths in education are, in order of importance:

- Some learning styles suit certain people, but not others;
- Some people are left-brain dominant, and vice versa;
- Coordination exercises boost interaction between the brain's two hemispheres;
- We use barely 10% of our brains.

According to Masson—one of the foremost contemporary experts in neuroeducation—these all represent mistaken beliefs about how the brain functions in relation to learning (2015a). For instance, "neuroscientific research has not yet been able to demonstrate that auditory, visual or kinaesthetic learners exist. It would be wiser to combine different ways of learning."

Masson also specifies that "a person is never totally logical or totally creative. It is true that certain brain regions develop more quickly in some people, but that has nothing to do with a left/right opposition in the brain."

Still according to Masson, the third example is also a neuromyth, since "brief exercises in motor coordination do not lead to a boost in learning, nor in cognitive function, nor in communication between the brain's hemispheres."

As for the percentage of our brain use, "it's an urban myth. Research shows that all the regions of the brain perform cognitive functions" (Masson 2015a).

In this light, one might also wonder what happens to *mirror neurons*. It is entirely possible that what some researchers designate as "mirror neurons" do indeed make it easier to grasp the link between language and gesture or between language and emotion. However, as these interesting hypotheses have only appeared fairly recently, that is to say well after we developed the NLA, they could not be taken into account in our theoretical foundations. Even today, "no widely accepted neural or computational models have been put forward to describe how mirror neuron activity supports cognitive functions. The subject of mirror neurons continues to generate intense debate" (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mirror_neuron, accessed September 20, 2018). Before deducing pedagogical implications from the theory, we prefer to wait for greater certainty about mirror neurons' possible role in language learning.

It is important to emphasise that everything relating to the NLA's foundations is drawn from the most stable and trustworthy empirical data emerging from research in neuroeducation over the last twenty years, particularly Paradis's 1994 article on neurolinguistics.

## The Originality of the NLA

To sum up, the first two principles (two grammars, internal and external; literacy and sentence pedagogy), as well as the fourth one (authenticity), constitute the NLA's three main original contributions, as compared to any other approach (for more on this, see next chapter).

To my knowledge, there does not currently exist any other approach that is based on theoretical foundations that flow simultaneously from the neurosciences, from an L2/FL-specific concept of literacy pedagogy, and from the concept of authenticity. It is in this sense that, together, the three principles mentioned above form the NLA's three most original characteristics.

The remaining two principles (emphasising meaning and the use of a project-based pedagogy; social interaction), meanwhile, are not unique to the NLA and can be found to various degrees in a number of other applications. However, they are not generally associated with the three other principles.[5]

**In summary**, the NLA's five principles may be formulated as follows:
1. Distinguishing between **two grammars, internal and external** (implicit competence and explicit knowledge);
2. **Literacy** (importance of orality) and **pedagogy of the sentence** (importance of the *lexicon*);
3. **Emphasising the meaning** of messages during project completion (**project-based pedagogy**);
4. TAP and motivation: **authenticity** of (oral) communication and the (written) document;
5. **Social interaction**.

---

[5] As will be seen in the rest of this work, the NLA includes a number of other important characteristics, namely: an approach extensively tested empirically among children, adolescents, and adults; original strategies for teaching speaking, reading, and writing; and, in the version of the NLA (in preparation) adapted for adult learners, an understanding of culture and intercultural awareness moving from the known to the unknown by opening up to the worldwide francophone community via original reading texts involving members of the same family throughout the teaching units; etc.

# CHAPTER THREE

# THE NLA AND OTHER APPROACHES

This chapter shows how the NLA is sometimes similar to and sometimes distinct from the *action-oriented approach* that is strongly recommended in the *Common European Framework of Reference for Languages* (CEFR, 2001), as well as some other pedagogical approaches. With respect to the original teaching strategies deriving directly from the way learners appropriate (acquire and learn) an L2/FL, they will be discussed in order in the second part, which is specifically dedicated to the pedagogical application of the NLA, developed in chapters 4 and 5.

## The "Grammatical Paradox"

An important argument that demonstrates the soundness of Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (2004) is that it is, to my knowledge, the only theory allowing us to account for a phenomenon, familiar to all language teachers, that I call the "grammatical paradox." What is this?

It is common knowledge that some people do not know the rules of a language, but can still speak it, while for others, the exact opposite is true: they know the rules of a language (L2/FL), but cannot speak it.

In the first case, we immediately think of children who already master a great part of their L1 before starting school, or of bilingual or even multilingual persons who are functionally illiterate. The opposite case immediately brings to mind those numerous L2/FL learners who, in a school setting, achieve high marks in written exams, but are incapable of communicating orally when placed in an authentic communication situation. This presents a paradox.

Those who support the idea of a direct connection, or even of a possible *transformation*, between two discrete neuronal systems cannot adequately account for this "grammatical paradox." If "knowledge proceduralisation" were indeed an existing phenomenon, learners who are successful at exams on language knowledge should be able to

communicate with at least some spontaneity, by "proceduralising their knowledge." But this is not at all the case.[1]
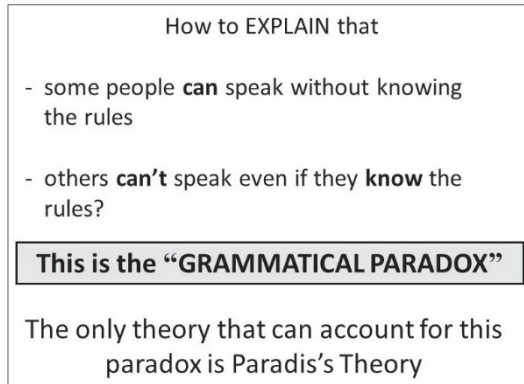


*Fig. 3-1*

Paradis's theory stands alone in accounting for the "grammatical paradox" by explaining that not only is there no direct connection between declarative and procedural memory, there is also no *transformation* of one into the other. Otherwise, one would merely need to possess knowledge of a language for this knowledge to turn into communicative skills in that language, and vice versa, which, as we know, is not what occurs.

When a theory can explain a phenomenon that other competing or rival theories cannot, this signifies that it possesses either a greater level of precision or greater import than the others. In other words, to use the term favoured by certain epistemologists, it is a more "powerful" theory than the others (Kuhn [1962] 2012). This is an important argument in favour of the NLA's core theory, namely Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism. It is a solid, far-reaching theory.

## Reassessing Language Teaching's General Reference Models

Adopting Paradis's theory as the essential foundation for the NLA forced me to partially reassess the general reference model for language teaching

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[1] Let me emphasise again, as I did in the previous chapter, that this is the reason that the NLA never refers to "knowledge proceduralisation" or even to "know-how," as this would imply that knowledge can be transformed into skills.

that, until then, I had used in my published writings. To better explain what this entails, I will here very briefly present some theoretical frameworks or models of language teaching which have marked my personal development to this day (for an overview of how my thinking has changed, see Germain 2016b).

As is well-known, one of the first proposed models for organising the concepts underlying all teaching is Chevallard's famous 1984 *didactic triangle*, which highlights three familiar poles: *knowledge*, *students* and *teacher*.
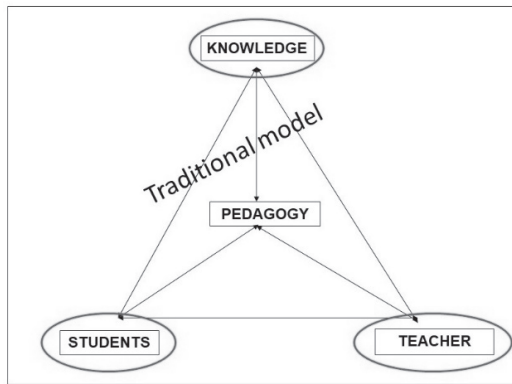


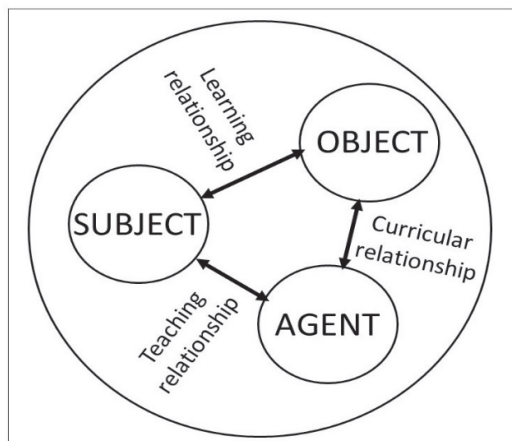*Fig. 3-2—Chevallard's didactic triangle*



*Fig. 3-3—Legendre's SOMA model (1988)*

A few years later, Legendre ([1988] [1993] 2005) proposed his SOMA (subject-object-milieu-agent) model, which had the advantage of focusing as much on the relationships between each pole as on the poles themselves, while Chevallard's triangle was restricted to the latter. This led me to use the SOMA model, lightly adapted for L2/FL, when I wrote my work on the history of language teaching (Germain 1993).

At a later stage, I developed some intermediate stages that it would be inappropriate to deal with here (see Germain and Netten 2010b and 2011b). Currently (2017), the as-yet-unpublished revised conceptual framework or model for language teaching I use is the following:
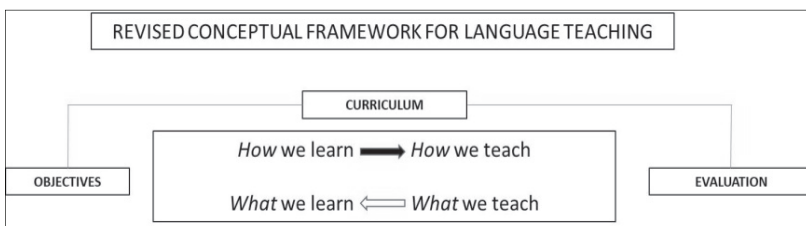


*Fig. 3-4—Source: Germain 2017*

It is admittedly a reductive framework, as is any conceptual framework or model, but it presents the great advantage of simplicity (rather than complexity).[2] It seems to be relatively instructive to re-examine the current situation of language teaching in light, quite simply, of *how we learn*, thought of as the decisive variable which determines *how we teach* and, partly, *what we teach*. As for *what we learn*, when it comes down to it, this is to a large extent determined at once by *how we teach* and *what we teach*. Naturally, however, not all of *what we teach* is learnt, and *what we learn* can come from other external sources (what is known as the *hidden curriculum*, illustrated by the white arrow).

Moreover, one cannot neglect the importance of the two areas that frame the nucleus of language teaching, so to speak: upstream, *the objectives*, and downstream, *the evaluation*—which directs us towards one of the major characteristics of the CEFR.

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[2] I do not think it would be useful here to call on the concept of "complex pedagogy," as Puren (1998) proposes. Reality is extremely complex, but its study is best served by using abstract models—as is the case for the models used by linguistics to study a reality just as complex as language teaching, if not more so: language itself. What would linguistics have gained from a concept of "complex linguistics"?

# The NLA and the CEFR's Action-Oriented Approach: A Comparison

From the outset, on the practical level, one of the major novel features of the CEFR is its specification of proficiency levels for learning levels, from A1 to C2. This provides a common departure point from which to develop programmes, exams, etc., based on incrementally increasing levels of difficulty in terms of goals and content as well as on an understanding of the learner not only as a simple communicator but also as a social actor. This explains why almost all programme and exam developers as well as essentially all authors of textbooks and teaching materials constantly have recourse to it.

On the theoretical level, in order to position the NLA alongside the action-oriented approach mentioned in the CEFR (2001), I will begin by summarising what are, to my mind, the three major novel features of the *European Framework*, before making a few comments on each and showing, in each case, what differentiates it from the NLA.

## The CEFR's General Guidelines—Plurilingual and Pluricultural Competences

On the theoretical level, the CEFR's greatest innovation is undoubtedly its concept—from not only an educational perspective, but also a political one of European unity—that the communicative competences a plurilingual individual possesses do not form a collection of distinct and separate abilities, but rather a sort of unique common repertoire.

From the very first pages of the text, the authors are careful to specify the document's resolutely political orientation:

> You will see that the Council is concerned to improve the quality of communication among Europeans of different language and cultural backgrounds. This is because better communication leads to freer mobility and more direct contact, which in turn leads to better understanding and closer co-operation. […] In this way the work contributes to the promotion of democratic citizenship (Council of Europe 2001, "Notes for the User," n.p.).[3]

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[3] It should be noted that in Canada, where the NLA was first developed under the name of Intensive French, linguistic and cultural politics are not the same as in Europe. The Canadian federal government adopted a law specifying its official policy on bilingualism (French and English) in 1969, and, shortly after, on multiculturalism (1971).

Later, discussing the document's more specifically linguistic dimension, the authors spell out their fundamental presupposition: "a given individual does not have a collection of distinct and separate competences to communicate depending on the languages he/she knows, but rather a plurilingual and pluricultural competence encompassing the full range of the languages available to him/her" (Council of Europe 2001, 168).[4]

## Comment

Setting aside the document's resolutely "political" orientation (likely aimed at countering the growing influence of English), let us concentrate on the fundamental assumption outlined above, which leads to the following observation: with only a few exceptions, L2/FLs are most often consciously learnt as *knowledge* in school or institutional settings, through grammatical rules and verb conjugations that call foremost on the declarative rather than the procedural memory. This is completely different from the mechanism whereby the L1 develops, which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, calls mainly on procedural memory.

In this sort of situation, it is therefore difficult to accept the hypothesis of a single language-learning system, as the CEFR suggests. In that case, one would have to speak of a dual system, since "the two languages would be represented differently in the brain and would function like independent systems" (Germain 2015a, 146). Yet the authors of the CEFR quite rightly rejected this hypothesis from the start, as it is seen as outdated and regressive.

In the circumstances, the only hypothesis the CEFR advances (that of a unique, common repertoire) only appears acceptable in certain cases: when the L1 is acquired in tandem with the L2 or FL in a so-called "natural" environment or in an institutional setting *as a skill*. The hypothesis is therefore quite insufficient. To account for the existing situation that all language teachers are familiar with (learning in a school or institutional setting), another hypothesis is certainly required.

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[4] A similar concept was formulated over a decade before the publication of the CEFR in an article by Grosjean entitled "Beware, Neurolinguists: A Bilingual Person is not the Sum of Two Monolinguals in One Single Person" (1968). In scarcely two lines, this title ably sums up the position underlying the CEFR.

## In the NLA—A Modular Approach

The hypothesis of a plurilingual and pluricultural competence thus seems to explain in an acceptable manner cases where an individual's L2 and other foreign languages have been *acquired* in similar conditions to the L1, i.e. by calling first and foremost on procedural memory.

But in order to also account for cases where the L2 or other foreign languages are *learnt*, as is most often the case in school or institutional settings, and thus calling overwhelmingly on declarative memory, it is important to consider a different hypothesis from that of a unique repertoire. This is the three-system hypothesis, in the context of, for example, a modular approach such as the one advocated by Paradis: the "Three-Store Hypothesis" (1997, 2004). According to this hypothesis, two languages (forming two different "stores") are related to a same (third) store "containing experiential and conceptual information" (Paradis 1997, 18).

According to this hypothesis of a modular approach (or "Three-Store Hypothesis"),

> bilingual persons have available to them two subsets of neuronal connections for each of the two languages, which seem to operate within the same cognitive system […] These linguistic subsets are independent but linked, not only within a same language but also between language and another. (Germain 2015a, 147-148)

The Three-Store Hypothesis, adds Paradis,

> considers both words and lexical forms (phonological form and syntactic properties) as components of lexical representation, together with a third, conceptual system of representations independent of language. Two lexicons are therefore postulated, which are necessarily distinct, as demonstrated by the numerous cases of selective damage and non-parallel recovery of languages among bilingual aphasic individuals […] We therefore postulate two lexicons, one for each language, as well as a single conceptual system, no matter the number of languages. (Paradis 1997, 19)

## The CEFR's Privileging of an Action-Oriented Approach

The CEFR's other great innovation is, of course, its "action-oriented approach," which now serves as the basis for the majority of L2/FL textbooks on the market. As the approach focuses on considering the user and the learner of any language as a social *actor* rather than simply as a *communicator*, the "viewpoint" adopted is defined as "action-oriented":

The approach adopted here, generally speaking, is an action-oriented one in so far as it views users and learners of a language primarily as 'social agents', i.e. members of society who have tasks (not exclusively language-related) to accomplish in a given set of circumstances, in a specific environment and within a particular field of action. While acts of speech occur within language activities, these activities form part of a wider social context, which alone is able to give them their full meaning. (Council of Europe 2001, 9)

## Comment 1

Advocating for a specific "approach" strikes me as contradicting the objectives as they are frequently stated in the CEFR. With this in mind, here are some quotations asserting the document's neutral position:

- "One thing should be made clear right away. We have NOT set out to tell practitioners what to do, or how to do it. We are raising questions, not answering them. It is not the function of the Common European Framework to lay down the objectives that users should pursue or the methods they should employ" (CEFR, "Notes for the User," n.p.).
- "To encourage practitioners of all kinds in the language field, including language learners themselves, to reflect on such questions" (Council of Europe 2001, "Notes for the User," n.p.).
- "[…] it is not the function of the Framework to promote one particular language teaching methodology, but instead to present options" (142).

This suggests an *inconsistency* between the *Framework*'s stated goal (to remain neutral) and the very idea of advocating for a specific approach: the *action-oriented approach* (as well as, on the political level, "pluralism and pluriculturalism").

## Comment 2

It seems to me appropriate to note that political rather than teaching or pedagogical considerations seem to have guided the choices made by the authors of this major document. Looking at the conceptual framework outlined above, it is clear that, generally speaking, the *what to learn* aspect and its corollary *what to teach* contain few innovations, other than perhaps a broadening of perspectives: the content itself falls appreciably within the tradition of previous studies.

Indeed, if one quickly glances at the nature of European studies on language, one notes that every 25 years or so, government authorities call on current experts to develop an orientation document. Thus, the mid-1950s saw the publication of *L'Élaboration du français fondamental* (Gougenheim et al. [1956] 1964) for teaching French to non-native learners, under the aegis of France's Ministry of Education. A generation later came the book *Un Niveau-seuil: systèmes d'apprentissage des langues vivantes par les adultes* (Coste et al. 1976) (*A Threshold Level: Systems for the Learning of Living Languages by Adults*), published by the Council of Europe. Then, early in 2000, came the CEFR.

What is striking is the direct line of descent between the content of the 1975-76 text and that of the CEFR, a quarter of a century later, in terms of *what to learn* and *what to teach*—in other words, the content of the learning and teaching.
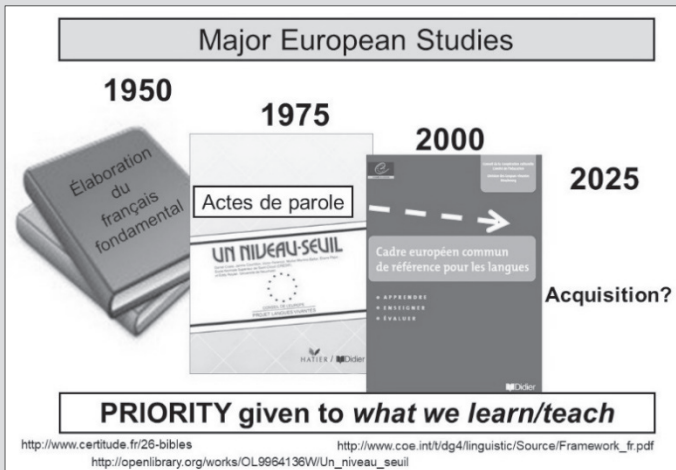


*Fig. 3-5*

True, emphasis has been placed on the shift to a broader concept of the learner as a social actor, and there is a very important specification that evaluation criteria should be in line with the objectives mentioned. In terms of content, however, though broadened in scope, it is 1975's tradition of "speech acts" that predominates.

If the European tendency continues in this vein, i.e. if a major study of languages is commissioned every 25 years or so, can we hope that the 2025 report will focus in depth on the acquisition mechanisms for an L2/FL, in line

with teaching strategies? In other words, it is to be hoped that the *how we teach* will finally be harmonised with the *how we learn* (and, of course, *what we learn*).

Where we might have expected to find a harmonisation between the concept of the learner as a social actor and the way in which languages are taught, we unfortunately find only a reference to tradition. Though the sixth chapter is titled "Language Learning and Teaching," it contributes very little to match the *what we learn/what we teach* to the *how we teach*. Despite its title, the chapter makes no mention of the debates which, when the CEFR was published, had been going on for two decades among language "acquisitionists." As a result, there is no major evolution in this area. Once again, therefore, an opportunity to improve the *how we teach* side of the equation—or at least to reconcile it with a coherent understanding of how an L2/FL is acquired—was missed.

## Comment 3

Finally, a third thing to note about the *action-oriented approach* is its lack of a definition of *literacy*.[5] There is no solid theoretical foundation in the CEFR to justify the learning/teaching order for basic competences in an L2/FL: written comprehension, written production, oral production and oral comprehension. Curiously, the concept of *literacy* was already a subject of discussion among specialists in language teaching when the CEFR was written, and yet it is nowhere to be found.

## In the NLA—"What We Learn"

On this level, the fact that the NLA's teaching units are not designed on the basis of *speech acts* allows the focus to be on the learners rather than concentrating on the linguistic elements to be learnt. When writing the Canadian units made available to French-language teachers, my colleague and I would bring together three or four experienced FSL teachers for a given school level. For example, for the Grade 5 units, we brought together teachers with many years of experience of teaching French (as an L2/FL) at that level and asked them what, in their opinion, would be most likely to *interest* students of this age—for instance, *What do they like to talk about among themselves?* We developed a series of teaching units with *different* teams of FSL teachers for each school level.

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[5] For a brief definition of this concept, see chapter 1 note 1.

The NLA depends not only on learners' interests, but also on their life experience. Why? Because it seemed to us that if we wanted to have people speak, all that was needed was to have them talk of themselves. This is an elementary principle everyone knows, but which may have been forgotten in some prevailing modern pedagogical approaches.

## The CEFR and the Concept of "Tasks"

A third important element in the CEFR is its concept of "tasks": "We speak of 'tasks' in so far as the actions are performed by one or more individuals strategically using their own specific competences to achieve a given result" (Council of Europe 2001, 9).

> A *task* is defined as any purposeful action considered by an individual as necessary in order to achieve a given result in the context of a problem to be solved, an obligation to fulfil or an objective to be achieved. This definition would cover a wide range of actions such as moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract, playing a game of cards, ordering a meal in a restaurant, translating a foreign language text or preparing a class newspaper through group work. (Council of Europe 2001, 10)

### Comment

As I mentioned in an interview, "the concept of tasks is interesting, but it would have been even more so had it been founded on acquisition, in order to show that when we concentrate on the meaning of a message associated with a task, we forget about language" (Germain 2012).

Moreover, it must be agreed that in their first language and culture, learners already possess—to use the CEFR's wording—the abilities for "moving a wardrobe, writing a book, obtaining certain conditions in the negotiation of a contract" (16). How is this type of task specific to acquiring an L2/FL?

## In the NLA—The Concept of "Project" and the Renewal of Teaching Strategies

In order to pique learners' interest while at the same time having them meet certain cognitive challenges, we chose to use a project-based pedagogy (based on one of our foundational principles, as seen in chapter 2) which offered a further source of interest for learners: namely, the possibility of a tangible display of learners' cooperative achievement.

"Project" and "task" must be seen in this context, as the terms do not have quite the same meaning for the CEFR and for the NLA. In the NLA, completing a project is necessarily a linguistic activity, whether of an oral or written (reading and/or writing) nature, and regularly makes use of technology available to the learners. Moreover, every project is an activity of a certain import: *playing a game of cards*, for example, as mentioned in the CEFR, would be nothing more than an enjoyable activity in an NLA classroom. It would not even be a mini-project, let alone a teaching unit's final project.

Here is an example of an NLA final project, taken from *The Inventions* unit, and the three mini-projects that have to be completed first, in sequence, in order to arrive at the final product (Germain and Netten, 2011f):

| | |
|---|---|
| **Final Project:** | *In groups, present an invention that they have created, with the help of various supports: its use, positive impacts and explanation of how negative impacts have been limited.* |
| **Mini-project 1:** | *Present the results of their group's research on an important historical invention (prior to the year 2000) to show its use and its necessity nowadays.* |
| **Mini-project 2:** | *Through a group brain-storming session, prepare a list of recent inventions, outlining recurring impacts, both positive and negative.* |
| **Mini-project 3:** | *Debate the potential impacts of future new technologies.* |

At more advanced levels, debates are initiated on current events such as pollution, the environment, advertising, social responsibility, and so on. But at this level, each unit always starts from the teacher's personal stance on the topic, their ideas and life experience. This approach allows the teacher's expressed viewpoint to serve as a linguistic model. Following this, the learners, using the model to which they have been exposed, share their own views, opinions or knowledge of the subject, so that by the end of the teaching unit, they can complete a concrete, meticulously prepared final project built, like scaffolding, on two, three, sometimes four collaborative mini-projects.

As can be seen, in our approach all tasks are necessarily linguistic ones. To quote an FSL teacher's testimonial:

The last, but in no way the least essential element is to consider language as a tool for communicating while carrying out a project. Language is not

an end in itself, and as Paradis notes (2004, 2009), one cannot learn a language except by concentrating on the meaning of messages while doing something else. For example, designing a photography exhibit will encourage students to talk about the choice of photos to show the public. These projects are carried out in groups, and they are developed from A to Z. Thus, learners choose the photos, write the captions, find the exhibit space, calculate the budget and buy the materials, and do all this in French. (Ricordel 2012, 9)

These students are able to use French, because in the numerous preceding activities, they have been meticulously prepared on the linguistic level: "Students work on projects such as drawing up their family trees, which they will present to the other members of the class, or give oral presentations on unjust situations in the world and propose solutions to attempt to eliminate them" (Ricordel 2012, 9).

## "How We Teach"

Turning now to the "how we teach" dimension, we will recall that historically, the mid-1970s saw the advent of the communicative approach which might suggest a contribution to renewing *how we teach*. This did not in fact occur, due to the fact that changes in ways of teaching were not aligned with changes in teaching objectives and content, as we have just seen. The majority of L2/FL researchers at the time, particularly in Europe, tended to believe—as often remains the case—that all that is needed to improve learning is to modify the goals or the content to be taught. *What we learn/teach* was therefore modified (with "speech acts" becoming popular) but *how we teach* remained "structural," i.e. focused more on language forms than on the message.[6]

When we began to design IF at the end of the 1990s, it quickly became evident that renewing teaching strategies would necessarily entail a major study of research on the ways one can acquire an L2/FL.

We derived our teaching strategies, then, from what the neurosciences teach us about L2/FL acquisition and learning mechanisms. Here too,

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[6] This is, for that matter, the reason why an informal discussion group of a dozen L2 teachers was founded in Québec at this time: the *Centre d'étude sur la pédagogie de la communication en langues secondes* (Centre for the Study of Second-languages Communication Pedagogy) or CEPCEL (of which I was a founding member and the first chairman). In 1986, the CEPCEL published the work *Propos sur la **pédagogie de la communication** en langues secondes* (*Trends in Second-Language **Communication Pedagogy***) (Boucher, Duplantie and LeBlanc 1986/1988).

progress was slow. From the moment our research results began to indicate that learning had to start with the development of oral language, not as *knowledge* but as the *ability to communicate*, practically everything had to be created from scratch.

The crucial question, which for a long time was at the core of our deliberations, was therefore that of designing a way to develop the ability to communicate and interact without making a detour through explicit knowledge. Every one of the teaching models available to us took linguistic knowledge (vocabulary, grammatical rules, verb conjugations) as its starting point, in the hope that through the use of exercises, most often written ones, students would eventually succeed in combining all this knowledge in order to communicate orally at the end of the lesson with a certain level of spontaneity, once placed in "communicative situations."

Given that the core of Paradis's theory entailed proceeding in exactly the opposite direction from these common practices, we had to undertake multiple trials in classrooms over the course of several years before developing a set of multistage teaching strategies, as will be seen in the following chapters.

## Comparison with Some Other Teaching Approaches

### Freinet's Pedagogy

Célestin Freinet's (France) pedagogy was developed at the beginning of the 20th century with the primary goal of ensuring the child's social development in L1. The approach gravitates around group activities for young students, such as the collective creation of a class newspaper, allowing them free expression.[7] There is no direct or explicit link between "Freinet's pedagogy" and the NLA. In hindsight, though, one can find a certain affinity between the two use of a "project-based pedagogy." However, unlike in a L1 classroom situation, before students can collectively undertake a shared project in an L2/FL they must go through a

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[7] A personal note: when I was a professor at the Département d'éducation préscolaire et d'enseignement primaire (Department of preschool and primary education) at the Université de Montréal's Faculté des sciences de l'éducation (Faculty of Education) from 1979 to 1987, before transferring to the Université du Québec at Montréal (UQÀM) in 1987, some of my more "socialist" colleagues advocated for and implemented what was then known as "Freinet's pedagogy" in a few French L1 schools. But as far as I am aware, this school of thought does not appear to have been replicated in the area of L2/FL learning.

lengthy process of linguistic preparation: how could they freely express themselves without already possessing the linguistic assets that permit this "expression"? It should be noted, though, that we strongly encourage interschool correspondence, as does the Freinet pedagogy. This has already been experimented with several times in the NLA, among young (10 or 12 years old) Canadian learners.

## The Montessori Method

The Montessori method originated in early 20th century Italy. It was initially designed for developing the L1, based on different stages of development depending on the child's age: use of sensory material, becoming aware of the position or movements of different parts of the body, etc. There is no direct or explicit link between the Montessori method and the NLA. This is mainly because the NLA was primarily designed for students in the later grades of Canadian primary schools who are already enrolled in regular Anglophone schools, whereas Montessori schools generally serve younger students. In Canada, the Montessori method is generally used within private establishments, as this type of school requires teachers who have specialised in this educational philosophy. There even exist bilingual Montessori schools.[8] In theory, nothing in the NLA contradicts this method's principles, but, for practical reasons, it would have been difficult to associate the Montessori name with the NLA.

## The "Flipped Classroom" or "Reverse Teaching"

Essentially, the "flipped classroom" or "reverse teaching" method involves having the theoretical elements of a subject studied at home in order to free up classroom time for work or practical activities, either individually or in groups. Here too, there is no direct or explicit link between the "flipped classroom" or "reverse teaching" method and the NLA. Admittedly, this teaching style does go hand in hand with our teaching strategies, as the primary emphasis is on developing skills, closely linked to the principles of active education methods. For example, outside of the classroom, in an exolingual environment, it is rather difficult to develop the ability to communicate orally. This is why a lot of time *in the classroom* is dedicated to social interaction activities and to working on

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[8] A further personal note: one of my sons attended pre-kindergarten and kindergarten at a bilingual (French/English) Montessori school in Montreal.

group projects, while study time at home can therefore be devoted to individual study of linguistic knowledge, particularly through the use of authentic reading texts, etc.[9]

## French Immersion

French Immersion, meanwhile, offers many similarities with the NLA (Germain and Netten 2012a; Netten and Germain 2012). The major difference, however, which must be clearly understood, is the following: in Canadian Immersion classes, Anglophone students learn their school subjects, such as mathematics, science, the arts, social studies, and health, in their L2/FL, in this case French. In IF (Intensive French—or NLA), they learn their second language, in this case French, but continue to learn all other subjects in their L1, English. It should be mentioned that though Immersion produces positive results, given the overlap between its principles and those of the NLA, it is always possible to improve these results through the use of some of our teaching strategies in the classroom—as has already been suggested (Cogswell 2008; Germain and Netten 2012a; Netten and Germain 2012).

## Approaches That Aim for Autonomy

It is important to specify what is meant by "autonomy." One must not confuse *linguistic autonomy* with *learning autonomy*. By *linguistic autonomy*, we mean a learner's ability to spontaneously use new utterances in an authentic communicative situation. Below this level, we can only speak of linguistic competence, nothing more. "We therefore hypothesise that, in learning an L2, learning autonomy (as a process) is above all aimed at developing linguistic autonomy (as a product)" (Germain 2007, 114).

In terms of *learning autonomy*, we may distinguish (Germain 2007):
- The **narrow concept** focused on learning conditions: the individual rhythm, place, and moment of learning;
- The **individualist concept**, to which are added self-directed learning and the ability to formulate a critical judgement on one's self-directed learning;

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[9] It should however be noted that, even in the case of knowledge-based teaching, the "flipped classroom" or "reverse teaching" method remains a controversial subject (Bissonnette and Gauthier 2012).

- The **social concept**. According to Little (2002), the learner is not only responsible for his learning but, as a social being, independence must be counterbalanced, essentially, by interdependence. Under this model, it is social interaction (as we saw with Vygotsky under "The *Individual* Cognitive Benefits of a *Social* Interaction" as noted earlier, p. 13) which lies at the root of an individual's cognitive development.

## Language Textbooks

When looking at various approaches, one cannot omit mentioning the important role played by language textbooks. Generally, the problem with L2 textbooks is their theoretical foundations, particularly their underlying understanding of language acquisition. Currently, most language textbooks (likely unbeknownst to their authors) are weighted down by the crushing burden of tradition: prioritising written language, grammar, verb conjugations, and written exercises, despite the authors' claims in their forewords that their primary aim is to teach how to communicate and interact orally. As Jourdan, of the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, quite correctly remarks: "A little experiment. Give your students cloze texts, grammar exercises and conjugation exercises. What do they learn? To complete cloze texts, grammar exercises and conjugation exercises. In what everyday situation will they use 'je vais tu vas il va nous allons vous allez ils vont'? None" (Jourdan 2017, 67). There is a blatant mismatch between the *targets* and the *means* chosen to reach them. The belief persists that one can learn to communicate orally via written language. This is the weight of tradition, which goes back to Latin.

As I already noted several years ago (Germain 1993), around the end of the 9th century, Latin ceased to be a so-called "living" language, i.e. one that was spoken on a daily basis by the general population. At the time, there was no concept of a "second" or "foreign" language. Only two types of language were distinguished: the *living* (spoken) and the *dead* (written only).

However, before it disappeared as a living language, Latin had slowly given birth to the so-called *Romance* languages, such as French, Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, Provençal, etc. These new spoken languages were thus "living" languages. Much later, after centuries of teaching in Latin, once these new oral languages came to be taught (sometimes even before their written forms had been developed), the question arose of how to proceed. The solution, naturally enough, was to imitate the only known method for language teaching, namely how Latin

was taught. Latin—as a *dead* language—continued to be taught in schools in this era (Germain, forthcoming 2019).

## The Evolution of Latin

From the 4th to the 8th/9th century ⟶ end of the 16th century

"Vulgar" Latin

Italian
French
Spanish
Portuguese
Catalan
Romanian …

*Romance languages*
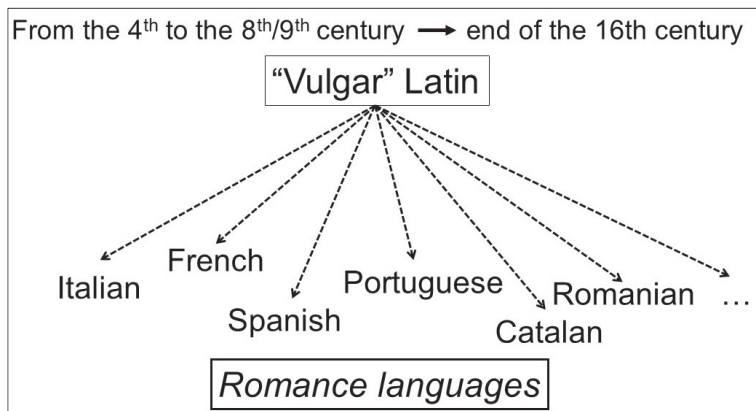
*Fig. 3-6*

How did one teach a dead language? Through drilling in grammatical rules, conjugating verbs, translation exercises, and so forth. This gave rise to what was later called the *grammar-translation method.* It was not until the advent of the *direct method* at the end of the 19th and beginning of the 20th century that the "indirect" component of the grammar-translation method (translation) was abandoned: "As 'communicative' goals for teaching Latin could no longer be invoked, having students learn Latin came to be justified as a way to develop intellectual abilities: Latin was seen as a sort of 'intellectual gymnastics,' a sort of necessary discipline for forming the mind" (Germain 1993, 60). Nevertheless, the grammar-translation method subsisted well into the 20th century, "and even, in modified form, remains occasionally used in certain environments, particularly at the university level" (Germain 1993, 102).

Modern school texts have, of course, set aside the tradition of explicit translation, which raises a difficulty: what, then, happens to "grammar"? Generally speaking, this conception of language learning is more or less corroborated by a certain trend in cognitive psychology.

## The Standard Cognitive Theory

> According to the standard reference theory:
> **3 steps** in the acquisition of a L2/FL
>
> 1. Learning of vocabulary, conjugations and grammar:
>    CONSCIOUS KNOWLEDGE
>
>    ↓
>
> 2. Exercises (writtten) to **transform** *knowledge*
>    into *skill*
>
>    ↓
>
> 3. Oral communication activities:
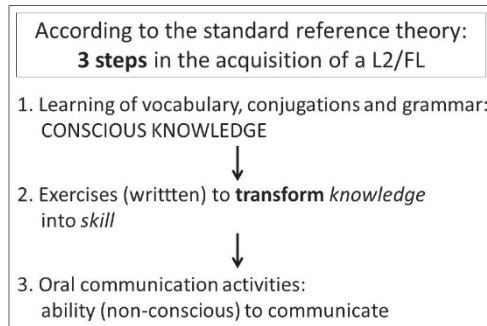>    ability (non-conscious) to communicate

*Fig. 3-7*

Language pedagogy most often refers to a general three-stage psychological model (Anderson 1990) that DeKeyser (1998) transposed into the realm of L2/FL pedagogy. According to this theory, knowledge may be transformed into skills through exercises, which, as we have seen in the previous chapters, is completely contrary to Paradis's theory.

Another difficulty with current cognitive psychology models is that, in most cases, they focus on the individual. Teaching, on the other hand, involves groups of individuals. The implication here is that the failure of cognitive psychology to include social dimensions, interactive models or group models—no matter what these may be—provides inadequate value. The current standard cognitive models are therefore doubly limited.

## Selection

This way of understanding language acquisition has a major impact on the concepts of *selection* and *progression* in language pedagogy. Naturally, in this traditional view of learning, all the linguistic elements to be taught are selected from the language, that is to say, from the language as a subject of study (the language-object) and not on the basis of social communicative needs. As a consequence, pedagogy is necessarily centred on the language-object.

All this goes against one of the fundamental principles of the NLA: authenticity. What is fundamental, in our view, is not so much the authentic document (even though the NLA uses these in abundance) as *the authenticity of the communication*. Objections may be made that classrooms are artificial environments; yet how are they more artificial

than office environments? As Coste (2002) remarks, in a move to rehabilitate the classroom as a *potential site of acquisition*: "if we learn to communicate by communicating, the classroom must be rethought and become, as far as possible, a communication site similar to other social sites" (paragraph 8).[10] And if we initially take into account the learner's communicative needs, the classroom becomes highly authentic. But to do this, language cannot be thought of as a subject of academic study. There is thus some confusion between language considered as a subject for academic study, like other school subjects, and language seen as a genuine means of communication and social interaction.

## Progression

The second consequence is linked to what is called progression. Even many years ago, I used to say that textbooks were *detrimental to learners, but necessary for teachers*. Why a necessity for teachers? Because if they suddenly lost their textbooks, the majority of teachers would design their own, more or less imitating the same model (with exceptions here and there). This is entirely understandable. Nevertheless, textbooks are probably harmful in that the mode of linguistic progression risks coming somewhat into conflict with the learners' mode of psychological progression, be they young people or adults.

I would even go further and say that not only does the use of textbooks not assist in learning, but that it often carries a high risk of *harming* language appropriation. For instance, some FSL/FFL textbooks suggest not teaching negation until the fourth lesson, or the present perfect (one of the most common tenses used in French) until the eighth or ninth lesson. The logic behind this escapes me utterly, because, as soon as one wishes to communicate, one has negative things to say right from the start: *I like this*, but *I don't like that*, etc.

