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Government French Language Training Programs:
Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences

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Government French Language Training Programs:

Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences

by

Josée Bessette

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Abstract

This collective case study explores second language (L2) training experiences from the perspectives of six Canadian statutory civil servants and examines factors that may have influenced their L2 learning experience. Three instruments were used to collect data: a preliminary questionnaire, an in-depth questionnaire, and an interview protocol. Findings reveal that a language and culture connection, opportunities to use the L2, and a short-term intensive cultural and linguistic immersion experience in particular were all associated with more positive L2 learning experiences. Negative comments regarding L2 learning experiences revolved around the anxiety and stress surrounding the one-shot summative nature of the oral exam, and seemingly no link between instruction and evaluation. This research contributes to the growing literature on factors affecting the L2 learning processes and outcomes. Furthermore, it may be beneficial for future candidates, language teachers, L2 program planners and curriculum designers within the Public Service Commission (PSC) and similar contexts.

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Government French Language Training Programs: Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences

Chapter 1: The Research in Context

Introduction

In 1969 the Official Languages Act was introduced by the Canadian Federal Government and since then the need for bilingualism has been addressed within the Canadian public sector. Today, second language (L2) training appears to be an integrated part of a civil servant's daily routine within the Public Service Commission (PSC). Whether it is in the PSC context or other contexts (e.g. the private sector, the educational milieu), there seems to be a growing desire, need or demand for learning a L2 in our day. Seliger and Shohamy (1989) argue that after the acquisition of the mother tongue, learning a L2 may be the most omnipresent of human intellectual activities. The fact that learning a L2 seems to be a common activity does not necessarily facilitate the actual learning process; on the contrary, learning a L2 seems generally difficult for adults to achieve and maintain.

Numerous studies have attempted to identify factors that affect L2 acquisition and retention, and have consequently offered some possible solutions. Research indicates that motivation, attitude, aptitude, personality traits and styles, the context, and level of practice play a role in the extent to which language skills are acquired and retained. It appears, however, that there is no perfect 'recipe' for learning and maintaining a L2; hence, empirical studies continue to seek further clarification on the issue.

Dawson, McCulloch and Peyronel (1996) suggest that our attention should be focused on the learners themselves because it is they who know best what helps them learn, and Wenden (1986) claims that learners are quite capable of articulating what they know about their own learning process. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) argue that learners'

perceptions are important because they influence motivation, which in turn, has a direct effect on how successful individuals will be in acquiring new material. This study recognizes the importance of learners' perceptions and examined how a specific group of learners experienced their L2 learning experience and brought forth their insights.

This first chapter will set the research in context. It will present a historical background of the Canadian Official Languages Act in order to better understand the reasons for L2 training with the Canadian Federal Government. Next, the Canadian PSC language training program will be discussed in more depth to situate the reader in the learners' context. Finally, a synthesis of previous studies on the PSC language training program will be offered, leading to the justification for the present study.

A Historical Account

In Canada, there seemed to be no overall bilingualism policy per se within the Federal Government before 1963. It was only in the sixties that it began to take shape. By September 1969, the Official Languages Act came into effect, affirming the equality of Canada's two languages: French and English. This Act implied that public civil servants had the right to work in the language of their choice and that the public could obtain services in either of the two official languages. All departments and agencies within the Federal Government were required to fulfill this policy by either hiring bilingual civil servants and/or by setting up unilingual units in the minority language, or by offering L2 training for those civil servants already in service. To date, it is the Treasury Board's responsibility to ensure the implementation of the official languages programs and policy, while the PSC and the departments determine the required proficiency level for each position, provide language training, evaluate civil servants, and finally hear appeals (PSC of Canada website, 2002).

In July 1975, the PSC of Canada submitted a study to the Coordinator of the Official Languages Program that identified a L2 retention problem within the Public Service following language training and testing. The study's objective was to provide guidelines for solutions to this problem. Taking these into consideration, the Federal Government reacted by setting a target date of December 1978 for a functionally bilingual Public Service (Edwards, 1977). Twenty-five years later, the Canadian PSC is still facing the same problem: a workforce that is not sufficiently bilingual. While the Treasury Board of Canada had recently set a new target date of March 2003 for a bilingual Public Service (May, 2002), civil servants are still scrambling to learn their L2.

The Canadian PSC Language Training Program

The PSC of Canada's audit report (2000) states that language training courses are offered in six regions within Canada: The National Capital, the Atlantic, Quebec, Ontario, the Prairies, and the combined region of Alberta, the Pacific and the Yukon. Two types of candidates are eligible for L2 training: *statutory* and *non-statutory* candidates. The former are those civil servants who are required to take L2 training courses as per the Official Languages Act in order to be promoted or to keep their present positions. The latter are those civil servants who are not mandated to, but voluntarily request L2 training courses to advance in their career. Statutory training is offered in all regions of Canada while non-statutory training is offered everywhere excluding the National Capital Region and Quebec.

Language training is a program that employs approximately 600 teachers, over 400 other individuals in positions related to language training and roughly 40 groups (250-300 students) on a monthly basis (PSC language training website, 2002). Since the demand in the National Capital Region is mainly French language training, it is the focus of this study.

French language training is offered through the *Canada School of Public Service* (CSPS) at two locations: *L'Esplanade* (located in downtown Ottawa) and *Asticou* (in Hull). There are also many private schools in the Ottawa area that offer language training and civil servants may choose this option.

The PSC website (2002) provides a description of the different programs offered in each region (i.e., cyclical, continuous, or immersion). In the National Capital Region, cyclical and continuous training is offered. The cyclical training requires civil servants to leave their regular duties for two weeks at a time, allowing them to complete one segment of the course. Continuous training necessitates civil servants to take a longer leave of absence (between six to nine months). Both types of training are offered in a group format; however candidates may opt for private or semi-private lessons. A third type of training is also available: immersion. When all else fails, candidates may then request to go on French immersion training in Quebec City, for example. A short immersion may consist of several weeks while long immersion can last up to six months (Frigon, oral communication, October 15th, 2002). However, this type of training is done through private schools and is rarely chosen due to time and budgetary constraints. Lastly, civil servants may also pursue more than one type of L2 training program in order to achieve their required level. During their L2 training, civil servants receive their full salaries.

The level of desired L2 proficiency of the language training program is job specific and is determined by the PSC. As per the PSC of Canada's website (2002), four levels of proficiency currently exist: A, B, C and E, whereby "A" is the lowest level and "E" offers exemption from future testing. These levels are specified for the four language skills: reading, writing and oral interaction (including the listening and speaking skills). This study

examined the 'EX' senior management, who are required to have a very high level of proficiency: "CBC" in reading, writing and oral communication, respectively. Candidates are entitled to 1,300 hours to reach level B and 1,860 hours to reach level C. The curriculum for the 'EX' group stresses the linguistic needs associated with management tasks. Course content is organized according to functions such as planning, organizing, directing and evaluating. For instance, these civil servants must be able to read and understand complex details in a wide variety of work-related texts. They must also have sufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary to write short descriptive or factual texts in their L2, and be able to converse effectively on a variety of topics with ease, clarity and accuracy. (See Appendix A for a more complete proficiency scale for the 'EX' level)

Background to this Study

There is very little published research that has examined the Canadian government sponsored L2 training programs since the late 1970's. Wesche (1975) examined the PSC's 'Dialogue Canada' language training course. She used tests, observation and interviews to compare three beginner Anglophone groups in order to highlight the strategies and techniques used by the successful language learners. Among her findings, Wesche noted that a "critical mass of positive factors must be present if success is to be achieved..." (p.235). She found that each successful student had his/her own blend of positive learning strategies, such as initiative in the learning process, frequent practice of the L2 in and out of class, low inhibition towards using the L2 in practice situations, a high level of motivation, and prior knowledge of the L2. Wesche points out that many students did not have *all* of these positive factors, but the more positive factors present, the greater the likelihood of success.

Bibeau (1976), leader of a large cross sectional evaluative study commissioned by the Treasury Board, was mandated to identify “aspects [of the PSC training program] that could be improved, corrected or adjusted to maximize the success of students who undertake language training” (p. 3). His research team observed classrooms and sent out questionnaires to teachers, administrators and students (both Anglophone and Francophone) to better understand their language learning experience. He recognized that, by and large, Anglophone students (85% of target population) had high general aptitudes but only average language specific aptitudes, and that their overall attitude toward learning French was only slightly positive. Furthermore, he found that it was the candidates’ responsibility to maintain the L2 knowledge acquired after training since their workplace neither supported nor opposed the L2. In contrast, the Francophones (15% of the target population) seemed to have a more positive perception of their working environment vis-à-vis their L2. Finally, Bibeau reported that only the two highest levels within the PSC proficiency scale actually surpassed the threshold of bilingualism set by the Council of Europe and that only 20% of the candidates were successful in attaining these two levels. Thus, he noted that some civil servants might not have initially learned enough of the L2 to retain it. He recommended that the PSC organize a two-week session prior to the training in order to psychologically prepare and acclimatize the candidates for their training. He further suggested that the departments promote the L2 in the workplace.