Finally, there exists a confusion which, to my knowledge, is rarely (if ever) denounced by experts in language teaching: the confusion between "learning to speak" and "learning to speak *correctly*." Remarkably, history shows us that this confusion was recognised as early as the 17th century, by the well-known English philosopher John Locke, in his *Some Thoughts on Education*: "Grammar being to teach Men not to speak, but to speak correctly and according to the exact Rules of the Tongue" ([1693] 1989, 227). In modern terms, one could say that Locke had, as it were, noted the

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[10] Nevertheless, the author rejects the *acquisition/learning* dichotomy from the outset and conceives of these two concepts as existing on a continuum.

confusion between a psychological problem (the mechanism of language acquisition) and a linguistic or a language-teaching problem (correct language). The fact is that learning to speak and learning to speak *correctly* call on two completely distinct mechanisms or processes.
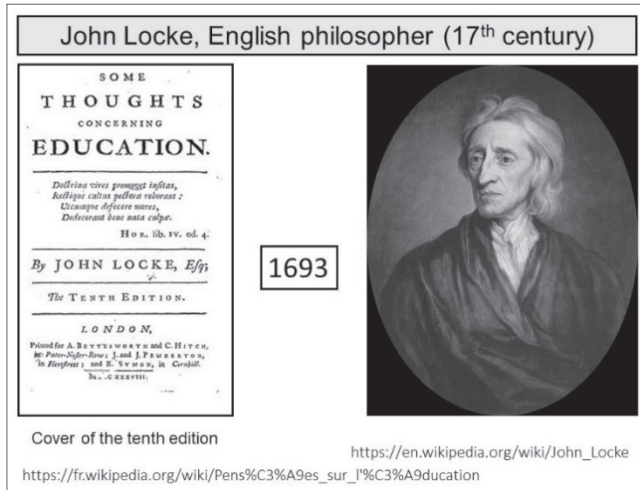


*Fig. 3-8——John Locke*

## Dropping Out of Language Classes

Of course, one could raise the objection that many people managed to learn to speak an L2/FL before the advent of the NLA. How can this be explained? In most cases, these are people who would have succeeded with any textbook, given either their strong motivation, their aptitude, or both. Often, those who succeed in speaking a language they have learnt from a textbook are also those who, either simultaneously or subsequently, have had an immersive experience within an appropriate linguistic community, or in a foreign country. In many cases, in fact, it would seem that those who are most successful are the ones who later become either translators or language teachers. I would almost go so far as to say that many of them succeed *despite* the use of textbooks. What often fails to be mentioned is the unbelievably high level of attrition rates in language courses among schoolchildren. And to my knowledge, no trustworthy empirical data exists about attrition rates among adults. Yet this is a well-

known fact among all stakeholders at the school level: many people sign up for language courses, but very few complete them.

At the school level in Canada, for example, the Atlantic Provinces[11] Education Foundation carried out a survey in 2002 among Grade 11 students who had chosen not to continue their language education in Grade 12 (when the programme becomes optional). The survey was aimed at identifying the factors explaining why "only 16.5% of students enrolled in the Core French programme continue it through Grade 12" (MacFarlane 2005, 6). The overall conclusions drawn from the survey explain why students abandoned the French programme, as quoted here:

- *They are discouraged by their lack of progress and their inability to express themselves in French.*
- *The focus on linguistic aspects bores them and is repetitive and irrelevant.*
- *Assignments are difficult, and the poor grades they receive for these assignments lower their grade point average.* (MacFarlane 2005, 6-7)

As for adults, here is what a teacher from a university in Taiwan writes about students' lack of motivation: "It is possible, in this case, that this lack of motivation is reinforced by the lack of interest in the textbook, given that it focuses on language rather than on the students' lives or interests" (Chang 2017, 31-32).

To this must be added the idea that learning an L2/FL is a highly complex phenomenon, as the previous chapters have indicated. Current textbooks likely fail to make things any easier, judging by the fact that most of the reasons mentioned in the Canadian survey discussed above appear to be closely linked to the textbooks then in use.

To conclude, let us recall that, to my knowledge, only Paradis's neurolinguistic theory seems able to account for the "grammatical paradox" with which all language-teaching experts and language teachers are familiar. Adopting Paradis's theory contributed to our calling into question the general standard models used until now in language pedagogy. Given this, one can understand why I have been led to propose a renewed conceptual framework for language pedagogy, which serves as a basis for comparison between the NLA and some other approaches, notably the action-oriented approach advocated by the CEFR (2001).

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[11] These are the four provinces at the extreme east of Canada: New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Labrador, and Prince Edward Island.

# PART TWO

# THE NLA IN PRACTICE:
# FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

Having presented the NLA's theoretical foundations in the three preceding chapters, it appears opportune to now look at its pedagogical applications, that is to say the second-language teaching strategies geared to the speaking, reading, writing, and cultural stages of learning an L2/FL, as suggested by the lessons we have drawn from the neurosciences.

However, as the content of the previous chapters may have sometimes proven difficult for some readers, it seemed practical to include a brief review of some of the NLA's foundations (see Text Box 4.1). Thus, it is hoped that it will be easier to observe in a concrete fashion how the teaching strategies proposed in this second part are indeed derived from the theoretical concepts discussed in the first part.

Another way of making it easier to read about the practical applications of the neurosciences, in the context of the NLA, is presenting them in the form of frequently asked questions, as mentioned in the Introduction to this work.

# CHAPTER FOUR

# THE PREDOMINANCE OF ACQUIRING ORAL SKILLS IN THE NLA

Having presented the five fundamental principles and their neuroscientific bases (in chapters 1 and 2) and compared the NLA to some other approaches (in chapter 3), here now is *how to teach* oral communication in the NLA.

## Acquiring and Teaching Internal Grammar

**Q 4.1** *What is the place of grammar in the NLA? Is it entirely absent, inferred?*

The core of the answer to this question can be found in the second chapter, where we discussed the existence of two grammars: an implicit, unconscious grammar, known as the *internal grammar* in the NLA, and an explicit, conscious grammar designated as the *external grammar*. The first of these is mainly *acquired* through speaking, while the second is mainly *learnt* when written language (reading and writing) is taught, as we will see in the next chapter.

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**Text Box 4.1**
**A BRIEF REMINDER OF SOME OF THE NLA'S BASES (from previous chapters)**
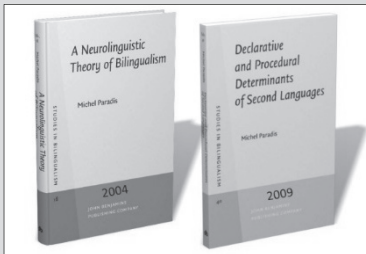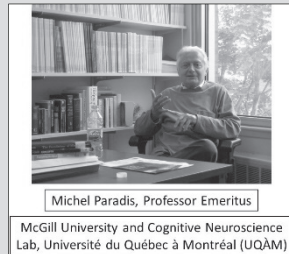


*Fig. 4-1*



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McGill University and Cognitive Neuroscience Lab, Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM)

*Fig. 4-2*

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Where does the distinction between two grammars come from? As we saw in the preceding chapters, one of the main theoretical principles underpinning the NLA is Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism (1994, 2004, and 2009). In his theory, Paradis begins by recalling a fact well known to psychologists: the existence of two memories, declarative memory (concerned with facts or knowledge) and procedural memory (which sustains skills).
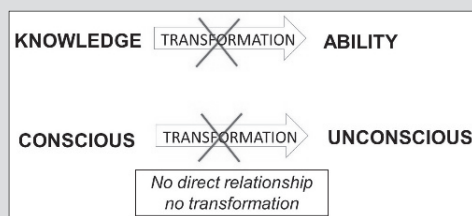


*Fig. 4-3*

The novelty of his theory, however, lies in the fact that, based on abundant empirical data about bilingual persons suffering from Alzheimer's Disease (where declarative  memory is affected, but not the procedural memory) or from aphasia (where the converse is true), it appears that there is no direct link or connection between these two memories. If there were, patients suffering from Alzheimer's Disease would present the same symptoms as those suffering from aphasia, and vice versa.

Concretely, this means that knowledge cannot be transformed into ability, that the conscious cannot transform into the unconscious.

Most language textbooks on the market, however, presuppose the opposite: generally, they begin by having learners memorise long lists of vocabulary words and grammatical rules, and then conjugate verbs, all of which are functions of declarative memory. It is believed that thereafter, with the help of a series of *written* exercises (even, most of the time, when the primary aim is developing speaking abilities), this knowledge will be transformed into the ability to communicate orally, by placing all of this into brief communicative situations. In other words, the presupposition is that via the completion of exercises, knowledge will transform into a skill, or that the conscious will become unconscious (see Fig. 3-6, under "The Standard Cognitive Theory"), which completely contradicts the neuroscientific data.

Moreover, Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism informs us that the declarative memory is a sort of product, made up of formal rules (grammatical rules, conjugations, vocabulary), while the procedural memory is more of a process composed of frequent statistical regularities.
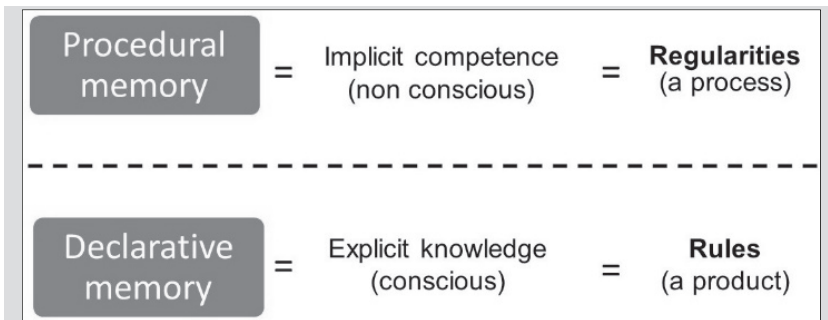
*Fig. 4-4*

What does this imply? It means that in order to ensure that newly used language structures leave traces in the brain, it is important to repeatedly use them and reuse them so that they form *patterns* or furrows, like the little path traced into a wheat field we see in the Monet painting reproduced in the first chapter (Fig. 1-1).

This is why, in the NLA, we advocate developing two discrete grammars, an unconscious internal grammar (primarily through speaking) and a conscious external grammar (primarily through reading and for writing). The first is sustained by the procedural memory, while the second is sustained by the declarative memory, with no direct link between the two. This is what explains how people can succeed at language tests based on knowledge (by calling on their declarative memories) without necessarily being able to spontaneously communicate or interact socially (which requires the use of procedural memory). This is what I have called the "grammatical paradox" for which, to my knowledge, only Paradis's neurolinguistic theory can account (Germain and Massé 2018).

**Q 4.2** *How can we be sure that the students will retain key grammatical principles? What types of exercise should be developed? How should we introduce this grammar and evaluate what's been learnt?*

To be able to answer these questions,[1] it is first necessary to reword them. Since we are discussing internal grammar, it cannot truly be a matter of retaining *key grammatical principles.*

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[1] The answer to the final question (about evaluation) will be specifically addressed in chapter 7, "NLA Results: Evaluation."

**Text Box 4.2**
**INTERNAL GRAMMAR**

It is not a matter of "principles," in that internal grammar, sustained by procedural memory, is basically made up of patterns or neuronal circuits in the brain, whose development depends on the regularity or frequency of their use.

In order for learners to derive some benefit from the development of their internal grammar, i.e. to ensure that they do not forget it, teachers periodically return to previously studied themes, thus ensuring that learners can use and reuse what has already been learnt in new contexts.

An excellent example of unconscious acquisition of internal grammar *in a classroom* is found in the brief analysis (in Text Box 4.3 below) of a video filmed in autumn 2011 at the Nanhai campus of the South China Normal University (SCNU), in Guangzhou.

**Text Box 4.3**
**INTERNAL GRAMMAR BEING ACQUIRED: ANALYSIS OF A VIDEO**



Fig. 4-5

The instructor is Minyi Liang. Her class comprises 30 18-year-old Chinese students, all of whom are complete beginners in learning French. The video was filmed in the second week of classes, after only 15 hours of teaching.

As we will see shortly, spoken language is taught using eight strategies. The video was filmed during the fifth of these steps when the instructor questions a few learners about *their partners' answers*. The first question is the following: *N..., who was your partner?* One will note the use of the past tense, the imperfect in this case (even if the learners are not aware of the fact at this point in their learning process), which is necessary given that the question is asked once the learners have returned to their seats.

To better grasp the significance of the comments below, it is important to know that the spontaneous use of the possessive adjective (*mon/ma*) is almost a new usage for the learners, as they have only just learnt the gendered distinction between *mon partenaire* (for a male partner) and *ma partenaire* (for a female partner) in the previous class. This was learnt situationally, and not in the form of declarative or metalinguistic

knowledge. They have also recently learnt (again, situationally) the distinction between *il* (he) and *elle* (she).

**Étudiante assez forte**

P :   *Qui* | *était* | *ta* | *partenaire?* [2ᵉ semaine]

É :   *Estelle* | *était* | *ma* | *partenaire.*

P :   | *Ses yeux sont* | *de quelle couleur?*

É :   | *Elle a* | *les yeux noirs.*

**Fairly Strong Student**

I :   *Who* | *was* | *your* | *partner?* [2nd week]

S :   *Estelle* | *was my* | *partner.*

I :   *What colours* | *are her eyes* | *?*

S :   | *She has* | *black eyes.*

*Fig. 4-6*

The instructor begins by questioning a fairly strong student who is able to adequately answer the questions asked. The questions and answers evolve from linguistic models used in the previous steps, and one will note that they require the use of the verb *to be* in the question (*What colour* are *her eyes?*) but of the verb *has* in the answer (*She* has *black eyes*). At this level, however, the learners are unaware of these distinctions on the metalinguistic level.

What is especially important here is the intervention reproduced in Fig. 4-7, which involves a weaker student who clearly has not yet fully grasped all these linguistic nuances. For example, in answering the first question, she replies *Myriel était **ma** partenaire*, incorrectly using the feminine form of the pronoun to designate a male co-student. In order to correct this mistake, the instructor uses an explicit form of correction by saying ***mon [or] ma?*** The most remarkable thing is that other learners prompt the student with the correct answer, saying *mon* aloud. The learner being questioned then uses the correct formulation of her answer to the question, which the instructor asks her again. The instructor carries on, asking *What colour are his eyes?* The student answers: ***She** has…*, but she has barely said

**Étudiante plus faible**

P :   *Qui était* | *ta* | *partenaire?* [car P ne sait pas s'il s'agit d'une ♀ ou d'un ♂]

É :   *Myriel* [♂] *était* | *ma* | *partenaire.*

P :   *MON ou MA?* [correction : explicite]

É :   *MA*

Autres É : *MON*

É :   *Mon*

P :   *Qui était ton partenaire?*

É :   *Myriel était MON partenaire…*

P :   *Ses yeux sont de quelle couleur?*

É :   | *Elle a…*

Autres É : | *Il a…*

É :   | *Il…* | *Il a… Il a…*

**Weaker Student**

S :   *Myriel was my partner.*

I :   *What colour are his eyes?*

S :   | *She has* | *…*

Other S : | *He has*

S :   | *He has… He has…*

*Fig. 4-7*

this before, once again, other learners prompt her with the correct answer: ***He has…*** And the student begins again: ***He has…***

The greatest point of interest in the analysis that was made of this video is that it concretely shows how the *implicit language acquisition process* is forming itself in this learner's mind.

**Q 4.3** *How do you teach the unconscious, internal grammar?*

The extract above has already answered most of this question. However, it should be specified that we also use several complementary methods (which are explained and put into practice during our NLA training workshops). As it would be both lengthy and inappropriate to explain in detail here every step of our teaching strategies for developing oral proficiency, we will restrict ourselves to the essentials.

To begin with, it should be specified that, for teaching oral production, we advocate the use of eight strategies, grouped in two segments: five consecutive strategies, to be used in the prescribed order, and three overlapping strategies, used simultaneously when the time seems appropriate in the classroom.

Two of these latter strategies call on two of the NLA's key concepts: *fluency* and *accuracy*. To provide a definition in the negative, one could say that the *lack of fluency* means to speak hesitantly, pausing, repeating and taking a long time (Germain and Netten 2001a). As Jourdan writes, fluency is "the ability to communicate without needing to make any effort that slows down the communicative process. Just the opposite of a speaker who's searching for words, fumbles, scours through the dictionary" (2016, 65).

As for *accuracy*, it usually only refers to knowledge about language. In the NLA, it is defined as being at the same time correct knowledge of the language's rules and the ability to use this language correctly taking into account communicative situations and sociocultural reality (Germain and Netten 2001a).

It will have been noticed that, for us, *accuracy* is not only considered as knowledge (*accuracy-knowledge*) but also as a skill (*accuracy-skill*) (Germain and Netten 2006a; Carullo 1999). Jourdan continues with "It is simply a matter of correcting a learner's internal grammar as soon as possible, and a sentence-based pedagogy allows us to check that everything's where it should be" (2016, 65; see also Massé 2018).

**Text Box 4.4**
**TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR ORAL SKILLS**

The NLA includes two sets of teaching strategies: the first are applied following a specific sequence, while the second are superimposed on them.

The first set consists of five strategies that must invariably be applied in the order discussed below.

**First,** it is necessary to provide learners with a model of the language structure (i.e., sentence) that they will have to produce, while adapting it to the authentic circumstances of the conversation. If a lesson were to start with a question, it would doom the learners to failure since they would have no way of knowing *how* to answer. Therefore, teachers provide a language model based on their life experiences or personal situation. For example, in a lesson dealing with food, in order to respect the NLA's principle of authenticity, teachers should indicate what THEIR preferred dessert is: *My favourite dessert is apple pie* (if that is really the case). As it is oral language that is being developed here, there is no question of writing words on a board; however, to ensure good comprehension of the model sentence being used, teachers might resort to using an illustration (of an apple pie in this case—while avoiding asking *What is this?,* which would be a return to descriptive language rather than language of communication).

**Secondly**, the teacher asks a few learners the question that is related to the language structure that they have just used (for example: *What's your favourite dessert?*) so that they can respond by using the model that has been presented while adapting it to their own authentic situation. As individual learners may not possess the word needed to reply, they will have been trained to re-use a part of the model sentence while adding, for example (if this is indeed the case): *How do you say…* (name of the dessert in their first language). The teacher does not simply provide the word being looked for, but inserts the word in a full sentence such as *Ah! Your favourite dessert is chocolate cake*. Then the teacher asks the question *What's your favourite dessert?* once more and the learner answers using the new word in a full sentence (to ensure the development of internal grammar), adapting it to their personal situation (*My favourite dessert is…*).

**In the third step**, a few learners ask a few other learners the same question, and they, in turn, answer, adapting the answer to their own situation. Then, in front of the class (if this suits their ages), in a conversation that is as "natural" as possible, two learners ask each other the question and provide the answer. This is done to provide a model of the

language structure and of the task for the next step.

**During the fourth step**, learners interact simultaneously in pairs, carrying out the task and reusing the language structures that have been modelled.

**Finally**, the teacher takes advantage of the situation to ask a few questions about what has been said during the previous interactions, first asking, for example, *Who was your partner? – My partner was N...* The teacher then asks, for example, *What's N's favourite dessert? – His/her favourite dessert is ...*

If need be, the last two steps are repeated, but learners are asked to create new pairs.

_ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _ _

The next set consists of three teaching strategies which can be applied at any time, depending on need, concurrently with the first set of teaching strategies described above.

**The first case** which may arise is when there is a lack of *fluency* in a learner's utterances, that is, when the pauses are too long or if there are too many hesitations, etc. In order to develop fluency in communication, it is important to have learners produce full sentences, especially with real beginners. Obviously, at a certain level of language development, a learner might answer the question *Why...?* simply by saying *Because...*

**The second case** deals with the development of *precision of language*. If a learner makes an error of any kind (phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical, etc.), it is important to ensure the development of correct usage in the target language. That is why learners' errors are constantly corrected by remodelling the utterance and asking the question again.

**The third case** aims at what in the NLA is called *purposeful listening*. To ensure that all learners listen carefully to the answers given by other learners (and not just the teacher's answers), and to stimulate their listening, the teacher questions a learner on the answer provided by another learner.
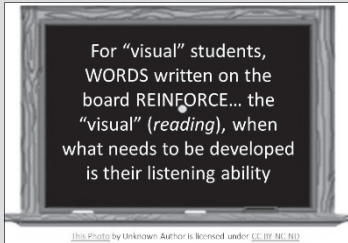
Once all these steps have been covered (both strategy blocks), the teacher proposes a **final activity** so that learners can use and reuse, in a new, somewhat different, communicative situation, the language structures that they have just acquired.

To return to the original question, we can now say that modelling is undoubtedly the foremost way to teach oral production.[2] In our approach, for oral communication, modelling means first giving the learner a *model of how to answer* when asked the corresponding question later. What does this mean? Traditionally, it is common practice in L1 teaching for the teacher to ask the learners questions. When teaching an L2/FL, however, this technique cannot be used, because it dooms the learners to failure: how can they possibly answer a question asked at the start of a lesson when they do not even have the language that would allow them to answer? While it is true that school subjects are taught through language, it is also true that language is taught through language, something which is, *a fortiori,* especially true in the case of an L2/FL. This is a distinctive feature of L2/FL learning that the NLA takes into account through the use of *modelling*.

Consequently, every lesson or teaching unit begins with the teacher providing a model of an answer, based on his or her life experience, which immediately brings out the importance of authentic communication. For example: *I'm five and a half feet tall. I'm of average height. But my brother is six feet tall. He's tall.* It is only with a genuine understanding of these language structures that the question can then be asked: *And you, how tall are you?* And so on.

At this stage, it is oral production that is being developed. There is absolutely no need for the teacher to write these sentences on the board (or project them on a screen). That being said, on the basis of TAP (Transfer Appropriate Processing, as we saw in the first two chapters), the use of illustrations, gestures, and mimicry is recommended, to ensure that the meaning of new statements is properly grasped.

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[2] We have made modelling a key concept for all of our teaching strategies, for reading and writing as well as for speaking, as will be seen throughout this chapter and the next. As Gaonac'h observes, returning to Gatbonton and Segalowitz's (1988) old but *still valid* idea, "it is of primary importance that […] communication situations leading to the repetition of the same statement be exploited in the classroom" (Gaonac'h 2005, 239).

**Text Box 4.5**
**REASONS FOR NOT WRITING ON THE BOARD**

For "visual" students, WORDS written on the board REINFORCE... the "visual" (*reading*), when what needs to be developed is their listening ability

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*Fig. 4-8*

One oft-expressed objection from teachers at our NLA training workshops is the following: *In my class, many of my students are "visual learners." Why not write on the board?* Three answers come clearly to mind. Firstly, as we saw at the end of chapter 2, the simplistic distinction between "visual learners" and "auditory learners" is in all probability a neuromyth.

Secondly, writing is a linear representation and is not comparable to illustrations, which are globally perceived.

Lastly, as the aim of this teaching stage is developing both oral comprehension and oral production, it follows that the ear (or hearing) that must be developed first, and not the eye (sight). In fact, one could almost argue—assuming that the distinction is not a neuromyth—that the existence of more "visual" learners is exactly why teachers *should not write* on the board (or project writing on a screen). Not doing so reinforces or develops a language's auditory dimension.

To use neurological terminology, we might say that entirely discrete neuronal connections are involved: a written word does not activate the same network of neuronal connections that a heard word does, as we saw in the first chapter when discussing certain scans of the human brain.

If we start with writing (conscious/knowledge), it makes for a long...

DETOUR →

This Photo by Unknown Author is licensed under CC BY-NC-ND

*What is automatized is not the explicit knowledge of the rule, its formulation, as it is known, but its application*
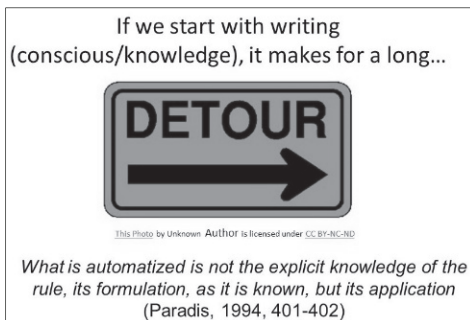(Paradis, 1994, 401-402)

*Fig. 4-9*

Written language, meanwhile, is only introduced once learners can spontaneously express in speech what they will have to write (in the NLA, only real, personal texts are written, never isolated sentences). It may take thirty minutes, for example, to reach that stage. Beginning a lesson or a teaching unit by reading a text (as a launch pad for

discussion, for instance) creates a long detour, because it makes learners call on declarative rather than procedural memory first. By always beginning lessons or teaching units orally, we ensure that in the NLA, learners use a direct route, without distractions.

In many cases, *modelling* also means demonstrating an example of the task that learners will have to accomplish, rather than trying to explain it orally in language that learners will find incomprehensible, at least if they are beginners. To be clear from the start, this does not imply that learners will then uncritically imitate the given language model, but that they will *adapt* it to their personal situations, in order to avoid falling into the trap of the mechanical style of behaviourist psychology prevalent in the 1950s.[3]

*Fig. 4-10*

Referring to the list of oral teaching strategies above, it will be noted that the NLA provides ample opportunities for the frequent use of certain linguistic structures (remembering Monet's painting, Fig. 1-1) and for learners to interact among themselves and with the teacher. The goal is to contribute to the development of patterns in the brain in order to establish new networks of neurological connections and, eventually, ensure the development of the learners' procedural memory.

## Vocabulary and Lexicon Acquisition

**Q 4.4** *How are vocabulary and the lexicon acquired, according to the NLA?*

In order to adequately answer this question, we first have to remember that (as seen in the first chapter) a word's *referent* is the object we point to when using the word. It is important to understand this because on occasion, apparently identical words can have different referents, not only across languages but even between two varieties of a same language. For

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[3] For more on this subject, see chapter 10, "La méthode audio-orale," of my book *Évolution de l'enseignement des langues: 5000 ans d'histoire* (1993).

instance, take the case of the French word *bleuet*, which has two separate referents, depending on whether it is being used in France or in Québec. In France, the referent is a small blue flower, while in Québec, the referent is blueberries, the small berry that the French call (with a few unimportant nuances) *myrtilles*.

Similarly, in American English, the word *biscuit* refers to a small, soft cake (like a scone), while in Britain, it refers to a flat, unleavened, typically sweet cake (which in America is a cookie).
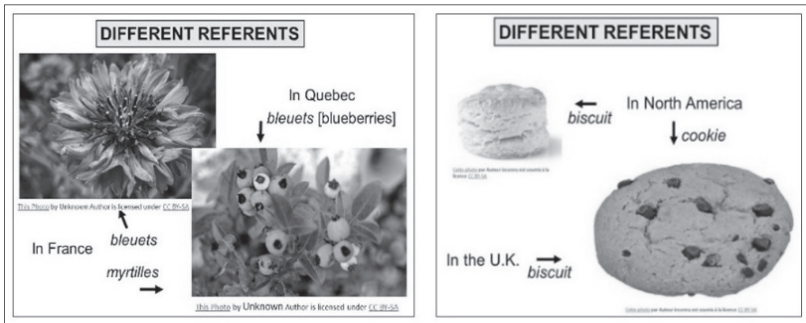


*Fig. 4-11*

**Text Box 4.6**
**AN EXAMPLE OF REFERENT CONFUSION**

An amusing example of referent confusion can be found in the 1934 film of Louis Hémon's novel *Maria Chapdelaine* (1913). While the film was made in France, the novel is set in northern Québec. Thus, when the author sends his protagonists to gather *bleuets*, he intends to have them pick blueberries. French director Julien Duvier wrongly interpreted the meaning of the word, and thus actors Jean Gabin and Madeleine Renaud instead gather bouquets of little flowers! (Germain 2017b, footnote)

We should reiterate the importance of using a sentence-based pedagogy for teaching a language's *lexicon*, which includes implicit grammatical properties. It would be utterly inappropriate to have learners memorise lists of decontextualised vocabulary words. As we have seen, the same distinction holds for verbs. For instance, the fact that the verb *sleep* is intransitive is part of its grammatical properties, just as it is one of the grammatical properties of the verb *put* that it is transitive when part of the phrasal verb *to put on*. The same phenomenon is true of pronominalisation

with a verb like *to remind oneself*. In all these cases, what occurs is *acquisition* (as these are implicit, unconscious phenomena) and not *learning*.

Such distinctions have serious consequences.[4] They mean that the NLA places much greater importance on acquiring a *lexicon* than learning *vocabulary*, unlike what is practised on several Internet sites purporting to teach English as a foreign language.

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**Text Box 4.7**
**VOCABULARY AS OFTEN PRESENTED ON THE INTERNET**
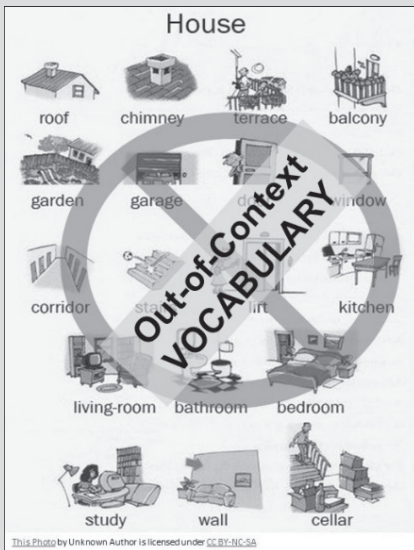


For example, if we examine certain illustrations related to houses offered on the Internet to help learners build their vocabulary, often all we will find beneath the picture is the object's name, without even the necessary definite or indefinite article, necessary in French to distinguish gender (*food*, *kitchen*, etc.). Such cases simply present vocabulary words in isolation, with no sentential context.

*Fig. 4-12*

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**Q 4.5** *In the NLA, is vocabulary taught only using sentences as context?*

When teaching an L2/FL, one of the most effective ways to take into account the unconscious grammatical properties of words is to use a sentence-based pedagogy when teaching orally, rather than isolated, out-of-context words. Especially with beginners, teachers insist that learners utter complete sentences, so that they can develop their internal grammar.

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[4] In light of this, I should point out that in homage to the great pedagogical scholar Robert Galisson, I entitled my contribution to the journal *Synergies Portugal* (Germain 2017b) "Le vocabulaire s'apprend, le lexique s'acquiert" ("Vocabulary is Learnt, Lexicons are Acquired").

Internal grammar is made up of the links between the elements of a sentence, which exist on a horizontal level. Only by using sentences, and not isolated vocabulary words, can one acquire the (unconscious) grammatical properties of words.
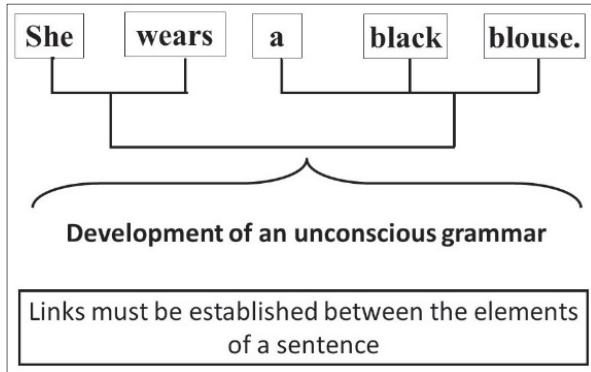


*Fig. 4-13*

In the case of verbs, how could a learner acquire the proper linking words (such as prepositions) if the word being acquired is not presented in a complete sentence? Some verbs require a direct object (to use traditional terminology) while others require an indirect object. These are grammatical properties (and therefore part of the *lexicon*) which can only be acquired if a sentence-based pedagogy is used

**Text Box 4.8**
**SENTENCE-BASED PEDAGOGY: A TESTIMONIAL**

Here is what an instructor of French as a foreign language at the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, who applies the NLA, says about sentence-based pedagogy:

That's all they have gained by spending time learning words: knowing words. Their mastery of the language ends there. This is why sentence-based pedagogy is so important. Always have students learn and use complete sentences. A sentence contains words, articles introducing those words, verbs, structures, logical connections, sociolinguistic elements like politeness, the way of asking for something, not to mention, in spoken language, pronunciation and prosody.

That's what sentence-based pedagogy does: it introduces language in all its complexity from the start. Learners don't need to analyse all this

according to the rule book. What they most need is to develop their unconscious grammar. All that's needed for this is to insist on a complete answer to every question asked. "Yes" or "My brother" are never satisfactory responses. Every interaction must be an opportunity to use a complex structure that will develop patterns. Your students will thank you. (Jourdan 2017, 65-66)

Of course, at a certain level, the teacher can accept an answer to the question *Why?* starting with *Because…* Meanwhile, to ensure that internal grammar is being developed as correctly as possible, i.e. in a way that is faithful to the target language, mistakes are corrected by the teacher, as much on the phonetic level as on the morphological, syntactic, lexical or sociocultural levels.

**Q 4.6** *How can I get learners to produce more elaborate sentences?*
Generally speaking, even in non-beginner classes, the sentences students produce can be relatively unsophisticated. One option is to ask the follow-up question *Why do you say that?* Teachers should expect more than one reason. Once the learner has given a reason, the teacher presses on by asking *Can you give at least one more reason why you…?*

**Q 4.7** *Given that the NLA doesn't provide any vocabulary lists, how can I help learners to develop and enlarge their vocabulary, so that they can express themselves better?*

**Text Box 4.10**
**ABOUT LEXICAL ENRICHMENT**

As a general rule, learners are only taught a limited number of vocabulary words in the classroom, maybe four or five at a time, ones that they can actually use in complete sentences, rather than having them learn lists of 30 or 40 out-of-context words they cannot use. In that sense, we are only dealing with a *lexicon* rather than a *vocabulary*, because the words are acquired, along with their implicit grammatical properties, in a context of actual use. "Lexical" enrichment can then take place later in a real context, while reading the authentic documents presented in each teaching unit.

This brings us to the distinction between what is accomplished in the classroom and what is done as homework. It is reading that allows learners, in a relatively autonomous manner, to build up their lexical store related to the theme already discussed orally in class (always in the context

of a sentence). When the readings are later revisited in the classroom, learners can be led to use some of the newly learnt words in new contexts.

Another way to develop learners' internal grammar is to use project-based pedagogy. As we saw in the second chapter, it is when learners concentrate on something other than the linguistic forms themselves (i.e. on the meaning of the messages produced while working on a project) that they develop their internal grammar, without realising that they are doing so. This is what a project-based pedagogy permits.

**In summary,** in the NLA, everything has been put in place to ensure the development of learners' internal grammar. More specifically, in the context of the strategies for teaching oral skills listed above, teachers can use the methods we have explained, namely:

- modelling;
- social interaction;
- sentence-based pedagogy; and
- project-based pedagogy.

**Q 4.8** *How can I stop learners from using their L1 during interactive activities?*

In our NLA training workshops, we recommend that teachers use three methods.

**Text Box 4.11**
**THREE WAYS TO KEEP LEARNERS FROM USING THEIR L1 DURING INTERACTIVE ACTIVITIES**

The first method involves taking the time needed to linguistically prepare the learners to adequately ask and answer the questions before having them interact in pairs.

When the learners are interacting in pairs, one trick is to announce aloud *30 seconds* (this number is used as an arbitrary example; obviously, in real life, the time allotted depends on the complexity and number of linguistic structures the learners must use). This way, students do not have time to resort to their L1 or to another language they share.

Another trick is to ask the pairs to sit down again or to return to their seats as soon as their interaction is over—which presupposes that interactions almost always take place while standing, with different partners each time, as is recommended in NLA training workshops.

**Q 4.9** *When an L2/FL learner isn't managing to correctly construct a verbal form while speaking, can the teacher use the opportunity to explain a grammatical point, or must they restrict themselves to correcting the mistake?*

When such a situation arises, the teacher does not give a grammar lesson. As we explain in our NLA training workshops, the NLA's advocated model is *remodelling*. If a learner is having difficulty answering the question asked, despite the linguistic model previously provided, the teacher should remodel his or her personal answer, which the student must adapt. There is no question of explicitly discussing the grammatical point in class, as this would prematurely introduce explicit knowledge about the language.
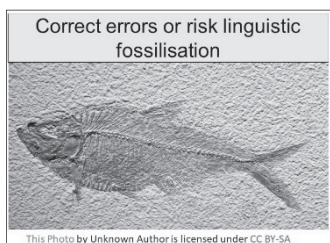


Fig. 4-14

It is only when the time comes to read authentic texts—i.e., once the learners can correctly use a few linguistic structures with a certain degree of spontaneity—that explicit knowledge of the language is touched on, in a real context. If a learner formulates an answer improperly, the teacher always corrects the mistake, either by explicitly drawing the learner's attention to the structure produced, or by remodelling the linguistic structure in question. Failing to correct the mistake entails a high risk of *linguistic fossilisation.* We discuss the nature of *oral mistakes* below and that of *written mistakes* in chapter 5 (Q 5.12).

**Text Box 4.12**
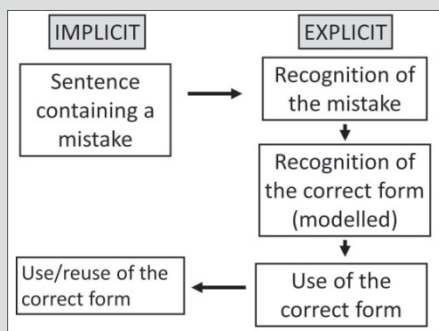**MOVING FROM THE IMPLICIT TO THE EXPLICIT AND BACK WHEN CORRECTING AN ORAL MISTAKE**



Fig. 4-15

The method for correcting an oral mistake raises the question of the links between the implicit and the explicit. As mentioned previously in the first part of this work, there is no direct connection between procedural and declarative memories, between the implicit and the explicit. However, when an oral mistake is corrected, the two

memories *alternate*, so to speak. That is to say, the implicit (a spontaneous utterance containing an error) gives way to the explicit, i.e. the conscious recognition of a mistake, either by the speaker or by the teacher who draws attention to the mistake made.

The teacher's modelling of the correct form follows, after which the learner uses the corrected form. All this is done consciously, using the declarative memory. The learner then returns to the implicit when made to use and reuse the new, corrected linguistic form in a context of a complete sentence. This represents a return to the procedural memory, in the form of an unconscious automatism.

**Q 4.10** *Doesn't immediately correcting mistakes risk discouraging learners?*

This is a very common fear among language teachers. Nevertheless, quite often many learners, adults for example, themselves insist on being corrected. And, as a rule, both with adults and younger learners, immediate correction is not as embarrassing as one might think (Mohammadi, 2018).

However, when learners are engaged in a debate, one would not wish to interrupt the spontaneity of their exchange. In such cases, a better option is to wait out the debate, discreetly noting down or mentally recording frequent mistakes, and bringing up only a few of the most common of these once the debate is over.

**Q 4.11** *Is it possible to teach an L2/FL using the NLA, but in another language than the target language, for instance the teacher and the learner's L1? What role does the L1 play in the NLA?*

It is inevitable that there will be reference to the learner's L1, even if only implicitly, particularly at the start of the learning process. However, one of the NLA's goals is to avoid the use of explicit translation by using various specific teaching techniques or strategies, such as using and reusing the language to bring learners to speak with a certain spontaneity. Generally speaking, with one exception (see Text Box 4.13 below), everything that takes place in the classroom occurs in the target language, i.e. the language to be learnt. A student is not going to learn the L2 in class by speaking in the L1.

**Text Box 4.13**
**THE TEACHER'S USE OF THE L1**

The only time the teacher uses an L1, or another language that the teacher and the majority of students share, is on the very first day of classes, and then only to explain what the NLA is. Experience shows that this sort of explanation is absolutely necessary, especially in the case of adult learners who believe that acquiring an L2/FL requires learning large numbers of vocabulary words and grammatical rules, conjugating verbs, and memorising preset dialogues, with written language constantly serving as their crutch.

It is therefore advisable to explain to them that if their goal is not only to be able to read and write the language, but also to use it to communicate and interact verbally, the NLA is much more likely to help them reach these objectives. For this to work, however, they must first accept to becoming familiar with a new and different way of acquiring (and teaching) a language. To date, experience has shown that all groups have willingly agreed to meet this challenge. Witness to this is the testimony of several teachers using the NLA in Japan and China:

> In Japan, we occasionally use Japanese to start with, in order to explain the principles of the NLA to the students, make sure they understand how NLA-based classes work and allow them to get used to the idea. But after a few classes, we have noticed that we no longer have any need to speak Japanese, as the whole class carries on very well in French, maybe even better than it would in Japanese. This is especially due to the collaborative learning ethos the NLA encourages and the way the learners help each other out when placed in small groups. Likewise, in the Chinese case, the Chinese teachers only use French in the classroom. (Cartier, Heuré, Jourdan and Konishi 2017)

Generally speaking, teachers only use the language being taught. In exceptional cases, however, learners can ask a question using a word taken from their L1, on condition that they place this word within a complete sentence.

**Text Box 4.14**
**LEARNERS' USE OF THEIR L1 IN THE CLASSROOM**

Learners, for their part, are asked to only use the L2/FL in the classroom, with one exception: when learners do not know a word that is absolutely essential for them to adequately answer a question, by adapting it to their personal situation, they are allowed to use a word from their L1, or from another language shared by learners and teacher (generally speaking, this will be English).

However, it must be emphasised that the question must be asked using the language form that the teacher has already modelled. Attempting to answer the question *What is your favourite dessert?*, the learner would say *My favourite dessert is… how do you say "tarte aux pommes"?* (In the very first classes, learners are taught the phrases *How do you say X?* or *How can you say X?*) In this case, the teacher would not simply reply *apple pie*. Rather, he or she would again use a complete sentence, saying *Your favourite dessert is apple pie*, and then ask the question again: *What is your favourite dessert?* This time, the learner should reply (changing *your* to *my*) *My favourite dessert is apple pie.*

**Q 4.12** *Can games be used in the NLA?*



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*Fig. 4-16*

A great deal could be said about the use of games in the classroom. Broadly speaking, yes, of course: games are not only allowed, but even recommended. To mention some of the benefits games provide from the outset: they allow for the reuse of previously learnt structures in a variety of situations, and most often they provide the opportunity for learners to interact socially. Moreover, they help to develop spontaneity and fluency, give rise to brief authentic conversations, and are both amusing and motivating, even for adults.