Edwards (1977) furthered Bibeau’s study in order to determine whether a retention problem indeed existed within the PSC and under what circumstances employees tended “to lose, maintain or improve the level of linguistic capability originally attained” (p. 3). The 209 Anglophones and 246 Francophones in his study were tested for their L2 competencies,

completed questionnaires and several were interviewed. He confirmed that the problem of language retention manifested itself in the Anglophone group twelve to eighteen months after training, and particularly with speaking. He attributed the loss of language, for the most part, to the lack of successful prior learning of the L2 and to the extent to which the L2 was used at work. Anglophones who had indeed maintained their L2 had not relied on the work context alone for incidental learning and practice. Francophones, on the other hand, had had continuous exposure to their L2 in their workplace after the training. Edwards also explained that L2 learners must reach a point of confidence in their linguistic knowledge and communicative strategies to maintain their L2 proficiency. This threshold reduces the potential loss of performance where recovery is impossible. According to his participants' accounts of their L2 training, Edwards recognized that "the majority of Anglophone subjects never reached that point of confidence" (p. 100). In his opinion, a higher level of initial learning, a high level of self-confidence and the opportunity to practice during and after L2 training would have promoted the long-term retention of the L2.

Kuttner (1995), the only more recent study found, explored the civil servants' perspectives on the New Brunswick Government L2 training program. All of her 23 participants had voluntarily followed a specific four-year L2 training program (hence none of them were statutory candidates), and over 70% of them had been successful (only 6 participants had not achieved the Advanced Level rating on the exit test). On the whole, Kuttner's findings brought forth factors pertaining to a *successful* language learning experience. Some of the significant factors that emerged vis-à-vis a positive L2 learning experience included: prior L2 exposure, intrinsic motivation, being proactive, and finding opportunities to use the L2. Language use anxiety (i.e., a state of apprehensiveness to speak

the L2), and socio-affective factors (e.g., group dynamics), seemed to be factors prevalent in unsuccessful L2 learning experiences. Kuttner also noted, as Edwards (1977) did, that after the training the majority of participants were not satisfied with their acquired level of competence, regardless of their success in achieving the expected proficiency level.

The above studies have collectively identified several factors pertinent to L2 acquisition and retention within the Canadian PSC language training program. While Bibeau (1976) and Edwards (1977) studied all types of subjects in both the English and French programs, their studies are somewhat outdated. Wesche (1975) looked at beginner Anglophone students and Kuttner (1995) mainly targeted non-statutory civil servants. These studies have led me to explore the topic for myself.

In one of my graduate classes, I had the opportunity to do a mini-pilot study on the L2 learning experience from the civil servants' perspective. This mini study consisted of three civil servants who had successfully obtained their 'BBB' proficiency level through the government sponsored L2 training program. All the participants (two men and one woman) volunteered and gave their written consent prior to the interviews. The following is a quick description of the participants:

Participant A – was required to take the French language training in order to keep her position of more than five years (statutory candidate). She was part of a group of eight students in a continuous L2 course. Her prior knowledge of the L2 consisted of high school French classes up to grade ten. Her only exposure to French at the time of the interview was through her sons' homework.

Participant B – was a Chinese speaker from Hong Kong, who won a competition within the PSC. Since his new position was a bilingual one, he needed to undergo French language

training (statutory candidate). He was part of a group of ten students in a continuous L2 course. His prior knowledge of French was very limited; he had taken some weekend French courses when he moved to Canada, but no more.

Participant C – was a retired RCMP officer. While on the force, he requested to take French language training to be eligible for a transfer (non-statutory candidate). He took a continuous L2 course in a class of eight students. Although his father was Acadian, he had very limited knowledge of French prior to the training because there was no French spoken at home. He did remember some of his high school French though.

The research question for the mini-pilot study was: “In what ways do civil servants, who have taken government sponsored language training courses, believe these courses impacted their professional careers?” Despite the fact that only three candidates were interviewed, multiple realities were brought forth, and these were surprisingly different. Attitude, family support, anxiety, stress and an opportunity for practice were some of the factors that emerged from the participants’ recollections of their L2 learning experience. The common themes emerging from these interviews were used to write a composite description of the factors that the civil servants perceived as contributing to a positive or a negative language learning experience. (See Appendix B for these descriptions)

This pilot study inspired me to venture into the civil servants’ perceptions of their L2 learning experiences. It also allowed me to formulate the research question, and refine the interview questions for the present study. Furthermore, the themes that emerged from the data analysis (motivation, stress, and satisfaction, to name a few) gave me a direction as to which factors to include in the literature review for the present study.

The Current Study

The purpose of the current study is to examine the *statutory* civil servants' perceptions of their L2 learning experience within the current Canadian PSC French language training program. The study has targeted the Public Service's "EX" senior management who have undergone government sponsored L2 training through the CSPS in order to achieve a "CBC" proficiency level. These "EX" statutory employees carry an immense baggage of responsibilities and a wealth of experience, and I believe that it is worthwhile to examine their L2 training experience. The following remarks offer a glimpse of the promising diversity of perceptions that were captured in each participant's experience: "*French language training was harder than having kids!*" (Participant 'Vft') and "*I was savoring the experience*" (Participant 'Mms').

Research Question.

The general question that will direct this research is: "What are the Canadian PSC statutory civil servants' reflections on their second language training experience?"

Such an examination may provide further insights into factors affecting learners' perceptions of their L2 learning experiences and outcomes. It will also update the previous studies on language learning within the PSC language training program. Lastly, it may prove to be beneficial for teachers, program planners, and future students within the PSC context, as well as similar contexts.

Summary

This chapter presented a historical background for L2 training within the Canadian Federal Government, discussed the Canadian PSC language training program in particular, and offered an overview of previous studies on the PSC language training program in order

to set the research in context and situate the reader for the present study. It also stated the purpose of the current study and identified the general research question that guided the study.

Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

The following review of the literature on factors influencing success for adult language learners may help us better understand why some individuals are successful at L2 training and some are not. Next, an outline of the procedures that civil servants undergo when becoming language students will illustrate all that is involved for these particular L2 learners. Finally, relevant affective, cognitive, socio-cultural, and contextual factors that may influence the language learning outcome will be examined.

The Adult Language Learner

Research suggests that the age of the learner and individual characteristics influence the learning outcomes of second language acquisition (Ellis, 1994). Although it is a common belief that children have the upper hand when learning a second language, the issue is still debated. Researchers agree that the unique characteristics of the adult learning process set adult education in a class of its own (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991). Knowles (1980) defines this distinct teaching approach as andragogy: The art and science of teaching adults that focuses on the unique goals of individual learners and provides a structure to assist learners in achieving these goals (p.43).

Adults have numerous roles and duties that “result in a different orientation to learning from that of children” (Brookfield, 1986, p. 30). They are conscious of specific learning needs created by real life responsibilities or problems and they wish to apply their new acquired skills or knowledge to their immediate situation (Knowles, 1980). They also have individual learning styles and a preference for learning environments due to their accumulation of life experiences (Smith, 1983). Furthermore, adults have superior cognitive abilities to those of children, and are hence capable of handling abstract rules and concepts

(Brown, 2000). Bash (2003) adds that adults are goal-oriented and value an educational program that has clearly defined expectations and objectives. In addition, they express the need to be treated as equals by their peers and instructor (pp. 28, 29).

Adult learners are not willing to tolerate boring or irrelevant content; in other words, their learning must be purposeful (Schleppegrell, 1987). Hedge and colleagues (1984) concur as they found that adults process new information by making associations with past experiences so as to make the learning experience relevant and meaningful. Brookfield (1986) cautions, however, that past experiences may enhance or hinder an adult's current L2 learning experience. He further argues that self-directed learning should be the aim for adult teaching. Merriam and Caffarella (1991) suggest that "control, freedom, and flexibility are the major motivators for engaging in self-directed learning" (p.44). One could argue, however, that not all adult learners prefer self-directed learning; some may feel content in a teacher-directed classroom.

Apps (1987) interviewed 91 adults returning to school in order to identify possible barriers they faced as older learners. His findings revealed that they perceived an increase in stress as the most important barrier when returning to school. Juggling time commitments was one reason for this stress (i.e., balancing family and school time or balancing job and school time). This finding further supports the fact that since adults participate in multiple roles, it may be difficult for them to keep their mind on one thing – language learning. Nonetheless, as Knox (1977) suggests, "almost any adult can learn anything they want to, given time, persistence, and assistance" (p. 469). All of the above characteristics of adult learners have implications for L2 acquisition and should be taken into consideration by adult education programs.

The Civil Servant as a Language Learner

Brookfield (1986) claims that people, structure and culture are the three major factors which can manipulate the learning climate of an organization. He adds, “the programmer, the administrators concerned, the support staff, the institutional head, [and] the learners all shape the form and process of the resultant program” (p.277). Hence, in a perfect situation, the learner would be viewed as a mutual partner when designing the program (Knowles, 1980). Unfortunately, such is not the case with most adult learning settings today (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

Edwards (1997) states that the Canadian PSC “represents a particular case of language users by virtue of its uniqueness of structure and context” (p. 5). Having observed civil servants before, during and after language training, Bibeau (1976) found that the need for language training must initially be identified, either when a civil servant applies to or occupies a position designated as bilingual. With regards to the “EX” group, the official languages or human resources branches of the departments concerned initiate the requests for language training.

Once the need for L2 training is identified, an assessment technician at the Canada School of Public Service (CSPS) evaluates the candidate’s dossier and recommends a knowledge and aptitude evaluation test, if need be. Next, an orientation officer interviews the candidate, or studies the dossier in order to establish the candidate’s current language level and identifies the degree of training necessary to meet the language requirements. A prognosis letter is then sent to the department. This letter contains information with regards to the number of weeks and training hours planned, the recommended starting lesson, the learning program and the candidate’s learning style. The department subsequently contacts

the Course Loading Service to register the candidate for either cyclical or continuous training (Canada School of Public Service website, 2004).

While candidates are in language training, any engagement with their department is reduced to a minimum since candidates should devote all their energies to learning the target language (Bibeau, 1976). However, Kuttner (1995) reports that some civil servants were expected to carry out their regular work duties while they were in language training, and this caused a great deal of stress. During their L2 training, civil servants undergo periodic diagnostic tests and after the required number of weeks of training they must face the final reading, writing and oral interaction examination that is administered by a representative of the Personnel Psychology Center, a division of the Public Service Commission (Frigon, oral communication, October 26th, 2004). Since the oral interaction (OI) exam is usually the last exam that candidates need to take to obtain their “CBC” proficiency level, if they pass they will be granted a language certificate and return to work. Civil servants are tested every five years if they change positions within this time frame.

As Knowles (1980) explains, the emotional or psychological climate of a learning environment within an organization will either facilitate or inhibit learning (p.66). In the case of the PSC context, Kuttner (1995) points out that since the language training is government sponsored, civil servants often “find themselves dancing to a tune they had no part in choosing” (p.8) and this may have consequences on the whole L2 learning experience. Bash (2003) adds that program administrators sometimes have difficulty understanding why adults do not operate in the same manner as most traditional students. He suggests that programs should respond with flexible options for these particular learners, who are already subject to a burdened lifestyle (p.86).

The above sections have shed light on the characteristics of adult language learners and the PSC language learner. The following sections will introduce relevant affective, cognitive, socio-cultural, and contextual factors that may affect language learning.

Affective Factors

Brown (2000) explains that there are two facets of the affective domain relevant to learning another language. The first consists of individual or personality factors that may contribute to the success of L2 learning, and the second encompasses the sociocultural factors (e.g., attitudes towards the L2) that emerge when one learns a second language.

Self-confidence is one of many variables comprised in individual or personality factors. Covington's (1992) self-worth theory maintains that an individual's highest priority is the need for self-acceptance, which, in turn, leads to the need for achievement motivation. Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) claim that self-confidence develops as a result of positive experiences associated with L2 learning, and Brown (2000) suggests that a positive self-esteem is essential to the success of L2 acquisition because it counters inhibition. This notion is reflected in Clément, Dörnyei and Noels' (1994) study of 301 Hungarian high school students learning a L2. Their findings showed a positive correlation between self-confidence and L2 proficiency. Gardner, Tremblay and Masgoret (1997) point out that language anxiety may have a negative impact on an individual's self-esteem. Researchers seem to utilize a cluster of related concepts when discussing the notion of self-esteem/self-confidence, however, for the purpose of this study the term 'self-confidence' will be used.

Language anxiety can be characterized by derogatory self-related cognitions, feelings of apprehension and physiological responses such as increased heart rate (Gardner & MacIntyre, 1993). According to Oxford (1994), many potentially excellent L2 learners

are naturally inhibited due to language anxiety, and Ellis (1994) specifies that speaking is the component that prompts the most anxiety within a L2 learning situation. Gardner and colleagues (1997) found a negative correlation between language anxiety and L2 achievement, leading to the conclusion that “anxiety-provoking experiences may create difficulties in the cognitive processing of L2 material” (p. 345). Krashen (1981) argues that a low level of anxiety lowers the affective filter, allowing ample input processing and consequently promoting L2 acquisition.

Cheng, Horwitz and Schallert (1999) studied the constructs of L2 classroom anxiety and L2 writing anxiety for 433 Taiwanese university students taking both English speaking and English writing classes. Their findings indicated that students who suffered from L2 anxiety had low self-confidence and were very concerned about “possibilities of failure, flawed performance and negative evaluation” (p.436). In order to reduce anxiety, Hedge and colleagues (1984) maintain that it is essential to have a relaxed, non-threatening learning atmosphere. Cross (1991) also suggests that since adults with low self-confidence will avoid the risk required in learning new things, educators should reduce the level of risk and threat in a classroom setting (p.133). Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) point out that anxiety seems to decline steadily as L2 experience and proficiency increase.

Motivation is yet another important variable that may have a bearing on L2 acquisition. Gardner and colleagues (1997) define it as “the individual’s attitudes, desires and effort to learn the L2...” (p. 345). Weiner (1979) claims that humans attribute their past successes and failures to their expectations of their present or future tasks and this, in turn, drives motivation. Other researchers such as Eccles and Wigfield (1995) explored motivation with regards to *value* in L2 acquisition. They suggest that the interplay of four

components (attainment value, intrinsic value, extrinsic value and cost) will determine the overall achievement of a task and determine the intensity of an individual's behaviour and motivation. Paradis (1998), on the other hand, brings forth a physiological/neurological explanation as to why the degree of motivation is one of the best predictors of L2 learning success. He affirms that one of the functions of the "amygdala is to appraise the subjective emotional significance of the incoming sensory stimuli" (p. 4). In other words, motivation may not solely be an abstract concept; it also seems to be based in neurological mechanisms.

Deci and Ryan's (1985) self-determination theory claims that for any behaviour to be intrinsically rewarding, the individual performing it must have wanted and chosen to do it. Further along the self-determination continuum, extrinsically motivated individuals carry out their actions to achieve some external reward or avoid a punishment. Noels, Clément and Pelletier (1999) examined this intrinsic/extrinsic dichotomy when they studied 78 Anglophone students registered in a French immersion program. Their findings showed that students learning a L2 for external rewards or pressure did not put forth the effort needed for eventual competence. In contrast, students having an intrinsic motive seemed to enjoy the learning experience, felt more competent and were more likely to learn the L2.

Gardner (2000) reviewed a collection of tests named the Attitude/Motivation Test Battery (AMTB) that measure the major attitudinal and motivational variables associated with L2 learning. He proposes that attitudes and integrativeness are the basis for an individual's motivation and the latter, along with aptitude, are seen as direct causes to L2 achievement. Moreover, Gardner and MacIntyre (1991) found that integrative motivation had a more positive continuing influence on language learning and maintenance than instrumental motivation. This notion is also reflected in Xie and Derwing's (1996) study of

140 students taking community English courses. Their findings indicate that most successful students wished to know more about English speaking cultures despite the fact that English did not have an immediate social or communicative function for them.

According to Dörnyei (1998), the reason there is so much literature regarding motivation and its exact meaning is because motivation is a multifaceted construct and an absolute and unequivocal concept of it does not exist. Nonetheless, researchers seem to agree that motivation carries great weight in a successful L2 learning experience (Ellis, 1994).

Cognitive Factors

Rubin's (1975) study revealed that successful language learning depends on at least three variables, one of which is language *aptitude* (the other two are motivation and opportunity). Language aptitude is essentially "a general term referring to those verbal abilities that facilitate L2 learning" (Gardner et al., 1997, p. 345). The major components identified by Carroll (1981) are phonetic coding, grammatical sensitivity, rote learning, and inductive language learning. There is much controversy regarding these abilities. For instance, Gardner (2000) reviewed several studies of Anglophone high school students learning French. His findings were consistent in showing that language aptitude was a strong predictor of L2 achievement. Ellis (1986) points out that although language aptitude does not have any effect on the route of learning a L2, it can influence the rate of development, particularly in formal settings such as classroom learning.

Rubin (1975) argues, however, that these tests give little direction as to what can be done about a person's ability. Wesche (1975) states that while the Modern Language Aptitude Test (MLAT) short form appeared to be a predictor for success, it did not

differentiate between good and excellent learners of French. Stansfield (1989) reports that there are many concerns vis-à-vis the aptitude tests currently in use. He claims that these tests are somewhat outdated and they do not take into consideration more recent work done by cognitive, social and educational psychologists. He concludes that perhaps it is time to revamp the aptitude tests and expand on the few cognitive variables that it is presently testing.