*Fig. 4-17*

Without this, there is a high risk of demotivation. On this subject, recall what I mentioned earlier about the NLA's fourth principle (chapter 2): in the specific area of language learning, motivation is likely derived from self-esteem, itself derived from the desire to communicate (see Fig. 4-17). This is where the limbic system is brought into play, assessing both the pleasure of communicating and the desire to do so.

**Text Box 4.15**
**NOT ALL GAMES ARE SUITABLE**



*Fig. 4-18*

That being said, there are a number of precautions to be taken. Numerous games available on the Internet are non-communicative and, most often, focus exclusively on language *rather than on communication*.

Especially worrisome is that many of them are elimination games, where success depends mainly on the speed at which answers are given. In other words, the more time learners take to answer, the likelier they are to be eliminated, with the unavoidable effect of increasing the gap between the strongest and weakest learners (the standard deviation, in statistical terms). Given that the weaker students are those who most need to use and reuse the linguistic structures they have learnt, this type of game would clearly be counterproductive.

*Fig. 4-19*

Finally, it is important to *linguistically* prepare the learners for playing, depending on the type of game involved. To do so, before starting the game, the teacher *models* both language and task simultaneously, using some linguistic structures the students are likely to use once they begin playing.

**Q 4.13** *Given that the NLA prioritises speaking, what sort of oral activities and exercises can students use to continue learning at home?*

As a matter of fact, in the NLA's current iteration, only a few photocopiable master sheets are provided at the end of each teaching unit for learners to complete at home. For oral expression, we recommend that learners use their smartphones to record their teacher in the classroom.

Also, in some establishments, teachers occasionally record texts that we consider quasi-authentic, since they deal with the teacher's reality, and are often ones they have written themselves.

**Q 4.14** *How do you avoid the drawbacks of a thematic approach?*

As will have been noted, the teaching units we provide deal with various themes, such as *What I eat, What I wear, Music*, etc. One drawback of a thematic approach is that learners may fail to continue using certain linguistic structures or words after moving on to a new theme, for instance if the topic has shifted from clothing to music. Given the importance of allowing learners to *use* and *reuse* the same linguistic

structures in different situations/contexts, so that they may develop their implicit (internal) grammar, this clearly presents a risk.

**Text Box 4.16**
**TESTIMONIAL REGARDING THEMES**

Internal grammar is fed by the neurological connections or patterns that are formed by using language. The more often we hear the same elements, the more they imprint on the brain. The more we say them, the more we know how to say them, without thinking. On the teaching level, this means that in order to allow for the development of the learner's internal grammar, teachers must restrict themselves to a limited number of linguistic structures, which will be reused until the patterns are set.

If, on the other hand, as often happens, you change themes almost every week, switching from meals to leisure activities or from work to transportation, your students may have encountered a certain number of structures, but things will go no further. Their internal grammar will be insufficient to allow them to express themselves about these topics. At best, as has often been noticed, they will be able to find the page in their textbook that mentions whichever element they need to complete an exercise. (Jourdan 2017, 64-65)

**Q 4.15** *Is it really possible to teach the sequence of tenses orally?*

Here follows the transcription of a video sequence concerned with the *use* of the imperfect tense and the present perfect in French, *in the process of being acquired*.

**Text Box 4.17**
**ORAL TEACHING OF THE IMPERFECT AND THE PRESENT PERFECT: VIDEO EXTRACT**



Inès

The class is made up of some thirty Chinese students in their second year of university (aged approximately 19), all of whom were complete beginners in French the previous year. The video was filmed after approximately 540 teaching hours. The video extract shows only the first two steps and the first part of step 3 of teaching oral production. It was recorded in March 2015 at the Nanhai campus of the South China Normal University (SCNU), in Guangzhou. The instructor is Inès Ricordel.

*Fig. 4-20*

STEP 1: INSTRUCTOR MODELS

I: Bon! Alors, vous vous souvenez de la semaine dernière ? N… vous a raconté que quand il était plus jeune il avait l'habitude d'aller en colonie de vacances. *[Right! So, you remember last week? N... {the other French teacher} told you about how when he was younger, he was in the habit of going to summer camps.]*

Tandis que moi, quand j'étais plus jeune, j'avais l'habitude d'aller chez mon oncle qui vivait dans le sud de l'Angleterre et j'avais l'habitude d'aller à la plage et de me baigner tout le temps. Mais, malheureusement, un jour, la veille de mon départ [pour l'Angleterre], je suis tombée et je me suis cassé le bras [gestes]. *[In my case, though, when I was younger, I was in the habit of visiting my uncle, who lived in the south of England, and I used to go to the beach and swim all the time. But unfortunately, one day, the day before I left {for England}, I fell down and broke my arm {gestures}.]*

Alors, je suis allée à l'hôpital et on m'a fait un plâtre. Donc, quand je suis arrivée en Angleterre, chez mon oncle, je ne pouvais pas me baigner. J'étais très très très malheureuse. *[So I went to the hospital and they put a cast on. When I arrived at my uncle's, in England, I couldn't go swimming. I was very very very sad.]*

STEP 2: INSTRUCTOR QUESTIONS A FEW STUDENTS

I: Et vous, quand vous étiez plus jeunes, vous aviez l'habitude de faire quoi ? Et, un jour, qu'est-ce qui s'est passé [rires] ? [court silence] *[How about you, when you were younger, what were you in the habit of doing? And what happened one day? {Laughter} {Short silence}]*

S: Quand je suis plus jeune… [geste d'Inès montrant qu'il s'agit d'une action passée] Quand j'étais plus jeune, j'avais l'habitude d'aller au parc où il y avait des fleurs, et… beaucoup de fleurs. J'ai fait la promené, j'ai fait la promenade. *[When I am younger… {Inès gestures, indicating that the action is in the past} When I was younger, I used to go to the park where there were flowers, and… lots of flowers. I did the walked, I did the walking.]*

I: Tu te promenais. *[You walked around.]*

S: Je me promenais. Je me suis… *[I walked around. I was…]*

I: Bien ! Ça dépend! Est-ce qu'en général tu avais l'habitude de te promener chaque jour, chaque semaine, dans ce parc, ou est-ce que c'est arrivé une fois: tu t'es promenée et… Ah! Il s'est passé quelque chose ? *[Good! It depends! Were you generally in the habit of walking around every day, every week, in this park, or did it happen*

one time: you were walking around and... Ah! Something
happened?]
S: [inaudible]
I: Donc, tu avais l'habitude de te promener dans ce parc. Donc, tu te
promenais dans ce parc. *[So, you were in the habit of walking around
in this park. So, you were walking around in this park.]*
S: Je me promenais dans ce parc. *[I was walking around in this park.]*
I: Oui. *[Yes.]*
S: Et… là-bas… j'ai rencontré une, un étranger. *[And... there... I met a, a
foreigner.]*
I: Ah oui ? Tu as rencontré un étranger ? *[Oh really? You met a
foreigner?]*
S: Un étranger. Et j'ai rencontré un étranger. *[A foreigner. And I met a
foreigner.]*
I: Ah oui ? *[Oh really?]*
S: J'ai parlé avec… lui. *[I spoke with… him.]*
I: Oui. *[Yes.]*
S: J'ai parlé avec lui [rires de la classe]. *[I spoke with him. {Laughter from
the class}]*
I: Oui, c'est un évènement particulier [rires de la classe]. Donc, voilà !
D'accord ! Donc, N… avait l'habitude de se promener dans le parc où il
y avait beaucoup de fleurs. Et est-ce que tu avais l'habitude de ramener
des fleurs ? *[Yes, that's an unusual event. {Laughter from the
classroom} So, there we are! Right! So, N... {student's name} was in
the habit of walking in the park where there were lots of flowers. And
were you in the habit of bringing back flowers?]*
S: Non. *[No.]*
I: Mais, un jour tu as rencontré un étranger. Et il était de quelle
nationalité ? *[But one day, you met a foreigner. And what was his
nationality?]*
S: Il est… il était…, il était… Anglais. *[He is... he was… he was
English]*
I: Ah! Ah! Et c'est pour ça que tu apprends le français maintenant [rires
de la classe] ? *[Ah-ha! And that's why you're learning French now?
{Laughter from the class}]*
S: Mais, mais… je n'ai pas rencontré… un… étranger français. *[But,
but... I didn't meet... a... French foreigner.]*
I: Oui, d'accord. *[Yes, all right.]*
   Et les autres, alors ? Quand vous étiez plus jeunes, qu'est-ce que vous
   aviez l'habitude de faire et, un jour… Ah! Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ?
   [court silence] *[And the rest of you, then? When you were younger,*

*what were you in the habit of doing, and, one day… Ah! What happened? {Short silence}]*

Oui, N…, qu'est-ce que tu veux dire ? *[Yes, N... {student's name}, what do you want to say?]*

S:  Quand j'étais plus jeune…, j'avais l'habitude d'aller… […] *[When I was younger, I was in the habit of going... {...}]*

STEP 3a: A FEW LEARNERS ASK OTHER LEARNERS QUESTIONS

I:  N… [s'adressant à un garçon], est-ce que tu peux poser la question à quelqu'un qui n'est pas une femme ? *[N... {speaking to a male student}, can you ask the question to someone who isn't a woman?]*

S:  Quand tu étais petite [rires de la classe]…, quand tu étais petit, tu avais l'habitude de… faire quoi ? *[{Using feminine form of the adjective} When you were little... {Laughter from the class} {Using male form of the adjective} When you were little, you were in the habit of... doing what?]*

I:  Et un jour… *[And one day...]*

S:  Et un jour,… qu'est-ce qui se passe ? *[And one day, ... what happens?]*

I:  [geste d'Inès indiquant qu'il s'agit du passé] Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé? *{Gestures, indicating that the action takes place in the past} What happened?]*

S:  Qu'est-ce qui s'est passé ? *[What happened?]*

[…]

As can be seen, the distinction between the imperfect tense and the present perfect in French is first discerned through oral *use*, more or less consciously and in the context of an authentic situation. Later, when reading an authentic text, it is observed as a grammatical phenomenon: at this point, learners become aware of the distinction, in the context of an inductive teaching process. This is then followed by the writing phase, where learners have the opportunity to use the distinction again in a new situation, one of personal communication. These new texts will then be read by classmates and, finally, the teacher will "close the circle" by asking the learners about what they've read, leading them to spontaneously reuse orally the distinction between imperfect tense and present perfect.

**Q 4.16** *How can we deschool the teaching of oral language?*

In the NLA, we often speak of "deschooling" how oral language is taught. To do so is simply a matter of respecting the recommendations given for each step of our strategies for teaching oral language, as these

steps are essentially centred on the learners' and teacher's interests and lived experience.

## Teaching Oral Comprehension and Phonetics

**Q 4.17** *In the NLA, learners only acquire competence in oral comprehension in the classroom, by listening to the teacher and what the others say. Why are there no oral comprehension exercises?*

Thus far, there is no step specifically dedicated to *oral comprehension* exercises. As Brumfit (1984) remarks, as is the case for any communication in an authentic situation, understanding and oral production are intimately linked. In other words, to a great degree, this derives from the authenticity principle: there are no *overt* exercises for oral understanding and oral production. As mentioned previously, when discussing the complementarity of Vygotsky and Piaget's views (see chapter 1, "Fifth Lesson"), social interactions are essential to ensure cognitive development.

That being said, to ensure that learners' oral comprehension skills in authentic communication situations are indeed being developed, we recommend frequently using the *purposeful listening* technique (step 8 of the teaching strategies for oral production):

**Text Box 4.18**
**PURPOSEFUL LISTENING**

All that is required is to ask learners, out of the blue or simply during an oral exchange, to report on what a classmate has just said or said during earlier conversations (while in pairs, for instance). This "forces" learners, so to speak, to be constantly aware of what the teacher and the other learners are saying.

There is no *a priori* reason to avoid using oral recordings already available on the market. However, if doing so, teachers should approach these oral texts just as written ones are, i.e. planning for an *oral preparation* to the listening, in a "contextualisation" phase. Under these conditions, it is quite possible, even desirable to take advantage of oral recordings available on the market.

**Q 4.18** *Why does the NLA not include videos?*

So far, the IF and NLA teaching units have been self-published by their developers. However, a French-language NLA textbook intended to meet the needs of young adults and adults is currently in preparation. Though there will be no accompanying videos for this textbook, there will be sound recordings for activities specifically intended to help learners planning to attempt the *Diplôme d'études en langue française* (DELF) certification test.

**Q 4.19** *Why are there no phonetic exercises?*

As with "aural comprehension," there are no "artificial" or academic phonetic exercises. Given that all language acquisition depends on authentic communication, phonetic mistakes are consistently corrected during oral exchanges, either between the teacher and the learners (somewhat like parents correcting a child's faulty pronunciation) or between learners. This is done by repeating the model of the proper pronunciation—as much for prosodic elements as for matters of pronunciation per se.

**To conclude,** we hope that it is clearer how overhauling L2/FL teaching strategies first requires serious study of what the neurosciences can currently teach us about the process of acquiring a language. *Teaching*, therefore, is merely a means to an *end*: the acquisition/learning of a language. In the NLA, it is the end that guides the means (and not the reverse), as has been shown throughout this chapter on the predominant role the NLA gives to the acquisition of oral skills.

# Chapter Five

# Learning and Teaching Reading, Writing and Culture with the NLA

Except when it proves necessary to qualify matters, this chapter is principally concerned with issues related to explicit knowledge, i.e. external grammar. We begin by reviewing the NLA's conception of how reading, writing, and culture are acquired, including the influence of oral skills on writing skills. Each subsequent section provides the NLA's recommendations regarding the teaching of each of these fundamental elements of any language.

## Learning and Teaching Reading

**Q 5.1** *How is reading learnt?*

As we saw in the first part, one of the neurolinguistic bases of the NLA's second principle is the brain's great flexibility. This allows us to account for the evolutionary nature of the way in which reading is learnt.

**Text Box 5.1**
**THE BRAIN'S FLEXIBILITY IN TERMS OF LEARNING HOW TO READ**

As we learn to read in an L2/FL, the situation evolves: the learner gradually moves towards letting the *automatic* (unconscious) aspects of reading—i.e., a language's regular patterns (and not its rules)—take a greater place in the experience. As Gombert says about learning how to read, even in a L1, "the engine driving implicit learning has a sequential nature" (2005, 253).

Thus, when the learner begins to read in an L2/FL, the greater part of the process involves recognising certain linguistic phenomena. For instance, at the very start, a certain amount of emphasis must be placed on the relationship between a sound and the various ways it can be written in order for the learner to be able to read aloud correctly (without pronouncing silent letters). The same is true of prosodic issues occurring

when reading aloud, such as rhythm and intonation. In other words, when students begin to learn to read, the part played by the declarative memory is likely to be greater than it will be at higher levels, where numerous unconscious cerebral mechanisms will come into play, first when reading aloud and then, gradually, during silent reading.

We must never forget that as learners' reading abilities progress, a larger and larger role will be played by automatic mechanisms: "Taking into account the implicit side of learning in no way diminishes the importance of the conscious side. So long as their implicit skills are insufficient to do so, explicit learning of the correspondences between graphemes and phonemes is indispensable for students to be able to read" (Gombert 2005, 253).

**Q 5.2** *How do you teach reading in the NLA?*
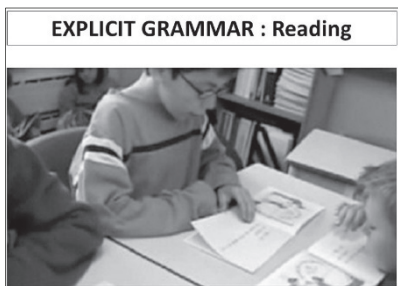


**EXPLICIT GRAMMAR : Reading**

*Fig. 5-1*

In line with our understanding of literacy, orality must still retain a predominant place. As briefly discussed in the second chapter, we hold that teaching strategies for L2/FL literacy cannot be the same as for a L1. There are four potential ways in which literacy teaching must be specific to the L2/FL rather than simply modelled on how the L1 was taught (see Fig. 5-2 below).

In the NLA, therefore, every teaching unit or lesson begins and ends with spoken language. As knowledge cannot be transformed into skill, speaking—i.e. the development of implicit competence—is given precedence. Then, as much for reading as for writing, it is imperative to always begin with a spoken, *contextualising* phase, in order to activate the learner's internal grammar—something which is not necessary in a L1, because in that situation learners already know how to speak the language in which they must read and write.
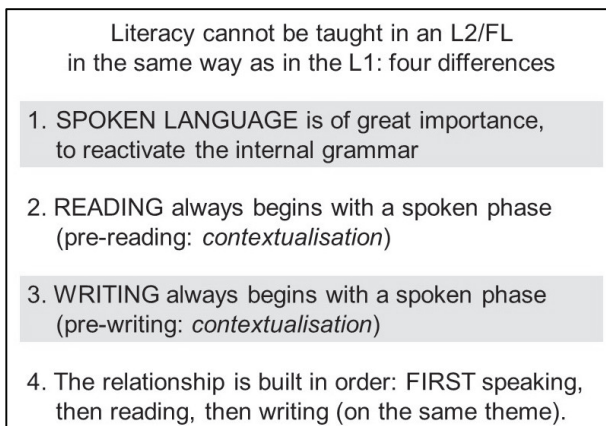
Literacy cannot be taught in an L2/FL
in the same way as in the L1: four differences

1. SPOKEN LANGUAGE is of great importance,
   to reactivate the internal grammar

2. READING always begins with a spoken phase
   (pre-reading: *contextualisation*)

3. WRITING always begins with a spoken phase
   (pre-writing: *contextualisation*)

4. The relationship is built in order: FIRST speaking,
   then reading, then writing (on the same theme).

*Fig. 5-2*

**Text Box 5.2**
**PRE-READING: ORAL PHASE**

It may be worth recalling here the two main reasons why orality must precede reading. Firstly, for reading to be possible, meaning must be created first by understanding of the relationship between the words in a sentence, then by understanding the relationship between the sentences, thus making sense of the overall text at the paragraph level. Secondly, one must be able to correctly recognise the relationship between a sound and its various written representations, as well as be able to respect a text's prosody.

As we will see later, any reading activity (involving an authentic text) will necessarily be preceded by a *contextualising* phase in the classroom, i.e. a *pre-reading* phase. With authentic texts, one must have "previously made sure that the students are well prepared for the difficulties this type of text will present […] In other words, one must always prepare well for ensure good preparation for the adventure the authentic represents" (Cornaire [1991] 1999, 70-71).

During the pre-reading phase, the teacher begins by making the link between his or her life experiences and the text's theme, and then *orally* presents the main new words or new expressions that will be encountered in the text. Learners are then asked questions that make them use these new words or expressions, always in an authentic sentential context. All this takes place *orally*, before reading the text or having the learners read it.

Turning to the basis for the NLA's third principle, the importance of centring on messages' meanings, it will be agreed that in a written text, the unit of meaning is the paragraph. In an L2/FL, learners should be made aware that it is not necessary to understand every single word in a text, and that the important thing is to try to grasp the general or overall sense of the assigned reading paragraph. In terms of reading, we advocate a paragraph-based pedagogy.

**Q 5.3** *How do you teach students to read a narrative text?*
Understandably, the steps enumerated below are incomplete, given that—as mentioned in the previous chapter—teachers usually familiarise themselves with these teaching strategies during an NLA training workshop, a necessary step for those wishing to use this approach.

**Text Box 5.3**
**TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR READING A NARRATIVE TEXT**

As is the case for teaching oral skills, there are two sets of strategies in the NLA for teaching learners how to read a narrative text: those that are applied in a specific sequence and those that are superimposed on the first.
The first set consists of five strategies that need to be applied in the order discussed below.
**First of all**, in a pre-reading situation, teachers "contextualise" the activity and link their life experiences to the theme or topic of the text to be read. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that learners have a good general sense of the meaning of the text to be read, by introducing and having learners use four or five new words (or new expressions) in a conversational setting.
**Secondly**, to encourage learners to "guess" the overall meaning while they are reading, teachers have the learners make a few **PREDICTIONS**, showing the cover page and a few of the illustrated pages that bear on the main events of the text to be read. Teachers do not use descriptive language (such as *What's in this picture?*) but question learners on the attitude or the reactions of characters, their actions, etc.
**In the third step**, in the first reading session of a text, the teacher reads the text aloud, without stopping, while the learners follow the text in their books or on an electronic board. The teacher then asks a few questions to check overall understanding of the meaning BEFORE having the learners read the text. In the NLA, even prior to reading a text, learners must understand, even if it is just approximately, the general meaning of the text. This is why the teacher then returns to the predictions that were made in the second step.

**During the fourth step**, a second reading session of the text is carried out by having a few learners read certain sections of the text aloud. Rather than dividing the text sentence by sentence, it is better to have each designated learner read a complete paragraph at a time, since, in reading, the unit of meaning is the paragraph. The teacher pays attention to the quality of the reading aloud and, depending on the difficulties noted, has the learners observe a prosodic feature (rhythm, pronunciation, intonation, diacritics, elisions, etc.) or a link between a sound and the different ways of writing that sound (for example, *ruff* and *rough, weigh* and *way, threw* and *through*). Having had the learners find a few other similar cases in the text that has been read, the observations are noted in an exercise book for that purpose.

**Finally**, the teacher uses the third reading session to have learners observe a grammatical point that is specific to written language, for example, the verb agreement with the third person singular, the distinction between *its* and *it's*, and so on. The teacher has the learners find a few other examples in the text of the linguistic feature in question and, by induction, has the learners formulate a rule (even if only approximate). This type of rule, formulated with the help of the teacher, is then noted in an exercise book used for that purpose.

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The second set comprises two strategies for teaching reading which can be applied at any time, depending on need, concurrently with the first set of teaching strategies described above.

**The first case** which may arise is when there is a lack of *fluency* in reading. This can happen when the *links* between the words of a sentence are not respected, in other words, the text is read haltingly in fragments (word by word, or phrase by phrase) or when punctuation is not followed, and so on. The text must be read as "naturally" as possible, so that the meaning of the text is respected.

**The second case** deals with the development of *precision of language*. As is the case with oral production, if a learner reads the text and makes an error of any kind (prosodic, phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical, etc.), it is important to ensure the development of correct usage of the target language. That is why there is constant correction of learners' errors, and, if need be, modelling the reading of the section that is causing difficulty. When correcting an error, it is important, each time, to have the learner reread the section in question.

Once all these steps have been covered (both strategy sets), the teacher proposes a **final activity**, for example, an extension of the text, where learners continue the story or imagine (and talk about) a new ending to the story, and so on.

**Q 5.4** *How do you teach students to read an informative text?*

Teaching students to read an informative text requires slightly different strategies than those used for narrative or even argumentative texts (the latter at higher levels). Again, the strategies come in two parts: a set of six consecutive strategies, and a set of two strategies (fluency and accuracy) that overlap with the preceding.

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**Text Box 5.4**
**TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR READING AN INFORMATIVE TEXT**

As is the case for teaching oral skills, there are two sets of strategies in the NLA for teaching learners how to read an informative text: those that are applied in a specific sequence and those that are superimposed on the first.

The first set consists of five strategies that must be applied in the order discussed below.

**First of all**, in a pre-reading situation, teachers "contextualise" the activity and link their life experiences to the theme or topic of the text to be read. The purpose of this phase is to ensure that learners a good general sense of the meaning of the text to be read, by introducing and having learners use four or five new words (or new expressions) in a conversational setting.

**Secondly**, in the case of an informative text that is usually written for non-beginners, in particular adults, the teacher is advised to use the **KWL** technique, rather than the procedure suggested for reading a narrative text:

> K = what I **k**now about the topic
> W = what I **w**ant to know about the topic
> L = what I have **l**earned about the topic

The teacher begins by having learners state **EXPECTATIONS** (in order to distinguish between the activity for a narrative text, *predictions*, and the one for an informative text). To do this, the teacher shows the title and the table of contents of the book or text to be read, as well as any subtitles and the general organisation of the text in order to discuss it.

The teacher then asks learners what they **KNOW** about the topic of the book, then what they **WANT** to know about the topic, noting three or four responses for each of the two sections (**K** and **W**).

**In the third step**, in the first reading session, the teacher reads the text aloud (or asks a strong reader to do so), without stopping, while the learners follow the text in their books or on an electronic board. The

teacher then asks a few questions to check overall understanding of the meaning BEFORE having the text read by the learners. In the NLA, even prior to reading a text, learners must understand, even if only approximately, the general meaning of the text. This is why the teacher then returns to the **EXPECTATIONS** that were made, and asks them what new things they have **LEARNED** (the **L** of the technique) about the topic.

**The fourth step** is only required if learners still experience some difficulties in reading. If this proves to be the case, a second reading session of the text is carried out by having a few learners read certain sections of the text aloud. Rather than dividing the text sentence by sentence, it is better to have each designated learner read a complete paragraph at a time since, in reading, the unit of meaning is the paragraph. The teacher pays attention to the quality of the reading aloud and, depending on the difficulties noted, has the learners observe a prosodic feature (rhythm, pronunciation, intonation, diacritics, elisions, etc.) or a link between a sound and the different ways of writing that sound (for example, *ruff* and *rough, weigh* and *way, threw* and *through*). Having had the learners find a few other similar cases in the text that has been read, the observations are noted in an exercise book for that purpose.

**Finally**, as a second or third reading session (depending on the necessity—or not—of the previous session), the teacher uses the reading session to have learners observe a grammatical point that is specific to the written language, for example, the verb agreement with the third person singular, the distinction between *its* and *it's*, and so on. The teacher has the learners find a few other examples in the text of the linguistic feature in question and, by induction, has the learners formulate a rule (even if only approximate). This type of rule, formulated with the help of the teacher, is then noted in an exercise book used for that purpose.

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The second set consists of only two strategies for teaching reading which can be applied at any time, depending on need, concurrently with the teaching strategies described above in the first set.

**The first case** which may arise is when there is a lack of *fluency* in reading (which can persist even with non-beginners). This can happen when the *links* between the words of a sentence are not respected, in other words, the text is read haltingly in fragments (word by word, or phrase by phrase) or when punctuation is not followed, and so on. The text must be read as "naturally" as possible, so that the meaning of the text is respected.

**The second case** deals with the development of *precision of language*. As is the case with oral production, if a learner reads the text and makes an error of any kind (prosodic, phonetic, morphosyntactic, lexical, etc.), it is important to ensure the development of correct usage of the target language. That is why there is constant correction of learners' errors, and, if need be, modelling the reading of the section that is causing difficulty. When correcting an error, it is important, each time, to have the learner reread the section in question.

Once all these steps have been covered (both strategy sets), the teacher proposes a **final activity**, returning this time to the **KWL** technique. The teacher then asks the learners if the text has raised other questions that the discussion has not answered. If there are, the teacher suggests that the learners do some research (as homework) to find answers to these questions.

**Q 5.5** *In the teaching sequence for reading informative texts, you replace hypotheses about the pictures with the KWL strategy. What stops us from making hypotheses about the illustrations in informative texts?*

It all depends on what role the illustrations play in the text. Generally, illustrations that accompany an informational text play a different role from those accompanying a narrative text: they complete a text's information.

In a narrative text, illustrations usually accentuate the essential elements of the plot. Still, it must be admitted that the distinction between the two types of text is not always very clear. For instance, in a text whose purpose is to convince the reader to stop smoking, the first part might be informative, to educate the reader, while the second part might be motivational, aiming to give the reader advice.

**Q 5.6** *There are many other discursive genres beyond the narrative and the informative. Do you introduce them? If so, at which point do you do so, and how?*

Currently, the NLA only uses three common types of text: narrative, informative, and argumentative.[1] It should be noted, however, that the latter requires quite a strong command of the language.

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[1] That being said, the new iteration of the NLA for teaching adult learners (the textbook for which is in preparation), will include a wider variety of text types.

## Teaching External Grammar

**Q 5.7** *How do you teach external grammar? When is it introduced? How? In what shape? What tools do you use?*

Once the learners have reached the point of reading the texts in class themselves, the teacher introduces a moment of *grammatical observation*, looking at a few cases found in the authentic texts that have been read. For instance, with young beginner students, the teacher might observe that the word (or the verb) that follows *He* or *She* usually ends in an *s*, as in *He plays with…* At this level, with young learners, one doesn't formulate a rule as such. Likewise, the teacher might note that in *My address is*, there are two *D*s and two *S*s.

However, with non-beginners, one step in teaching them to learn to read an authentic text is to have the students note a grammatical phenomenon and, in addition, to have them formulate the rule in their own words before writing the rule down in their notebook (for instance, constructing the past tense with *-ed*). Gradually, as students encounter further examples of the same rules in other texts, the way these rules are formulated can be revisited. What is always to be avoided is starting with a rule and then applying it. Rather, the approach is resolutely inductive, with rules (or generalisations) formulated on the basis of concrete cases observed. In this sense, grammar is considered to be *contextual* rather than *traditional* (learnt deductively).

**Text Box 5.5**
**WITH ADULTS**

The process is relatively similar with adults, except that it begins to be used much earlier, even in the first teaching units, as the learning culture of most adults is attuned to lead them to believe that learning a language must imply learning grammatical rules. Explicit (external) grammar is still taught through reading; writing is considered simply as an opportunity to apply the rules learnt during a reading stage.



*Fig. 5-3*

To demonstrate how an inductive approach can be used to teach external, explicit grammar during a reading phase, in Text Box 5.6 below we give an example of a *grammatical observation* noted in an informative text. This is only one small aspect of how this approach can be applied

in practice, which is explained in much greater detail during NLA training workshops, where we demonstrate how an intermediate-level informative text, entitled "Une invention très ancienne: la roue" (*A Very Old Invention: The Wheel*), can be used to enhance learners' grammatical understanding.

Let us remember that this is the fifth of the eight teaching strategies used for informative texts.

**Text Box 5.6**
**AN EXAMPLE OF GRAMMATICAL OBSERVATION (INFORMATIVE TEXT)**

GRAMMATICAL OBSERVATION STEP
(to prepare learners for writing their own text later)

When preparing the lesson plan, the teacher begins by carefully reading the text to identify which grammatical features are used on several occasions throughout the text and seem likely to present some difficulties for the learners *when they come to write*. In the case of the text mentioned above, the teacher could spend extra time on the agreement in gender and number of adjectives in French, if this has not already been done during previous teaching units.

In the classroom: the teacher asks the learners to explain why the adjective in the text's title is "ancienne" rather than "ancien" (namely, because it is modifying a feminine noun [*roue*]), and why the adjective in the unit's title, "grandes," takes an "s," and why one writes "grandes" rather than "grands" (namely, because it is modifying a feminine, plural noun). The students then seek out other similar examples in the text, i.e., other adjectives that agree in number and gender with the noun that they qualify. The teacher then asks the learners to explain, in their own words, why these adjectives are in the feminine and why they are in the plural.

To sum up, the teacher asks the learners to formulate the rule in simple terms, and to write it down in their notebook, giving two examples from the text that has been read and two other examples they come up with themselves to demonstrate their rule.

In reading, as we've seen, the unit of meaning is the paragraph, which is itself a collection of sentences. When having learners read a text, it is a good idea to have a complete paragraph read aloud by the same learner, rather than only one or two sentences (unless, of course, it's a very long paragraph).

**Q 5.8** *What grammar book do you recommend using with the NLA?*

Though some learners may wish to compare their own rules with the "official" ones, we do not recommend any particular grammar reference book. It all depends on what's available.

# Learning and Teaching Writing

**Q 5.9** *How do you learn to write in the NLA?*

At the beginning of this chapter we mentioned the evolutionary nature of learning to read. *Mutatis mutandis*: a similar reasoning applies to writing. The more L2/FL learners write, the larger the role played by the *automatic* (unconscious) aspects of writing. For example, at the very start of the learning process, it is possible that learners will have to stop to "think" before they can write down *My address is*, in order to revive the observations made on the topic: two *D*s and two *S*s. But after a certain amount of time, this can become a sort of automatic routine, requiring no appeal to the declarative memory, thus not interrupting the writing flow.

**Text Box 5.7**

**IN WRITING, HOW APPLYING A RULE BECOMES AUTOMATED (NOT THE RULE ITSELF)**

As Paradis remarks, knowledge of the rules does not become automated in a writing activity. If it did, it would present a case of knowledge transforming into a skill. Rather, what becomes automated is not knowledge of the rule, i.e. its formulation, but how it is applied (Paradis 1994).

Gombert reiterates this point, specifically in regard to writing: "An automatic answer does not derive from the automation of the rule that has been learnt (which continues to be managed through conscious attention) but is the product of implicit learning" (2005, 254).

**Q 5.10** *How do you teach writing in the NLA?*

Writing is looked at simply as a phase where the explicit rules previously learnt through reading are applied to the production of authentic personal texts. Even if the primary objective of a written text is to transmit a message, one of the traditional markers of correct writing is the absence of spelling mistakes, lexical and/or grammatical. As the learners then have time to reread their own texts, they are able to call on their explicit knowledge of the language.
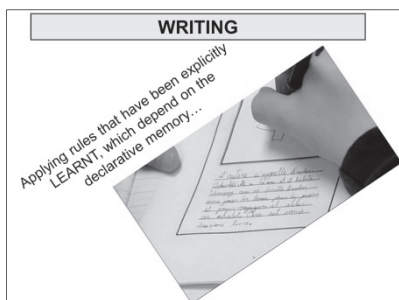
**WRITING**

Applying rules that have been explicitly LEARNT, which depend on the declarative memory…

*Fig. 5-4*

When it comes time for beginners to produce written texts, the teacher always provides the model of a text on the blackboard (or screen), one jointly constructed by the learners and the teacher. This is the text that the learners will have to *adapt* (and not simply *copy*), just as they have become used to doing when speaking. Here again, the *modelling* technique is at the root of their learning. Naturally, all this is adapted to the learners' level of development. For example, with students who already have a certain understanding of the L2/FL being acquired, the teacher need only write the logical connectors (e.g. *first*, *then*, *finally*) on the board as a model.

The writing process is similar to that used for teaching reading: six consecutive strategies must be followed, then two (fluency and accuracy) that overlap with the preceding ones.

**Text Box 5.8**
**TEACHING STRATEGIES FOR WRITING**

The NLA includes two sets of teaching strategies for writing: those that are applied following a specific sequence and those that are superimposed on them.

The first set consists of five strategies that must be applied in the order discussed below.

**First of all**, as is the case for oral production and reading (whether the text is narrative or informative), in the NLA one starts with a linguistic *model* for the activity that is to be carried out by the learners. Thus, having mentioned the topic on which the learners will write (naturally, the same topic that has been the focus of oral work and reading tasks), teachers ask learners to make suggestions orally about what they (the teachers) should write (thus providing a model), based on their own life experiences, all of which have previously been discussed orally. For example, to return to the example used earlier, if a text about food is to be written, the teacher's favourite dessert should be mentioned. While correcting, if necessary, the errors that are made orally by the learners, the teacher writes down the learners' suggestions on a flip chart or an electronic board. For example, if a learner says *Your favourite dessert is apple pie*, the teacher writes *My favourite dessert is apple pie.*

**Secondly**, once the teacher's text is complete, as a first activity, the teacher (or a strong reader in the class) reads the text aloud, without stopping, while the learners follow the text on the flip-chart or electronic board. If necessary, should learners still have difficulty reading, the teacher corrects prosodic errors or links between a sound and its written form.

**In the third step**, the teacher proceeds with a sort of grammatical-awareness activity, recalling certain grammatical conventions that have already been observed during the previous text-reading phase. This is done to ensure that learners are well-prepared for the writing activity to come.

**During the fourth step**, the teacher motivates the learners for the next step, where they will write their own texts, based on the one written by the teacher, and adapted to their own context, while using the language structures and vocabulary that have been used orally and seen in reading on the same topic. To do so, the teacher asks some learners a few questions to prepare them orally ("in their head") for what they are about to write.

**Finally**, the learners write their own texts.

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The second set consists of only two teaching strategies for reading which can be applied at any time, depending on need, concurrently with the teaching strategies described above in the first set.

**The first case** which may arise is when there is a lack of *fluency* in writing. This can be observed, for example, when a teacher notes that a few learners have a tendency to constantly translate everything they wish to write. In this case, the teacher can question the learners individually so that they first state orally what they wish to write (if necessary, the teacher once again provides several personal models orally).

**The second case** deals with the development of *precision of language* when writing. Two situations may present themselves. While going around in the class, if the teacher observes that errors in the written text are, in fact, oral errors (that is, the sentence that the learner is producing is "said" wrongly), the teacher can then orally question the learner who is making the error to ensure that the sentence is said aloud correctly (syntactically, for example). If the teacher observes that the errors in a text are specific to written language (agreement, spelling), the teacher can encourage the learner who is making this type of error to consult the exercise book in which the grammatical observations, made during the reading phase of previous lessons have been noted down.

Once all these steps have been covered (both strategy sets), the teacher proposes a **post-writing activity**. For this, learners are encouraged to

share the texts that they have just written, to read them and to discuss them with the rest of the class. From time to time, once the texts have been corrected, they can be posted on a wall or exchanged with other classes.

At the writing stage, the overall unit of meaning becomes the entire text, itself made up of a few paragraphs. Very early on, students must write complete texts, with several paragraphs. In terms of writing, we advocate teaching on the basis of complete texts (not of isolated sentences).

**Q 5.11** *What grammatical rules should be taught first?*
If one considers, for instance, cases such as personal pronouns (*he/she*, etc.) or possessive adjectives (*my, his/hers,* etc.—see Text Box 4.3), these should first be introduced to learners orally in order to develop their unconscious grammar, well before the rules governing them are taught. In other words, first take care of developing the ability to communicate before teaching explicit knowledge about a language. As for the actual selection of what rules to teach, these should be determined according to the real cases encountered while reading authentic texts.

**Q 5.12** *How does one deal with the grammatical agreement of the verb with the subject when there is a word between the subject and the verb?*
An error in writing that often comes up in French-as-a-second-language classrooms is the agreement of the verb with its subject, when there is a word that separates the subject from the verb, as for example in the sentence *Mes enfants* **me laisse** *un peu de temps pour faire du sport* (My children allow me a bit of time to play some sports), where the verb should be spelt "laissent" in order to agree with the plural subject "enfants." In such cases, it is possible that the learners have copied a similar sentence, or a model sentence, whose subject is singular, and that "the spelling produced is that which has been learned implicitly, which corresponds to what the learner has encountered most often (agreement between the verb and the subject that immediately precedes it)" (Gombert, 2005, 254).

A parallel challenge in English might be a student who writes *My father didn't* **thought** *that it was a good idea*.

In the French example above, the error is specific to writing, as the pronunciation of *laisse* and *laissent* is identical. Thus, it is necessary to start with a grammatical observation phase in reading (see the fifth step of the strategies) and have the learners discover the rule inductively by finding a few examples of its application in the text. They must be brought to notice that even if the verb is immediately preceded by a word in the

singular (*me*, in the French example), the verb must agree in number with its subject, in this case *mes enfants*, despite that word's presence. The learners must *analyse* the text, in a simple manner, to discover whether the subject of the verb is in the singular or in the plural.

It is then possible to move on to the writing phase, taking care to look out for this particular grammatical element when writing a text on a related theme, in which there is a strong likelihood of coming across the same phenomenon. This is where the importance of the *contextualisation* phase lies: in ensuring that the learners use, orally, subjects that are sometimes plural, sometimes singular.

**Text Box 5.9**
**EXAMPLES OF WRITTEN PRODUCTIONS, STUDENTS IN INTENSIVE FRENCH, GRADE 5 (AGE 10-11)**

The following texts are examples of strong, intermediate, and weak texts written by students in Intensive French, with English translations showing equivalent errors.
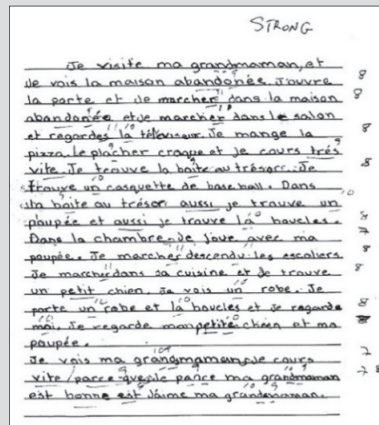


*Fig. 5-5*

**Strong Text**

I visit my grandmother, and I see the abandoned house. I open the door and I to walk in the abandoned house and I walking in the living room and looks at the television. I eat pizza. The flor cracks and I run very fast. I find the treasure box. I find a baseball cap. In a treasure box also I find a doll and also I find rings. In the bedroom, I play with my doll. I to walk went down the stairs. I to walk in her kitchen and I find a small dog. I see a dress. I wear a dress and the rings and I look me. I look my small dog and my doll.
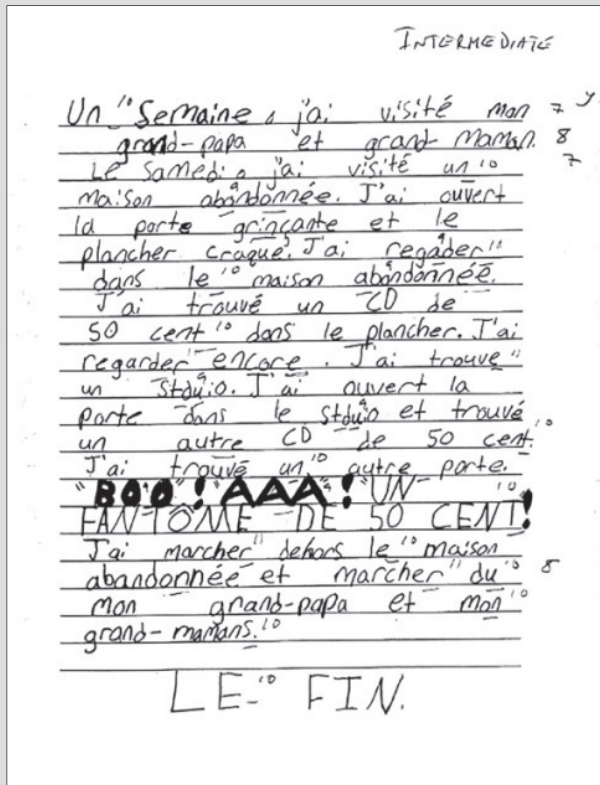
*Fig. 5-6*

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**Intermediate Text**

<u>On</u> week, I visited my grand father and grand mother. On <u>saturday</u> <u>visited</u> <u>a</u> abandoned house. I opened the <u>door grinding</u> and the floor <u>cracks.</u> I <u>look</u> in the abandoned house. I found a CD of 50 <u>cent</u> <u>in</u> the floor. I <u>look</u> again. I found a studio. I opened the door <u>in</u> the studio and found another CD of 50 cent. I found <u>other</u> door. **BOOH! AAA!** GHOST OF 50 CENT! I <u>to walk</u> outside <u>of abandoned house</u> and to walk <u>of the my</u> grandfather and my grandmothers.