Prior L2 knowledge or previous L2 training/experience are also relevant cognitive factors with regards to L2 acquisition and retention. Vechter, Lapkin and Argue (1988) were part of a U.S. based language skills attrition project that summarized several language retention studies. One of these was Bahrck's (1984) study involving 773 participants learning Spanish as a L2. These participants were divided into three groups: those who had very recently completed language programs; those who had taken one or more Spanish classes between one and fifty years prior the study; and those who had never studied Spanish before. The results of the proficiency test indicated that prior training in Spanish and other Romance languages contributed positively to language retention, and that much content survives more than fifty years. In Kuttner's (1995) study, the individuals who did not pass the proficiency test were the only ones who had little or no previous L2 exposure. She noted that prior or "...recent experience in language training was simply the latest installment in an ongoing chronicle for the more successful learners"(p. 61). Moreover, in Wesche's (1975) study one of the successful students' characteristics was having previously learned some of the L2 or having mastery of two other languages.

Breen (2001) argues that it is important to identify the *learning strategies* used by learners because these give us insights into the processes involved in L2 learning.

Furthermore, by recognizing ‘good’ language learning strategies, it may be possible to teach less successful language learners how to become better language learners. Rubin (1975) and Stern (1975) were interested in such strategies when they investigated how ‘good’ language learners coped with L2 learning barriers. Rubin reported that ‘good’ language learners monitored their own speech and that of others, attended to form as well as meaning, sought out opportunities to use the language in order to practice, and were not inhibited. Moreover, they had a strong desire to communicate, were willing to guess and often did so accurately. Stern listed the ‘good’ language learner characteristics, including descriptions such as taking an “active approach to the learning task; self-monitoring and critical sensitivity to language use” (p. 316). Reiss (1985) followed up Stern and Rubin’s studies and added a characteristic of her own – that ‘good’ language learners were silent speakers (i.e., those who engaged in inferencing, answering questions mentally, etc.), thus making them constantly active in the L2 learning process.

The results of Wesche’s (1979) study of learning behaviours of successful adult students in the Canadian PSC also indicated that ‘good’ language learners sought out opportunities to use the L2 outside of the classroom and used this time actively. In addition, their profiles included a high level of personal initiative and effort in the L2 learning process and conscious association-making and meaningful L2 practice. Oxford (1990) suggests that there are five types of ‘practicing strategies’. The first is simple repetition of words or phrases. The second involves practicing sounds in a variety of ways (intonation, pronunciation). The third is recognition and use of chunks of words or formulas (e.g., how are you), and the fourth is recombining known elements in new sequences (paraphrasing). The final practicing strategy, which is the most significant according to Oxford, involves

practicing the L2 in a realistic setting (e.g., participating in a conversation, reading a book or listening to a lecture).

An individual's *learning style* is one more cognitive factor to consider when examining a L2 learning situation. Ellis (1994) defines learning styles as the "characteristic ways in which individuals orientate to problem-solving" (p. 499). Merriam and Caffarella (1991) state that institutions could promote a more effective learning environment if they assisted both learners and instructors to become aware of their personal learning styles. Reid (1987) reviewed surveys regarding individuals' preferred learning styles and reported four perceptual learning styles: visual learning (i.e., reading), auditory learning (i.e., listening), kinaesthetic learning (i.e., physical response) and tactile learning (i.e., hands-on activities). He added that native speakers of English tended to be visual and auditory learners while native speakers of other languages preferred kinaesthetic and tactile learning.

Another learning style distinction that has attracted much attention is field dependence/independence. Field dependent individuals see the picture as a whole and do not tend to focus on any part of it selectively, whereas field independent people are "able to separate figures from ground, to separate the essential from the inessential and to be usefully analytic" (Skehan, 1989, p. 111). Tennant (1997) adds that field dependent people require more external reinforcement, they depend on relevant cues when identifying concepts, and they enjoy learning situations that allow interactions with other students. In contrast, field independent people learn more through intrinsic motivation, they tend to sample the entire array of cues, and they prefer lecture type learning situations (p. 83). According to Skehan, both types have advantages: field-dependent people are highly sociable and are therefore more inclined to engage in conversations, which in turn, leads to greater communicative

competence. On the other hand, since field-independent individuals are more analytical, they better comprehend the rules of the language. Krashen (1981) states that because of this analytic orientation, field-independent learners are potentially better language learners.

Socio-Cultural Factors

Gardner and MacIntyre (1993) recommend that when examining the process of L2 acquisition, one should pay close attention to the *social context* in which the learning is taking place.

Schumann (1976) introduced the notion of social distance as the proximity or distance between two cultures that affects the degree to which an individual acquires an L2. He claims that the greater the social distance, the more difficult it is to learn the L2. Pierce's (1995) longitudinal study of five immigrant women in Canada reflects this notion. Despite being highly motivated to learn English, some women were uncomfortable and unlikely to speak in particular situations when they felt they were at the low end of the social rank (e.g., speaking with a doctor, teacher or other Anglophone professionals). Her findings indicate that when individuals exchange information, they are processing a sense of themselves with regards to how they relate to the social world. In her report, Carrier (1999) offers a short synopsis of studies on the role of status within the society as well as a summary of studies on L2 listening variables. She suggests that the way people define their status with one another will determine how they will communicate with each other. Furthermore, she notes that people may occupy many statuses simultaneously.

Ellis (1994) claims that the social settings in which learners find themselves will affect their attitudes towards the target language, its speakers and its culture. Baker (1988) adds that attitudes are both cognitive and affective since one can think about them, and they

provoke feelings and emotions. Furthermore, attitudes are learnt, not inherited, and they may influence L2 proficiency. For instance, positive attitudes towards the L2, its people and its culture generally enhance learning while negative attitudes may impede it (Ellis, p. 200). Dörnyei (1994) explains that the reason learners' attitudes are influenced by social factors is because language "is the most important channel of social organization embedded in the culture of the community where it is used" (p.274). According to Ajzen and Fishbein (1980) a person's behaviour is based on the subjective norm of that behaviour and one's attitudes towards the behaviour and target language and culture. Hence, if the learner's social surroundings or community has favourable attitudes towards the L2, the learner will take an interest in the L2 and make an effort to learn it. Gardner (1979) supports this notion that the social milieu plays an important role in the L2 acquisition process. He claims that factors such as the political climate, the linguistic nature of the community, the learner's social class and the context will shape the learner's attitudes towards the L2.

Lantolf (1999) believes that the process and extent to which students are able to understand and even acquire another *culture* is essential to language learning. Kramsch (1993a) explains that advanced language learning goes beyond simply trying to master an academic subject; it strongly requires a desire to communicate with other people. She further adds that since communication is fixed in its cultural setting in everyday life, one cannot learn a L2 without considering its cultural component. Cortazzi and Jin (1999) point out that to develop cultural awareness in the classroom, language teachers must make students "aware of members of another cultural group: their behaviour, their expectations, their perspectives and values, [... and] attempt to understand their reasons for their actions and beliefs" (p.217).

The affective, cognitive, and socio-cultural factors discussed above have shed light on plausible ways in which the civil servants' perceptions of their L2 training experience may have been influenced. In this next section, the importance of the context will be discussed with regards to the L2 learning experience.

Contextual Factors

Ellis (1994) suggests that the context in which students are expected to learn the L2 may vary; some will experience the L2 entirely in natural settings, others will only be exposed to it through an educational setting, and many will be exposed to both types. Natural settings give the learners ample opportunities to be in contact with native speakers in a variety of situations (e.g., at home, at work, through the media), whereas educational settings put more emphasis on the mastery of the L2 as a subject matter.

Researchers argue that *immersion* is essential to language acquisition and retention since this context provides authentic L2 input (Genesee, 1987; Harley, 1994; MacFarlane, 1998). Harley studied students who had been in immersion programs from elementary to the end of their high school and concluded that a "relatively high level of initial proficiency is likely to imply better long-term retention of the L2" (p. 239). Furthermore, she suggests that a threshold may exist in language learning, which allows for some sort of 'permanent storage' of the L2. Weltens, Van Els and Schils (1989) lend support to this notion. When they tested the Dutch students' French L2 receptive skills after two and four years, respectively, they found that only a small amount of language attrition occurred within the first two years and then leveled off. Snow, Padilla and Campbell (1988) studied the L2 retention of Spanish students in an immersion program and point out that productive skills are lost sooner than receptive skills.

Tarnopolsky (1999) believes that learners who have densely packed hours of input within a distinct period of time will more likely learn and retain the L2. According to his study, if an educational setting has less than four to five hours of language training per week, the students will be much less proficient on a long-term basis. Furthermore, in Weltens, Van Els and Schils' (1989) study, the students' level of proficiency was quite high after they had intensively learned French for a total of four hundred to six hundred hours. Indeed, researchers seem to agree that there is a "direct relationship between spending more time studying a L2 and higher proficiency in that language" (Turnbull, Lapkin, Hart & Swain, 1998, p. 31). However, Cummins (1983) and Swain (1981) question the relationship between the length of L2 instruction and L2 achievement. They believe that the time argument does not necessarily apply to older learners since these learners can accomplish some aspects of L2 learning better than younger learners, where time is held constant. Genesee (1987) further claims that the intensity of the learning experience, such as in an immersion context, may be as important as the length of time the student is exposed to the L2.

MacFarlane (1998) studied French immersion students between the ages of 10 and 18 who participated in an exchange program. Francophone and Anglophone students were paired up and visited each other's communities for a period of five to seven days where they lived with their 'twin' and respective families. Her findings revealed that almost all the participants had very positive feelings vis-à-vis the exchange. Participants indicated that their listening and speaking skills had improved due to the exposure to native speakers, and that their level of self-confidence had increased. Furthermore, most participants expressed a desire to continue studying and using their L2 after the exchange. Although the participants

perceived the immersion experience as a climax, MacFarlane points out that prior L2 classroom instruction was a contributing factor to the success of the exchange. She explains that without the threshold level of L2 proficiency acquired in the classroom setting, students would not have had the self-confidence or the ability to communicate with their native-speaking peers. In her opinion, both classroom and immersion contexts are needed to provide L2 students with the “organizational and pragmatic components needed for interaction in most L2 use contexts whereas neither setting would be as effective alone” (p.219).

The L2 *classroom setting* has implications of its own for L2 learners. MacFarlane (1998) argues that L2 classroom input is limited because it does not provide the student with “the range of vocabulary, the types of discourse or the unmodified input found in ‘real’ contexts nor adequately develop listening comprehension skills” (p.217). Ellis (1994, p.228) also notes that “learners often fail to develop much functional language ability” in classroom settings, and this is partly due to the traditional teacher/student roles of informant/information seeker. He suggests that teachers take on a more informal role, such as a referee, and allow the students be the players. In his opinion, this better reflects real-life situations. Dörnyei, (1994) claims that one important role of teachers is to stimulate the learners’ motivation. According to him, this can be done through modeling, task presentation (e.g., show potential interest and value of task), and feedback. In addition, he believes that individuals will be motivated to learn if they feel the instruction is interesting, relevant, and not too difficult. Breen (2001) points out that teachers who demand overt responses from learners by questioning or nominating turns may influence their individual learning outcomes. Furthermore, the way in which teachers respond to students’

participation may pose as a threat to their self-confidence in a public situation (p.127).

Breen (2001) notes that within a classroom setting, social relationships influence the discourse of lessons, and as such, determine what is made available for learning, how learning is done and what is achieved. Indeed, group dynamics are quite significant in a classroom because they promote self-determination and trust through mutual feedback (Tennant, 1997). Breen (1985) cautions, however, that since the classroom is the meeting point of various subjective views of language, a “major challenge for teachers and learners is the maintenance of a fine balance between conflicting internal social realities and the external reality, which has to be continually negotiated” (p.144). According to Dörnyei (1994), an individual’s motivation and L2 learning outcome will depend on the tightness of group cohesion and whether or not the group is attuned to pursuing a common goal (L2 learning). As Breen (2001) remarks, it is entirely possible that not all students in a classroom have a common goal since their motives for being there may be different.

Summary

This chapter has presented some of the literature with regards to adult language learning and the PSC learner, bringing forth an andragogy perspective and a bureaucratic one. It has also discussed how certain affective factors (e.g., self-confidence, language anxiety, and motivation), cognitive factors (e.g., aptitude, prior knowledge, language strategies, and language styles), socio-cultural factors (e.g., social context and culture), and contextual factors (e.g., immersion and classroom) influence the civil servants’ perspectives of their L2 learning experience.

Chapter 3: Methodological Considerations

This chapter will present the research perspective and the type of qualitative research chosen for this study, which will lead to the study's theoretical framework. The next section will outline the selection process and describe instruments used to carry out the study. A brief description of each participant will then be offered, and finally ethical considerations and the study's limitations will be discussed.

Research Approach and Design

As Patton (1990) affirms, the nature of the research and the approach taken is directed by “the kinds of questions a particular research will ask” (p.66). My research question, as previously stated is: “What are the statutory civil servants' reflections on their second language training experience?” This type of question lends itself to a design that seeks to gain a thorough understanding of a particular experience and meaning for those involved, rather than predict a hypothesis that needs to be tested (Merriam, 1998). Therefore, this study has taken on an exploratory approach within a qualitative research paradigm (Creswell, 1998).

Several traditions or designs exist in qualitative research, one of which is the *case study*. Merriam (1998) claims that case studies are more focused on the process rather than the results, in the *way* one experiences a situation rather than the final outcome. She characterizes case studies as being particularistic, descriptive and heuristic. In other words, they focus on a particular situation or experience, and this experience is presented in a rich, thick description. Finally, they are heuristic because they “illuminate the reader's understanding of the phenomenon” (p.30). Within the case study umbrella term, one finds the *instrumental case study*. This type of case study takes an in-depth look at a particular

case in order to provide insight into an issue, experience or phenomenon (Stake, 2000).

Collective case studies, or multiple case studies are essentially several cases of a single case study (Merriam, 1998). Using the collective instrumental case study design, and keeping in mind its characteristics and exploratory nature, this study has attempted to bring forth a detailed account of specific civil servants' insights on their L2 learning experiences so as to shed light on the larger portrait of L2 learning. Creswell (1998) explains that a case study is bound by time and place. The boundaries of this study are the L2 training within the PSC context - as experienced by the statutory civil servants, and this, within a particular time frame (i.e., those having completed in 2003).

When doing qualitative research, one must have a vast tolerance for ambiguity because although guidelines may exist, "there are no set procedures or protocols that can be followed step by step" (Merriam, 1998, p20). Keeping this in mind, I used Lincoln and Guba's (2000) axiomatic philosophical assumptions to guide this research. Ontologically, (i.e., the realities of the experience), I quoted the participants directly in order to provide the multiple perspectives possible. Each participant had a constructed reality of the issue, and I kept this view as 'authentic' as possible. With regards to the epistemological assumption, (i.e., the relationship between the participant and myself), I was able to empathize with the participants because I have learned a second and third language myself and I am a L2 teacher, which may have lessened the distance between us. However, I was not an insider within the study; instead I attempted to develop an informal relationship with the participants through discussion. Axiologically (i.e., values), I recognized and included my own biases with regards to the case study and used a reflective journal to record these in order to accentuate the participant's perspective and keep the interpretation genuine.

Rhetorically (i.e., the language), the interviews were semi-structured and informal; therefore the language used was colloquial. I referred to the participants on a first name basis (pseudonyms) and the first-person pronoun was used in the write-up. When interpreting the data, language pertaining to a case study was used. And lastly, the steps I took regarding Lincoln and Guba's methodological assumptions (i.e., the process) will be discussed throughout the chapter.

Much of the literature on case studies presumes that research should contribute to scientific generalizations, but Stake (2000) argues that when researchers describe their cases in sufficient descriptive narratives, readers should be able to experience these happenings and draw their own conclusions. Hence, through this collective instrumental case study, I have painted a comprehensive, descriptive portrait of how each of these particular learners experienced their French language training so that the readers may get a complete sense of what the experience was like for the civil servants and thus broaden their understanding of a L2 learning experience.

Theoretical Framework

Schwandt (1993) argues that a theoretical framework is present in all research, including qualitative research, since no study could be designed without some sort of question being asked. Merriam (1998) adds that although the nature of qualitative research is to build inductively, as opposed to testing concepts, hypotheses, and theories, its framework will be guided by relevant "concepts, terms, definitions, models and theories within a particular literature base and disciplinary orientation" (p. 46). I therefore examined models and theories specific to Second Language Acquisition (SLA). Ellis (1986) affirms that the main goals of SLA are to describe and explain what, how, when and why learners

acquire a second language. These types of questions would be dependent upon different variables, or factors. Yin (2003) introduces the *factor theory* as one framework within case studies. He explains that this “paradigm assembles a list of independent variables and determines those that are most highly correlated with the dependant variable” (p. 14). In order to select plausible variables that may or may not have influenced the participants’ perceptions of their French language learning experience, I made use of two SLA models that accounted for probable factors to describe and explain SLA in an integrated fashion.