THE. END.

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*Fig. 5-7*

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**Weak Text**

I to go in house and I lookd all thing in house. I to walk in one room and there is a bed. I to jump in the bed and what surprise it's a gohst in the bed with mee. I have scared. I have vary scared. I to jump one the flor and run from the door. But a wolf next to the door and he to run to me and to jump one me and I climb the wolf and I to jump in the window and I never going back of that house.

It's End.

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With teens or young adults, the production of written texts can be even more elaborate, as the following text demonstrates.

**Text Box 5.10**
**TEXTS WRITTEN BY TWO JAPANESE UNIVERSITY STUDENTS (**after a total 18 HOURS of classes)

The class consists of 18 Japanese students of French, who are learning their third foreign language (after English and one other, such as Chinese, German, or Italian). There are two teachers: a Japanese instructor who teaches "French Grammar" in Japanese, and a French instructor who teaches "Conversation," each scheduled for 90 minutes of classroom time every week for 30 weeks, for a total of 45 hours per year each. There is no connection between these two courses and these two instructors.

The French instructor, Romain Jourdan-Ôtsuka, of the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies, attended an NLA training workshop in Tokyo in March 2015. Subsequently, he attempted to put NLA principles into practice in his "Conversation" classes (9 of the total 18), which explains why he did not restrict himself to teaching oral language. Here then are written texts by two "average" students in his class, after only nine hours of teaching/learning with the help of the NLA. The English translations preserve equivalent awkward turns of phrase to those in the original.



*Fig. 5-8*

**You write to a French student. Talk about yourself and your family. Ask him questions about himself and his family. A minimum of <u>60 words</u>. <u>Write numbers in letters.</u>**

Hi! This is Yui. How are you? I'm fine. I introduce you to my family. In my family there are how many four persons. There is my father, my mother, my brother and me. My father, he is called Nobukazu. He is fifty-five years old. My mother, she is called Akiko. She is fifty years old. My brother, he is called Jun. He is nineteen years old. They live in Hiroshima in Japan.

And you? How many people are there in your family? Who are they? How old are they? Goodbye! Yui.

*Fig. 5-9*

**You write to a French student. Talk about yourself and your family. Ask him questions about himself and his family. A minimum of <u>60 words</u>. <u>Write numbers in letters.</u>**

Hi. My name is Toya. How are you? I'm nineteen years old. I come from Kochi in Japan, but I live in Kyoto. I introduce my family. There are five persons. My broter, my moter, my grand moter, my sister, and me. I not have animals.

My boter's name is Hiroki. He is forty-six years old. My moter's name is Keiko. She is forty-four years old. My grand moter's name is Suhaiko. She is seventy-five years old. My sister, her name is Nana. She is seventeen years old. And you? How old is he? There are how many who?

Now, here is another example of a text written in a university in Taiwan, but this time, after 120 hours.

**Text Box 5.11**
**TEXT WRITTEN BY A UNIVERSITY STUDENT** (after 120 HOURS of classes)[2]

The text was written by Céline, a student in the same class as Euphémia. (At this Taiwanese university, as at the South China Normal University and elsewhere in Asia, Asian students are usually given French names in their FFL classes.)

### *Les goûts d'Euphémia et les miens*

*Le matin, au petit déjeuner, je mange habituellement des gâteaux aux navets. Le midi, au déjeuner, je mange habituellement des nouilles en soupe. Le soir, au dîner, je mange habituellement un repas en libre-service. Dans le courant de la journée, je mange des fruits.*

*En revanche, ma partenaire, Euphémia, le matin, au petit déjeuner, mange habituellement un sandwich et des fruits et elle boit du thé au lait. Le midi, au déjeuner, elle mange habituellement des nouilles en soupe, des légumes et elle boit du thé noir. Le soir, au dîner, elle mange habituellement un repas en libre-service et des fruits.*

*Moi, je mange tous les jours des légumes parce que c'est bon pour la santé et ça sent bon. Je mange souvent des nouilles en soupe parce que c'est délicieux. Je bois rarement des boissons sucrées parce qu'elles sont riches en sucre. Je ne bois jamais de coca parce que ce n'est pas bon pour la santé.*

*Ensuite, Euphémia, elle boit tous les jours du café parce que le café lui donne beaucoup d'énergie. Elle mange souvent des nouilles parce que c'est bon. Elle mange rarement des raviolis chinois et elle ne boit jamais de lait de noyaux d'abricot.*

*Je suis gourmande. J'aime manger de bonnes choses. J'adore le café, l'alcool de riz, la soupe, les nouilles, les légumes, les fruits, les œufs, etc. En plus, j'aime le thé, le riz, le poisson, les gâteaux aux navets, etc. En revanche, je n'aime pas les boissons sucrées, les pâtisseries et le yaourt parce que c'est trop sucré.*

*Euphémia, elle est aussi gourmande. Et elle aime manger de bonnes choses. Elle adore l'alcool de riz, la soupe, les boissons sucrées, les nouilles, les fruits, les pizzas, le fromage, les pâtisseries, le yaourt, etc. En plus, elle aime le thé, le café, le lait de soja, le riz, les œufs, les légumes, par exemple, les pommes de terre, etc. En revanche, elle n'aime pas les courgettes amères parce que c'est amer. Enfin, elle déteste boire du lait de*

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[2] To read another example from the same establishment, written by a student who followed a lesser number of classroom hours (90 hours), see Text Box 5.20.

*noyaux d'abricot, car à son goût ça ne sent pas bon.*

*Euphémia aime manger tous les légumes. Je pense que c'est une bonne habitude alimentaire parce que les légumes sont riches en fibres. Mais elle mange aussi beaucoup de bonbons, je pense que ce n'est pas une bonne habitude alimentaire parce que les bonbons sont trop sucrés, c'est mauvais pour la santé. Je lui suggère de manger moins de bonbons.*

*Si elle veut être en forme et avoir une vie de bonne qualité, il faut qu'elle mange plus équilibré et elle doit aussi faire du sport pour être en bonne santé.*

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**Euphemia's tastes and mine**

*Usually, for breakfast in the morning, I eat turnip cakes. At noon, for lunch, I usually eat noodles in soup. In the evening, for dinner, I usually eat a self-service meal. During the day, I eat fruit.*

*On the other hand, my partner, Euphemia, in the morning, for breakfast, usually eats a sandwich and some fruit and she drinks tea with milk. At noon, for lunch, she usually eats noodles in soup, some vegetables and she drinks black tea. In the evening, for dinner, she usually eats a self-service meal and some fruit.*

*I eat every day some vegetables because it is good for health and it smells good. I often eat noodles with soup because it's delicious. I rarely drink sweet drinks because they are full of sugar. I never drink Coke because it's not good for the health.*

*Afterwards, Euphemia, she drinks some coffee every day because coffee gives her a lot of energy. She often eats noodles because it's good. She rarely eats chinese ravioli and she never drinks apricot nut milk.*

*I am greedy. I like to eat good things. I love coffee, rice alcohol, soup, noodles, vegetables, fruit, eggs, etc. I also like tea, rice, fish, turnip cakes, etc. On the other hand, I don't like sweet drinks, pastries and yogurt because it's too sweet.*

*Euphemia, she's also greedy. And she likes to eat good things. She loves rice alcohol, soup, sweet drinks, noodles, fruit, pizzas, cheese, pastries, yogurt, etc. She also likes tea, coffee, soy milk, rice, eggs, vegetables, for example, potatoes, etc. On the other hand, she doesn't like bitter courgettes because their bitter. Finally, she hates to drink apricot nut milk, because to her taste it doesn't smell good.*

*Euphemia likes to eat all vegetables. I think it's a good eating habit because vegetables are rich in fibre. But she also eats a lot of sweets, I don't think it's a good eating habit because sweets are too sweet, it's bad for health. I suggest to her to eat less sweets.*

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> *If she wants to be in shape and have a life of good quality, she has to eat more balanced and she must also play sports to be in good health.*

(Chang 2017, 39-40)

It is important to note that even though this text includes many "vocabulary" words, they are always used in complete sentences which include many expressions, adverbs, etc.[3]

Finally, it may be of interest to show texts written by two Japanese students of Spanish, whose teacher now uses the NLA. We should mention that the students in this class had previously taken other courses in Spanish that used a different approach. However, a close examination of the two assignments reveals that both are personal adaptations inspired by the same model, guided by the teacher.

**Text Box 5.12**
**TEXTS BY TWO STUDENTS OF SPANISH IN A JAPANESE UNIVERSITY** (after 120 HOURS)



*Fig. 5-10*

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[3] The phrase "good eating habit" comes from reading the narrative text *Je fais des petits pas* (*Taking small steps*), published by Myosotis Presse, that all the learners in the class had read and studied previously.

Hello Carmen,

How are you? I am writing to you because lately I am remembering you a lot. I am already making efforts to learn Spanish at the Foreign Studies University in Kioto. All from the Spanish class with Javier are very well. And you? What are you doing lately?

I was very happy because I could see you and learn Spanish for you. Especially, I surprised that we are same age. I thought that you was nervous because it was first time that teach Spanish to Japanese, but your classes were very contentably. And you? How were you in this university?

After this September I am going to go to Colombia to learn Spanish. I am going to be there 6 months, before the next March. I cannot wait the day I go there, but I am a little nervous because they say that Colombia be a little dangerous. What do you think on the country? What are you thinking of doing in near future? And why don't you come back to Japan another time?
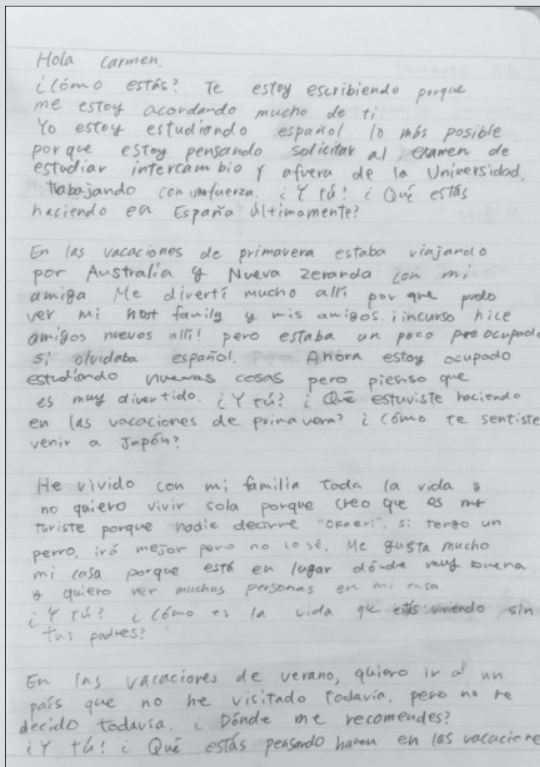
I am wishing to see you, a hug,

Suzuka



*Fig. 5-11*

Hello Carmen,

I am writing to you because I am remembering you a lot. I am studying Spanish as much as possible because I am thinking of asking for the exam for to study exchange and away from the University, working with a force. And you? What are you doing in Spain lately?

In the spring vacations, I was travelling to Australia and New Zerand with my friend. I had a lot of fun there because I could see my host family and my friends and also I made new friends there! but I was a little worried if I forgot Spanish I am now busy studying new things but I think it's a lot of fun. And you? What have you been doing during the spring vacation? How did you feel coming to Japan?

I have lived with my family the whole life and I don't want to live alone because I think it is very sad because no one to tell me "okaeri." If I have a dog it will go better but I don't know. I like my house a lot because it is in a place where very good and I want to see many people in my house. And you? How is the life that you are living without your parents?

In the summer vacations, I want to go to a country I have not yet visited but I have not decide yet. Where do you recommend me? And you, what are you thinking of doing during the vacations.

## Q 5.13 *Do you teach verb conjugations in the NLA?*

The quick answer is yes, but with a double caveat. Firstly, verb conjugation is not taught as part of learning oral language, as this would imply that knowledge could transform into ability, contrary to one of the NLA's basic principles. Conjugation rules can only be learnt explicitly after the verbs in question have been spontaneously used orally in a complete sentence.

Furthermore, in the case of teens and adults, the verbal communication situations presented in the classroom are not diversified enough to allow all of a verb's forms to be used. *Once the students can use several forms of a verb while speaking*, and after observing a few cases of the verb's use in the assigned reading, then the rules of conjugation can be taught. However, it would be completely against the NLA's principles to go through a verb's entire conjugational paradigm without providing at least a sentential context.

Moreover, to choose which sentential context to use, one must bear in mind the verb in question's grammatical properties, following the TAP (as discussed in the first two chapters). A close English equivalent would be the different meanings conveyed by the different forms of the present tense (I bike, I am biking, I do bike) and past tenses (I biked, I was biking, I have biked, I did bike, I will have biked) This then permits language structures already used orally in the classroom to be reused in a new situation.

**Q 5.14** *Are dictations allowed in the NLA?*

For teaching adults, we advocate a new style of dictation known as *No-Fault Dictation*, which has been successfully tried out with Chinese university students (according to the FSL teachers concerned). The technique was inspired by experimental research into the teaching of French as a L1 in Québec, which produced excellent results.[4]

Here is an extract from a description of the method, in an article by Nadeau and Fisher:

> In a No-Fault Dictation, a short text is dictated, but at the end of every sentence, the learners express their doubts about spelling, no matter what they are. The teacher does not answer directly by giving the correct answer, but invites the learners to find the solution by verbalising their doubts. This way, the No-Fault Dictation becomes an activity in which the learners reflect on all their grammatical and spelling knowledge as they engage in discussions allowing them to test their knowledge on the basis of issues they have themselves raised […] (2011, 22-23)

**Text Box 5.13**
**NO-FAULT DICTATION: RESULTS**

Briefly, here are the results of the experiment (which used both a study group and a control group):

The results show that learners participating in No-Fault Dictations on a regular basis improve their spelling skills. On average, in an 83-word dictation serving as post-test, learners in the study group correctly spell six words more than the learners in the control group do. They substantially improve their mastery of the agreement in number and gender for modifiers, nouns and adjectives: on average, they make 1.23 mistakes on the post-test, while the control group average is 4.37. Their ability with regards to subject-verb agreement also improves in the post-test (0.4 mistakes for the study group and 0.8 for the control group). The No-Fault Dictation therefore seems to be an effective approach for teaching grammatical spelling.

[4] It derives from an MA thesis in linguistics entitled *Les effets de la dictée 0 faute sur la compétence en orthographe d'apprenants de troisième secondaire* (*The Effects of No-Fault Dictation on Spelling Skills Among Grade 9 Learners*, 2009), completed at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM) by Kathy Wilkinson, under the supervision of Marie Nadeau. In Québec, "troisième secondaire" is equivalent to Grade 9 for students with French as their L1 who are about 15 years old. This approach, applied to L2/FL learners, might prove to be a fruitful topic for a thesis.

Learners increasingly learn to doubt, given that the number of words called into doubt increases over the course of the sessions. Their attention levels also increase, as signalled by the decrease in the average total number of errors as well as in the number of mistakes made in words discussed at the end of the intervention, evidence that more attention has been paid. Occurrences of the use of grammatical metalanguage also increase, tripling with the teacher and doubling among the learners. (Wilkinson 2009, xiv)

**Q 5.15** *Should we set up an inter-school correspondence network?*

Insofar as it is possible, setting up an inter-school correspondence network is strongly recommended, through facilitating visits, exchanges or electronic communications. Correspondence is an activity closely tied to real life and emphasises the message, which is consistent with NLA principles. Moreover, it gives students a personal investment in their learning process and allows them to "participate in developing intercultural skills" (Durr 2016, 13).

**Q 5.16** *If we ask students to produce an illustrated text, should they write the text first, or the other way around?*

Depending on the learners' level, as well as their interests, it can be worth encouraging them to enrich their texts with pictures, drawings or photographs. In such cases, however, they must also write the text *first*, before adding illustrations. In other words, the purpose of the pictures and photographs must be to illustrate an already-written text. Doing the reverse runs the risk of seeing the text become a mere *description* of an illustration.

**Q 5.17** *Are we allowed to have students write a collective poem?*

Not only is this permitted, it is actively encouraged—so long, of course, as the learners are likely to be interested. To do so, each learner writers a two-to-four line stanza on the topic. These stanzas are then collected into a long, detailed poem that the students are proud to display as "their" work.

## The Spoken and the Written

**Q 5.18** *What distinction does the NLA make between the spoken and the written?*

It will almost certainly prove useful to refer to our understanding of literacy and, especially, to the order of competences that this

understanding leads to. Doing so shows that reading serves as a sort of *intermediary* between speaking and writing.

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**Text Box 5.14**
**READING AS AN INTERMEDIARY BETWEEN SPEAKING AND WRITING**
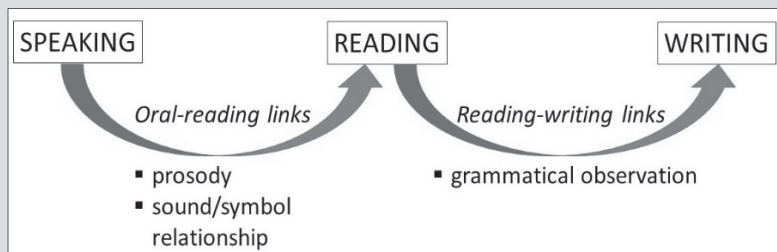
*Fig. 5-12*

As the diagram shows, reading can be seen as the first link between spoken language and the authentic written text. Subsequently, reading serves again as a link, this time between the authentic written text and the text to be written—in particular thanks to the grammatical observations made in the reading text, which allow students to be reminded of the main grammatical points noted when it comes time for them to write. This should demonstrate just how important a role reading plays in learning an L2/FL.

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**Text Box 5.15**
**RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN SKILLS—A TESTIMONIAL**

The reading stage reuses the same theme and the same structures, but shows how all of these are organised in writing […]

More complex texts, either narrative, informational, or argumentative, are introduced at higher levels. In turn, these allow for more complex activities, in the form of debates, etc. However, no matter the level, the learner is never faced with a text without having been prepared. The speaking stage prepares for reading, and, likewise, reading prepares learners for the next stage, writing. (Jourdan 2017, 69-70)
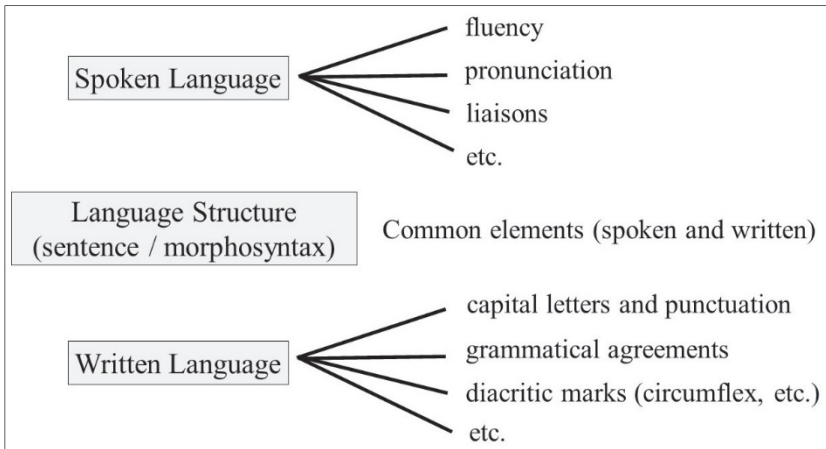
*Fig. 5-13*

As we know, certain language forms in oral language are sometimes different from those in the written language. Such is the case, for example, in French, with the negative (without the *ne*) and the replacement of the pronoun *nous* with *on*, etc. (Blanche-Benveniste, 2000, quoted in Kucharczyk, 2012, 2). A similar example in English would be *I wanta go*.

**Text Box 5.16**
**STRUCTURES SHARED BY SPOKEN AND WRITTEN LANGUAGE**

The important fact to note in the case of L2/FL learning by beginners or near-beginners is the fact that numerous structures are similar, both orally and in writing. Such is the case, for example of a sentence like *I went to the theatre*. Orally, this sentence is characterized by a certain rhythm, a certain intonation, a certain accent, some pauses, etc. as well as a number of particularities on the phonetic level. In writing this sentence, certain traits can be identified that are distinct from the oral expression: use of the capital letter and the final stop, punctuation, and, in French, accents and certain grammatical agreements, etc. However, even in these cases, morphosyntax, or the sentence structure, remains the same, both orally and in writing (German and Netten, 2013a).

Regarding this, Guedat-Bittighoffer reminds us that Vygotsky ([1934] 1985) insists on the fundamental difference between spoken and written

language, as these are two discrete processes in terms of psychological development. As she rightly remarks, "in the context of beginner allophones[5] acquiring FSL/FFL, we should not, at least not in the first stages of learning, mix spoken and written language" (2014, 156).

On another note, despite a language's idiosyncrasies with respect to its spoken and written forms, it is clear that the spoken word greatly influences how we write. For instance, before we can write down a sentence, we first have to *say* it, more or less, in our minds.

**Text Box 5.17**
**TO IMPROVE WRITING, FIRST DEVELOP IMPLICIT COMPETENCES ORALLY[6]**

When writing a text, the ideas that appear in our heads arise from our internal grammar (or implicit competence). What is written are precisely the language structures that are "spoken" in our heads and which have become automatic.

Learners can refer to their explicit knowledge (or external grammar) in order to write their messages correctly, but only once their implicit competence (or internal grammar) has been developed. If we refer to the previous example *I went to the theatre*, one must first pronounce it, so to speak, in one's head.

In the same way, a young francophone student will not be able to write, for example, *I am twelve years old* if, orally, he says *I have twelve years* (using the French structure). In order to use the correct English structure, that learner must be able to say spontaneously *I am twelve years old* when she responds orally to the question *How old are you?* (Germain and Netten, 2013a).

This explains why spontaneously-written texts by L2/FL learners tend to contain multiple errors that are, in fact, derived from errors in spoken language, i.e. from an insufficiently developed implicit competence. As an example, let us look at a text written by a student in Grade 6 Intensive French (age 11/12), reproduced in Text Box 5.18 below, and briefly analysed thereafter.

The test was given at the end of the five months of intensive study of French (offered during the first months of the school year, approximately

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[5] In Canada, the word 'allophone' refers to persons whose first language is neither French nor English.
[6] In the original article, the examples used were for Anglophone learners of French; they are here adapted for Francophone learners of English.

275 hours). Like all the other students in the same class, this one was a complete beginner in French at the beginning of the school year; nor was he not the best student in the class, as we can attest from our observations of that class and the teacher's comments. We are dealing here with an "average" student. The length of the text is similar to that of his classmates.

**Text Box 5.18**
**ANALYSIS OF A TEXT WRITTEN IN INTENSIVE FRENCH (GRADE 6)**



*Fig. 5-14*

On day in autumn I <u>past</u> the weekend to my grandparents. I gets up early and go on a walk.

On my walk <u>it is the weather is fine</u> and I find an abandoned house! <u>I walk up</u> the house and I open the door…

I walk in the house and I look for <u>the persons</u>. But I <u>find not</u> the persons in the house. I look in all the house and I find a big secret corridor!

In the secret corridor <u>is</u> a lot of <u>statue</u> and a door. I walk to the door and I open the door…

In the <u>room there</u> a big party with a lot of people! I walk in the room. The room <u>it is</u> very beautiful and they make music, a <u>danse</u> and food! I eat a lot and the party is fun. After one hour my grandparents <u>looks</u> for me.

The look in the abandoned house for me and they find the secret corridor and the room. After one hour, they <u>find also me</u>. "the abandoned house <u>were they house</u> when they <u>was</u> children" they <u>says</u>. We leave the abandoned house and we eat after.

Considering the aspects specific to written language, one will note that there are very few writing mistakes per se. For example, there are practically no mistakes in the use of punctuation, of diacritic marks (acute and grave accents—except in the case of the misspelt words *trés* and *aprés*, which should be *très* and *après*), of apostrophes, of capital letters and of periods, or in paragraphing—which to a large extent reflects how the student was taught. There are also very few mistakes in subject-verb agreement: *Il fait…, je découvre…, je marche…, j'ouvre…, je trouve…, je mange…, je regarde…, ils font…, est…, ils regardent…, ils trouvent…* and *nous quittons* are all correctly used.

On the other hand, we also find *Je passé* (*I past*), *je me lèves* (*I gets up*), *je aller* (*I gone*), *la maison étais* (*the house were*), *dis ils* (*they says*) and *nous mangons* (rather than *mangeons*—an English equivalent might be *we dinned* rather than *we dined*), etc. Most of the mistakes of this type could easily be explained, but that is not the goal here. The point is to observe the small percentage of writing mistakes due to writing-specific phenomena in this piece, compared to the percentage of mistakes in language structures, which are due to errors made orally.

For example, one need only examine the following cases: *C'est il fait beau* (*It is the weather is fine*), *je marche en haut à la maison* (*I walk up the house*), *je ne pas trouve* (*I do not finding*), *dans le corridor secret est beaucoup de statues(s)* (*in the secret corridor is a lot of statue[s]*), *dans le chambre est une grande fête* (*in room there a big party*), etc.

Most of these mistakes are due to the interference of the student's L1, English. In the preceding paragraph we provided equivalents in English of the types of mistake the student is making, but in fact the faulty French phrases in the original are direct transpositions from English, and it is evident that these are the types of sentence the student would use orally. For instance, when he writes *Je ne pas trouve*, he is most likely translating what he says in his head first: *I don't find*. The same is true for gender agreement in the case of *dans le chambre*: as "room" in English is neuter in the phrase *in the room*, the student incorrectly uses the masculine article in French rather than the correct *la*. The same phenomenon recurs with *est une grande fête* (*is a big party*), which should be *il y a une grande fête* (*there is a big party*), and so on.

A quick calculation reveals that 85% of errors in this *written* text are *oral* mistakes.

**Text Box 5.19**
**SPOKEN    LANGUAGE'S    INFLUENCE    ON    WRITING—**
**TESTIMONIAL**

In a written text, a mistake like "je m'ai levé" ("I am got up") is not, strictly speaking, an issue of written language *per se*. By efficiently correcting this sort of mistake during the oral stage, internal grammar is cemented, and when writing, learners only have to concern themselves with punctuation, rules of agreement, and silent letters. It is much simpler for them. (Jourdan 2017, 71)

**Q 5.19** *What marking grid or system is recommended for use in the NLA?*

Given our previous remarks on the distinction between spoken and written language, it is doubtless clear that correcting students' writing in the NLA requires an uncommon system. All that is needed is to explain to learners, beginning with their very first written text, that they will find only two symbols on their corrected homework: O (for a mistake derived from oral language) and W (for an error of writing *per se*).

For an example of this method of correcting written work, see Text Box 5.20 below.[7] Writing mistakes can thus be corrected at home by the learners themselves, by consulting either the grammatical observations, made during the reading stage, that they have written down in their notebook, or a colleague or friend, or a regular grammar textbook. Meanwhile, the teacher's task is to identify recurrent oral-based mistakes found across multiple student-written texts, in order to focus particular attention to those oral language structures during future lessons.

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[7] The example provided is a text written by a student at Da-Yeh University in Taiwan, produced after 90 hours of French learning. I wish to thank her, as well as her instructor, Ms Ching-hsin Chang, for their authorisation to reproduce this text and its correction method.

**Text Box 5.20**
**EXAMPLE OF NEW METHOD FOR CORRECTING WRITING**



*Fig. 5-15*

Yvonne's Family Tree

My paternal grandfather and my paternal

grandmother, they have five childrin:
three sons and two daughter. My father is
(W)

the youngest son of the familee. He has
(O)

two big brotherz, it's also my uncle. My
(W)

father also have two sister, it is meye aunt.
(W O)

They married, I have five boy cousin and
(O)     (O O)     (W)

three girl cousin. My maternal grandfather
(O)

and my maternal grandmother, they have
(O)

three children: two sons and one

daughters. My uncle are marrid, I have

two boy cousin and two gurl cousin. My
(O)     (O)     (W)

father and mi mother, they have one
(O)     (W)     (O)

daughter.
(W)

*Your two uncles are married.*
*Feb. 23, 2016*

**Q 5.20** *How does one select which grammar rules to teach?*

**Text Box 5.21**
**THE PLACEMENT OF THE ATTRIBUTIVE ADJECTIVE IN FRENCH AND OTHER SIMILAR CASES**

Let us take the case of a few grammar rules in French: for example, the pluralisation of adjectives (*Elle porte des chaussures noires* [*She is wearing black shoes*]), which requires agreement in number and gender, or (*Les enfants courent vite* [*The children are running fast*]), where there is, in writing, agreement between the subject and the verb, (*Ils courent* [*They are running*]), and so on. In all of these cases, these are grammatical rules specific to written language. That is, the distinctions are not noticeable in oral language: *noir* (masculine singular) and *noires* (feminine plural), *enfant* (child) and *enfants* (children), *cours* (is running) and *courent* (are running), *Il parle* (He's talking) and *Ils parlent* (They are talking) all sound exactly the same when spoken.



Placement of the attributive adjective

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*I was given a nice small red car as a gift*
(in the procedural, implicit memory)
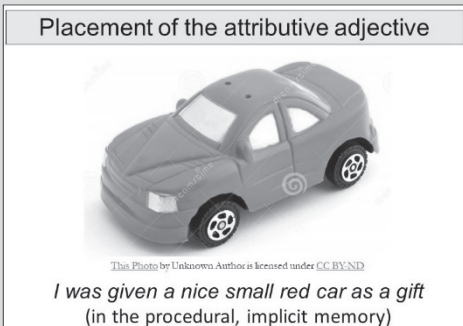
*Fig. 5-16*

On the other hand, it seems useless to have learners memorize rules on how to place the attributive adjective in French, for example, *J'ai reçu en cadeau une belle petite voiture rouge (I was given a nice small red car as a gift)*. This type of "rule" must be *acquired* when using the language orally: it is, therefore, an implicit competence, which is non-conscious. One could go further and state that it may be possible to have this type of rule learned (as in the case of the placement of the attributive adjective), but it is possible that this is prejudicial to language acquisition. Reference to one's declarative memory, in these cases, will negatively affect spontaneity in oral language.

Other similar cases, such as rules governing the placement of the adverb or the use of prepositions of place (for example, *I am sitting at the table, I'm sitting on the table*), which come under implicit competence, could be prejudicial to spontaneity in the oral language (Germain and Netten, 2013a).

This holds true for similar rules in other languages, such as the rules governing the ordering of multiple adjectives modifying a single noun in English, which follow the invariable sequence opinion-size-age-shape-colour-origin-material-purpose. Thus, while *C'est une belle grosse voiture américaine* literally translates as *It's a gorgeous big car American* and *J'ai reçu en cadeau une belle petite voiture rouge* as *I received as a present a nice small car red*, these renderings instinctively strike native speakers as wrong. They should be *It's a gorgeous big American car* and *I received a nice small red car as a present*. The immediate sense of "wrongness" produced by the literal translations testifies to the fact that they are transgressing implicitly, unconsciously held rules.

In this type of situation, if a clear distinction is not drawn between spoken and written language, students risk consciously *learning* rules in class, rather than *acquiring* them unconsciously through using the language in context.

**Q 5.21** *How should one correct certain frequent mistakes in writing (like* Je aime)*?*

In French, one written error frequently made by learners is the misuse of the personal pronoun. (An equivalent type of error in English might be *I should of* for *I should've*.) This is an oral mistake being reproduced in writing. Clearly, in the circumstances, this type of mistake must first be corrected orally, and once the mistake has been corrected by the teacher, the accurate sentence must be orally used and reused a few times in different situations.

But it is very probable that, despite the mistake being corrected orally, learners will still not be able to (still orally) produce the correct form. In the French example above, the rule not being followed is that when a pronoun ending in a vowel comes before a verb beginning with a vowel, the pronoun's final letter is invariably elided (rather as if, in English, *I have* were compulsorily shortened to *I've*). In this case, the error is probably caused because *Je aime* (*I like/love*) is said very rapidly, meaning that one might understand the learner to actually be saying the correct formulation *J'aime*. If that is the case, the problem arises from speaking speed. As long as the mistake is not accurately detected and corrected, it will continue to recur in the students' writing.

In the oral context, the difficulty is that knowledge does not transform into skill. And we also know that by using and reusing similar statements, a network of neuronal connections ends up forming in the learner's brain, and that the frequent use of the same pattern is what ends up becoming

unconscious and spontaneous (Ellis, 2005, 2011). When the language form is correctly used orally, there are strong chances that it will be correctly used when written (except for what is specific to written language).

Once the correct form has been expressed orally, one can move on to its written form, first in reading, then in writing. In reading, learners are asked to read a brief model text in which these forms occur a few times, while ensuring that these texts do not include more than one difficulty of this type at a time (e.g., they should not include three or four separate grammatical difficulties). The case in question can therefore be the object of the grammatical observation step, reinforcing the learners' awareness of the phenomenon in an authentic (reading) context.

From there, one can move on to the writing stage, hoping that, this time, the learners will know to elide the pronoun's final letter when writing such things as *J'aime, j'adore*, etc. but to retain it in the case of verbs beginning with consonants, as with *je regarde, je mange,* etc. (*I look, I eat*). These are recurring cases for which the usual method of oral correction proves insufficient: a certain level of explanation (or recourse to conscious knowledge) appears necessary to resolve the problem.

## Teaching and Appropriating[8] Culture

**Q 5.22** *According to the NLA, how does one come to understand an L2/FL's culture?*

In the last few years, the place held by the concepts of *language* and *culture* by language-teaching pedagogy has evolved considerably. With the publication of the CEFR (2001), a much broader understanding of the association between the two concepts has been proposed, using the expression *plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. Unfortunately, the document has nothing to say about how one might acquire an understanding of the culture associated with an L2/FL.

To answer this question, we must first closely examine what I call the "cultural paradox" (or, better yet, "intercultural paradox"), where on the one hand, one always talks about the close association between a language and a culture, but on the other, we always talk about their dissociation.

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[8] The word "appropriation" is used here as a generic term referring to both implicit (unconscious) and explicit (conscious) cultural phenomena, just as "appropriating" language refers to the implicit (acquisition) and explicit (learning) aspects of language.

**Text Box 5.22**
**LANGUAGE    AS    AN    EXPRESSION    OF    PARTICULAR
WORLDVIEWS**

For instance, in English one might say *He swam across the river*, but
in French one would instead say *Il traversa la rivière à la nage*. The two
therefore do not express reality the same way:

In English, the past action and the means used form a whole (*swam
across*), and the sentence ends with the object (*the river*); in French, the
means (*à la nage*) follows the object (*la rivière*), which comes after the
subject and the past action (*Il* and *traversa*). Let us take another example,
this time in Spanish. As we know, *Me duele la cabeza* is, in English, *I have
a headache*, or, in French, *J'ai mal à la tête*. The expression of pain is
verbal in Spanish, but nominal in English and French; in one case, the
subject of the statement is the suffering head, while in the other two cases
it is the person speaking. (Germain 2001a, 299)

One finds similar phenomena on the lexical level. For instance, English
does not distinguish between a river that flows into the sea (for which
French has the word *fleuve*) and a river that flows into another river
(French *rivière*). Conversely, French has only the single word *raisin* to
refer to the two distinct English realities of raisins and grapes (Germain
2001a, 299).

As a particular way of seeing reality, or as a *vision of the world*, "a
language is a worldview, a component part of a worldview. Thus, we find
worldviews within languages. A worldview is not simply an added
element or an ornament: a language is its worldview and a worldview is
inscribed in its language" (Germain 2001a, 300). In this sense, to acquire
an L2/FL means to acquire a culture. The two seem inseparable.

On the other hand, it is well known that one can become acquainted
with a foreign culture without knowing its language. For instance, nothing
prevents us from attending a course on Japanese culture given in English,
even if we don't speak Japanese. In this way, the two appear to be doubly
dissociated.

This presents a paradox: the "cultural paradox." In the circumstances,
just as Paradis's neurolinguistic theory can account for the "grammatical
paradox" (as seen at the beginning of chapter 3), it is possible to account
for this "cultural paradox."

The NLA proposes two separate grammars (internal and external, i.e.
implicit and explicit) in order to solve the "grammatical paradox." It
seems appropriate, then, to speak of the existence of two types of culture:

one implicit and unconscious, the other explicit and conscious. Implicit culture is governed by the procedural memory, while explicit culture depends on the explicit memory. Just as declarative knowledge cannot transform into implicit competence and external grammar cannot become internal grammar, we may hold that cultural knowledge does not transform itself into "implicit cultural competence."[9] To continue with the previous example, is it conceivable that explicit knowledge about Japanese culture could transform itself into implicit knowledge of the word order of Japanese, or into a new way of seeing reality?

When we say that culture is inscribed in its language, we mean that an implicit culture is found within the language. As I wrote over 15 years ago, in this sense, "the cultural is essentially implicit" (Germain 2001a, 300). In neurolinguistic terms, we are therefore speaking of (unconsciously) *acquiring* a culture—a process which begins with acquiring the spoken language of that culture.

On the other hand, when it comes to familiarising ourselves with a culture by acquiring explicit knowledge of the cultural characteristics of a foreign country whose language we do not speak, we are talking about explicit culture, dependent therefore on the declarative memory, and which can be *learnt* (e.g. by reading or taking a course).

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**Text Box 5.23**
**IMPLICIT CULTURE CANNOT BE TAUGHT**

Inevitably, the NLA involves the *acquisition* of the implicit culture associated with the L2/FL being learnt. But it cannot be said that the implicit elements of a foreign culture are *taught*, since, by definition, these elements are *implicit*. We may say that *explicit culture is learnt*, but *implicit culture is acquired*.

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The pedagogical question this raises is the following: should teachers simply have their students orally *acquire* the L2/FL's implicit culture, or should they *teach* (*make them learn*) the basics of the explicit culture in tandem with the earliest stages of language appropriation?

In IF, which is intended for young learners, students' access to the other culture takes place in two stages, practically speaking. A choice was made to start by teaching beginners the fundamentals of the language (and

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[9] Through study or observation, it is always possible to explain the implicit, whether grammatical or cultural. But in no case is this the transformation of one into the other.

its associated *implicit* culture) and to only begin teaching *explicit* culture at the intermediate level.

In the NLA, in an adult context, it is important to proceed otherwise, allowing learners to access the other culture (on the linguistic level) as soon as they start acquiring the language (and its associated *implicit* culture). The question then becomes how to determine the best way of *teaching*—that is, of *having students learn*— cultural elements that can, in principle, be dissociated from the language being learnt. We will see later how the explicit elements of culture are *taught*.

**In summary,**

Explicit culture is **learnt**

Implicit culture is **acquired**

*Fig. 5-17*

**Q 5.23** *What is your opinion of the CEFR's concept of "intercultural competence"?*

As to this, I fully agree with the propositions included in the CEFR, particularly those dealing with the learner's "awareness of the relation between home and target cultures […] so as to develop an appropriate intercultural competence" (Council of Europe 2001, 104).

**Text Box 5.24**
**THE CEFR'S VIEW OF INTERCULTURAL AWARENESS**

According to the CEFR, "Knowledge, awareness and understanding of the relation (similarities and distinctive differences) between the 'world of origin' and the 'world of the target community' produce an intercultural awareness" (Council of Europe 2001, 83).

We should also note that, teaching-wise, in the NLA, this "intercultural awareness" moves from the known to the unknown. This might seem obvious, but there is no question of confronting the learner directly with the other culture: no NLA lesson or teaching unit begins with reading a text in a foreign language.

**Text Box 5.25**
**FROM THE KNOWN TO THE UNKNOWN IN THE NLA**

In keeping with the need for an L2/FL-specific literacy pedagogy, which, as we have seen, is one of the fundamental principles of the NLA, every lesson or teaching unit begins with speaking, and this oral activity, in terms of theme, necessarily focuses on the learners' life experiences and interests. For instance, in the unit on *Music*, the first mini-project is *Talk about your favourite singer and your favourite band*. The teacher begins by telling the students what his or her favourite song is and why (thereby "modelling" for them), before asking the learners what their favourite song is and why. This is then repeated with the other few language structures needed to complete the first mini-project.

What has to be noted here is that it really is a matter of starting first from the teacher's life experiences, and then from the learners'. It is in this sense that in the NLA (for adults), access to the other culture always starts with the known (orally) then moves towards the unknown (written). It is only when *reading* is being taught that learners will have access to this cultural "unknown," access to the other culture through the L2/FL, using language already acquired orally when discussing the theme in question. For the reading phase, in accordance with the NLA's principle of authenticity, all reading texts are authentic or quasi-authentic documents, necessarily geared towards a gradual presentation of the implicit (first acquired orally) and explicit elements of the foreign culture.

In the Canadian version of the NAL aimed at young learners, the reading texts are sometimes taken from texts found on the Internet and modified or adapted to match the learners' level, and sometimes from texts written by IF teachers who have created their own original narrative or informational texts.[10]

On the other hand, the new French-language NLA teaching units for adults (in preparation) will propose a different method for becoming familiar with other cultures, in order to bring about "intercultural awareness." All the reading texts provided will be original texts in the form of blog entries purportedly written by a character (to begin with, Marianne) who will reappear throughout the teaching units. These reading texts will be in line with the socio-cultural requirements of the DELF.

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[10] It should be noted that the authors of the readers available for IF teachers, published by Myosotis Presse (myosotis.ca), were not given any linguistic guidelines. The only instruction was that the texts be likely to interest their students.

**Text Box 5.26**
**EXAMPLE: MARIANNE'S BLOG (adapted for English)**

*Hi, how are you?*
*I'm fine!*

*My name is Marianne Worcester. I live in Paris.*
*And you, what's your name? Where do you live?*

*Marianne is my first name, and Worcester is my family name.*
*What about you? What's your first name? And your family name?*

*Worcester is spelt W.O.R.C.E.S.T.E.R, but you say "WOOSTER"*
*And you, how do you spell your name?*

*Goodbye,*
*Marianne*

As can be seen from the blog entry above, the learners will gradually come to know Marianne and her family. Over the subsequent episodes, they will be exposed to the other family members' various occupations, their pastimes, their environment, their lifestyle, etc. What is important to note is that over time, the authors of these texts will gradually introduce other members of Marianne's family, who are themselves from other cultures. For instance, from the very beginning, we learn that Marianne's father is British, but that her mother is from Québec and that they live in Paris; over the course of the teaching units, therefore, we can expect to be introduced to both French and Québécois cultural elements. What's more, other members of the family will write their own blogs, like *Jacques's Blog*, and so on, allowing for greater diversity in texts and content.

In addition, in the following blogs (still in the first NLA unit for adults), readers (i.e. learners) will discover that Marianne's life partner is an immigrant, that his name is Issouf, and that he is from Ivory Coast.

By providing original reading texts, then, the NLA will not only "raise intercultural awareness" among FSL/FFL learners, but also promote openness towards the French-speaking world over the course of each subsequent teaching unit's episodes. The reading texts will therefore not only be connected to themes first studied orally, but will also depict a whole modern family (with travel, divorces, pastimes, etc.) who will serve as a guiding thread through the collected texts. Thus, learners will gradually gain access to elements of the other's culture, but from the

starting point of elements of their own culture (first presented orally): from the known to the unknown.

Though these teaching units are currently only being developed for French, the approach they use could obviously be easily adapted for other languages.

**To conclude**, let us mention that even in terms of teaching reading and writing, the NLA required us to innovate and develop original teaching strategies, derived from the approach's theoretical foundations, that would highlight the need to have learners *acquire* an internal grammar, particularly orally (discussed in the previous chapter) and to have them *learn* an external grammar, particularly when it comes to writing (discussed in the current chapter). It thus appears important to draw a parallel between grammar and culture, to show that the pairing of "implicit/internal grammar—explicit/external grammar" is mirrored on the cultural level by the pairing of "implicit culture—explicit culture." And only Paradis's neurolinguistic theory allows us to account for this double paradox, the "grammatical paradox" and the "cultural paradox."

# PART THREE

# IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NLA

The first part of this book presented the NLA's theoretical foundations, in the form of lessons drawn from the neurosciences. In the second part, we examined the practical applications of the NLA in a teaching context, in the form of teaching strategies, all derived from those lessons.

At this juncture, it seems appropriate to return to the origins of the NLA, developed in the context of the Canadian school system under the name of *Intensive French* (IF). Unsurprisingly, given that IF was first introduced some twenty years ago, the NLA has expanded its reach somewhat since its inception in 1997-98, notably among adult learners in several countries, beginning with China at the South China Normal University. This third part of the book (consisting of chapter 6) describes the NLA's origins and its expansion to this day.

# CHAPTER SIX

# THE NLA AND INTENSIVE FRENCH

The current chapter begins by explaining how the Canadian linguistic context led to the creation of Intensive French (IF), which later became known as the NLA. This is followed by a definition of IF and a brief presentation of its main features. We then provide some details about the particular case of the bilingual province of New Brunswick, which, in 2008, implemented IF for all students enrolled in Grade 5 in the English-language school system, with the exception of students who chose to enrol in the French Immersion programme in Grade 3. After some considerations pertaining to allophone students (whose L1 is neither French nor English) and Canadian First Nations, we will look at the first attempt to put IF principles (now under the name of NLA) into practice outside Canada, at the South China Normal University (SCNU), and all the challenges this presented. The chapter then ends with a brief list of other places worldwide where the NLA has been implemented.

## The Canadian Linguistic Context

From the very beginning, Claude Germain and Joan Netten, the two Canadian scholars who developed the NLA, defined it as a new paradigm, that is to say a new way of conceptualising the connection between appropriating (acquiring and/or learning) and teaching a second or foreign language (L2/FL), with the aim of creating optimal classroom conditions for spontaneous communication and successful social interactions.

To properly understand the nature of the Canadian linguistic context in which IF (which later developed into the NLA) was conceived, it is important to know that in Canada, education falls under the jurisdiction of provincial and territorial governments. Everything concerned with education, and especially L2 education, therefore presents a great deal of variety when considered at the national level, as well as extreme complexity. There is no national Canadian Ministry of Education; rather, there are thirteen distinct Education Departments, one for each of the ten

provinces and three territories. Each of these had to be consulted separately in order to implement IF across Canada.[1]

Before continuing, we must clarify a terminological matter. In Canada, the NLA is known as Intensive French (IF). This is because the provincial and territorial Education Departments are not authorised to approve an *approach* per se, but can approve a *programme organisation* such as IF. For that matter, the expression *neurolinguistic approach* (NLA) came into use some dozen years after IF was implemented in Canadian school systems, to designate its use in adult contexts when it was first used in Asia, at the South China Normal University (SCNU).

**Text Box 6.1**
**FRENCH AS A "FOREIGN LANGUAGE" IN CANADA**

With the exception of the French-majority province of Québec, the Francophone minorities of Canada are scattered across small, generally quite isolated pockets, which FSL students rarely visit; the latter therefore have very few opportunities to use the language they're learning outside of the classroom. Given this, and despite what is widely believed outside Canada, French is learned by Anglophone and allophone Canadian students much more as a "foreign language" than as a "second language" (except in Québec), as is the case more or less everywhere else in the world.

Whether FSL or FFL is being taught, the pedagogical reality in the classroom remains the same. In other words, we do not advocate different teaching methods depending on whether a "second" language (or *endoglossic*) environment or a "foreign" language (or *exoglossic*) environment is involved. These represent sociocultural, rather than pedagogical, realities, one of which affords certain learners in an endoglossic environment the opportunity to learn more quickly. Nevertheless, even in an exoglossic environment, the same reality is true for all the learners in the same classroom. Moreover, the NLA's teaching strategies do not vary between these two environments or contexts.

The majority of FSL/FFL teachers working in Anglophone environments in Canada are not native Francophones. Most of them are Anglophones or allophones who have themselves learnt French as an L2/FL. This being the case, IF was initially conceived and evaluated not only by native speakers, but also by teachers who were non-native speakers.

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[1] http://www.statcan.gc.ca/pub/75-006-x/2013001/article/11795-eng.htm

# Results in Core French[2]

For all practical purposes, before IF, there were only two major instructional systems for teaching FSL in Canada: *Core French* and *Immersion*. Given that, generally speaking, Immersion produced (and continues to produce) good results, we focused on Core French, which presented a certain number of challenges.

**Text Box 6.2**
**CORE FRENCH AND IMMERSION**

In the 1980s—as was still the case towards the end of the 1990s, when we began to discuss IF—approximately 85% of Anglophone Canadian students studying French were enrolled in Core French, while a minority of approximately 15% (approximately 24% in 2015-2016) were enrolled in an immersion programme.
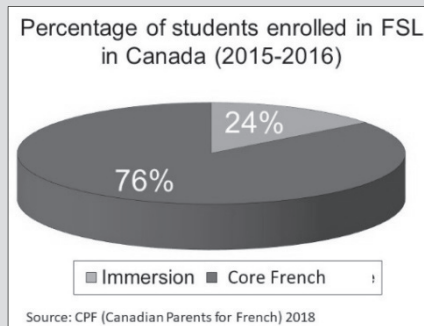


*Fig. 6-1*

Basically, our goal in setting up the new instructional system (IF) was to find ways to improve the Core French programme (Germain and Netten 2006a).

But we still lacked empirical data or valid tests demonstrating to what extent our poor opinion of Core French results corresponded to reality.

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[2] In Core French, French is taught on a daily basis in short (30- or 40-minute) periods, adding up to 90 or 120 hours a year. This instructional system has been described as a "drip-feed method." Depending on the province/territory, it can begin in either Grade 1 or Grade 4 (when students are nine years old), and may end in Grade 8, Grade 9, or even Grade 12.

Over the years, we therefore proceeded to administer oral pre-tests to Core French students wishing to enrol in IF (after 1998), in order to determine their competence level in French. This allowed us to acquire invaluable empirical data on the levels attained by Core French students after one, two, or three or more years of Core French, depending on the grade level in which IF was implemented. This way, we were finally able to paint an overall picture of the results obtained in Core French, as can be seen in Text Box 6.4 below.

To ensure that the graphs showing the results of the learning evaluations are correctly interpreted, we here briefly introduce the evaluation scale used. Generally speaking, when evaluating the oral skills of younger students (IF) or adult learners (NLA), the test used was the Canadian province of New Brunswick's *Oral Proficiency Interview* (*OPI*), with the *New Brunswick Middle School Scale* as evaluation scale.[3] Essentially, this scale rates interviewees from 11 (novice) to 20 (advanced), with 14 representing learners displaying the first signs of spontaneous communication.[4]

| TEST – INDIVIDUAL ORAL INTERVIEW *Oral Proficiency Interview* (OPI) | |
|---|---|
| **Novice** (11, 12, 13) | Oral production limited to isolated words or memorized expressions |
| **Basic** (14, 15, 16) | Start of spontaneous communication using complete sentences (*Subject – Verb – Complement*) |
| **Intermediate** (17, 18) | Spontaneous communication in a wide variety of topics |
| **Advanced** (19-20) | Formal and informal conversations on practical, social and abstract topics (19) Speaks with sufficient ease to participate formal and informal exchanges in a variety of contexts (20) |

*Fig. 6-2*

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[3] The original oral proficiency scale for second languages was developed for the province of New Brunswick in the mid-1970s and was used to evaluate both adults and students enrolled in second-language programs in schools. The IF scale presented here was also developed by New Brunswick and based on the Middle School Scale that was created to allow measurement of progress within each level of the OPI scale. It closely resembles the scale developed by the American Council for the Teaching of Foreign Languages (ACTFL). Both the OPI and the ACTFL scale are based on the proficiency scale developed by the United States' Foreign Service Institute (now the Interagency Language Roundtable) and still in use.
[4] There is also a level 10 (*unrateable*), which only applies to students who, during the oral interview, prove incapable of saying anything, as sometimes happens during pre-tests.

**Text Box 6.3**
**CORE FRENCH RESULTS**
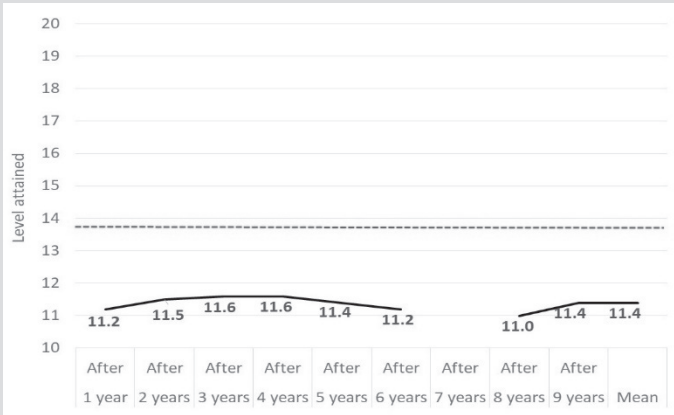


*Fig. 6-3*

Using the OPI scale, we were able to assess the level of oral proficiency attained by over 1,600 students enrolled in Core French by means of IF pre-tests carried out between 2003 and 2008 in four provinces and territories. These pre-tests were prepared by the evaluation experts of the provinces and territories involved.

The information presented in the graph is organised as follows. "After 1 year" means that when they took the pre-test (before starting IF), the students in question had only completed one year of Core French. "After 2 years" indicates that they had completed two years of Core French, and so on. The lack of results for "After 7 years" is due simply to the fact that no such case was encountered (Netten and Germain 2005 and 2009).[5]

No matter the number of years of study in Core French, then, on average the results are almost exactly the same: students are unable to communicate in French with a certain level of spontaneity (though there are always individual exceptions). If they had been able to do so, the students would have reached level 14. But the average results are well below this: 11.4. At that level, all the students are capable of is reproducing a few isolated words or expressions, nothing more. In these

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[5] When presenting these results in public, we occasionally asked the following question: "And if these results were in mathematics or science, would we have let the situation deteriorate this much?" To ask the question is to answer it.

circumstances, it is understandable that after five or six years we begin to see signs of regression, or even discouragement.

These results were later corroborated by empirical research undertaken by other scholars (Lapkin 2008—see Text Box 6.5).

**Text Box 6.4**
**CORROBORATION OF THESE RESULTS BY ANOTHER EMPIRICAL STUDY ON CORE FRENCH**

At a colloquium organised by the University of Ottawa in June, 2008, Dr. Sharon Lapkin of the University of Toronto gave a paper including a significant subtitle: "Eliminate Early Core French."

In summary, her paper stated that there exists no empirical data showing any significant difference in the results obtained at the end of Grade 8, whether students began Core French in kindergarten, in primary school (Grade 4 or 5, for instance), or even in Grade 6 or Grade 8. Her research group tested 574 students from 25 classes across seven Canadian provinces and territories (Lapkin 2008).

This was the same conclusion we had ourselves reached as we carried out our empirical research between 2003 and 2008, testing, as we just saw, approximately 1,600 students. (For more Core French results, see Germain and Netten 2006a.)

**Text Box 6.5**
**CHALLENGES IN CORE FRENCH**

Core French is characterised by the fact that it treats language more as a school subject than a genuine method of communication and social interaction. This is due, not least, to the small number of hours allocated to its teaching. Though there are some exceptions, most often it is explicit knowledge (knowledge which can be articulated or of which we are conscious), like conjugation rules or the formulation of a grammatical rule) that is emphasised, rather than the ability to communicate (Germain and Netten 2006a). Though some efforts were made at the beginning of the 1990s to rectify the situation, attempting to institute a multidimensional curriculum which emphasised the importance of communication (LeBlanc 1990), matters did not improve, as will be seen in chapter 7. This is explained by the restricted number of hours, spread over eight or nine school years. How could students be thus cognitively engaged in and genuinely motivated to learn French?

In the circumstances, it is obvious that the Core French instructional system failed to meet expectations, both those of officials in the school system and those of parents. A survey carried out in the mid-1980s, for instance, found that only 40% of parents were satisfied with Core French (Calman and Daniel 1998).

## Intensive French in Canada: Origins of the NLA



*Fig. 6-4*

In order to improve Core French, we first began discussing IF in Canada in early 1997 (for more details, see Appendix 1). An experimental version of IF was implemented in the 1998-99 school year, as part of a doctoral thesis (Netten 2001) combined with a federal government research grant (1998-2001). This pilot project ran in four classes in the Anglophone province of Newfoundland and Labrador, involving over 100 Grade 6 students (11 years old). After three years of the pilot project, we received a further research grant (2001-04) to study the *follow-up* program (designated post-IF some years later), i.e. what became of students who took IF in Grade 6 when they were in Grades 7-9. During these six years, a very large number of students were evaluated, for both oral and written skills, as we will see in chapter 7, which discusses evaluations.

**Text Box 6.6**
**DEFINITION OF INTENSIVE FRENCH (IF)**

The Intensive French programme (IF) can be seen as enriching the Core French programme in Grades 5 and 6, offering intensive French-as-a-second-language (FSL) teaching (approximately 70% of the school day) over a concentrated period of five months. In the other five months, the regular programme of studies is compressed. The enrichment includes changes to the study programme and to teaching strategies, as well as an increase in the number of hours. (MacFarlane 2005, 1)

Over the years, however, the definition broadened, and IF became a programme in its own right, taught up to the end of high school. In some provinces and territories, the school authorities have chosen to "prepare" their students for intensive learning of French: this pre-IF programme is offered in Grade 4 or 5, depending on whether IF begins in Grade 5 or 6. Even if the number of hours dedicated to French is not increased in these cases, the teachers of pre-IF classes must nonetheless be initiated into this new way of understanding the learning and teaching processes, by attending a training workshop (see chapter 8).



*Fig. 6-5*

In the school year that follows IF, (either Grade 6 or 7), many students opt to enrol in a "late" immersion class (should this be available), i.e. one where school subjects such as mathematics, science, etc. are taught in French. But such cases represent personal choices.

The normal follow-up to IF is what we have designated "post-IF."

Depending on the province or territory, this runs from Grade 6 or 7 to Grade 11 or 12, and follows the usual schedule for learning French (90 or 120 hours a year). Nevertheless, in order to ensure a minimum level of intensity, we strongly recommend that school administrators modify the normal timetables and schedule two consecutive periods of French every second day, rather than a single period every day.

**Text Box 6.7**
**INTENSIVE FRENCH: AN INITIATIVE BY SL RESEARCHERS**

We should note that unlike the first French immersion classes piloted in Canada (in Saint-Lambert, a suburb south of Montréal), in 1965 (Rebuffot 1993), IF is not the product of a grassroots movement. It was not instigated by a group of parents, for example. Rather, it stems from an initiative taken by two university researchers (an Anglophone colleague and myself), based on theoretical and empirical research likely to improve the learning of French as an L2 in schools.

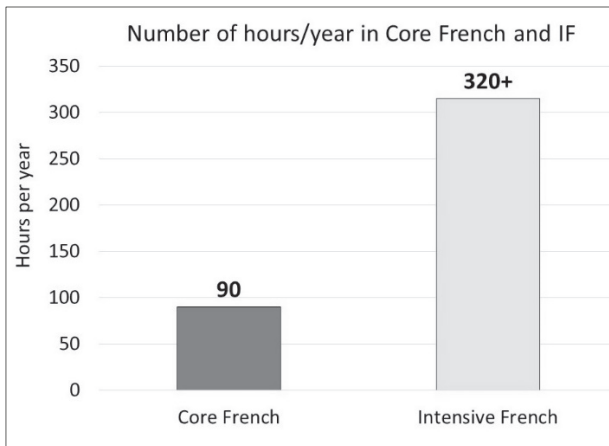### Effects of Increasing the Number of Hours in French on Other Subjects



*Fig. 6-6*

The IF instructional system generally begins with an intensive phase lasting for the first five months of the school year, in which at least 60% of

the school day is exclusively dedicated to learning French as a second language, which can represent between 275 and 300 classroom hours.

In the last five months, the students return to their usual schedule, with classes in other subjects, as well as further FSL classes representing approximately 45 additional hours (though still designated as part of IF, the latter hours are taught in a "non-intensive" way). This means that the time allotted over the year to other subjects, such as social studies, science, and health education (though not mathematics), must be halved in order to increase the number of hours dedicated to FSL. The challenge, therefore, was to justify the *compression* of the other subjects in the province's Grade 6 curriculum in order to increase the number of FSL hours.[6]

To do so, we turned to two complementary theoretical sources: Vygotsky's concept of "unitary," original, intellectual development ([1934] 1985) and Cummins's Iceberg Hypothesis (2001).

Vygotsky's "unitary" concept refers to the important idea that, in a school setting, concepts are not partitioned from one another in the student's brain. Contrary to what some people might believe, even today, the different disciplines taught in schools—such as mathematics, science, the social sciences or humanities, health education, L1 education, etc.—are not tasked with developing different or discrete cognitive processes, each one specific to a subject.

**Text Box 6.8**
**VYGOTSKY'S "UNITARY" CONCEPT OF COGNITIVE DEVELOPMENT**

According to Vygotsky, the student's brain is not compartmentalised according to the various ways in which subjects are separated in curricula. The brain is "unified" rather than "compartmentalised." As Vygotsky puts it, "Instruction has its own sequences and organization, it follows a curriculum and a timetable, and its rules cannot be expected to coincide with the inner laws of the developmental processes it calls to life […] intellectual development […] is not compartmentalized according to topics of instruction […] the main psychic functions involved in studying various subjects are interdependent" (Vygotsky [1934] 1985, 185-86).

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[6] In each province/territory, we asked the programme directors to identify the essential elements of these subjects, so that teachers could prioritise them during the last five months of the so-called "intensive" year.
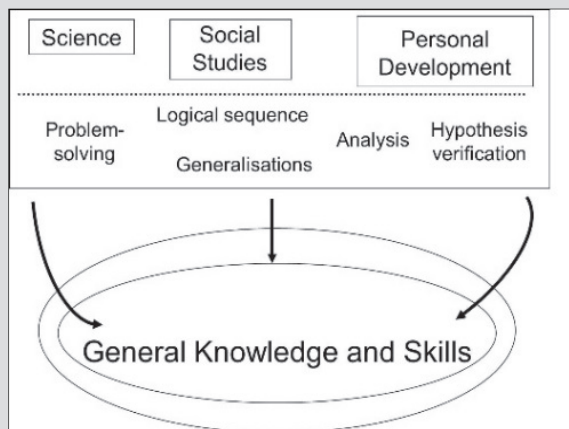
*Fig. 6-7*

This led us to think that it was possible, even likely, that every school subject contributes (though to different degrees) to the development of *all* the student's cognitive processes (such as problem-solving, comparing, generalising, etc.). The difference between cognitive processes used in each separate subject matter would therefore be a difference not in kind, as is often believed, but in degree. Even when learning a language, in other words—as much when learning an L1 as an L2/FL—the student learns to solve problems, make comparisons, generalise, etc., but to different degrees than when acquiring knowledge from other school disciplines (Germain and Netten 2005a).

This Vygotskyan view of cognitive development was a key factor that allowed us to suggest halving the amount of time dedicated to teaching the other school subjects, in order to set aside more time for the teaching of French in Grade 5 or Grade 6.

The second reference we turned to was Cummins's Linguistic Interdependence Hypothesis, often known as his Iceberg Model (Cummins 1979, 2001), with which we could justify halving the amount of time spent on teaching the L1, in this case English.

**Text Box 6.9**
**ICEBERG MODEL**



Linguistic level →

Cognitive processes →

L2  L1

Problem-solving
Formulating hypotheses
Analysing
Generalising
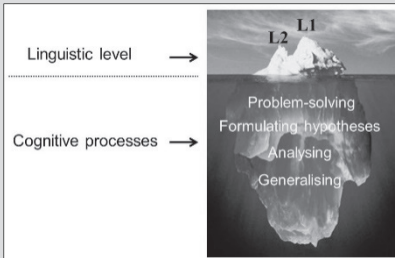
Using the Iceberg Model, it seems legitimate to hold that many "transfers" could take place from the L2 to the L1, given their "interdependence." In this sense, we might even say that Vygotsky's model encompasses Cummins's hypothesis.

*Fig. 6-8*

From the inception of IF, we were able to use these theory-based arguments to convince some school district administrators that it was indeed possible, at least theoretically, to halve the amount of time allotted to teaching most subjects in favour of French, that is, to make way for an "intensive" French-language learning process.

This made it possible to dedicate between 275 and 300 hours to French over the course of the first half of the school year. Of course, the challenge was to empirically demonstrate the validity of Vygotsky's and Cummins's hypotheses. From the start, it was the school districts themselves who put these hypotheses to the test, by deciding to test the students following the *compressed* courses in the L1, science, etc. It was a matter of investigating whether the results would be at least equivalent to those of previous years or of comparable groups not enrolled in the intensive programme.

| First 5 months | Intensive French | Literacy emphasised |
|---|---|---|
| Last 5 months | English (L1) Science Social studies Health education | In English |
| | French (FSL) | Literacy emphasised |
| Complete school year | Mathematics Physical education/ Music/Arts | In English |

*Fig. 6-9*

One of the main concerns shared by many parents at the time was the potential *negative* impact IF might have on their children's L1 (English) learning. The Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador undertook an empirical research project from the moment IF was implemented in that province in 1998, aimed at evaluating the impact of IF, not only on the L1, but also on mathematics, even if there were no reduction in the time allotted to the latter subject.

**Text Box 6.10**
**EVALUATION OF IF'S IMPACT ON ENGLISH AND MATHEMATICS[7]**



Results in English (L1) and in Mathematics, End of Grade 6
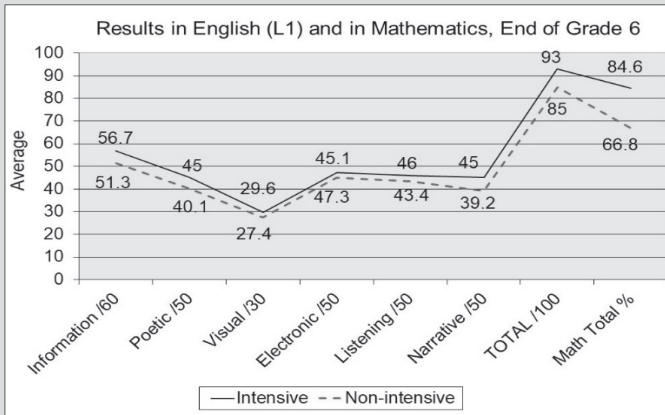
*Fig. 6-10*

Eighteen comparable classes (across six schools) were evaluated, seven of which were IF classes. This focused evaluation, which looked at various facets of English learning (such as informative, poetic, or narrative texts, etc.), showed that the IF classes achieved statistically significantly better results than the non-intensive classes serving as a control group, not only in English, but even in mathematics. Thanks to the evaluation results of this and other similar empirical studies (carried out by the same province, and then elsewhere), IF was extended to a considerable number of other classes.

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[7] The graph reproduced in Fig. 6-10 was provided by the Department of Education of Newfoundland and Labrador.

As consulting Text Box 6.11 shows, the results achieved in subjects other than French supported, to a certain extent, Vygotsky's and Cummins's hypotheses, at least insofar as the students' L1 is concerned.

## In the Province of New Brunswick[8]

Having noted the absence of negative results in mathematics and English among IF students in Newfoundland and Labrador, the Department of Education of the bilingual province of New Brunswick also decided to pilot IF. Naturally, the evaluation experts in this province undertook numerous empirical studies—once again, in response to the wariness of many parents and some school administrators—not only to measure the levels reached in French but also to determine the effect of IF on the compressed subjects.

Here too, IF classes were compared to comparable non-intensive classes, though in this province these were Grade 5 students, as Grade 5 is the final year of primary school in that province, as opposed to Grade 6 in Newfoundland and Labrador. At this stage, it was suggested to us that IF could be implemented beginning in Grade 1, or perhaps in Grade 4. Bearing in mind the results of an empirical research project carried out in Québec in the mid-1970s (Billy 1980), we recommended that IF only be implemented in the last year of primary school. The results of that empirical research made it clear that it is preferable by far not to implement intensive classes before the final year of primary school—i.e. in Grade 5 or 6, depending on the province or territory—largely due to the students' levels of cognitive development.

Based on this and on our theoretical foundations, we therefore did not recommend starting IF in the first years of primary school.

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**Text Box 6.11**
**WHY TO AVOID STARTING IF AT YOUNGER AGES**

Our decision is also based on our own experiences of educational practices. In the early 2000s, a school district in a Canadian province agreed to attempt the implementation of IF in a Grade 4 class, which included several students with diverse learning needs. Accompanied by the learning specialists from the school district and from the Department of Education, my colleague Joan Netten and I observed the class many times; over the course of the three years of this experimental programme,

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[8] New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada.

the students were evaluated in FSL oral skills and written skills. It became clear that though the oral results were positive, the written results were much lower than expected. This is another reason, based on empirical data, that we do not recommend starting *intensive* language teaching before children are about ten years old.

The success of IF in Canadian school contexts may be explained to a large extent by there being "L1 transfers" (in this case English) to the L2, which presupposes that something is available to be transferred, so to speak. Research in this area, moreover, shows that we cannot usually consider the development of an L1 as relatively "complete" until the end of Grade 4, when students are about nine years old. *Intensively* introducing an L2 earlier than this would risk building the new knowledge on shaky L1 pillars, while possibly compromising the development of skills associated with other subject matters.[9] In light of this, it was decided to implement IF in Grade 5 in New Brunswick, the final year of primary school.

**Text Box 6.12**
**EVALUATING IF'S IMPACT ON OTHER SUBJECTS: ENGLISH (READING AND WRITING), SCIENCE AND MATHEMATICS[10]**

In New Brunswick, the evaluation of IF's impact considered French as an L2, reading skills in English (L1), writing skills in English (L1), science, and mathematics, though again in this case, the latter subject had not been "compressed." Additionally, in this case the results were compared with the average results from a sample of students who had undergone testing at the end of primary school, representing some 1,400 students throughout the province. As the graphs below demonstrate here too, the results were significantly higher across all subjects tested, particularly in writing.

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[9] In Bulgaria, in fact, IF does not begin until Grade 8, though the model used differs from ours. (For more on this topic, see Appendix 3.)
[10] The graphs reproduced in this box were provided by the Department of Education of New Brunswick.

Fig. 6-11



Fig. 6-12

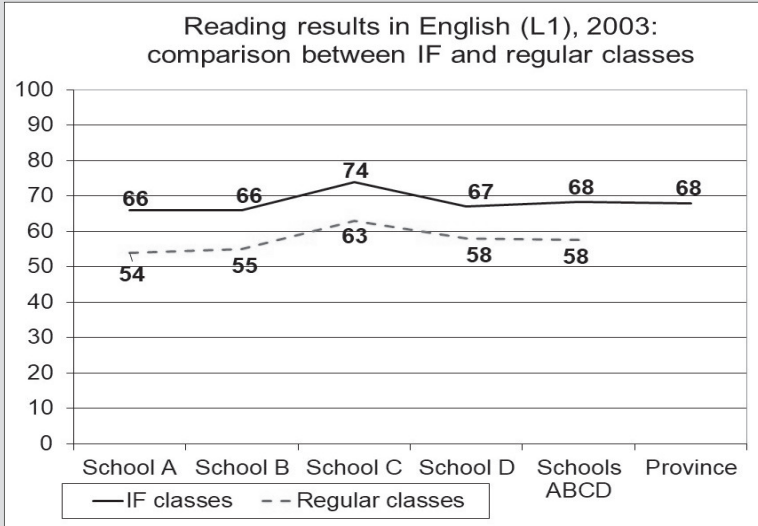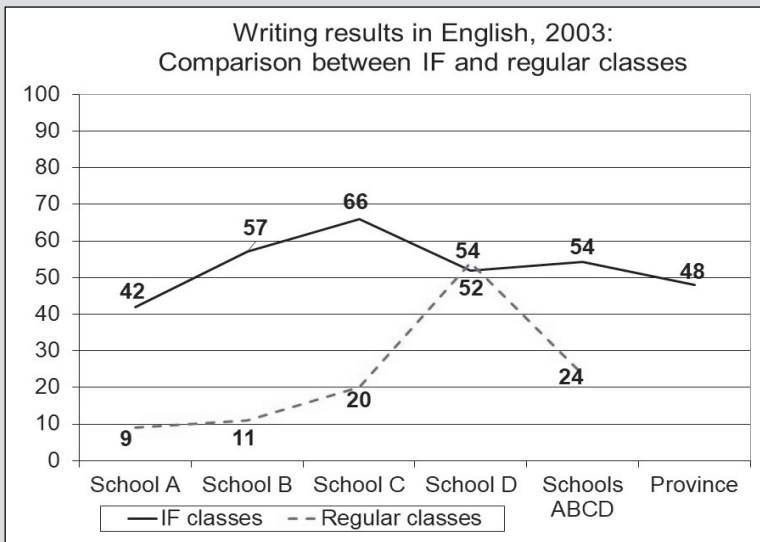In written English, it will be noted that the IF results are far superior to those achieved in the regular classes. This can be explained by the fact that IF teachers had to apply the "writing process" (which does not appear to have been taught in English classes, with one exception), which the students appear to have transferred, simply enough, to their work in English.
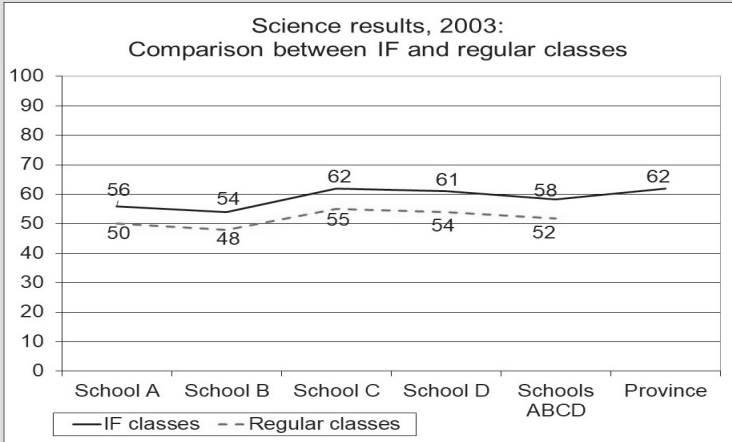


*Fig. 6-13*
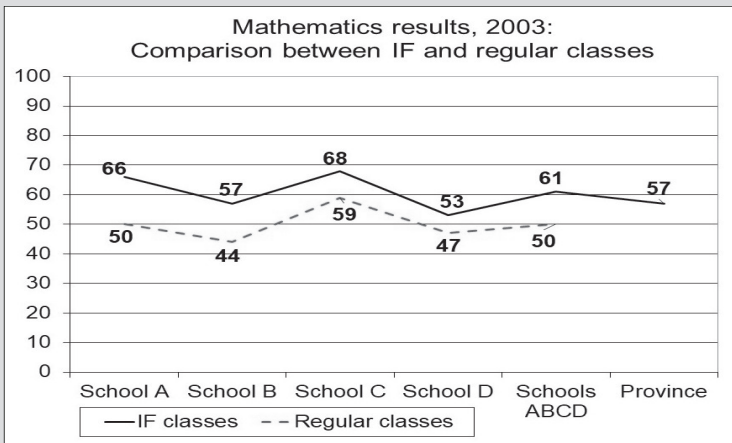


*Fig. 6-14*

As can be seen from the graphs above, the impact IF had on the compressed subjects, including mathematics (which were not compressed) was anything but negative. On the contrary, IF students achieved results higher than the provincial average. In September 2008, therefore, after five years of piloting IF classes, the Department of Education of New Brunswick decided to implement our approach in all Grade 5 classes across the province for students who had not already chosen to enrol in French Immersion in Grade 3 (Kristmanson 2005).[11]

It should be noted that soon after IF classes were implemented for New Brunswick's Anglophone students, the province's Francophone sector began a pilot of "Intensive English" in some classes. This programme is generally based on the IF model, but for various administrative and pedagogical reasons does not replicate it in every aspect.

## Across Canada

The great challenge we faced in Canada generally was the resistance we encountered on the part of some people due to their beliefs about language learning in the school environment. The problem was as follows: it was common knowledge that, on the one hand, Core French was (with very few exceptions) producing extremely poor results, while on the other, French Immersion was producing good results. Over time, this had led many people (school administrators, teachers, parents) to believe that *the only way to successfully learn* an L2/FL *in school* was Immersion. Some even reached the conclusion that the lack of success found among Core French students was probably due to their ineptitude, except for a minority of talented students.

| Pre-IF, IF, and Post-IF in Canada 2014-15 | |
| --- | --- |
| | Number of students |
| Pre-IF (Grades 4/5) | 3,200 |
| IF (Grades 5/6) | 7,000 |
| Post-IF (Grades 6/7-12) | 12,000 |
| **TOTAL** | **22,200** |

*Fig. 6-15*

Given this entirely erroneous assumption, many people rejected the idea that "improving" Core French could ever succeed, since only Immersion had proven itself. As the intention behind IF was simply to "improve" the effectiveness of Core French, this represented a major challenge.

Despite the above assumption, by 2014-15 there

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[11] That same year (2008) saw the first IF classes launched in Western Canada, when the province of Saskatchewan implemented it in Grade 6 for complete beginners in French.

were 7,000 students enrolled in IF (Grade 5/6) across Canada, making for a cumulative total (by 2015) of 70,000 students since it was first implemented in Newfoundland and Labrador in 1998.

If we add the number of students enrolled in pre-IF and post-IF to those enrolled in the intensive year itself, in 2014-15 there were 22,000 students enrolled in IF across Canada.[12]

## Among Allophone Students

Among young Canadian learners, IF was predominantly geared towards Anglophone students. In some areas, however, classes could include students whose first language was neither English nor French (designated, in Canada, as *allophone* students). One of these multi-ethnic environments has already provided the topic for a doctoral thesis, completed by Dr. Wendy Carr in 2007, the most salient points of which were published in an article (Carr, 2009).

To summarise the details of her research most relevant to our purpose, 357 IF students participated in her study between 2004 and 2007, some of them immigrants, many of Asian origin, who were simultaneously EAL (English as an Additional Language) students.

**Text Box 6.13**
**RESULTS ACHIEVED BY ALLOPHONE IF STUDENTS SIMULTANEOUSLY LEARNING ENGLISH**

A close examination of the results revealed that there was no significant difference between the French-language oral competence results obtained by allophone students also learning English and those who were not learning English.

"English proficiency assessments of EAL students in IF ($n$=43) showed their improvement over the school year was significantly greater than that of EAL peers not in IF ($n$=43)" (Carr 2009, 788).

In other words, not only did these non-Anglophone Canadian students succeed in learning French, they also performed better in English than did the immigrant children who did not participate in IF. Truth be told, these results are not surprising: they are to a large extent explained by

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[12] These data are provided by the Departments of Education of the various provinces and territories and were collated by the National Steering Committee for Intensive French in spring 2015. Readers may also wish to consult the Committee's website at http://francaisintensif.ca/index.php/en.

Vygotsky's concept and Cummins's hypothesis, mentioned earlier in the present chapter.

## Among Canadian Indigenous Nations

For several years now, the NLA has been applied to the teaching of Indigenous languages in many regions of Canada, notably in the three territories, where it has served for teaching languages such as Hän (Yukon), Déné (Northwest Territories), and Inuktitut (Nunavut), and in the north of some provinces for Cree (Saskatchewan and British Columbia); it has also been used for teaching French, English, and Cree in the James Bay region. As can be seen, in Canada, the NLA is not exclusively used for teaching FSL.
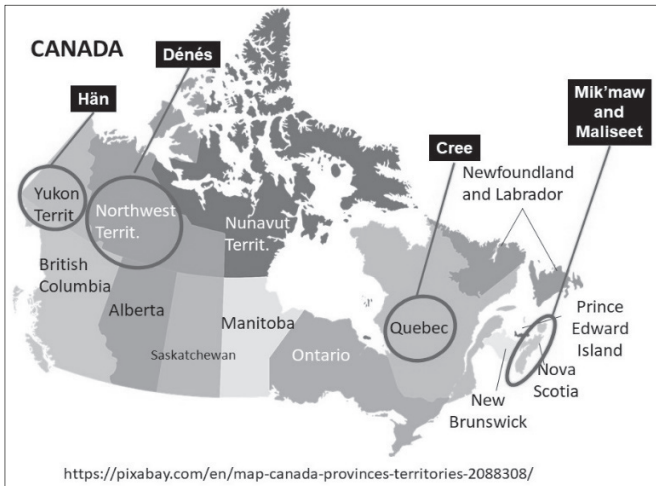


*Fig. 6-16*

Text Box 6.14
THE SURVIVAL OF SOME INDIGENOUS LANGUAGES THANKS TO IF

The *Teachers' Guides* we wrote for French have been translated and adapted for the teaching of some of Canada's Indigenous languages. This means that, in some cases, languages previously seen as endangered are experiencing something of a revival; however, the major challenge remains of finding qualified teachers who master their language well

enough to teach it and who could be trained in the approach. This presents a paradox: to "save" some "first" languages, we have to use "second" language teaching strategies, namely the ones we advocate. To date, even though in some cases the students involved presented diverse learning needs, everything leads to the conclusion that the NLA "is well-suited to teaching FSL to Native/First Nation/Indigenous students, as it is in tune with traditional Indigenous teaching methods [primacy of oral language, cooperative work, etc.]" (Allain, Demers, and Pelletier 2013, 11).