Gardner and MacIntyre’s two-part report (1992, 1993) brings forth a socio-educational model that portrays the SLA process through the learner’s attributes within the socio-cultural milieu. Their paradigm focuses on the learner’s cognitive abilities and affective dispositions within formal and informal contexts. This model proposes that the linguistic and non-linguistic outcomes of the L2 will vary according to the learner’s cognitive and affective components within a particular context. For instance, they claim that both cognitive and affective factors would be directly involved in a formal L2 instructional context, as shown by the solid arrows in the model. In an informal context however, the major characteristic is that it is voluntary; therefore only motivation (affective factor) may have a direct role on L2 acquisition. The cognitive factors will play their role in influencing how well the L2 is learned only once the individual has chosen to participate in the informal learning context (as shown by the broken arrow in the model). Gardner and MacIntyre claim that “positive experiences will result in improved levels of linguistic outcomes, ...[while] unsuccessful negative experiences will result in a lack of linguistic development...” (1992, p. 213). (See Appendix C for an illustration of this model)

Dörnyei (1994) proposes a motivational construct specific to language learning, while not rejecting the social dimension. The construct is divided into three dimensions: the language level, the learner level and the learning situation level. The language level (composed of two subsystems: integrative and instrumental motivation) is concerned with the orientation and motives related to the various aspects of the L2, such as the culture and potential usefulness of the L2. The learner level is composed of “affects and cognitions that form fairly stable personality traits [e.g., self-confidence]” (p.279). Lastly, the learning situation level involves the intrinsic and extrinsic motives and motivational conditions with regards to three areas: course-specific variables (the syllabus, materials and tasks), teacher-specific variables (personality and teaching style) and group-specific variables (the group dynamics of the class). This model proposes that L2 acquisition is a result of an individual’s motivation to learn, and the latter is affected by the above variables. Since research indicates that motivation plays an important role in the L2 learning experience, these variables were considered in this study. (See Appendix D for an illustration of this model)

The above sections have defined the research design, brought forth the *factor theory* that is the theoretical basis for this study, and presented two models that were used to select the variables that were examined in this study: cognitive, affective, social and contextual factors. Yin (2003) points out that within each general factor, a long list of specific factors could be created, which was the case in this research as will be shown in chapter 4. The following sections will depict the study’s selection process, instrumentation and subjects.

Selection and Instrumentation

This study has targeted Anglophone ‘EX’ civil servants whose positions require a ‘CBC’ French language profile in the reading, writing and oral interaction skills,

respectively. Personnel within the CSPS extracted an initial sample of 21 potential participants from a statutory database of 40 individuals who had completed their L2 training in 2003. All of these civil servants had eventually met the 'CBC' profile; some succeeded in their oral interaction exam for the "C" level after their first attempt while others needed two or more tries to attain the required level. My gatekeeper at the CSPS sent an e-mail to these individuals, inviting them to participate in my research. Thirteen of them responded affirmatively and subsequently, these names were forwarded to me. I then proceeded to send this convenience sample a package containing an information letter that explained my research in further detail, and offered them an opportunity to voice their reflections on their French language learning experience. (See Appendix E for a copy of the information letter) All thirteen participants were asked to complete a preliminary questionnaire (Q1) and an in-depth questionnaire (Q2), which were also included in the package, and completed and returned questionnaires were taken as consent to participate in the study, as specified in the information letter. (See Appendices F and G for Q1 and Q2, respectively).

Q1 was designed to get general background information on the participants (i.e., gender, prior background knowledge of the L2, number of attempts to achieve 'CBC' proficiency level, etc.), and therefore select the potential purposive sample for the interview stage. This purposive sample is a sample of "*maximal variation* [whereby it]...represents a diversity of perspectives..." (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003, p. 440). To ensure this diversity of perspectives, the sample aimed to include three civil servants who were successful in obtaining the 'CBC' profile on their first attempt and three candidates who needed more than one try. Furthermore, this sample sought a gender balance if at all possible. Finally, the last question in Q1 specifically asked the participants if they wished to participate in a

one-hour, tape-recorded interview.

The in-depth questionnaire (Q2) was adapted from Wesche (1975), Edwards (1977) and Kuttner (1995), and was based on factors included in the literature review (e.g., motivation, learning strategies, opportunity to practice the L2). This questionnaire included a multiple-choice section, a checklist, a Likert scale, and finally an open-ended section. The purpose of Q2 was to allow the participants to reflect on different variables that they believed had affected their L2 learning experience and, in turn, this information was used to create the interview protocol. For instance, one participant elaborated on her French immersion experience in the open-ended section of Q2. After reading her comments, I included questions in the interview protocol that pertained to issues she had brought forth (e.g. breakthrough, self-confidence). To promote validity, I conducted a pilot-test of Q1 and Q2 with personal acquaintances. It was then revised according to volunteers' feedback and administered only once to the sample population. All thirteen participants returned Q1 and Q2, however only ten responded affirmatively to being interviewed.

I then needed to select my purposive sample for the interview portion of this study. I divided these ten participants into two categories: those who had successfully obtained their oral proficiency "C" level on their first attempt and those who had not. Only two participants had been successful on their first try, and both of them were male. To include a gender balance within this first group, I set aside the two female participants who passed on their second attempt and randomly selected one. I then put the remaining pseudonyms in a hat by gender sub-category and randomly selected three more participants (two females and one male). This gave me, to some extent, the contrastive groups that I was aiming for in my purposive sample. There were two men and one woman at one end of the continuum who

had required less than two attempts and two women and one man at the other end who had needed several attempts to pass their oral exam and obtain their “CBC” proficiency level.

I subsequently contacted these individuals via e-mail to set up a meeting time and place for the focal stage of the data collection: the interview. Participants who had not been selected were informed by e-mail as well. The last instrument used in this study was the interview protocol, and it was the core instrument used for gathering and interpreting the data. Keeping in line with the case study framework (Creswell, 1998), one individual, tape-recorded, semi-structured interview was carried out with each of the six participants who had completed the cyclical, continuous, or immersion L2 training program in 2003. On the whole, the interviews lasted approximately one hour and were conducted during the period from May 26th, 2004 to June 10th, 2004, in a location of the participants’ choice. Subjects were given consent forms to sign and informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time. Furthermore, they were given pseudonyms for anonymity and confidentiality. Interview questions were drawn from data obtained in Q2 and consisted of open-ended hypothetical, ideal position and interpretive questions. These types of questions attempt to encourage participants to voice their interpretation of the L2 training experience; thus bringing forth the multiple realities of the phenomenon. For example, the hypothetical questions aimed to elicit the participant’s actual experience, the ideal position questions revealed both the positive and negative sides of a situation, and the interpretive questions allowed me to check whether I had accurately understood what the participant meant (Merriam, 1998). Silence was also used as a means of giving the participant ample time to reflect on a question and offering them additional time to expand on a topic, if they desired to do so (Kvale, 1996). (See Appendix H for the interview protocol).

The Participants

As mentioned earlier, all participants in this study are 'EX' civil servants who occupy a statutory bilingual position. These individuals are highly educated and occupy high-powered positions. They are not complainers; on the contrary, they are committed to learning, and their French language learning experiences are worth paying attention to. In order to differentiate the participants, each pseudonym started with a random capital letter of the alphabet, then the letter "f" (female) or "m" (male) to identify the gender, and finally the letter "t" (two or less) or "s" (several) to identify how many attempts they took to obtain their "CBC" levels. The following is a brief description of the six participants:

Participant 'Lfs' indicated that her position requires her to occasionally read and speak in French, but she rarely has to write it. Her background knowledge of French was quite good since she had obtained her oral "C" level once before, however, it took seven attempts to obtain her "C" level for oral interaction this time around and achieve her "CBC" linguistic profile. She took part in continuous language training at L'Esplanade for thirteen months, and went to Quebec City for a 10-day immersion.

Participant 'Mms' indicated that his position frequently requires him to speak in French, but he only occasionally needs to write it and rarely needs to read it. His background knowledge of French was very poor as he comes from a part of the country where French is virtually nonexistent. He took continuous language training at L'Esplanade for thirteen months, as well as an immersion course in Quebec City. He obtained his oral "C" proficiency level after several attempts in order to achieve the required "CBC" linguistic profile for his position.

Participant 'Rmt' indicated that his position requires him to frequently speak and

read in French, but only rarely writes it. He indicated that his background knowledge of French is very poor, consisting of high school French only. He took part in continuous language training at L'Esplanade for fourteen months, and a two-week immersion in the province of Quebec. He was one of two participants who successfully obtained a "C" proficiency level in his oral interaction skill the first time he was tested, and in turn, achieved his required linguistic profile of "CBC".

Participant 'Vft' indicated that her position requires her to occasionally speak and read in French, but rarely needs to write it. Her prior knowledge of French consists of very limited high school French and was very poor. She took part in French training at Asticou, L'Esplanade, and a private school in Ottawa for a total of eleven months. It took her 2 attempts to obtain a "C" level for oral interaction and complete her "CBC" linguistic profile.

Participant 'Wfs' indicated that her position rarely requires her to read, write or speak in French. Her knowledge of French prior to taking the course was poor despite the fact that her parents were native speakers of French. She took language training at L'Esplanade for approximately a year and successfully achieved her "C" level for the oral interaction skill after 5 attempts, thus obtaining her "CBC" linguistic profile.