## First Experience Outside Canada: Implementation at the South China Normal University (SCNU)



*Fig. 6-17*

For more or less the same reasons we developed IF for young learners, we were given the opportunity to improve language learning among adults. Despite conferences, journals, and research projects devoted to L2/FL learning among adults, many well-informed people are aware that results do not always meet expectations. One need only think of the high

dropout rates in language classes (see chapter 3, under the heading "Dropping Out of Language Classes").

In many language schools or institutions for adults, administrators, over time, start to wonder what textbook would be the best one to use. Since any textbook is merely the reflection of whatever underlying approach its authors rely on, people apparently fail to realise that swapping one textbook for another one using the same underlying approach will, when it comes down to it, change essentially nothing.

Some twelve years after IF was first put into practice in Canada, a first attempt at applying the NLA among young university-age adults took place in China, at the South China Normal University (SCNU) in 2010.[13]

The first—and by no means the smallest—difficulty that had to be surmounted when bringing the NLA to China was overcoming the way in which courses were organised. Teaching was highly compartmentalised: Chinese teachers taught French grammar in Chinese, along with reading and writing. Courses in "phonetics" and "conversation," meanwhile, were taught by native speakers from France. Furthermore, there was practically no contact between these groups of teachers, each of which followed its own "programme."

Implementing the NLA meant reorganising the courses, as the instructor (often two or three) assigned to the same class had to teach the different phases of each teaching unit in succession. This required a great deal of teamwork and coordination, which was achieved thanks to flow sheets. As Dr. Rong Fu remarks, the four guiding principles for "writing or rewriting a French-as-a-second-language (FFL) curriculum for Chinese institutions (FFL)" are that it should be "innovative, effective, realistic, and highly contextualised" (Fu 2012, 22).

The second major difficulty involved the standard curriculum and hence the textbook being used, which had to be disregarded. Teaching units were selected from among the extant Canadian options in order to retain only those appearing likely to interest the Chinese students, given their level of cognitive development.[14] In some units, the sentences proposed as model sentences sometimes had to be complexified, and some narrative texts had to be replaced by informational ones.

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[13] This followed a lecture I was invited to give during a colloquium organised in Guangzhou in autumn 2009 by the French Department of that university. (The text may be found in Germain and Netten 2011b.)

[14] For the results of the piloting of the NLA in this institution, see the next chapter. As the characteristics of the Canadian context have already been described at length elsewhere, for reasons of space they will not be repeated here—to learn more on this topic, see especially Netten and Germain 2009.

Another challenge that we faced was the reality of the learning culture among Chinese students (Rongkun 2017; Zeng 2018).

**Text Box 6.15**
**LEARNING CULTURE AMONG CHINESE STUDENTS**

Teachers in the French department decided from the very first piloting of NLA that a meeting would take place, in Chinese, at the beginning of each university year, in order to explain to new students how the NLA works. The objective was to prepare the students for the NLA, on the theoretical and especially the psychological level, as from that point on all classes would be held in French and they would not be permitted to write down in real time what they heard in class.

Ten weeks later, student-teacher group sharing sessions were organised in order to determine the fine-tuning necessary on both sides. For instance, the teachers agreed to let the students record the sentences orally modelled in class on their telephone, allowing them to retain a record of what they had learnt. It was also agreed that towards the end of each 40-minute teaching period, the teacher would write down on the board (or screen) the language structures used with a degree of spontaneity during the lesson. This way, writing served only as an aide-mémoire rather than as the vehicle for learning to speak the language.

Teacher training was a further factor needing to be considered. I was invited on a twice-yearly basis to provide and follow up on this training (especially with newly hired teachers). We quickly realised that the "strict separation" traditionally maintained between the Chinese and French teachers, and between the different language competences being taught, had to end.

Finally, it should be noted that in China, all students specialising in French must pass the compulsory *Test national de français comme spécialité niveau 4* (*National French as a Speciality Test, Level 4*, TFS4 hereafter)[15] at the end of their second year. This test evaluates their language competences according to the percentage in Fig. 6-18. However, it is worth noting that *it does not evaluate their ability to communicate orally.*

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[15] The TSF4 is administered by the National Education Examinations Authority and the Association chinoise des professeurs de français (Chinese Association of French Teachers, ACPF) (Dong 2012).
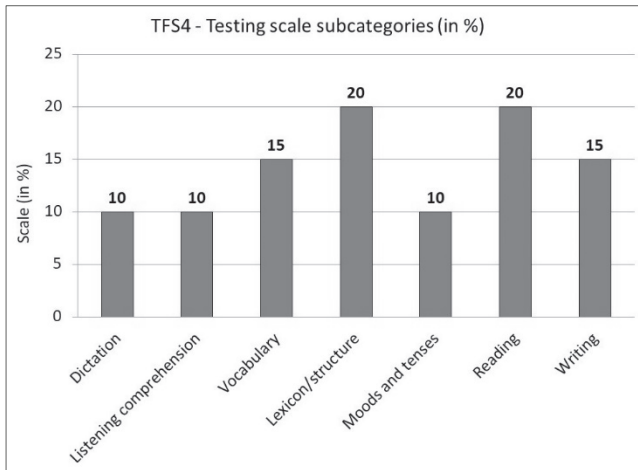
*Fig. 6-18*

Given this specific context, a large part of the fourth semester, towards the end of the second year, had to be dedicated to preparing for the TSF4. Nevertheless, students can be said to have almost always performed quite well so far, as demonstrated by the yearly statistics showing their results.

In fact, it is part due to the SCNU results, for both oral and written communication, that a neighbouring Chinese high school decided to adopt the NLA in 2014, in order to better prepare its students planning to study abroad in France. The results so far appear equally promising (see next chapter).

From the NLA's first implementation at SCNU in 2010, until 2018, over 300 students at the university have learnt French using this approach. At the neighbouring high school, the NLA has allowed over 400 students to learn French between 2014 and 2018.

## Elsewhere

Since 2014, the NLA has been used in some beginner-level classes of the Spanish programme at the Université du Québec à Montréal School of Languages, in a 45-hour course for Francophone university students from Québec. So far, the Spanish topics have included *My Family*, *My House and Neighbourhood*, *My Favourite Book*, and so on. The Spanish-language teaching units were in part inspired by the IF teaching units.

**Text Box 6.16**
**THE NLA FOR SPANISH**

Since 2014, A. Guillén and J. Payeras, two instructors who use the NLA to teach Spanish, have shared their experience at numerous colloquia, in Spanish, French, and English, not only within Canada—e.g. with the Association des professeurs d'espagnol du Québec (Quebec Association of Teachers of Spanish, APEQ)—but also in Bogotá, Colombia.[16]

So far, the piloting of the NLA for teaching Spanish in Québec appears to be successful: "The results show that with the NLA, students develop their ability to communicate spontaneously, while maintaining their motivation throughout the application of this approach" (Guillén and Payeras, personal communication).

The NLA was also piloted for teaching Spanish in Japan for the first time in 2017 (for more details on this class, see Text Box 5.12).



*Fig. 6-19*

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[16] As examples: A. Guillén and J. Payeras, "La competencia oral y escrita en cursos de nivel elemental (ELE) en la UQÀM a través del enfoque neurolingüístico (ANL): un análisis comparativo" (paper, Journées pédagogiques de l'Association des professeurs d'espagnol du Québec (APEQ), Université de Montréal, Montreal, Qc., May 2016) and J. Payeras, and A. Guillén. "Estrategias de aprendizaje y de enseñanza de ELE a través del enfoque neurolingüístico" (paper, 4to Encuentro Internacional de Español como Lengua Extranjera, Universidad Sergio Arbodela, Bogotá, Colombia, August 2015).

A first piloting of the NLA for adult FSL learners in Québec took place in 2015 at the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM). The 27 young adults in this 45-hour, 15-week class, all students from the UQÀM School of Management, came from various countries and thus presented a wide range of L1s.[17]

Further pilots using the NLA for adult learners of French followed, in Taiwan (beginning in 2015), Hong Kong, Japan, and Iran (in Tehran, with adult learners whose L1 is Fārsi – see Mohammadi, 2018). These courses have been offered either at universities or by private organisations.



In Japan

Kyoritsu Women's University and Junior College, Japan
Instructor: Hidenori Konishi (16 students)

*Fig. 6-20*



In Iran

To Be Language Institute, Tehran
Instructor: Elham Mohammadi (11 adults)

*Fig. 6-21*



In China

Nanhai High School
1 of the 4 classes

*Fig. 6-22*



In Taiwan

Da-Yeh University, Taïwan
Instructor: Ching-hsin CHANG + 20 students
June 2016

*Fig. 6-23*

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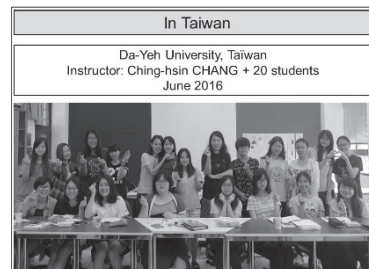[17] To learn more about this piloting of the NLA, which not only included a pre-test (showing the group's strong heterogeneity in terms of French language skills) but also an appraisal of the students' fluency and verbal interaction after only 12 teaching hours, see the next chapter.

When other jurisdictions, both in Asia and the Western world, began to express their desire to implement the NLA for FSL/FFL (in Belgium, France, Mexico and Colombia) despite already using textbooks accompanied by other resources specifically geared to preparing students for the DELF (*Diplôme d'études en langue française*) and DALF (*Diplôme approfondi de langue française*) tests, we had to face the problem of whether the NLA could be adapted for this type of assessment.

It must be recognised that the major obstacle to a broader expansion of the NLA, particularly among adult populations, is the DELF and DALF evaluation system, which has been put in place throughout much of the world following the CEFR's recommendations (2001). (For more on this topic, see chapter 3.)

When we began to implement IF in Canada in 1998, the CEFR had yet to appear. Moreover, when we began to implement the NLA at the SCNU in China in 2010, the test used was the TFS4, as we have just seen. This being the case, we felt no need to align ourselves with tests of the DELF type. Given the new reality that emerged concurrently with the NLA, a new NLA textbook is being prepared, which, as mentioned previously, will better take into account the content of the DELF tests and, eventually, of the DALF tests as well. This way, the expansion of the NLA among FSL/FFL teachers should be able to proceed without encountering too many obstacles, even if our resources are in no way comparable to the panoply of publications put out by the major French publishers.

**To sum up,** we can distinguish three phases in the NLA's development, from its early Canadian days in 1997-98 to the present (2018). The first, still ongoing phase began in 1998, when it was first introduced, experimentally, in four Grade 6 classes of Anglophone Canadian children (aged about 11), using what we came to call the "Canadian teaching units." A second phase began in 2010, when the NLA was piloted with young Chinese university students; this phase involved the selection of Canadian units and their adaptation to this new context, resulting in what we have designated the "Chinese teaching units." Finally, in the autumn of 2014, the introduction of the NLA in a Chinese high school aiming to prepare its students to sit the DELF tests made it clear that the Chinese teaching units required a further adaptation, one specifically geared to preparing for the DELF. With my two colleagues Romain Jourdan-Ôtsuka and Gladys Benudiz, I am therefore currently working on a *Manuel de français selon l'ANL* (*NLA Textbook for French* – (Germain, Jourdan-Ôtsuka and  Benudiz – in preparation).

# PART FOUR

# SOME OUTCOMES OF THE NLA

The fourth and final part of the present work first looks at the question of the results achieved by students who have learnt French as an L2/FL thanks to the teaching methods advocated by the NLA. This is a crucial element insofar as, without the positive results obtained to date both in Canada and Asia, the NLA would undoubtedly not arouse the same level of enthusiasm it has achieved among school administrators and language teachers alike. It is unfortunate that no comparable empirical data exists showing the results achieved when other approaches are used, as these would enable us to gain a better perspective on the NLA's weak spots as well as its strengths. The data we look at are drawn exclusively from FSL/FFL learning due to the fact that thus far, the NLA has overwhelmingly been implemented for teaching French (as seen in chapter 6); there is, however, no reason to believe that the results would not be comparable if the NLA were used with different target languages. The final chapter looks at training teachers in the NLA, focusing mainly on the effect teaching has on learning, according to original empirical research we have carried out on the matter. We then conclude with some reflections on language teacher training.

# CHAPTER SEVEN

# NLA RESULTS:
## EVALUATION

The current chapter is comprised of three parts. The first is a brief consideration of the instructor's evaluation of learners at the end of a teaching unit. Supported by empirical research, the second part takes an in-depth look at quantitative evaluations of learning. The reader will find here results obtained thanks to IF (achieved by young students) both in oral and written language, followed by IF's impact on the compacting of some other subjects, and, finally, the results obtained by students with diverse learning needs or those with learning challenges. We will then look at the NLA's results (both oral and written) achieved by older learners in various learning institutions for teens, young adults, or adults. Finally, following some testimonials from learners, we will examine the NLA as a universal approach.

## Evaluations at the End of a Teaching Unit

At the beginning of each of our teaching units, there is a list of "communicative functions,"[1] each associated with a series of language structures to be adapted according to the particular needs of the instructor and the learners. For example, the **Introduce Yourself** communication function is associated with structures such as *What's your job?—I'm an engineer/a secretary/a receptionist… Where do you work?—I work at/with…* At the end of the teaching unit, the teacher evaluates the learners by interviewing them orally on a one-by-one basis, assessing whether they are able to use the L2 fluently and accurately to carry out a given communicative function.

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[1] Let there be no mistake: these lists of "communicative functions" were in no way drawn up *a priori*, in order to determine the content that should be taught, but *a posteriori*, after the activities, mini-projects, and final project of each teaching unit had been developed according to the learners' interests and life experiences.

# Quantitative Evaluation of Learning

## IF: An Instructional System Tested from the Start

IF was first evaluated as a part of Professor Joan Netten's doctoral thesis, where the reader will find the results from the first evaluations of Grade 6 IF classes (Netten 2001).[2]

A large-scale study followed, carried out between 2003 and 2009 by my colleague J. Netten and myself in nine Canadian provinces and territories, in which we compared the results obtained by several groups of Grade 5 or Grade 6 IF students. As too much space would be required to present the entirety of this study, we present here the essential findings of this empirical research, published in 2009 (Netten and Germain 2009).
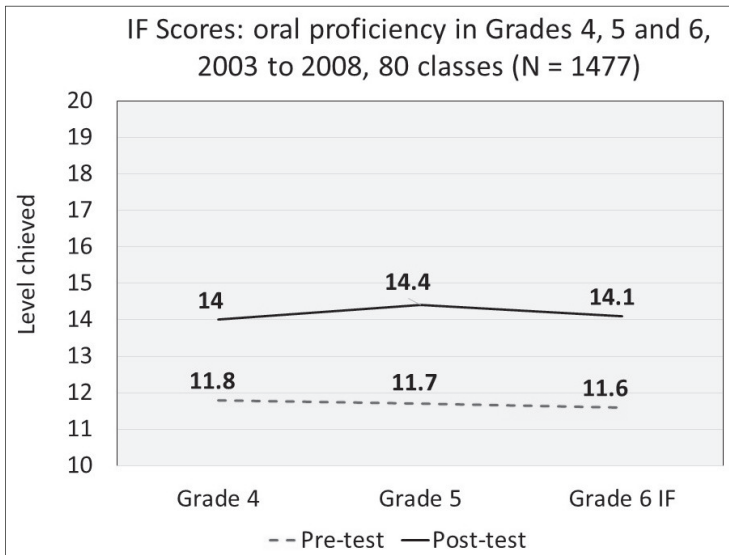


*Fig. 7-1*

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[2] We should, however, mention that this thesis uses the evaluation scale then current in Newfoundland and Labrador, the oral interview protocol for French 3200, which differs in some respects from the protocol used in New Brunswick and, subsequently, in the other Canadian provinces and territories.

## IF RESULTS IN GRADES 4, 5, AND 6

The graph shows the scores obtained in IF by 1,477 students (80 classes) in Grades 4, 5, and 6 (n=285, n=716, and n=476), between 2003 and 2008. These scores were based on individual oral interviews, using the OPI test outlined in Text Box 6.3. The pre-test averages vary only slightly: 11.8, 11.7, and 11.6 (for Grades 4, 5, and 6 respectively). In other words, whether the IF year begins in Grade 4, 5, or 6, the scores obtained by the different groups of students (coming out of Core French[3]) show no statistically significant difference between these groups. They are therefore quite comparable.

Following five months of intensive French learning, the post-test scores are (in the same order), 14, 14.4, and 14.1, a gain of 2.2 to 2.7 on the OPI scale as adapted for IF. The statistical tests applied show that all these increases, in all classes tested, are statistically significant at $p < 0.001$—which, in essence, means that there is almost no likelihood of these results being due to chance rather than the approach used.

Specialists may wish to consult Table 7-1 below, which details the tests of these scores' statistical significance and their confidence levels: gain, $p$-value, and $t$-test.

| IF | School years | No. Prov./terr. | No. classes | No students | Pre-test | Post-test | Gain | p-value | t-test |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Grade 4 IF | 2004-2007 | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | 1 | 16 | 285 | | | | | |
| Average | | | | | 11.8 | 14 | 2.2 | *** | p < 0.001 |
| Grade 5 IF | 2003-2007 | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | 2 | 38 | 716 | | | | | |
| Average | | | | | 11.7 | 14.4 | 2.7 | *** | p < 0.001 |
| Grade 6 IF | 2003-2008 | | | | | | | | |
| Total | | 3 | 26 | 476 | | | | | |
| Average | | | | | 11.6 | 14.1 | 2.5 | *** | p < 0.001 |

*Table 7-1. Oral proficiency scores in Grades 4, 5, and 6, 2003-08, 80 classes. (Adapted by Germain from Netten and Germain 2009, 768-9)*

Generally speaking, this means that IF oral proficiency scores are relatively comparable, whether the students are in Grade 4, 5, or even 6.

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[3] As a reminder, Core French is a "drip-feed" approach, offering 30 or 40 minutes of French a day.

We must note, however, that the results of tests measuring writing proficiency show statistically significant differences between the results obtained by each grade. In other words, even though oral proficiency scores are more or less equal across grade levels, this is not true for writing. This is understandable, as the level of cognitive development among 9-year-olds (Grade 4) is not at all the same as that of 10- or 11-year-olds, a fact with important repercussions for the quality and quantity of written production.

If we look specifically at Grade 5 IF over several consecutive years, the results show a certain consistency, as seen below.

## GRADE 5 IF RESULTS

Without delving into the technical details of this empirical study, it should be mentioned that—as can be seen in the graph—the average score (on a scale of 10 to 20, as indicated on the y-axis) is 14 for the 2003-04 school year, and so on for subsequent years (Netten and Germain 2009).
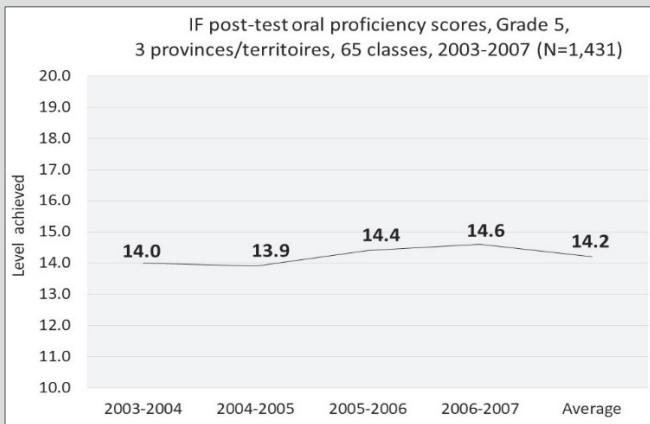


Fig. 7-2

The overall average for four consecutive years, from 2003 to 2007, is 14.2 (as seen in the rightmost column in the graph). These results represent the scores from 65 Grade 5 classes in three provinces and territories, a total of 1,431 students individually interviewed by experienced evaluators using the OPI scale as adapted for IF. The number of hours per class varied from 240 to 363, for an average of 298 hours.

   Two of the reasons reported for the success of IF, and that are worth mentioning here, are resorting to teaching strategies that, first, allow the development of internal grammar before external grammar and, secondly, are based on a literacy approach that focuses on links between the different skills (oral, reading and writing). These two reasons in particular explain the benefits of the approach used (Netten and Germain, 2009). The first two of the NLA's (or IF's) fundamental principles, detailed in chapter 2, help us understand the importance of the above.

   What of the follow-up, i.e. what happens to IF students in later school years?

**POST-IF RESULTS, GRADE 6**

Post-Intensive French: Pre and post-test scores, grade 6, 1 province/territory, 4 classes, 2005-2006 (N=53/60)
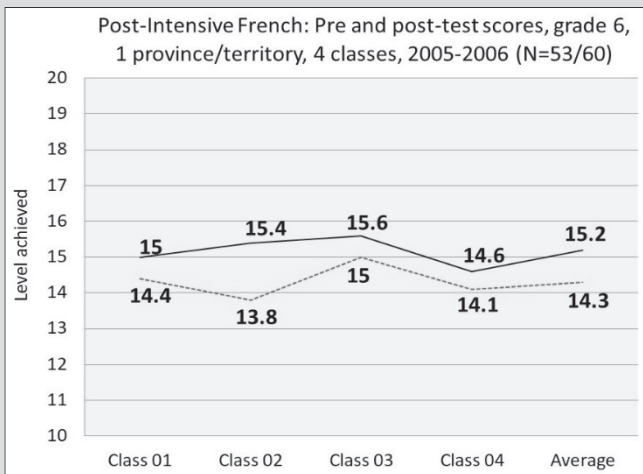
*Fig. 7-3*

   Fig. 7-3 shows the oral proficiency results of post-IF students (53 students in four Grade 6 classes) in the year that followed their intensive semester in Grade 5.

   What is important to note here is that on average, these post-IF students not only maintained the levels they reached on entering Grade 6 (14.3), but made considerable progress by the end of the year (15.2), even though this was no longer an intensive year. On the OPI scale (adapted for IF), they made an average gain of 0.9. These results are statistically significant (Netten and Germain 2009).

We can see that, even though the post-IF sample size is rather small (four classes), students continued to build on the results they achieved the previous year, when they were in IF, making significant progress in oral proficiency. What must be understood here is the importance of this sort of empirical study: if the results had shown that the students were *unable* to at least maintain their language levels in later years, school administrators would certainly not have chosen to implement the NLA in their schools.

If we now turn to Grade 5 student scores from the province of New Brunswick, a meaningful comparison can be made between the results obtained by students after several consecutive years of *Core French* and those achieved after a single year (Grade 5) of IF, despite the overall *lower* number of class hours in the latter.

**COMPARISON OF CORE FRENCH AND IF RESULTS IN GRADE 5**



Average oral proficiency score at the start of Grade 5, after 4 years (360 hrs) of Core French, 31 classes, 2002-2006 (N=689)
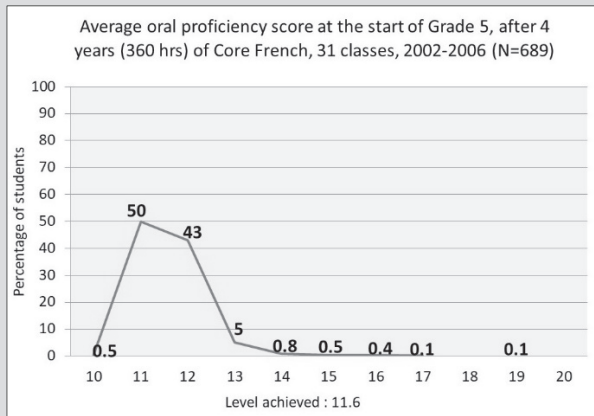
*Fig. 7-4*

Careful examination of Fig. 7-4 reveals that after four consecutive years of learning French for 30 minutes a day (a total of 360 hours), only 2% of students could communicate spontaneously in that language (i.e. achieve 14 on the OPI scale). In this major study carried out by New Brunswick's Department of Education, 689 students in 31 classes were individually tested between 2002 and 2006 as they began Grade 5 (as pre-tests for IF).

Intensive French: Level achieved after 5 months (300 intensive hours), Grade 5, 32 classes, 2003-2006 (N=655)
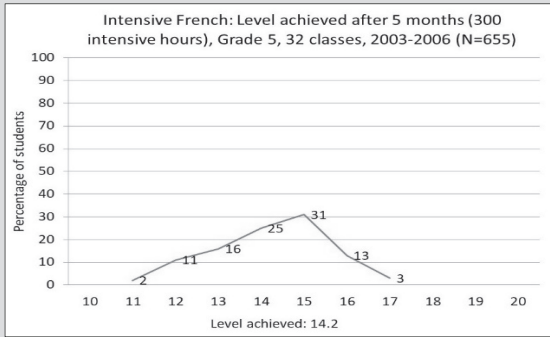
*Fig. 7-5*

In IF, by contrast, after five intensive months—an average of 300 hours, i.e. 60 *fewer* hours—72% of the 655 students tested could communicate in French with a certain level of spontaneity.

It was following their own statistical analyses that, in 2008, the decision-makers of New Brunswick's Department of Education chose to make IF mandatory for all Grade 5 students in the English school system who have not previously chosen to take French Immersion in Grade 3.

Elsewhere, results from another province (which we are not authorised to identify) show almost exactly the same patterning, as seen in the graph below.

**PERCENTAGE OF GRADE 6 STUDENTS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE SPONTANEOUSLY**

Oral proficiency results, % of students having reached 14 or +, 44 classes, 2007-2011
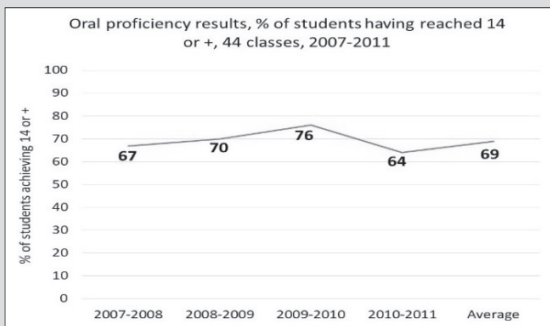
*Fig. 7-6*

Fig. 7-6 shows the results obtained by the students of 44 Grade 6 IF classes, all of whom were complete beginners at the start of the year. After five intensive months of learning French, 69% of the students achieved Level 14 (the target level) when individually tested using the OPI scale. In other words, almost 70% of these students can communicate with a certain level of spontaneity.

## Relationship between the Number of Hours and Oral Proficiency Results

However, one could speculate that these results are due simply to the increase in the number of hours dedicated to French. We attempted to assess the validity of this idea in one of our numerous empirical studies of IF, formulating the following hypothesis: There is a proportional relationship between the results in French and the number of classroom hours dedicated to this learning (Germain, Netten and Movassat, 2004: 311; Sénéchal, 2005).

To test this hypothesis, we recorded the number of hours dedicated to intensive FSL learning in 21 Grade 6 classes, from 1998 to 2001.

**CONNECTION BETWEEN NUMBER OF HOURS AND RESULTS**
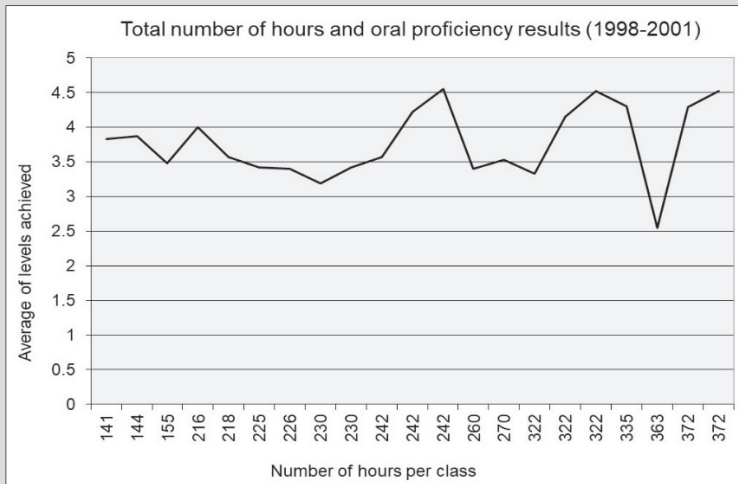


*Fig. 7-7 Source: Germain, Netten and Movassat, 2004*

If the number of hours and results were closely correlated, a graphic representation of the two ought to show an upward trend line: the greater the number of hours, the higher the results.

What results were obtained during the three years in question (1998-01)? The x-axis of Fig. 7-7 shows the number of hours, which ranges from 141 to 372 over the five months of intensive teaching.

Yet if we look at the scores obtained (shown on the y-axis), on a 0-5 scale, it is clear that the results (using this scale) do not vary according to the number of hours. For instance, the class which spent 363 hours on FSL achieved much lower results than those which only had 141 and 144 FSL hours respectively. In other words, as the graphic shows, there is no ascending curve, as there would be if the two variables were closely correlated (Germain, Netten and Movassat 2004).

What do these data indicate? Clearly, other significant variables come into play and are likely to explain the results. The results shown above cannot, therefore, be attributed solely to the number of hours dedicated to language teaching.

On the basis of further hypotheses we formulated while undertaking the same research project, and following our many classroom observations, it became quite evident that the level of oral proficiency obtained resulted more from the teaching strategies than from the number of hours dedicated to language learning (Germain, Netten and Movassat, 2004). For empirical data on this matter, see "The Effects of Teaching on Learning" in chapter 8.



IF: Oral pre- and post-tests, average Grade 5 scores, 11 classes, 270 hrs, 2005-2006 (N= 196)

| | Cl. 1 | Cl. 2 | Cl. 3 | Cl. 4 | Cl. 5 | Cl. 6 | Cl. 7 | Cl. 8 | Cl. 9 | Cl. 10 | Cl. 11 | Average |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| – – Pre-test | 12.1 | 11.6 | 11.8 | 12.2 | 11.7 | 12 | 12.2 | 11.4 | 11 | 12 | 11.2 | 11.7 |
| —— Post-test | 13.7 | 15.5 | 14.3 | 15 | 14 | 14.5 | 14.8 | 14.8 | 13.7 | 13.9 | 14.3 | 14.4 |
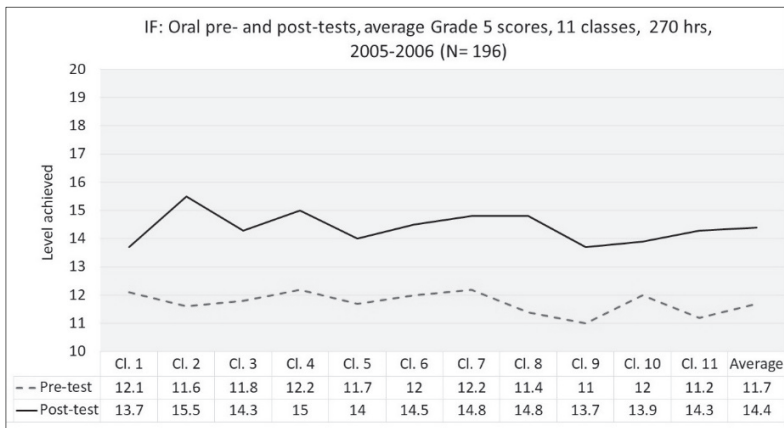
*Fig. 7-8*

The post-test scores shown in Fig. 7-8 show the results obtained at the end of the five intensive months by 196 students in 11 classes, in jurisdictions where students began learning French before Grade 5 or Grade 6 and had passed oral pre-tests. On the strength of our classroom observations, the varied results achieved by certain classes can be explained to a large extent by the uneven degree to which the teaching strategies proposed by the NLA were applied.

## Criteria for Grading Written Work

Though we have so far emphasised oral competence, this does not imply neglect of students' L2/FL writing skills. A significant number of tests allowed us to measure IF students' performance in this area. We will first describe the grading criteria applied, after which we will describe the results achieved by nearly 600 students in 23 Grade 6 IF classes.

To evaluate IF students' written work, we used the grading scale developed by the Société de gestion du réseau informatique pour les commissions scolaires (School District Computer Network Management Company) (GRICS 1995), which at the time was recommended and used by the Québec Ministry of Education for the evaluation of written work by Francophone (i.e. L1) students in that jurisdiction. This scale had been standardised with approximately 1,200 Francophone students from Québec (Germain, Netten, and Séguin 2004). A number of its aspects had to be adapted for use with French as an L2, resulting in the following grid.

**CRITERIA** (GRICS 1995)

**CATEGORY A**

Three criteria, focusing on the level of development of the text, the order of the information provided and the method of presentation.

**CATEGORY B** (Tally of Elements)

Four criteria of a quantitative nature, consisting in counting the number of sentences, subordinate clauses, adjectives/adverbs and words.

**CATEGORY C** (Percentage of Errors)

Five criteria, focusing on errors in punctuation, sentence structure, standard spelling, number/gender and verb agreement.

Note that statistical analysis is essential here for results to be comparable, as Category A uses a graduated scale, Category B a "positive" tallying of elements, and Category C a percentage of mistakes (a "negative" score, as it were).

After all raw scores for the 12 criteria are entered, a weighted total score[4] is produced, which is in turn converted to a 0-8 scale provided by GRICS (1995).

Numerous texts by IF students have been corrected by the provinces' and territories' evaluators, who have been trained to use the criteria of the grading scale adapted from GRICS. Too much space would be required to present the results in detail, as every text marked using this grid is read 12 times, one criterion at a time, which can result in very nuanced results.

It must be mentioned that when students took the test at the end of the intensive five-month period, they first had to write a draft (in 45 minutes) on a given theme, while following the "writing process." In a later session, they had to revise their text and then, as a final step, make a clean copy. Neither dictionaries nor grammar textbooks were permitted.

As the results cannot conveniently be explored in detail here, we will discuss the broad conclusions derived from consideration of the analysis of written work by three groups of Grade 6 students (aged approximately 11) who were evaluated in this way in three consecutive years. Each year involves different students.

## Evaluation Results for Written Production (1998-2001)

This study involved 23 classes in two Newfoundland and Labrador school districts, one urban and the other rural, representing a total of 587 students.

The broad conclusions of this important study are as follows: IF students in Grade 6 are able to write texts that are nearly at the same level as those written by Francophone students in Québec who are somewhere between Grade 3 and Grade 4. That being said, their level is distinctly higher than that usually achieved by anglophone students in Grade 6 who are enrolled in Core French (Germain, Netten and Séguin, 2004)[5].

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[4] Weighting the scores is important, given that the longer a student's text, the higher the number of mistakes to be expected. Thanks to certain mathematical formulae developed by statisticians, it is possible to take this factor into account and provide fairer evaluations.

[5] For details of the evaluation procedure and the statistical tests used, consult this article.

These results were therefore seen as indicating a very strong performance. Moreover, students who had received at least 250 intensive hours of teaching obtained results that were higher than others', and these results were statistically significant, both for fluency and precision (Germain, Netten, and Séguin, 2004).

As IF expanded across Canada, the various provincial/territorial educational authorities involved also took care to test their own students, both orally and in writing, using the same evaluation tools. Here are the results in writing achieved by Grade 6 classes in one educational authority after five months of IF.

**EVALUATIONS OF WRITTEN PRODUCTION IN GRADE 6 IF OVER FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS (2007-12)**

Evaluation of written work, Grade 6 IF, fluency and accuracy, average mean, 60 classes, 2007-2008 (n=117), 2008-2009 (n=156), 2009-2010 (n=174), 2010-2011 (n=318) and 2011-2012 (n= 348). Total: (n=1,113)
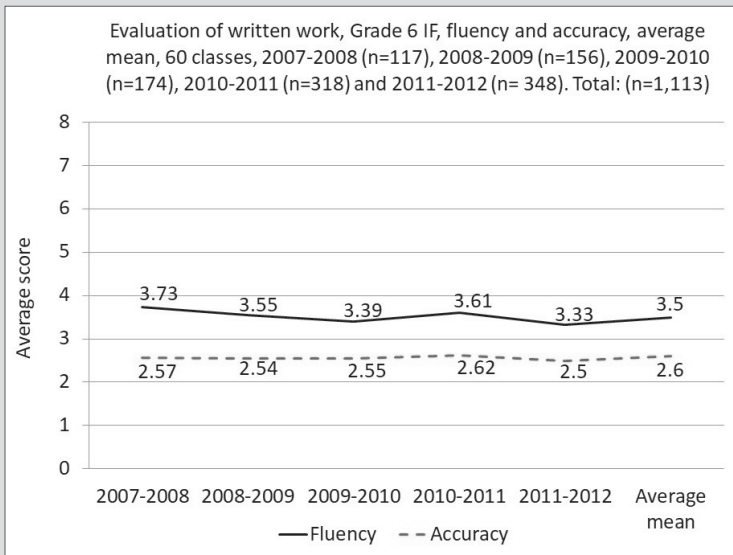


*Fig. 7-9*

As with those previously commented on, this graph shows that the average mean (final column on the right) for fluency over the five years studied is 3.5, meaning that these students achieve a score between level 3 and level 4, comparable to Québec students (whose L1 is French) midway through Grade 3.

These results are considered entirely satisfactory. They indicate that

after five months of IF, the Anglophone students evaluated are able to compose a text with a level of fluency close to that of Francophone students from Québec halfway through Grade 3. Their accuracy level is comparable to that of Francophone students from Québec in the second half of Grade 2.

One of the conclusions these studies lead to is that, in the two cases discussed above, the results clearly contradict the erroneous belief of many teachers with respect to the seemingly limited ability of students to write. It is often forgotten that there exist transfers from L1 to L2, particularly with respect to ease of communication, in accordance with Cummins's theory (2001) and with results from various empirical studies (Germain, Netten, and Séguin, 2004; Mouddane, L., 2004).

## Evaluating IF's Effect on Students with Special Needs and on Students Overall

It is important to emphasise that the NLA does not just help the best students, and that it is not a "selective" approach reserved for a minority of learners. The NLA is designed for all learners. In 2012, two researchers published the results of a research project, undertaken at Memorial University of Newfoundland, that looked at the effects of IF on children with diverse learning needs (Joy and Murphy 2012).

In the course of their empirical research, which concerned eight Canadian Grade 6 classes (with students aged approximately 11), these researchers were able to observe several positive effects, notably in "basic French communication ability, positive behaviour changes, heightened self-esteem, increased motivation, participation, and engagement" (Joy and Murphy 2012, 103).

The positive effects of IF on self-esteem had already been noted among students in general, from its very first trials in the classroom: "In no other subject do we ever see such changes in the course of a single school year. We are fascinated by what the students can do in French and by the increase in their belief in themselves. Every student learns and can speak and use French" (Collins, Stead, and Woolfrey 2004, 371).

One of the conclusions of the 2012 study worth reporting here is that IF is "a model of good practice" and that "Teachers in (non-IF) second-language classrooms might also benefit from […] exposure to IF approaches" (Joy and Murphy 2012, 114-15).

Prior to this, New Brunswick's Department of Education carried out a major study during the 2008-09 school year, looking at 1,034 Grade 5

students who had participated in IF, which showed that even students with diverse learning needs (or experiencing learning difficulties) could attain a certain level of spontaneous communication in French.

**PERCENTAGE OF STUDENTS WITH DIVERSE LEARNING NEEDS ABLE TO COMMUNICATE ORALLY WITH SOME SPONTANEITY**
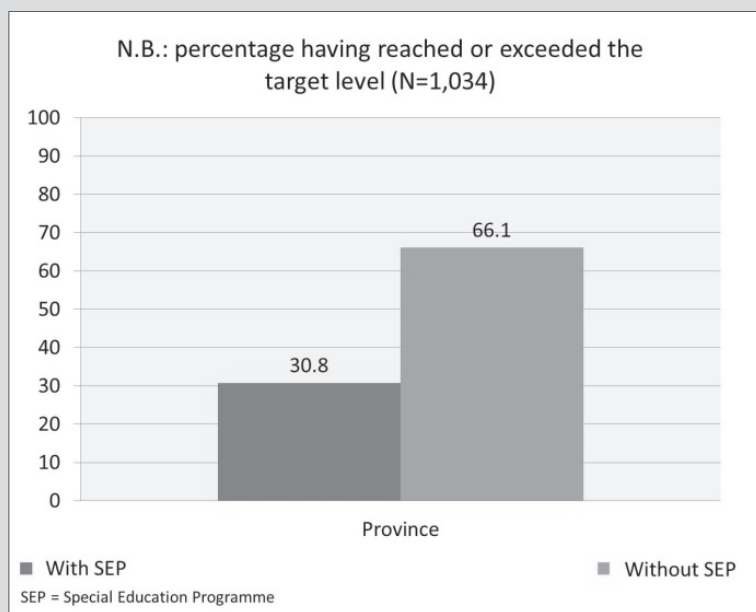


*Fig. 7-10*

Fig. 7-10 is a graph provided by provincial administrators which shows that 66% of Grade 5 students succeeded in reaching the desired level of spontaneous oral communication on the OPI scale, while nearly 31% of students experiencing learning difficulties also succeeded in reaching this level. Naturally, this was deemed a very positive result.