Participant 'Xmt' indicated that his position rarely requires him to read, write or speak in French because his clientele is made up of 90% Anglophones. Prior to his L2 training, his knowledge of French was fairly limited, consisting of high school French. He attended courses at L'Esplanade for approximately ten months and succeeded in passing his "C" level for the oral interaction skill on his first attempt. He then completed his written exam and obtained his "CBC" linguistic profile.

Ethical considerations

Pugsley and Welland (2002) state that in qualitative research the degree of connectedness that exists between the researcher and the participants can generate a range of ethical issues. In this study, the ethical dilemma was addressed procedurally through the University of Ottawa's ethics guidelines: A proposal for the research was presented to the University of Ottawa's ethics committee, who meticulously examined it, and the following steps were taken by myself to ensure the legitimacy of the methods and procedures used in order for it to be approved.

It was vital that potential participants were not solicited (by myself) to take part in this research. Hence, my gatekeeper at the CSPA contacted the potential participants and only the names of those individuals who agreed to participate were forwarded to me (Neuman, 1997). These individuals were not compensated in any way for participating in this study, other than the opportunity to reflect on their own experience. In order to accommodate the participants' busy schedules, the interviews were conducted at a time and location of their choice.

I gave each participant a pseudonym to ensure privacy and confidentiality (Christians, 2000; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). I then sent each individual a package containing an information letter, two questionnaires, and a self-addressed envelope. The information letter clearly stated that participants could withdraw from the study at any time, and that returned questionnaires would be taken as consent to participate in the research. (See Appendix E for a copy of the information letter) The participants for the interview stage were randomly selected, and those individuals who were excluded were reassured that

they had been excluded due to a random selection and no other reason (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 1997).

As the interviewer, I was well aware that my conduct would determine the relationship between the interviewee and myself, and in turn shape the form of the interview. I therefore made sure that I would avoid seeking control and depersonalizing the interview (White, 2002). My role in this study was to provide the participants with the opportunity to voice their opinion vis-à-vis their French L2 learning experience with someone outside of the context they are situated in, and I kept this notion in the back of my mind during each interview. To promote comfort and ease, I specifically told each participant “there’s no good or bad answers, it’s just how you feel”.

Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) explain that during an interview, participants may describe events in their lives that could leave them very vulnerable if misused so their informed consent is strongly desirable. For this reason, participants were given two copies of a consent form prior to commencing each individual interview (Christians, 2000). They had ample time to read it and any queries or concerns were addressed immediately. Once the consent forms were signed by both parties (i.e., the researcher and the participant), one copy was given to each. (See Appendix I for a copy of the consent form) In order to ensure confidentiality, participants were given pseudonyms and informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time (Kvale, 1996). To ensure that the participants were not be emotionally or psychologically harmed or inconvenienced in any way, I refrained from asking questions that are too personal during the interviews. Furthermore, each participant read his or her narrative of the experience once it was written up, and I omitted any section that they did not want to include.

As data were collected I created a file for each participant, which included their contact information, their Q1 and Q2, the tape-recorded cassette of their interview, as well as a hard copy of the interview transcription. These files are kept in a secure location and only my thesis supervisor and myself have access to them (Kvale, 1996, p. 172).

Limitations and Threats to Validity

All studies have certain limitations and threats to validity, and at this point I wish to address some of these in this study. Firstly, the subject characteristics could be an issue (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003). For example, the participants' honesty when describing the experience may have biased or altered the findings. As the researcher, I attempted to control this threat by asking questions that are unambiguous and not too personal so that the candidates felt at ease to answer truthfully. Another threat to validity is the researcher bias (Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Merriam, 1998). It goes without saying that the findings in this study are *my* interpretation of the participants' perceptions of their L2 learning experience. There is a definite possibility that others may have interpreted the same data differently. In an attempt to control this threat, I refrained from asking leading questions during the interviews and used open-ended questions instead. The interview was taped and field notes were taken to ensure that each transcript would be accurate. I also used a reflective journal when analyzing the data to 'bracket' my biases in order to ensure validity and allow the participants' voice to be fully expressed. Furthermore, *member checking* (i.e., having the participants check their written narratives) was used to ensure that the essence of the participants' perceptions was accurately presented and valid (Creswell, 1998; Fraenkel & Wallen, 2003; Neuman, 1997).

There were also some limitations with regards to the findings, and Yin (2003, p. 19) points out that these are common to the *factor theory*. For one, the specific factors that surfaced could not be ranked in any order of importance because each participant's experience was unique and emphasized different factors. Furthermore, it was difficult to distinguish which emerging themes (specific factors) fell under which umbrella term category (general factors), and the potential interaction or overlap between themes and sub-themes could not be avoided.

The last point that limits this study is its specific context. These participants' perceptions reflect their present needs, past experiences and personal characteristics in a particular instructional setting (i.e., the PSC context). One must keep in mind that although these findings may support findings in other types of situations, they may also vary significantly in different learning contexts (Wesche, 1975); hence generalizations are not possible. Merriam (1998) argues that a case study without generalizations should not be considered a limitation since case studies aim to "understand the particular in depth, and not to find out what is generally true of the many" (p. 208).

Summary

This chapter explained the choice in the research approach as an exploratory approach within a qualitative research paradigm. It clarified why a collective instrumental case study was selected as its design, and explained that the theoretical framework that best underlies this study is the *factor theory*. It also outlined the participation selection process, presented the instruments used in the research, and then offered a brief description of the six participants. Finally, the ethical considerations, limitations and threats to validity were discussed in this chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Findings

This chapter will discuss the procedures that were used during and after the data were collected. A rich descriptive narrative of each participant's experience will then be offered so that the reader may gain a sense of *how* these participants lived their L2 learning experience.

Procedures for Data Analysis

Merriam (1998) strongly suggests that the researcher begins to analyze the data while collecting it. She explains that an ongoing analysis generates data that are both parsimonious and revealing, while data analyzed after collection tend to be unfocused and repetitious (p.162). I therefore began data analysis using the information collected from Q1 and Q2 in order to prepare a profile of each of the six participants. (See Appendix J for the table summarizing the participants' profiles) Next, I wrote numerous observer comments during and after each interview, which stimulated identification of issues to consider when coding later. I also adapted my interview sessions according to what I found in previous observations. For instance, if a participant brought forth a theme that I had not included in my interview protocol, I added it in my next interview. Moreover, I kept an ongoing literature review while collecting data so as to explore and better comprehend factors that emerged (Bogdan and Biklen, 1992).

Once all the interview data were collected, I began transcribing the interviews for a closer analysis. Kvale (1996) claims that the style chosen for transcribing depends on the use of the transcriptions. He adds that transcripts are decontextualized conversations that may often appear as incoherent and confused speech due to false starts, incompleting sentences and fleeting directions and meanings to be followed up. I therefore kept in mind

that these transcriptions were the *essence* of these individuals' L2 learning experience and would be used as the basis for my narratives. In order to do them justice, I asked myself how *I* would have wanted my statements to be formulated into writing. Hence, each of the six interview conversations was transcribed as verbatim as possible, however, minor editing was needed to clean up false starts. I also wished to keep the emotional tone of the conversation so pauses and laughter were included in the transcriptions and written narratives.

After having transcribed all the interviews, I initiated the process of open coding, axial coding and selective coding (Creswell, 1998; Neuman, 1997). During the open coding, I labeled the passages of text according to content for each of the six transcripts. The axial coding enabled me to pinpoint the units of data or concepts that clustered together within each transcript and compare these to create possible themes. Finally, the selective coding involved a last check through the data so as to include all quotes pertaining to any of the themes. Essentially, the themes consisted of groups of repeating ideas that shed light on my research topic (Auerbach & Silverstein, 2003, p.37-38).

The above section outlined the steps taken when analyzing the data for this research. This next section will describe each participant's L2 learning experience.

The Participant's Experiences

Holliday (2002) explains that in order to achieve a thick description, one must not only present excerpts from the transcripts, but also include discursive commentaries to ensure that the reader comprehends the meaning of each piece of data (p. 111). Taking this into account, the following narratives are *my* interpretation of the six participants' recollections of their L2 learning experience. When it was necessary to shorten some quotes

from the original transcript, every effort was made to leave enough material that the passages would remain true to the participants' voice. The following conventions were used throughout the narratives: (---) indicates a pause or hesitation; [...] indicates a break in the transcript (i.e., either words were omitted to shorten the original quote or the train of thought continues in another sentence); and < > indicates an emotion such as laughter. Furthermore, when a word was added to make the sentence more cohesive, it was indicated as such: [but, and, etc.]. Finally, these narratives were presented to each participant, respectively, in order to ensure that his or her story was portrayed as accurately as possible.

Participant 'Lfs'.

This participant had already obtained her oral communication "C" level once before but during the five years that had elapsed since she had been tested, she dropped to a level "B" and therefore needed to go back on language training. The following remarks illustrate how she felt about this:

I was looking forward to the training; however, I should say that I was a little confused because [...] I had been using my French to the best of my ability (p.1). I thought that I was doing whatever I could do to maintain it and (---) when I was re-tested [...] it was determined that I only had a "B" level [...so] one of the options was to go back on language training (p.2).