We present below a text written by a Grade 5 student experiencing learning difficulties. For increased legibility, the transcription does not reproduce all grammatical or lexical spelling mistakes.

## TEXT WRITTEN BY AN IF STUDENT EXPERIENCING LEARNING DIFFICULTIES (GRADE 5)



*Fig. 7-11*

*Le lion s'appelle Clay. L'éléphant s'appelle Jared* [?]. *Le pieuvre s'appelle Jame* [?]. *Le singe s'appelle Kolbey.* [*The lion is called Clay. The elephant is called Jared. The octopus he called Jame. The monkey is called Kolbey.*]

*Le lion sport prèfèrè la hockey. L'éléphant sport préféré la soccer.* [*The lion favrite sport hocky. The elephant favourite sport the soccer.*]

Given the "inclusion policy" of this student's home province, he is part of an ordinary IF class. As a comparison, one may consult three texts from other students in the same class presented earlier, in chapter 5 (see Text Box 5.9).

In considering these results, my colleague Joan Netten and I came up with four hypotheses to explain the NLA's success with students with diverse learning needs.

The first of these involves the increased number of hours dedicated to learning French, with a focus on developing *literacy*. Students commonly designated as experiencing learning difficulties (in their L1) are, as it were, slower than their classmates. With the number of hours normally allotted to learning French increased three-and-a-half times, these students are afforded all the time they need to reach a satisfactory level in their learning—always excepting students facing major difficulties, who would require even more hours than are usually offered with the IF programme.

A second credible explanation for these results is what we have termed "the second chance hypothesis." Thanks to IF, students with diverse learning needs have the opportunity to be shown how to read and write a second time (this time in their L2), having by this point acquired greater maturity. Naturally, they perform better in these circumstances.

A third, more psychological, explanation is that when embarking on their intensive learning of French, all students are newcomers to learning the language, and all are treated on an equal footing (by both their teacher

and classmates), including the students with diverse learning needs. This has very positive effects on self-confidence and self-esteem.

Finally, a fourth hypothesis is that the use of a project-based pedagogy and numerous interactive strategies seems to be especially suited to this type of learner (and, in fact, to all types of learner). This way, these students are less isolated, and the language being learnt is better integrated in their life experience.[6]

## At a University in Québec

At this point, it may be important to note that the NLA has also been piloted in Canada with university students. An empirical study at the School of Languages of the Université du Québec à Montréal tested FSL learning with a group of 20 students of various nationalities enrolled in the university's School of Management. The study's goal was to determine whether the teaching strategies advocated in the NLA were indeed able to develop fluency in oral communication and ease in interaction.[7] It is noteworthy that fluency and oral interaction were evaluated after the fourth week of classes, that is to say *after only 12 hours of teaching*. At this stage of the course, the teacher had not yet led "any metalinguistic activity in the classroom," meaning that explicit grammar had yet to be taught (Hamdani 2016).

### ORAL PROFICIENCY EVALUATION CRITERIA

| Accuracy | Fluency |
|---|---|
| ✓Word choice adapted to intention | ✓Number of (complete) sentences |
| ✓Context-appropriate | ✓Sentence complexity (adjectives, adverbs, subordinate clauses) |
| ✓Links between sentences | |
| ✓Well-constructed sentences | ✓Lack of prolonged pauses, rewordings, and hesitations |
| ✓Gender and number agreement | |
| ✓Subject-verb agreement | |
| ✓Intonation, accent and pacing | |
| ✓Pronunciation of sounds | |

*Table 7-2. Language component: grammatical and discursive*

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[6] To date, the NLA has not been used with adult learners facing learning difficulties.

[7] The author of the study uses the definition for "ease of communication" that we had already provided: the ability to establish links easily between the various parts of a sentence (both of grammatical and discursive nature) used in a sociocultural communication situation (Germain and Netten, 2010b).

These criteria were supplemented by others, including a functional pragmatic component (adapting the message to the communicative intention) and a sociocultural pragmatic component (e.g. use of "vous" vs. "tu," turn-taking in interactions). Each criterion was evaluated on a three-point scale:

1. Not acquired;
2. Being acquired;
3. Almost acquired or acquired.[8]

The study was preceded by a pre-test carried out by an external evaluator, using the IF OPI scale, at the beginning of the course.

**ORAL PRE-TEST RESULTS (OPI scale)**
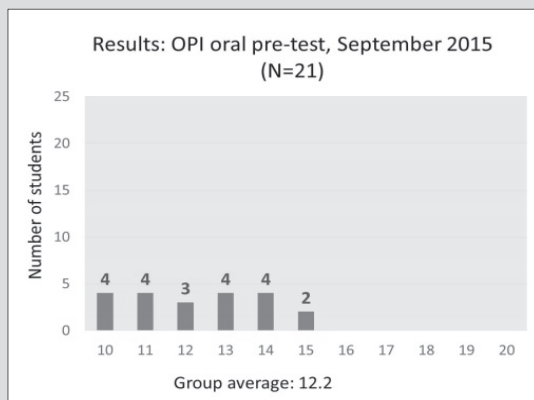


*Fig. 7-12*

The pre-test results show the notable heterogeneity of the students' levels, a feature that the author would however make the most of in the post-test (see below). Nevertheless, as the author remarks, the majority of students fall within the "Novice" range (10 [unrateable], 11, 12, and 13), meaning that they cannot communicate fluently and spontaneously (Hamdani 2016).

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[8] These criteria and categories are closely derived from our study of the evaluation of young Anglophone Canadian students' oral proficiency, published in Germain, Netten, and Movassat (2004) and quoted by the author.

As a post-test, the author opted for interviews in pairs, with stronger students working with weaker ones.

**ORAL POST-TEST RESULTS (interviews in pairs)**

Types of sentences (interrogative and declarative) in the interviews in pairs, after 12 classroom hours, 2015-16 (N=20)
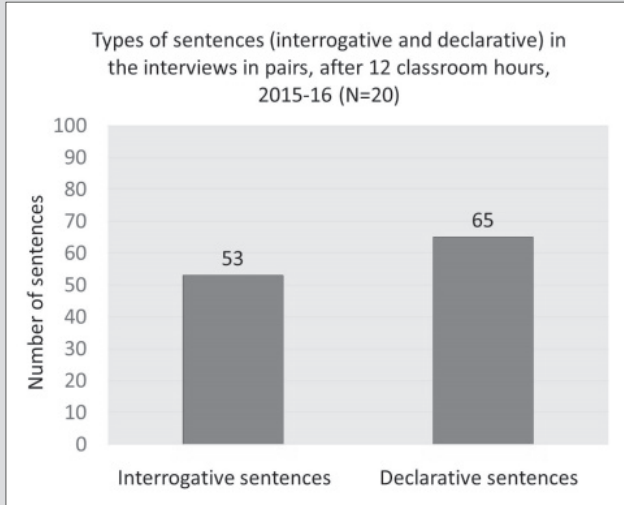


*Fig. 7-13*

In the interviews in pairs, two students at different levels had to "introduce themselves to their interlocutor, answer the latter's requests for personal information (first name, country of origin, programme and courses at the university, address, etc.), ask questions in return, etc." (Hamdani 2016).

Without going into detail, we may note that, even after only four weeks of classes (12 classroom hours), the students' oral statements average twelve complete sentences—including those of students who were considered unrateable after the pre-test. The oral proficiency average is 12.3.

Moreover, the students made use of a variety of structures: declarative sentences (65) and interrogative sentences (53), which are not all built on the same model. As might be expected, the sentences use simple structures: "lack of complement clauses; lack of matrix sentences and very few or no development in syntactic units" (Hamdani 2016).

Sentence corrections (incomplete/faulty and completed/well-constructed) during the interviews in pairs, after 12 classroom hours, 2015-16 (N=20)
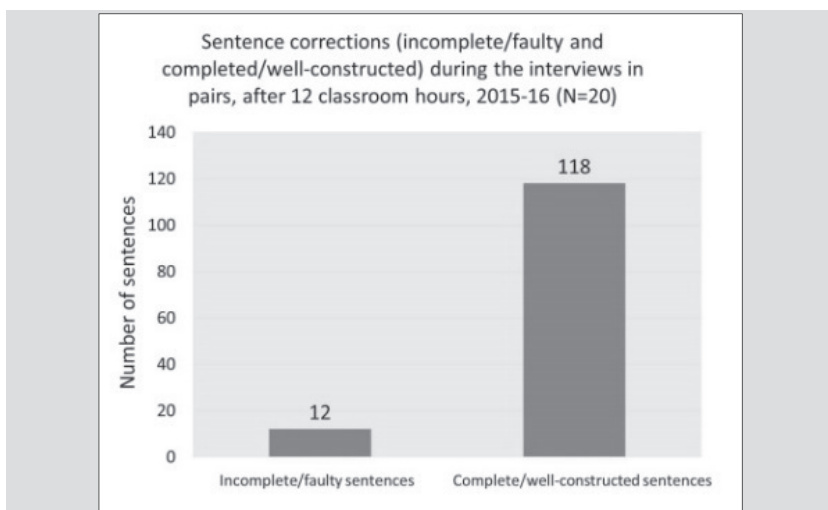
*Fig. 7-14*

Finally, there were very few utterances containing ungrammatical structures (of the *What do?* sort). In fact, only about a dozen statements contained errors, and most of these are incomplete sentences (of the *My address…* type). By contrast, there were 118 complete, well-constructed sentences.

In short, the author of this study concludes, "it appears that the oral statements made during interactions are indeed indicative of the development of an internal grammar and that the structures of simple declarative sentences and of interrogative sentences are either almost acquired or acquired," after only 12 hours of teaching (Hamdani 2016).

## At a Chinese University

As the NLA's objective is for learners to develop genuine communicative competence, one of the inevitable questions is whether it could also enable learners to succeed at French tests and certification exams that focus strongly on grammatical competence. As an example, let us examine the analysis of the detailed results—for both oral and written production—of an empirical study carried out in China among young university students at the South China Normal University (SCNU) and another, relatively comparable institution we are not permitted to identify (Germain, Liang,

and Ricordel 2015, 2018). For reasons of space, only a brief overview of the evaluation procedure used and of the results obtained can be presented here.

The intent was to compare the FFL results achieved by students at two relatively comparable Chinese universities, one of them using the traditional Chinese approach (the control group: 1st year n=27, 2nd year n=28) and the other using the NLA (experimental group: 1st year n=28, 2nd year, n=26). In the second year, however, the number of hours was rather unequal, *to the control group's benefit*, as the latter (using traditional Chinese teaching methods) had completed 106 more classroom hours than the experimental group. Moreover, the university providing the control group had more stringent admission criteria than did SCNU, meaning that the students in the control group had achieved stronger results than the experimental group in the National Higher Education Entrance Examinations.

## The OPI Test—Individual Interviews

The oral evaluations in China used the same OPI test used in Canada (see Text Box 6.3). As we saw in the previous chapter, this test includes ten levels (grouped into four rankings). The scale ranges from level 11 to level 20, with level 14 indicating the ability to communicate spontaneously.

The OPI uses individual interviews conducted by trained evaluation specialists; in this instance, 119 individual interviews were recorded and digitally stored. The interviews for this specific Chinese case were carried out by a team of three external evaluators (one Chinese and two French) unknown to the students and whom I had previously trained for this purpose. To ensure the validity of the testing, I carried out a statistical analysis using SPSS, which produced a 0.87 coefficient alpha.[9]

What were the results? Overall, even though the control group (using traditional Chinese teaching methods) had the advantage of 106 extra classroom hours over the experimental group (which, it must be admitted, is not a negligible difference), the NLA produced superior results.

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[9] This score means that the three judges gave each recorded interview the same ranking in 87% of cases, which is considered very satisfactory. Furthermore, ANOVA tests were applied to the results from both groups.

## COMPARISON OF THE RESULTS OF THE TWO GROUPS

|  | 2012 Class (1st year) | 2011 Class (2nd year) |
|---|---|---|
| Control group | 238 hrs | 706 hrs |
| Study group | 220 hrs | 600 hrs |

*Table 7.3. Number of teaching hours in the control group and the experimental group*



Comparison of average oral proficiency scores for control group and study group, after 1 year (2012 class) and 2 years (2012 class) of study
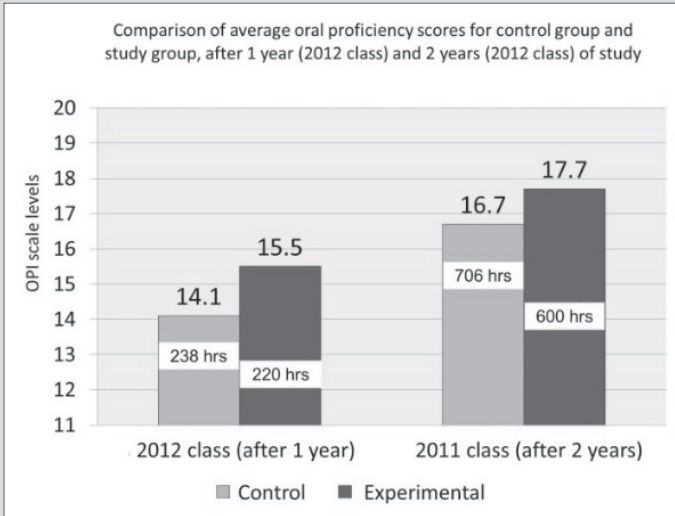
*Fig. 7-15*

To interpret Fig. 7-15 properly, we must understand that the NLA group's oral proficiency results, following a relatively equivalent number of classroom hours, averaged 15.5, or almost 1.5 levels higher than the control group's—though the latter did achieve the level of spontaneous oral communication (14).

After four semesters, however, the significant difference between the two scores is one point higher for the NLA group, despite the control group's extra 106 classroom hours.

In essence, our challenge was to show that, even with learners whose learning culture is entirely different from that of Western learners, the

NLA could lead to convincing results. This appears to have been the case (see also Mohammadi, 2018).

What of writing? Students were assigned different topics in each year for their written work; to evaluate these, we used the same GRICS standardised criteria as in Canada, as discussed previously in this chapter (GRICS 1995—see the section on "Criteria for Grading Written Work" in this chapter).

## Results for Writing Skills

As there were a total of 109 texts handed in, six texts were randomly selected from each of the four groups, making a total of 24 texts that were then marked. The results were as follows:

Overall, in terms of content and quantitative elements, in both years the experimental groups show superior results, despite the control group's greater number of classroom hours and their stronger performance in the entrance examinations. However, for the third set of criteria, at the end of the first year, the experimental group's results are only superior with regard to sentence structure and gender and number agreement, while at the end of the second year they are only superior in terms of sentence structure and verb agreement. Generally speaking, there is greater language accuracy in the experimental group, both orally and in writing, despite the control group's greater number of classroom hours.

> Except for some variation in some of the criteria, it may be concluded that […] the TCM [traditional Chinese method] used in the control group, despite the increased number of hours and the student characteristics that favoured this group, did not enable students to develop language competence in written French superior to that obtained by using the NLA. (Germain, Liang, and Ricordel 2015, 10—the graphs and a detailed discussion of these results can be found in this article.)

## At a Chinese High School

A further study, this one among Chinese high school students at Nanhai Experimental High School, compared results achieved with the NLA and those achieved with the standard French textbook (*Scénario*) then in use. Over two years, the total number of classroom hours was approximately 520, and 700 hours after two-and-a-half years, as follows:

| Year 1 | Year 2 | Year 3 (Semester 1) | Total |
|--------|--------|---------------------|-------|
| 250 hrs | 270 hrs | 180 hrs | 700 hrs |

***Table 7-4. Distribution of hours***

In June 2015, at the end of the first year using the NLA, the students passed the DELF Level A1 test. Below is a broad overview of the comparison this permitted.

**COMPARISON BETWEEN THE NLA AND THE CONVENTIONAL APPROACH**
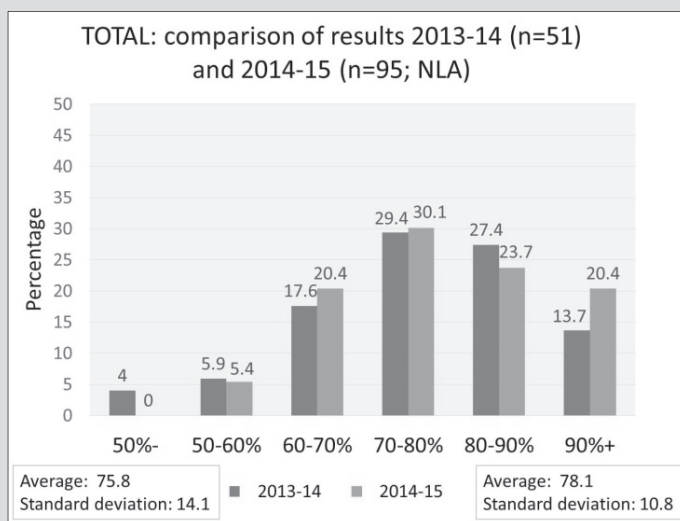


*Fig. 7-16*

With regard to the comparison between the 2013-14 class (conventional approach) and the 2014-15 class (NLA),

> results are positive and very encouraging: not only has the number of students who achieved 90% or higher increased from 2014 and 2015, rising from 13.7% to 20.4%, but not one student received an overall score under 50%. The majority of the weaker students achieved results in the 50%-60% range. For average grades, the percentages of students obtaining grades between 60% and 70%, and between 70% and 80%, are slightly higher. In 2014-15, a larger proportion of the students achieved scores of 90% or

above, relative to 2013-14, which is very encouraging. Moreover, the standard deviation is much lower, which means that the NLA groups are much more homogeneous. (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux 2017a and 2017b)

As the DELF test consists of four parts, here are the results for each of the four competences evaluated.

## ORAL PROFICIENCY
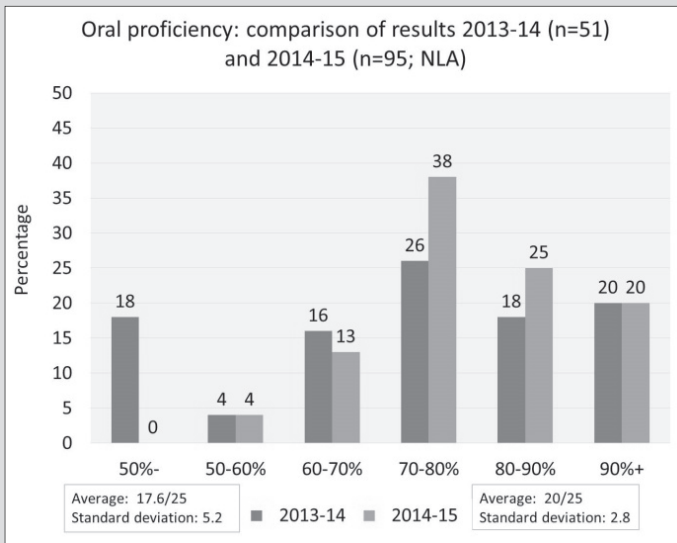


*Fig. 7-17*

"The oral component of the DELF Level A1 test is very easy […], at least for most students, including the most inhibited ones. The success rate is therefore high. What is more significant, however, is that a vast majority of students achieve 90% or higher, with a large drop in the failure rate, compared to previous years: students [who usually] failed are now found in the higher ranges." This is in no way surprising, given the NLA's strong emphasis on speaking. It should be noted that the students "adapted quite readily […] to roleplaying activities in particular [used as a testing technique], with which they were not at all familiar [as a teaching technique], unlike conventional methods methods" (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux 2017a, 2017b).

## WRITING
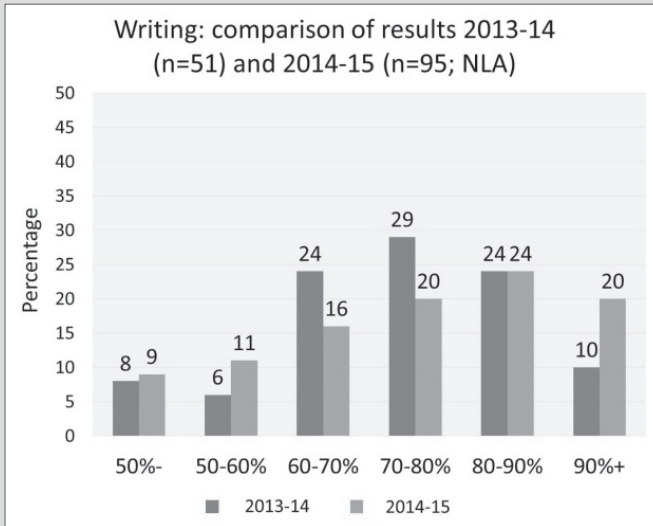


Fig. 7-18

According to the authors of this study, who are NLA teachers at this high school (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux), comparisons are difficult here. For instance, the preliminary results of the Bilan B1 (B1 Scorecard, after two years, or 520 hours) show that as a rule, "no NLA student returned a blank paper, unlike some students from the conventionally-taught classes." Moreover, the NLA students

> are all able to write texts longer than 100 words, with a large number of texts handed in reaching 200 words, and in some cases almost 300 words. Using the conventional method, we rarely have the chance to mark texts longer than 100 words, with 25% of students preferring to hand in blank papers at exams, claiming a lack of time.

The authors then add that "we also think that the quality of written work has improved with the NLA and that we have to correct far fewer texts containing sentences we might describe as surreal, where a lack of structure, syntax, and grammar make meaning and coherence hard to distinguish." In the final analysis, despite some qualifications, "writing is one of the NLA's strong points over time, but this is not reflected in the test results" (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux 2017a, 2017b).

## LISTENING COMPREHENSION
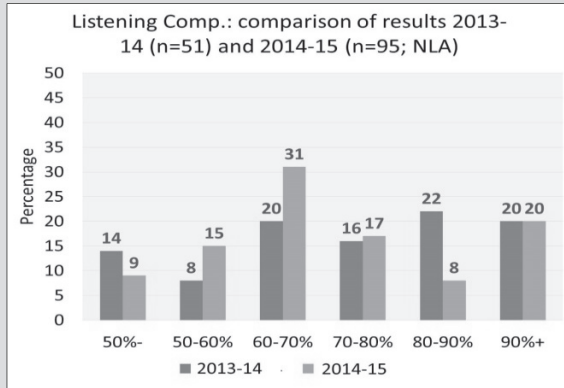


*Fig. 7-19*

Though the teachers anticipated that listening comprehension would be "one of the NLA's weak points," contrary to these expectations, a majority of students (76%)

> attained the average (60%) or higher. However, the failure rate rose slightly (from 22% to 24%) […] The majority of learners only just reached the average, and a larger number are ranked below 60%. We may hypothesise that these represent the weaker learners, who adapt more poorly to changes. (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux 2017a, 2017b)

## READING COMPREHENSION
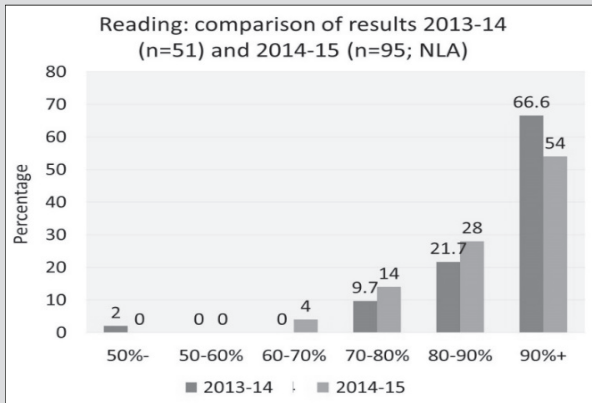


*Fig. 7-20*

> The majority gave correct answers 90% of the time or higher, but this majority is smaller than the previous year. However, there were no failures […] This is clearly a weak point of the NLA. Its visibility is heightened by comparison with conventional methods, as this is the latter's strong suit […] Conventional approaches focus a great deal on understanding written texts. In fact, this is likely their favourite activity, particularly as triggering factor. (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux, 2017a, 2017b)

Students who have studied with a traditional textbook "will have seen numerous situations, but, for example, only be able to speak in the present tense." NLA students, however,

> will have studied far fewer situations, but be able to talk about them much more elaborately, based on the needs expressed in the classroom. Speaking of their own experiences and discovering their teacher's experiences greatly reduces the spectrum of situations they encounter. One could deduce from this, in a general way, that moving to a DELF-type exam is not as great a handicap as was feared, but that a transition remains necessary. (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux, 2017a, 2017b)

In the end, what this major empirical study shows is that the NLA's strong suits are oral proficiency and writing proficiency, but that *at the moment* (despite a drop in the failure rate compared to previous years), listening comprehension and, especially, reading comprehension are weaker points. With traditional textbooks, students encounter a wider variety of situations and of types of text, both in listening and reading comprehension, without necessarily being able to take advantage of these in speaking or writing.

In any case, as the director of the school's French department (one of the authors of the study) writes, "Contrary to what we had feared, the NLA does not penalise students at the DELF A1 test." Overall, despite the few shortcomings noted, "by projecting from the grades [achieved so far]," this Chinese high school's French department "hopes to see a greater proportion of students admitted directly to university" in France after their graduation from high school (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux, 2017b).

## At a Taiwanese University

Taiwan's Da-Yeh University presents a further interesting case.

## Pre-NLA Results

At this university, students must pass the DELF Level B1 to graduate. Until recently, the textbooks used were *Latitudes 1* and *Latitudes 2*, which conform to the *Common European Framework for Languages* (CEFR 2001).

|                                            | LC    | OP    | RC    | WP[10] |
|--------------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|--------|
| Average of the 9 students not achieving B1 | 5.61  | 5.67  | 12.61 | 5.78   |
| Average of the 7 students achieving B1     | 13.36 | 12.64 | 14.86 | 12.93  |
| Overall average of the 16 students         | 9     | 8.72  | 13.59 | 8.91   |

*Table 7-5. Average Grades for each of the four parts*

In 2014, there were 16 FSL students who attempted the test, of whom only seven passed (and, thus, nine failed).

> According to the marks obtained […] our students were relatively weak orally (both in comprehension and speaking) and in writing, if we take 12.5 as a passing mark for each skill. On the other hand, the results in reading comprehension were relatively superior to those of the other three areas. This indicates that our students are more competent in reading and are lacking in oral competence (both in comprehension and in speaking) and writing proficiency. (Chang 2016, 193)

These are exactly the sorts of results that led Professor Chang (at that time chairperson of the department) to consider changing not only the textbooks used, but also the approach, eventually opting for the NLA. At the end of the first year after the NLA was implemented in September 2015, seven students out of 20 decided to take the *Second Foreign Language Proficiency Test-Basic* (SFLPT-Basic) in May 2016. This test was developed to meet the criteria defined by Taiwan's Ministry of Education with respect to learning a second foreign language and is geared towards assessing learners at the beginner level.[11]

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[10]  LC: Listening Comprehension; OP: Oral Proficiency; RC: Reading Comprehension; WP: Writing Proficiency

[11] "The SFLPT-Basic was designed with reference to the national curricula of the second foreign languages and the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages" (https://www.lttc.ntu.edu.tw/English.htm)

**SFLPT-BASIC RESULTS**

This test is multiple-choice, and divided into three sections: listening (L), vocabulary and usage (VU), and reading (R), each worth 40 out of a total possible score of 120. Reaching Level A1 requires an overall score of 60, with no score below 13 in any one section. A score of 96 or higher qualifies as Level A2. What results were obtained?

Though one student did not achieve the passing score, five students reached Level A1 and one even obtained an A2. If we compare our students' average scores with those of all 203 candidates, not only is our students' overall average higher, but their average results in each section are consistently superior to the general average. This is particularly true of the average results in listening [See table 7-7].

| Average | Listening | Vocabulary and usage | Reading | Final score |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| Our 7 students | 26.14 | 24.57 | 22.57 | 73.29 |
| All 203 candidates | 21.65 | 21.52 | 21.6 | 64.78 |

***Table 7-6. SFLPT-Basic Results***

This shows that our students now achieve strong results in what is often considered the hardest part of the tests—it will be recalled that listening comprehension was the weakest skill in previous years. We are therefore satisfied with these SFLPT-Basic results. (Chang 2017, 42-43)

## Some Testimonials from Learners

It would take too long to reproduce here all the testimonials learners have provided, let alone the results of empirical studies that demonstrate the extent to which adult learners (teens, young adults or university students, attending private or public institutions) have managed to communicate in French thanks to the NLA. We will therefore content ourselves with very succinctly providing a few testimonials from Asian university students learning French as a foreign language.

For a qualitative assessment of the NLA, one may consult a thesis completed for a Master 2 (France) degree at the Université de Rouen (Gal Bailly 2011). The goal of this thesis was to compare FFL teaching at a Chinese university using the NLA with that of another, comparable Chinese university using what the author calls "the traditional Chinese approach." To do so, the author first carried out a qualitative study at each

institution, to survey the learners' opinions, followed by a quantitative study, again at both institutions. We present here the conclusions reached in the qualitative facet of this research project.

The main conclusions of this study, gathered from the answers to a questionnaire regarding the opinions of each of these two comparable groups of learners, were as follows:

- It would seem that the learners [using the NLA] are more confident and see learning French as less demanding;
- Learning with the NLA seems to take a shorter time, while the traditional Chinese approach stigmatises French as a difficult language takes longer to learn.

   In the learners' eyes, then, the traditional Chinese method is lacking in terms of (in descending order) speaking, reading, and writing. The NLA, for its part, seems to better meet the learners' expectations. (Gal Bailly 2011, 78)

This survey of opinions yields very interesting results. When the NLA was first implemented in China, it appeared evident to some that this type of approach could never work with Chinese learners whose *learning culture* was entirely different from Westerners'. Yet this comparison of the use of the traditional Chinese approach and one such as the NLA reveals that, despite these concerns, Chinese students were more satisfied by this approach than by the traditional one. NLA students appeared to be much more confident than the others when it came to speaking, which is by any measure a positive result, considering the size of the challenge the Asian context presented. However, "despite its openness to new ideas, China is a country that remains very vigilant in the face of westernisation" (Fu 2005, 37).

The Taiwanese instructor who piloted the NLA at Da-Yeh University took the initiative of asking her 20 students (all women) the following question: "How do you feel about this style of teaching/learning?"

## TESTIMONIALS FROM STUDENTS AT A TAIWANESE UNIVERSITY

These testimonials are taken from an article in the *Revue japonaise de didactique du français* (Chang 2017, 41-42), in which they were translated from the Chinese into French by the teacher. This English version reflects the French translation of the Mandarin.

S1:   *We don't have many tests and we talk a lot.*
S2:   *No need to kill yourself to remember all the vocabulary, there's no pressure while learning.*
S3:   *The speaking exercises are adequate.*
S4:   *I feel at ease when we're reading texts.*
S5:   *There's less stress.*
S6:   *I'm always at ease.*
S7:   *It's very good. There are lots of speaking exercises and very few tests/quizzes we can learn vocabulary naturally during interactions.*
S8:   *If you come across something you don't understand, your classmates and teachers can help you.*
S9:   *Over time, you get used to it.*
S10: *There isn't the pressure to learn all the vocabulary words by heart.*
S11: *There's a good atmosphere.*
S12: *Reading together suits me.*
S13: *I feel at ease when we're reading books from the Collection Myosotis together.*
S14: *Sometimes, when the sentences are too long, you can't remember them.*
S15: *Reading texts is a big help.*
S16: *We can try more than once, without being afraid of making mistakes when speaking, we don't just follow textbooks, we feel better.*
S17: *I like reading stories together.*
S18: *No, there's too much freedom, we don't learn much, we're way behind.*
S19: *I feel at ease.*
S20: *At first, it wasn't working, I accepted it very gradually.*

Based on these answers, only one student (S18) truly appears to not have appreciated the approach, while another (S20) was sceptical at first but eventually came around to it. In the article reporting these answers (Chang 2017), the Taiwanese teacher presents her own opinion on the matter. She states that "Their views correspond more or less to what we ourselves observed during the course," before giving her own testimonial:

Moreover […] after approximately 160 classroom hours […] we could note a distinct improvement in the learning process, compared to previous years. Firstly, our learners speak with greater ease. They still sometimes lack a little spontaneity and fluency, but they are less reserved than before and speak more.
    Secondly […] the French-language speaking and writing skills acquired by those learning French with the NLA are better balanced, and

their language levels are also more homogeneous. In other words, the difference between the strongest and weakest students in the classroom is not enormous.

Finally, our learners help each other out more easily. In the classroom, we often see the best students voluntarily help the weaker ones to learn "constructions." Though competition still exists, it is much more human and convivial. Beyond this, through the completion of each final project, we have discovered that our learners are also quite creative. They know how to connect their texts with images they have drawn or taken from elsewhere. Looking at their final projects, we are often struck by their creativity. (Chang 2017, 40)

## The NLA as a Universal Approach

Despite what some might think at first glance, the NLA is not simply another attempt to impose a Western approach on an Asian milieu. How then can we explain the results obtained in Asian contexts? Two colleagues who teach with the NLA in China and I proposed the following as a potential explanation:

the NLA should not be interpreted as a Western approach imposed upon Asia, as its fundamental principles are based on cognitive neuroscience; indeed, the NLA is considered to be a universal approach which requires only local adaptations, particularly taking into account the learning culture of the students. For this reason, the NLA seems to be a promising route to take with young Chinese university students. Since the learning culture of Chinese students is not innate, as is the case with any culture, and in view of the changes taking place in China, it appears that young university students are more open than before to more modern and interactive ways of learning a foreign language. (Germain, Liang, and Ricordel 2015, 11)

This raises the whole problem of the universal truths of language teaching, which I recently had reason to discuss in an article (Germain 2015a). An extract follows:

The current state of neurolinguistic research appears to allow us to affirm that one of the universals of language teaching might well be the recourse to cerebral mechanisms common to all humans and that underlie the acquisition of any and all languages:

"Apparently, these processes are universal, we believe, according to cognitive linguistics" (Michońska-Stadnik 2013, 3). So far, indeed (at least to my knowledge), no study has been able to demonstrate that they come into play differently in language acquisition depending on whether learners are Asian or Westerners.

Even in the specific area of learning to read, for example, recent
neuroscientific research clearly shows that learning to read the Chinese
logographic writing system relied on the same cerebral mechanisms among
Chinese learners that learning to read the French alphabetic writing system
does among French learners (Ball 2012). The study's goal was to
determine precisely, through functional magnetic resonance imaging
(fMRI), whether the neuronal networks involved in reading acquisition
were universal or culturally distinct. Everything leads us to believe that it
is a universal process, involving two neuronal systems: one concerned with
the word's shape or appearance and another concerned with grasping the
physical movements used for written marks, with one cultural difference:
the effects that the direction of the movement causes, which is greater
among the Chinese. (Germain 2015a, 148-9)

These empirical studies, along with the few student testimonials quoted
above, seem to confirm the proposed hypothesis: despite the vast
differences between Asian and Western learning cultures, for reasons of
practical efficiency, young Asian students now appear more prepared than
before to use approaches that strike them as promising or more likely to
allow them to achieve their goal of useful communication.

**To summarise**, these recent studies of what Asian students who have
experienced the NLA in China and Taiwan think of the approach permit us
to conclude that, contrary to some concerns, even initial resistance, it
seems that the NLA is very much appreciated despite being such a novel
approach. I continue to believe that this is due to the fact that, as the NLA
is based on neuroscience and, consequently, on *universal* features of
cerebral functioning (until proven otherwise), it constitutes a promising
approach.

# CHAPTER EIGHT

# TRAINING TEACHERS IN THE NLA

In the present chapter, I will first discuss some of the few empirical data, arising out of four case studies, that demonstrate the positive effects on learning of certain teaching strategies (as opposed to others). I follow this with some personal reflections on the training of any and all language teachers, as well as practical recommendations for university training and for the NLA training workshops.

## Effects of Teaching on Learning

We raised the question of the relationship between certain teaching strategies and learning results in an article written several years ago (Netten and Germain 2005). Some dozen years later, one may wonder how the landscape now looks.

In 1983, a well-known American scholar in the area of language teaching, Michael Long, published a resounding article entitled "Does second language instruction make a difference? A review of the research" (Long 1983). His research methodology involved a statistical *meta-analysis* of the numerous articles published on the topic. The author's rather qualified conclusion is worth considering.

## Teaching Rarely Makes a Difference

Some empirical studies at the time did indeed show that, in some cases, teaching appeared to have some impact on learning, while in the vast majority of cases teaching had only minimal—or, sometimes, even no—positive effects on learning. According to some experts, language structures had to be learnt in a predetermined sequence that could not be altered by the teacher, who would only intervene according to the pace of learning (as in Pienemann 1989, for example).

One may imagine how such conclusions startled most language teachers, and understandably so, given that the essential nature of their role was being called into question. But these conclusions may merit

another look, as, even today, *some scholars hold* that the effects of teaching on learning have still not been demonstrated.

In the circumstances, it seems worthwhile to present four case studies, based on empirical learning evaluation data and our own observations of IF classes. The third and fourth case studies are presented here for the first time.[1]

**FIRST CASE STUDY**
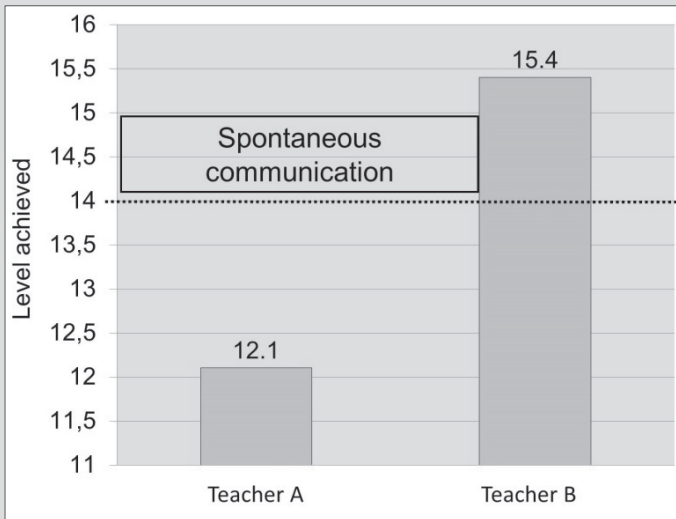


*Fig. 8-1*

This first study compared two teachers, both of whom had participated in a training session for Intensive French, over two consecutive years in the same school (Year 1 and Year 2). The students in these two Grade 5 classes were relatively comparable, and the oral pre-test revealed no statistically significant difference between the two classes (11.2 and 11.2). The number of students was the same (n=18) in both cases.

At the end of Year 1 (2002-03), the students whose teaching had mainly focused on knowledge (with teacher A), as our classroom observations confirmed, achieved weak scores (12.1) on the OPI scale.

Our two classroom observations in autumn 2003 showed that the new

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[1] The first two case studies were previously published in Netten and Germain 2005.

teacher (teacher B), who taught the Grade 5 class during 2003-04, actually put into practice (unlike the first teacher mentioned above) the recommendations made during the IF training workshop he had attended, focusing on language use rather than knowledge. At the end of Year 2, students achieved a significantly higher level (15.4) than that achieved with the previous teacher (12.1), despite the loss of 58 classroom hours in the second case, for administrative reasons (Netten and Germain 2005).

## SECOND CASE STUDY
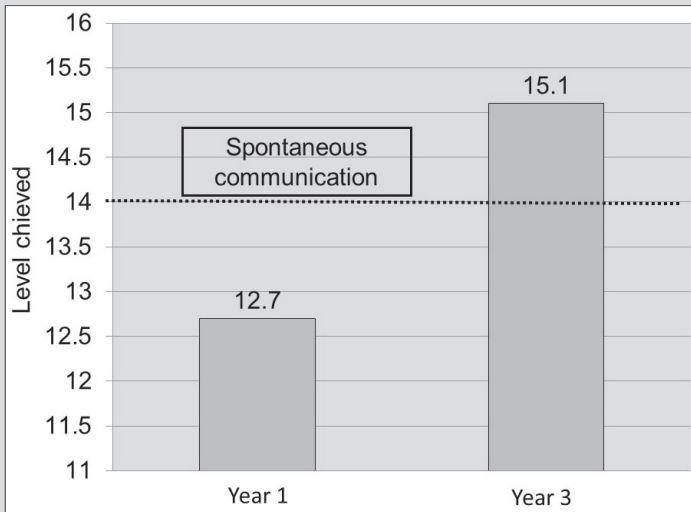


*Fig. 8-2*

In this case, the same IF teacher taught Grade 5 at the same school in two non-consecutive years, Year 1 (2002-03, n=29) and Year 3 (2004-05, n=29). The pre-tests revealed no significant difference between the two classes (11.4 and 11.8 respectively). In each of these two separate classes, classroom observations were carried out twice in the autumn of their respective school years.

In Year 1, the teacher's teaching strategies focused more on knowledge than on skills. On the OPI scale, students achieved weak results (12.7), though these were nevertheless significantly higher than on the pre-test (11.4).

In Year 3, by contrast, after the teacher had taken a summer training workshop on IF-recommended teaching strategies, the students reached

15.1, some 2.4 points higher than at the end of Year 1. It must be noted that in Year 3, the students received 55 fewer hours than in Year 1, with the same teacher in both cases. The only alteration between the two cases was in the teaching strategies, following the summer workshop. Consequently, everything suggests that these teaching strategies are the sole explanation for these higher results (Netten and Germain 2005).

## THIRD CASE STUDY
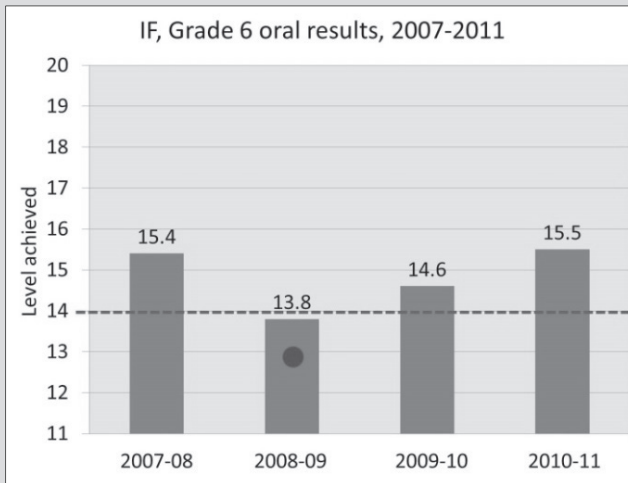


*Fig. 8-3*

In this case, a teacher had to take a year-long leave of absence and was replaced by a substitute for the 2008-09 school year. As we had witnessed in our classroom observations, and as evidenced by the 2007-08 results (15.4 on the OPI scale, which is considered a very strong result), the first teacher was extremely effective. Despite having taken a summer training workshop on IF teaching strategies, the substitute teacher proved less effective (13.8), as confirmed by our classroom observations, having used both effective techniques focused on language use and less effective ones focused on knowledge.

The first teacher returned the following year (2009-10), and this time the students obtained a relatively high score (14.6). The year after, the students again achieved a high score (15.5 on the OPI scale). As our classroom observations revealed, this teacher only used teaching strategies likely to contribute to the development of communicative skills, rather than to acquiring knowledge.

**FOURTH CASE STUDY**



IF: Grade 6, oral results, 2008-2011
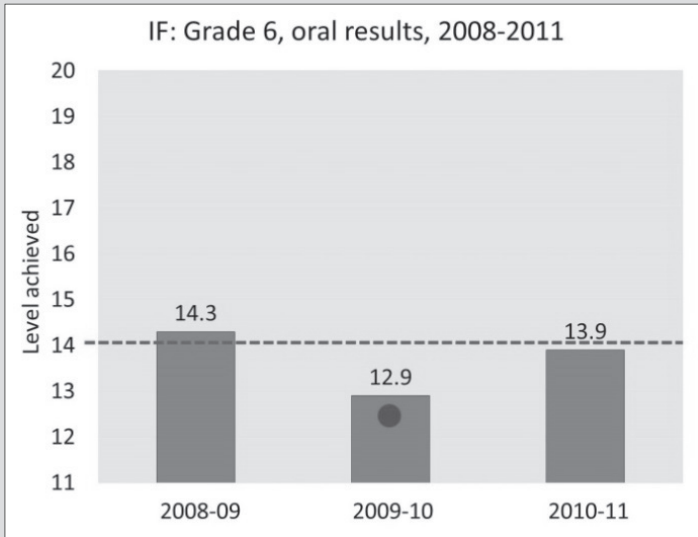
*Fig. 8-4*

In this case, a Grade 6 IF teacher took a one-year leave of absence (2009-10) and was replaced by another teacher. The previous year, the students had achieved 14.3 on the OPI scale.

Here too, the substitute had taken a summer IF training workshop but, as our classroom observations showed, had not fully grasped the importance of using the teaching strategies advocated and instead continued to focus more on knowledge than on language use. The substitute's students achieved a low score that year (12.9), whereas when the first teacher returned, the students achieved 13.9.

Of course, as with any case study that can only yield observed *tendencies*, these observations cannot lead to generalisations. An important further step would be to test the hypothesis arising from these rather qualitative studies in an empirical quantitative study, which would permit a certain level of generalisation, insofar, of course, as the subjects of the study could be considered truly representative of the entire body of L2/FL learners at one or several given levels.

## A HYPOTHESIS AWAITING EMPIRICAL VERIFICATION

A *causal link* exists between the teaching strategies used in the classroom and the results achieved by learners in L2/FL oral acquisition when the teaching is focused on developing skills rather than on acquiring knowledge. It will be noted that, strictly speaking, we refer here only to oral *acquisition* (rather than *learning*).

In other words, the case studies presented above (and some others not reported on here) show fairly clearly that there may be a cause-effect relationship between teaching methods and learning results in L2/FL oral production.

A few remarks are in order. Firstly: this hypothesis is likely only valid in cases where oral language is first taught as a skill (unconscious, implicit) and not as knowledge (conscious, explicit).[2]

Secondly, in the case of teaching reading and writing in an L2/FL, another hypothesis would be required, as these two language skills comprise both skills and knowledge.

One other remark: the hypothesis formulated above only applies to cases of L2/FL acquisition and makes no assumptions about results in other subject matters.

We should acknowledge here that my colleague Joan Netten's doctoral thesis includes a preliminary exploration of this topic: "We hypothesise that [subject to certain conditions] there might be a link between teaching approaches and learning results" (2001, ix). One of this thesis's conclusions is that there does indeed exist "a very close relationship between the approaches used by the teacher and the results of this teaching in terms of language fluency and accuracy in the learners' oral and written productions" (2001, x)—without, however, any explicit suggestion of a *causal link*, which remains to be empirically demonstrated.

Strangely enough, case studies such as those reported above are extremely rare in empirical studies concerning language teaching.[3] It therefore seemed both useful and important to present these four case studies, to ensure that the full effect of classroom teaching strategies on L2/FL language acquisition would be apparent.

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[2] This could constitute an important topic for a doctoral thesis.

[3] Given that none of our cases studies were planned for during our IF studies (among young Canadian students), it will be understood that we still lack any case study of this type for adults, as similar circumstances did not arise among adult learners.

How can we explain the fact that some studies could suggest that teaching might have no positive effect on learning? The answer is two-fold. On the one hand, the majority of empirical studies on the subject focus exclusively on language as an object of study in the tests used: almost no interest is shown for anything other than language forms and structures, with no consideration being given to language as a tool for communication and social interaction. On the other hand, the underlying teaching theory is relatively narrow and centred on knowledge. This presents a doubly reductive view of language and its teaching (Netten 2001). It is therefore unsurprising that Long's conclusions (1983) could be so unfavourable.

But if we conceive of language, on the one hand, as a tool for communication and social interaction, and teaching, on the other, as the creation of conditions likely to foster L2/FL acquisition by focusing, in the classroom, on language use rather than knowledge acquisition, we might be able to draw much more positive conclusions. And, of course, they would be more reassuring for language teachers and the teaching profession in general. In other words, it is crucial to draw a clear line between *knowledge* and *skill*.

During our many FSL/FFL classroom observations, both in Canada and abroad, we have come to the conclusion that not only can teaching, in many cases, have positive impacts on learning, but that under some circumstances these can be major impacts.

**In summary**, the major fact to be drawn from the case studies presented above is that classroom teaching strategies appear to constitute a very important factor that may explain how learners achieve a level of spontaneous communication in their L2/FL.

Of course, other factors must be taken into consideration, in particular the number of classroom hours as well as the type of learner (students with diverse learning needs, etc.). But the fact remains that, with a relatively equal number of hours and classes of relatively comparable students, the choice of teaching strategies appears to be one of the fundamental variables of L2 acquisition—that is, so long as the teaching focuses on developing skills rather than acquiring knowledge and the tests used do not themselves focus exclusively on knowledge.

## Language Quality or Teaching Quality

This gives rise to the question of whether the quality of a teacher's language is as important as the way he or she teaches. It must be said that

what is of foremost importance, for many scholars and teachers, is the quality of the teacher's language. The difficulty is that if one appears to insist on the importance of teaching methods, one risks being accused of not giving enough importance to language itself. One therefore feels caught in something of a double bind, whose elements, however, are not incompatible. The easy, and common, answer is to say that both (language quality and teaching quality) are necessary and of equal importance. In my view, however, this is not the case.

The numerous empirical studies we have carried out on IF in Canada now lead us to believe that, assuming a minimal (though hard to define) level is attained in terms of language quality, the teaching strategies used in an L2/FL class take precedence to a certain extent over the language itself. Our many studies show that students' learning results are always *better* when teaching is of high quality, even if the teacher's language abilities are not equivalent to those of a native speaker's.

## PRIMACY OF TEACHING QUALITY

The idea that language quality should take precedence over teaching quality is probably due to the common underlying (implicit) understanding of L2/FL acquisition, which appears to derive from behavioural psychology. If language were only learnt through *Stimulus-Response* conditioning, it would undoubtedly be correct to insist on the importance of a high-quality language stimulus to ensure the quality of the language response.

However, as we have seen throughout the preceding chapters, acquiring an L2/FL is a very complex process. And what is even more confounding about this whole question is that even if the teacher speaks a language very well, nothing guarantees that the learners' language will also be of high quality (as behaviourism would have led us to believe). If, in such a case, the teaching quality leaves something to be desired, there is a loss on both sides of the equation, so to speak. This, at least, is what the learning results, combined with our classroom observations, have revealed, since the very beginnings of our empirical studies of IF (Netten 2001).

To be crystal clear: I am not saying that the quality of the teacher's language should be disregarded (see "Training Second-Language Teachers" below). I am simply affirming, however controversial this may prove, that teaching quality takes precedence over language quality.

I hold this belief so firmly that, when I was asked one day what I would do if I had to hire either Candidate A, whose language was *good*, but not *superior*, but whose teaching abilities appeared *very good*, or

Candidate B, who possessed the opposite skill set (*superior* language skills, but *good*, not *spectacular* teaching skills), I replied—to the astonishment of my interlocutors—that I would hire Candidate A without hesitation. In my estimation, the learning results of this candidate's students would prove markedly superior to those of the other's, and, conversely, Candidate B's students' results would be inferior and, moreover, lack any noticeable superiority in language quality.

It must be said that it is extremely rare to find any documentation on this very (perhaps overly) delicate topic. To my knowledge, very few authors defend a similar position.

## Training Second-language Teachers

Following our very many classroom observations across Canada, as well as the IF and NLA training workshops we have had the opportunity of leading, I have come to the conclusion that a good training session for a second-language teacher should include at least three essential components: a *language* component (in cases where the language being taught is also an L2/FL for the teacher), a *cultural* component, and a *pedagogical* component.

With regard to the *language* component, it must be borne in mind that in FSL/FFL, teachers have very few opportunities to use French outside of their classrooms, particularly when they are teaching a language that is not their own first language. Given that their environment provides few opportunities for them to be corrected when they make mistakes while speaking, it is understandable that some of their errors end up becoming *fossilised*.

### THE CULTURAL COMPONENT: TWO DISTINCT APPROACHES

With language teachers who are teaching their own language (and thus their own culture), the *cultural* facet should mainly involve familiarising themselves with the principal elements of their learners' culture, insofar as this is possible (there are sometimes several cultures present).

For language teachers teaching languages that are not their L1, it is important that they be made aware of the cultural dimensions associated with the target language, as well as familiarising themselves with, in particular, the many current works on intercultural awareness (to mention only one aspect of a vast and complicated issue that would take too much space to discuss here).

I prefer to focus here on what is given short shrift in most of the university-level second-language education teacher-training programmes I have had occasion to analyse: the *pedagogical* component. By this, I mean (referring to the model I alluded to in chapter 3) everything that concerns the *connections* between *how we learn* and *how we teach*, and *what we learn*.[4]



Fig. 8-5
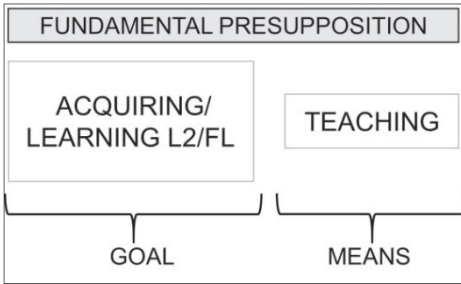
A large number of university programmes currently present a large gap in dire need of bridging, namely the lack of training about the acquisition of an L2/FL and, especially, about the *connection* between L2/FL acquisition and teaching, i.e. the link between *what we learn* and *how we teach*. As university courses most often exist in their own silos, it is quite common to find two university professors, one teaching a course on L2/FL acquisition and the other a course on teaching strategies, who never establish the links between these two fundamental elements of language teaching. As I reiterated in an interview, one of my fundamental assumptions is as follows: "To teach is to have learn. The goal is learning. Teaching is a means to an end. And this means must be tailored to the goal, unlike what is usually done" (Germain 2016b, 199).

Currently, the link between acquiring an L2/FL and teaching it seems to be the weak point in the majority of teacher training programmes.

## The Role and Importance of Linguistics

One of the most frequently encountered questions regarding language teacher training is whether linguistics should play a leading role in training programmes. My answer to a similar question was as follows: "What's needed is *relevant* linguistics, based on problems encountered in the field. Is the answer psychological, anthropological, or linguistic? If it's a truly linguistic problem, let's go see what linguistics can tell us. It is possible that linguistics will prove pertinent, but it's important to start with real-life

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[4] This is something Guedat-Bittighoffer mentions when she states the necessity, in teaching allophone students, "of using the advances made in neurolinguistic research to understand the processes of first language and L2 acquisition." In that respect, she specifies, "Paradis's works prove essential" (2014, 597-8).

problems and—especially—not to start from linguistic descriptions of the language which are then used as models in that language." (Germain 2016b, 200). Why?

## LINGUISTICS' POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTION TO LANGUAGE TEACHING

> In the past, 'applicationism' was a disaster. For that matter, it damaged linguistics a great deal as well. I'm thinking here of, for example, behaviourist structural linguistics. To avoid repeating the errors of the past, it's essential to always start from on-the-ground issues and search for relevant solutions, rather than the other way around. Similarly to what I was saying about acquisition: we have to find the relevant components of acquisition theories […] Linguistics can contribute concepts such as *register* [or] didactic *repertoire*, for example. What language teaching theory most needs from linguistics, I think, are analyses that distinguish between spoken and written language, at least if we're hoping for linguistics to be relevant to an approach like ours (Germain 2016b, 200)

However, what must especially be emphasised is the importance of university-level training in the area of language acquisition/learning, in order to acquire all that might appear pertinent in such training. For instance, some years ago my colleague (J. Netten) and I were honoured to give a graduate seminar on this topic to experienced FSL teachers undertaking their Master's in Education.[5] Given the circumstances, we took the opportunity to take stock of the major trends of research on language acquisition.

The basic objective of the course was to understand six fundamental positions in the debate surrounding explicit knowledge and implicit competence in order to identify a few possible effects on teaching a L2 in Canada, with a particular reference to the article written by White and Ranta (2002). A brief look at these six fundamental positions may be found in Netten and Germain (2005).

We should mention that one of the practical assignments for the course was to produce a critical analysis of an FSL textbook that the teachers had themselves used, in order to draw out its underlying theory of L2/FL acquisition by carefully examining the teaching activities it proposed. A second assignment was to rework the proposed teaching activities of a lesson analysed through the lens of Paradis's neurolinguistic theory. The

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[5] On two occasions, first in the summer of 2010, then in the summer of 2011, at the Faculty of Education of Memorial University of Newfoundland, St. John's, in the province of Newfoundland and Labrador.

guiding theme of the course was to build the students' awareness of the connection between the acquisition/learning of a language and its teaching, the connection between *how we learn* and *how we teach*, to use the terms of my renewed framework for language teaching (presented in chapter 3).

## NLA Training Workshops

Given the lack of university programmes offering adequate NLA training, to date we have instead had to organise NLA training workshops for teachers already in the workforce. In Canada, for instance, all current FSL/FFL teachers who wish to teach IF (or pre-IF or post-IF) must first attend a 30-hour training workshop. These training sessions are offered during the summer preceding the first application of the NLA, usually by provincial or territorial Departments of Education, or by some school districts, and are led by those in charge of the programme, who have been accredited to do the training. For those intending to teach adults, the training workshops are offered on request by qualified trainers, in sessions lasting a good 24 hours (four six-hour days, for instance). The structure of these workshops shows how we emphasise the *human* variables of language teaching rather than the *material* variables (textbooks and all their accoutrements).

### THE IF TEACHING UNITS

It is during these workshops that the school authorities provide the teachers with our IF teaching units. These documents are not available elsewhere, as we have avoided being told that *IF doesn't work* by individuals using the teaching units without having been adequately initiated to this new understanding of the links between learning and teaching and to new teaching strategies for teaching speaking, reading, and writing, along with culture.

Every workshop includes both a theoretical portion, to ensure that participants gain a better understanding of the approach's fundamental bases, and a significant practical portion, allowing them to familiarise themselves with the NLA's teaching strategies.[6]

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[6] For information concerning IF training workshops in Canada, consult the IF/NLA website (http://francaisintensif.ca/index.php/en/). Here is a list of the main persons who, at the time of going to press, have been officially accredited to offer NLA training sessions to those teaching adults: Gladys Benudiz (gbenudiz@yahoo.fr),

It must, however, be noted that for workshops geared towards teaching adults, the 24 hours of in-person training are only the first part of NLA training. The training must be completed by a *classroom observation* stage, which generally takes place some weeks or months after the workshop, and is usually carried out by one of the workshop leaders qualified to do so.[7]

As for the post-workshop implementation of the approach per se in a teaching establishment, that is arranged personally by the candidate, his or her institution, and the workshop leaders.

To conclude this chapter, let us recall that the piloting of the NLA in numerous classrooms (particularly with IF, in Canada) has made it possible to collect significant empirical data providing concrete evidence of the various effects that different ways of teaching French as an L2/FL have on learning. Very few second-language pedagogy studies exist that allow us to concretely measure the effects that different ways of teaching have on acquiring/learning languages. The scarcity of this sort of study is understandable: most teaching methods (based on the analysis of textbooks currently on the market) merely reproduce the traditional way of teaching "living" languages, still largely inspired by how "dead" languages such as Latin were taught (as seen in chapter 3), i.e. using written language as the starting point rather than paying attention to how students acquire or learn a language. Consistent with our theoretical framework as well as with our empirical data, it seemed appropriate to offer a way of training teachers to use the NLA that is somewhat off the beaten track and connects *how we learn* and *how we teach*.

David Macfarlane (macfarlingua@yahoo.ca), Steeve Mercier and Olivier Massé (website: https://cifran.org), Inès Ricordel and Vitri Truong (website: https://anlformation.wordpress.com/)

[7] One must therefore take into account travel (and sometimes lodging) costs for the workshop leaders who come to carry out in situ observations.

# Conclusion

# Why Adopt the NLA

When we first developed IF (for young learners), which later became the NLA (for adults), we were far from imagining that we were giving birth to a peaceful octopus whose many tentacles would reach various regions of the world and be applied to languages other than French. Will the NLA, to use an analogy drawn from 1960s Québec history, come to be seen as a *quiet revolution* in second-language pedagogy?

At the very beginning of this work, we defined the NLA—perhaps, at first glance, rather pretentiously—as "a new paradigm" in second-language pedagogy. Yet on reflection, this is indeed what the NLA represents, given that a paradigm, in the great epistemologist Kuhn's terms ([1962] 2012), is defined as a new *vision of the world*, a new way of conceiving of a research area or field of study—in this case, "the relationships between appropriating (acquiring and/or learning) and teaching a second or foreign language (L2/FL), which aims at creating optimal conditions, in a classroom setting, for spontaneous communication and successful social interaction" (see chapter 1 above).

If we speak of a "new paradigm," it is because the NLA calls into question the majority of preconceived ideas about how to teach languages, which still seem to me to depend on a tradition derived from the teaching of… Latin (as I pointed out in chapter 3). And, of course, "dead" language inevitably means "written" language. But the teaching of what were then called "living" languages strictly mimicked how a "dead" language was taught, turning first to the written text, to grammar, and to translation, with all the prestige that accrued (and to this day still accrues, in certain environments) to this way of doing things.

If I look at the history of language teaching, which I have considered in depth throughout my long career, it seems to me that, all things being equal, now, at the beginning of the 21st century, the NLA resembles what the Direct Method was at the beginning of the 20th century compared with the traditional grammar-translation method. The Direct Method was born of the optimism created by a then-new science that emerged at the end of the 19th century: phonetics. The NLA, meanwhile, comes from the

optimism created by a new science that emerged at the end of the 20th century: neurolinguistics.

While the Direct Method called into question the *translation* aspect of the grammar-translation method, the NLA, for its part, questions the *grammar* component of the grammar-translation method—at the very least, a type of grammar for learning to speak. It is in this sense that we can almost speak of a "cultural revolution" in second-language pedagogy with regard to the NLA, as others have already suggested (at a conference). However, despite such analogies, the fact remains that any reference to history also leaves one feeling humble. When we consider the fate that awaited the Direct Method, one may question what future the NLA can aspire to. As a matter of fact, the Direct Method still survives, many years later, but only in private institutions for adults: the Berlitz schools (and, to a certain degree, in the resources published by Assimil). Is the NLA at risk of meeting a similar fate? As is well known, no comparison is perfect. For instance, while the Berlitz method was inaugurated in private schools for adults (in Philadelphia, in 1878) and first encountered setbacks when it was expanded to the grade school system, the NLA took root among young Canadian school students wishing to learn French. It did not begin to spread among adults for another dozen years, first in China, and then in a few other countries.

But for a paradigm to develop, it must be adopted. This leads me to consider a few factors that may encourage the adoption of the NLA, which raises the whole question of the NLA's originality. I will simply restate here the NLA's three main original elements: to my knowledge, it is currently the only approach based on lessons learnt from recent neuroscientific research, as we saw in the first chapter. This is why the NLA involves acquiring/learning not ONE but TWO grammars: an implicit, internal grammar, particularly for speaking, and an explicit, external grammar, particularly for written language (as we saw in the second and fourth chapters).

Moreover, the NLA is the only approach based on what has rightly been called "neuroliteracy." Stemming from our understanding of literacy (as discussed in chapter 2), this is the ability to *use* a language to listen, read, write, and even think critically. This view of literacy is as valid for the L1 as for the L2/FL. In the NLA, however, the novelty is our conception of *literacy-based pedagogy*, for we have tried to show how the literacy-based pedagogy for learning an L2/FL cannot be the same as for learning a L1—because, in the case of an L2/FL, the learners are not already able to speak the language. This is why, on the one hand, the NLA gives precedence to speaking—even in reading and writing activities—

and, on the other, these competences are presented in an order that begins with speaking and moves on via reading (and the teaching of external, explicit grammar) to writing. This is what we have called the "literacy circle" (in chapter 2).

The NLA's third major original feature is its principle of *communicative authenticity*, which runs counter to the activities cherished by the communicative approach: simulation and role-playing. This has major pedagogical consequences, as this principle calls into question the traditional understanding of the "selection" and "progression" of linguistic elements. With the NLA, the selection and progression of linguistic elements are no longer guided by linguistic criteria or *speech acts*, as doing so strongly risks creating a conflict, so to speak, with the operation and progression function of the learner's brain. Instead, this choice is guided by the learner's desire and needs for communication and social interaction. This leads us back to one of the neuroscientific lessons, namely the primacy of acquiring oral language, insofar as explicit knowledge (whose primary manifestation is in written language) cannot transform into implicit competences, from which derives the importance of first and foremost developing implicit oral competence. As it happens, the easiest way to encourage people to speak is to ask them to speak about themselves. This is why all of the NLA's teaching units are determined by the learners' life experiences and interests, which automatically activate their limbic systems. And it is through reading (which can only follow speaking, on the same theme) that we can pass from the known to the unknown, from the learner's own culture to the culture of the target language. Regarding this, an FSL teacher who attended an NLA training workshop in Tokyo in March 2015 provides the following testimonial:

> It is essentially thanks to the classroom techniques borrowed from the NLA that the concept of authentic communication could be maintained. This was my first attempt. If I can judge from the level of oral fluency most of the learners reached in using the communication functions we worked on in class, and by the interest they showed for the teaching sessions, the verdict is positive. (Moroni Sato 2017)

These are only the three main original features of the NLA, which is also founded on two other, better-known principles: focusing on the message and social interaction. The novelty of the NLA's teaching strategies, meanwhile, simply flows from these principles. And as noted in our NLA training workshops, the NLA often requires a radical alteration in teaching practices. In the end, the true, overall originality of the NLA lies in the combination of its five principles (detailed in chapter 2).

Adopting the NLA implies accepting its five principles, all of which are based on the most solid neuroscientific research (not on "neuromyths")—in particular Paradis's neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism—as we have seen throughout this work.

Above all, what history teaches us is that any method, model, approach, or perspective only lasts so long. As the NLA is based on neuroscience and the latter field has only barely begun to be explored, it is patently obvious that it will have to evolve: "Over 90% of our current knowledge of the human brain was discovered in the last 20 years," observes Steve Masson, a renowned Québec expert on the matter (2015a). Developments in neuroscience will eventually give birth to other methods, models, approaches, or perspectives, which will be presented in their turn either as variants of the NLA or as entirely different approaches, depending on the discoveries yet to come.

From this viewpoint, one hopes that language-teaching theorists will begin to concern themselves with how to appropriate an L2/FL by engaging more thoroughly in research in language acquisition. But for the debates on the implicit and the explicit, for instance, to eventually produce results, the field overall needs to be "decompartmentalised." Researchers studying acquisition need to be able to interact more frequently with on-the-ground stakeholders and teacher trainers, and the latter must return the favour by showing greater interest in studies of language acquisition. After all, as I reminded the reader in chapter 8, the *goal* of the teaching is to have learners acquire/learn a language. Teaching is merely a *means* towards this goal. Is this not in itself a sufficient reason to prioritise studies in the area of language acquisition/learning? Both the language and the way language is acquired or learned must guide the teaching strategies used in the classroom. To date, only prioritising the "language" as an "object of study" has led to an important component of language teaching being discounted.

In any event, to use a simple analogy, let us say that when I began to implement the NLA for adults, at the South China Normal University, I set out on a motorway, the **NLA Motorway**. But as the NLA ventured forth into further climes, it encountered some administrative bumps in the road: missing official documents, incorrect official stamps, and who knows what else! It took me some time to realise that to cross the border into the adult realm I first needed to obtain a visa. Instead of travelling straight down the open highway, from time to time one has to take detours down side roads and bypasses to satisfy certain administrative and organisational requirements.

So, here I am, in 2017-18, 20 years after the approach took its first unsteady steps. As I write these words, I am also reworking the NLA teaching units (for adults) with two new collaborators (Romain Jourdan and Gladys Benudiz), with whom I am developing an *NLA Textbook* for French, which includes not only a *Teacher's Guide* but also a *Learner's Notebook*, complete with activities for preparing for the DELF test (forthcoming 2019).

In closing, I would like to leave the stage to a few language teachers who have taken advantage of the NLA in their work. It is remarkable that over time, many teachers have told us that the NLA has led to an irreversible alteration in their way of teaching. Here, for instance, is what one FSL teacher said after changing establishments: "The NLA has changed my way of teaching forever, even in my current job. I don't teach the same way anymore. This year, I'm in charge of kindergarten [L1] students and I use some of the NLA principles. I'd like to be working with primary school students to be able to teach and try a new way of thinking about grammar and reading/writing" (Sandy Bergeron – personal written communication, January 2017). We have often heard testimonials such as this from language teachers who had, for various reasons, had to change institutions or been assigned different grade levels to teach.

In autumn 2016, a teacher from Hong Kong, who was participating in an NLA training workshop, wished to test this idea, that is, combine the NLA and her FFL textbook. Here is her report on the results:

> The textbook used [which we will not identify] offers a starting point and a support for reading which fit most lessons very well, and proposes topics for conversation that allow students to share authentic and interesting information about themselves, according to the NLA principles (which is what works best, obviously!).
>
> I enjoy planning and guiding these conversations, before the reading stage, each time giving a model and a sequential progression of questions/answers to have the conversation evolve, and the students generally respond very enthusiastically and successfully. I'm really impressed by the results. I'm learning to simplify as much as possible. (Alice Moulimois, 2017—personal written communication)

Another telling testimonial comes to us from the Taiwanese FFL teacher whom we have already had reason to quote in earlier chapters. Here is what she says in her "Interim Assessment":

> To implement the NLA, not only is it essential to modify one's understanding of language acquisition, but one has to make major changes to the curriculum […]. We have had to discard the textbooks we were

using, as they focused above all on language rather than on the learners' experiences, interests, and communicative desires. Moreover, each teaching unit includes three or four mini-projects and a final project, which means there are no longer any rigid divisions between the different courses (grammar, conversation, listening, reading), as is often the case in Asian teaching contexts. The NLA therefore requires strong coordination between teachers. (Chang 2017, 40)

In any event, to date, every implementation of the NLA has had major repercussions on *what is taught* and *how it's taught*, and, consequently, on *what is learnt*—in other words on the learning results, as we saw in chapter 7. The NLA has also led to many language teachers rethinking their basic assumptions. As the authors of a report on the piloting of the NLA in a Chinese high school wrote, "implementing the NLA did not simply represent a change in method, but also a change in philosophy" (Agaesse, Amaudruz, and Guilloux 2017a).

Finally, I would like to give the last word to a practitioner who has taught French for many years in Japan, at the Kyoto University of Foreign Studies: "The NLA, as a very well-designed approach, satisfies scholars' theoretical expectations as well as teachers' more pragmatic requirements. Learners, meanwhile, find it more motivating and a source of constant progress" (Jourdan 2017, 74).

# APPENDICES

# APPENDIX A

# ORIGINS OF INTENSIVE FRENCH

Origin of Intensive French and Intensive English:
1975
Lise Billy, Education Adviser
Mille-Îles School Board

Model: Montréal welcoming classes (beginning in 1969)
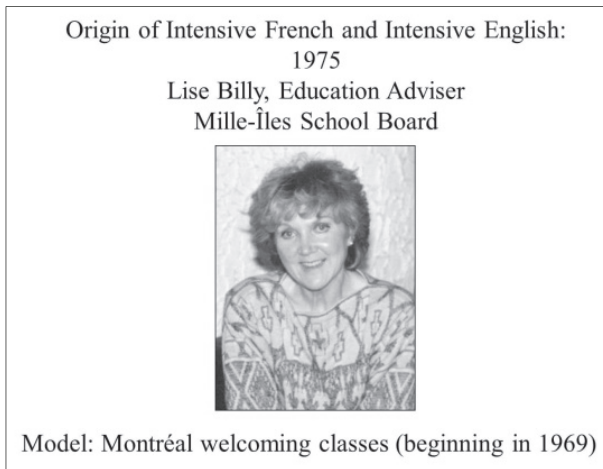
*Fig. A-1*

We did not originate the idea of IF. All credit for this must be given to Ms Lise Billy, former Education Consultant of the Seigneurie-des-Mille-Îles Bilingual School Board in the northern suburbs of Montréal, in Québec. In the early 1970s, Ms Billy had the idea of experimenting with intensive teaching of French and English in some Grade 1 (and later Grade 6) classes in her school district, which at the time operated schools in both languages, and proposed this to her superintendent (Billy 1980).

She was inspired by Montreal's welcoming classes, which were intended for children of recent immigrants to Québec and which made their appearance in 1969. Ms Billy had herself taught these classes, in which the students had to learn French *intensely* for five consecutive

months, after which (at least in theory) they were admitted to the regular Francophone classes.[1]

When she became Education Consultant for the Mille-Îles School Board, Ms Billy told herself that if five months of intensive learning of French worked for the children of immigrants, it should also work for Anglophone students learning French as an L2.

Thus, 1975 saw the first pilot classes of IF in Québec, supervised by researchers from the Université du Québec à Montréal (UQÀM). One of the most significant discoveries from this pilot project was that, contrary to expectations, the Grade 6 students' results were significantly higher than those of the Grade 1 students, despite a relatively equal number of hours (Billy 1980).[2] At the time, this intensive format was known as the *linguistic bath* (Billy 1980; Goguillon 2006).

Later years were punctuated by a few more on-off pilot projects here and there across Canada, testing more or less intensive instructional systems which were never truly followed up on. All of these represented interesting attempts to improve the situation of language learning in Canada,[3] but when we began our study of Intensive French, there was no equivalent in Canada to Québec's wide-scale ESL (intensive English) system (Netten and Germain 2004d).

With these facts in mind, when Ms Joan Netten wished to begin her doctoral thesis at UQÀM, under my supervision, I suggested that she experiment with the intensive teaching of French in Newfoundland and Labrador, where she was then working (Netten 2001). At the beginning of 1997, we first began to discuss Intensive French.

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[1] I wish to highlight a rarely mentioned fact: the idea of learning a foreign language intensively in a school environment first appeared in Bulgaria in the early 1950s. (For more details on this, consult Appendix C.)

[2] In the following year, 1976, the first intensive English classes were piloted, supervised at the time by researchers from Concordia University in Montreal. These classes still exist in Québec. However, unlike the IF model we have implemented in the rest of Canada, Québec's intensive English classes are not founded on any real theoretical basis, often representing a relatively *selective* instructional system, meaning that, barring a few exceptions, it is most often reserved for the best students.

[3] One of the most interesting of these was Peters, MacFarlane, and Wesche's attempt (2004).

# Appendix B

# The First IF Classes in Canada

Two of the first four IF classes in Canada (1998-99):



*Fig. B-1—Topsail Elementary School, St. John's, NL.*



*Fig. B-2—New World Island East Elementary School, Summerford, NL*
*(This school has since been closed.)*

The first four IF teachers:



*Fig. B-3*
*Shelley Sted*



*Fig. B-4*
*Jacquie Collins*



*Fig. B-5*
*Sally DeBruyn*



*Fig. B-6*
*Sid Woolfrey*

# APPENDIX C

# INTENSIVE LEARNING OF FRENCH—
# THE BULGARIAN CASE[1]

The Bulgarian case merits mention, as in that country French is taught intensively beginning in Grade 8 *throughout the whole school year* (and not just for five months, as in Canada). Moreover, unlike what is done in Canada, Bulgarian IF classes are designed as a preparatory year for what are known in Bulgaria as *Non-Language Discipline* (NLD) classes and what Canada calls *immersion* classes, that is, classes where other school subjects are taught in French. It is in these later school years that students gradually catch up in the subjects set aside in Grade 8. In the end, the programme does not extend the number of years of schooling. [2]

## BULGARIAN INTENSIVE CLASSES

In 1950, the communist regime expelled foreigners from Bulgaria. At that time, Sofia was home to at least three foreign-run colleges (British, French, and German). These colleges having been closed, the government attempted to replace them by implementing English-, French-, and German-language classes in high schools, beginning in Grade 8. This was when intensive classes were instituted for these three languages.

In Grade 8, IF consists of 18 40-minute periods a week dedicated to French, in addition to mathematics, which is taught in Bulgarian. What then becomes of other subjects? In Grade 9, the NLD programme is that of the preceding year; Grade 10 students undertake the Grade 9 programme

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[1] Much of this information was acquired during personal discussions with Dr. Gueorgui Jetchev, then-president of the APFB (*Association des professeurs de/en français en Bulgarie* [Bulgarian Association of Teachers of/in French]), during a conference organised by this association in October 2008 in Varna. The paper I presented on this occasion was published in the APFB's journal *Fréquences francophones* (Germain and Netten 2009).

[2] This type of programme was later extended to other languages, including Spanish (in the 1990s), Russian, Italian, Chinese, Japanese, Korean, and Arabic.

and portions of the one for Grade 10; the Grade 11 programme covers that of late Grade 10 and the entirety of Grade 11; and in Grade 12, subjects are no longer taught in FFL. Rather, they are taught in Bulgarian, as the matriculation examinations at the end of Grade 12 are set in that language.

Note that this type of programme has been operating in Bulgaria since 1950. It appears to constitute a "selective" and competitive programme, intended mainly for the best students, who are admitted on the basis of entrance examinations in mathematics and Bulgarian.[3] In Canada, IF is aimed at all types of learners, not only at the best students.

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[3] While carrying out classroom observations of two IF classes and three NLD classes in Bulgaria, I noticed that the students in these classes are indeed gifted. I must add that after hearing several students from Grades 8 to 11 speak, I can state that they made very few mistakes in French.

# APPENDIX D

# SAMPLE PROJECT

After 120 hours (May 2016, Taiwan).

After 120 hours (May 2016, Taiwan)



*Fig. D-1*

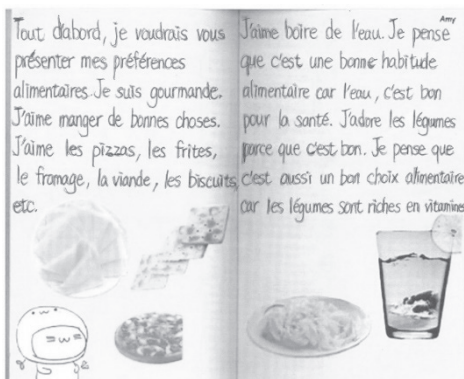Anaïs's Tastes



*Fig. D-2*

First of all, I would like to talk about my food preferences. I am greedy. I like to eat good things. I like pizzas, fries, cheese, meat, biscuits, etc.

I like to drink water. I think it's a good eating habit because water is good for health. I love vegetables because they are good. I think they are also a good food choice, because vegetables are full of vitamins.
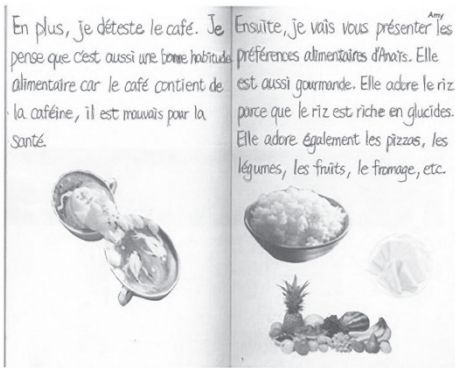
En plus, je déteste le café. Je pense que c'est aussi une bonne habitude alimentaire car le café contient de la caféine, il est mauvais pour la santé.

Ensuite, je vais vous présenter les préférences alimentaires d'Anaïs. Elle est aussi gourmande. Elle adore le riz parce que le riz est riche en glucides. Elle adore également les pizzas, les légumes, les fruits, le fromage, etc.

*Fig. D-3*

As well, I hate coffee. I think that it's a good eating habit for coffee contains caffeine, it's bad for health.

Next, I'm going to talk about Anaïs's food preferences. She's also greedy. She loves rice because rice is rich in carbohydrates. She also loves pizzas, vegetables, fruit, cheese, etc.

Comme elle adore le riz, elle aime également les cakes aux navets parce que c'est moelleux. Elle aime aussi la viande, la volaille, les crêpes taïwanaises, les frites, le poisson, etc.

Anaïs mange tous les jours un repas en libre-service. Elle mange souvent des légumes, je pense que c'est une bonne habitude alimentaire parce que les légumes sont riches en fibres.
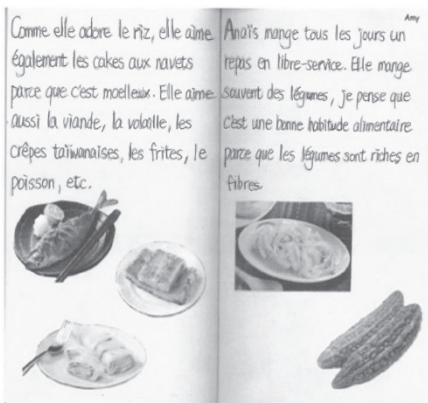
*Fig. D-4*

As she loves rice, she also likes turnip cakes because they are moist. She also likes meat, poultry, Taiwanese pancakes, fries, fish, etc.

Anaïs eats a take-out meal every day. She often eats vegetables, I think this is a good eating habit because vegetables are rich in fibres.
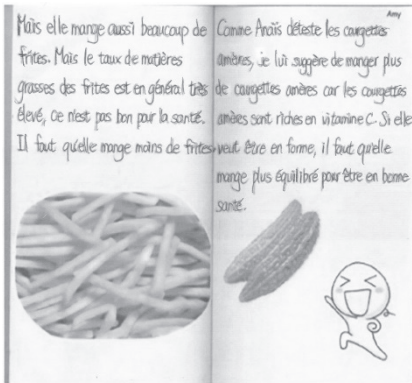
*Fig. D-5*

But she also eats a lot of fries. But the fat content rate in fries is generally very high, it's not good for health. She should eat fewer fries.

As Anaïs hates bitter courgettes, I suggest that she eat more bitter courgettes for bitter courgettes are rich in Vitamin C. If she wants to be in shape, she needs to eat more balanced to be in good health.



*Fig. D-6*

Thank you!

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