Her enthusiasm towards L2 training was transparent; however, she acknowledged that this fervor might not be shared by other civil servants. In her opinion, "second language training should be considered as any other kind of training" (p.11). She further questioned, "Why impose it on an individual? Why not say fine, when that individual leaves, for whatever reason, retirement or moves on or whatever [...] and] then you tack on the [CBC]

language”(p.11). According to her, the system has “this almost bull-headed approach [that is] going to ram it down your throats no matter what, and (--) nobody learns in that kind of environment”(p.11).

When discussing the abilities of learners that she believed to be most important in learning a L2, participant ‘Lfs’ indicated that one needs to be “clearly open to it, being open to try new things, not being afraid to make mistakes”(p.3). She added, “From my own perspective, I think that’s the only way that you can learn and you have to understand [that] as a learner that you’re going to make mistakes, and that’s fine (---) that’s why you’re learning” (p. 3).

Her comments further brought out some affective factors such as needing a positive attitude and intrinsic motivation. She explained, “I think you can’t just relate it to the job; you have to look at it more personally” (p.3). She went there with the idea of benefiting from this as an individual, as a person (p.3). She specified, “I was there to get a better idea of not just the language, but what’s behind the language” (p.10).

She reiterated, “You need to have invested interest in being there [in order to] make the most of what you can while you’re there” (p.11). She also emphasized the importance of learning the culture when learning a language, as shown in the following quotes:

When I went on language training years and years ago, there were opportunities for activities that were more cultural, social oriented, than focusing just on the language itself. [... Today] we know resources make it difficult for many employees to have that kind of an experience, but I think you need the two in some way because you can’t just have the language for language sake. You can’t understand where people

are coming from [...] unless you have some idea of the culture behind it and why people express themselves in a certain way (p.10).

Despite bringing with her much positive baggage, she explained that individuals going on language training tend to feel much pressure to ‘*get the job done*’. She believed “the frustration that (---) comes about is because you are an adult and you’re expected, even more so as a senior executive, you know, to master this thing in the shortest amount of time” (p.3). During the training she was fortunate enough, however, not to have to contend with both L2 training and her job. As she put it, “I didn’t have a job that was pulling me back. [...] I personally found the support that I got to be excellent [but] a number of my colleagues that were in my class had to contend with both” (p.13). She claimed that if the idea is continuing language training, then that means “that’s your work at the time [and] not the problems back at the office [and] this is something that doesn’t seem to be applied consistently within the public service, unfortunately” (p.14).

When asked about her most rewarding moment during the L2 training, participant ‘Lfs’ emphasized full immersion. After six attempts to pass the oral exam, she claims, “I was prepared to try something else [...] to get over that hurdle” (p.4). She confided that French immersion was the highlight of her training because “you’re immersed 24/7 basically in French (p.4). There comes a time (---) when you’re not translating and you realize you’re [...] starting to think in the second language” (p. 8). She added, “that comes to you as a real shock because you’re aware of that”(p.8). For instance, she remembered telling herself, “if I can’t say it in French, then I won’t” (p.8). Furthermore, she explained that it gave her immediate pride to be able to understand someone having a conversation, or being able to help somebody in the L2 (p.3). Overall, the immersion was “like night and day for

[her...and] when [she] came back, a number of the teachers remarked that there was a big change” (p.5). She boasted, “my level of confidence was just unbelievable, and that was the attitude that I took when I went to the exam (p.5).

She went on to discuss certain strategies that she had used during the training to either process new information or retain it. For instance, when learning new vocabulary, she explained, “I needed to listen, but I also had to write it down because I needed both” (p.9). However, she had difficulty memorizing her written notes and found that she preferred saying it in her own words when assimilating new information (p.9). Also, when listening to the T.V. or the radio she was always “looking at ways to improve and to augment [her] capacity [...and so she] started plugging in the additional vocabulary, more specific vocabulary (---) or common expressions that are used” (p.8). Finally, when in a conversation, she explained, “ I need time to think before I’m going to speak [...and] I have to ensure that what I’m saying is understood by checking periodically with the person that I’m speaking to” (p.5). At times she found herself “being drawn into speaking quickly again because when somebody asks a question [...] it tends to be quick, and you tend to respond that way” (p.15). So, she sometimes reminded herself “to slow down the rhythm of [her] speech”; something she was taught to do during her French immersion training (p.15).

This participant voiced the fact that although the experience had been positive on the whole, she had experienced some difficult and stressful moments: “I think for many people the language training and testing in particular has caused health problems, mental problems. The most stressful for me has been the test” (p. 7). She explained, “the more often you try, the higher the stress level because you just don’t know what their procedures are. [...] None of this information is ever shared” <laughs> (p.7). Although she understood why it was not

shared with the person being evaluated, she could not comprehend why it did “not seem to be shared with those who are tasked with doing the training so that they can help the students that they have” (p.7). She stated, “you never really know what the evaluator really wants from you” (p.12).

The following excerpts continue to demonstrate her concerns with regards to the oral evaluation process:

The exam itself has always been basically subjective (p.12). [One] evaluator that I had was somebody who has a reputation within the testing community <laughs> [and...] I associated the individual with what I thought the outcome would be [and] that might have had some bearing on [not passing] (p.2). [Another] evaluator refused to look at me when I was speaking, [...] and consequently trying to build a rapport, an eye-to-eye contact was impossible. It was strange because [...] I was re-tested by this individual a couple of times later [...] and the style was completely different. This same individual was most engaging, had developed a rapport at the beginning, and so once again, I was questioning as to why this different approach? (p.7).

This participant shared with me her feelings of anxiety and uneasiness that were present during the oral evaluations: “We can’t in any way show that we’re vulnerable or that we have our weaknesses or whatever. It’s like you have to be perfect [...] if you auto-correct yourself in an exam, it’s the wrong thing to do”(p.12). She questions why that is because she firmly believes, “I don’t think we’re perfect. [...] You know, [there’s] this attitude that seems to impose on us that we have to be so perfect”(p.13).

She went on to describe how the immersion instructors had helped her gain a sense of confidence, which enabled her to pass the oral exam: “One of the revelations was that they said even with your examiner (---) if you don’t understand, tell them, ‘I’m sorry, I don’t understand, is this what you’re talking about?’” (p.5) The instructors assured her that this is perfectly legitimate because this is part of what happens in a conversation when you’re communicating, but she claims “it is not one of the things that we [had been] encouraged to do here at L’Esplanade”(p.5). She strongly believed that her French immersion experience helped her gain the confidence that she needed (p.4). She explained, “the idea was that I’m the person who should be in control, not the examiner” (p.5). With this in mind, the last time that she went for her exam, she “forced an exchange between the examiner and [herself...] which had not been the situation the six other times that [she] had tried“(p.8), and she successfully passed.

When wrapping up, we spoke of opportunities to use or practice her L2 after her training, and she confided that “it doesn’t matter how much training [you have...] it’s what you have really up here in your capacity to use it [...] and you can’t do this yourself” (p.13). She added that the opportunities were not as frequent as they were the first day she came back, “unless I personally make the point of looking for someone and initiating a conversation [...] it just won’t happen. In the day to day [operations...] the language of work is still primarily English” (p.10).

As one can see, participant “L’s” experience is filled with a combination of positive and negative emotions vis-à-vis her L2 learning experience. On the whole, she expressed that it had been a positive experience; the negativity tended to focus on the evaluation and its components.

Participant 'Mms'.

This participant had no preconceptions vis-à-vis the target language prior to taking the L2 training since he lived in a part of the country where French is virtually non-existent. He therefore fully engaged himself in this opportunity with an open-mind. He recognized, “I was recruited into the federal government on the promise that they would teach me French”(p.2), so although it was initially a job requirement, it soon became “entirely selfish; a chance to learn something new that I didn’t know before” (p.15). He added, “I’d be a fool not to take that up” (p. 2).

Participant ‘Mms’ did admit, however, that his viewpoint might be “a one-sided biased view” (p.17) because he had no prejudices towards the language. He adds, “Other individuals may come and bring prejudices because they’ve had the chance to mingle in the environment [as] Ottawa bureaucrats, [...] and develop those prejudices” (p.12). He gives an example of people struggling to learn the L2 and claiming, “I don’t know why we have to learn this, [...] because even the French people [at work] speak English”(p.12). He believes that these prejudices contain “a lot of negative baggage [which] gets in the way” when going on language training (p.17).

When asked about the abilities of learners that he believed to be most important in learning a L2, he firmly believed that the number one thing that “holds people back [is...] to be self-conscious”(p.2). At times, he admits “it held me back too until somebody told me to [...] just let go”(p.2). He is convinced that one has to surrender himself or herself to the teacher. The following remarks illustrate this notion:

From a student’s perspective, (---) one cannot have a kind of egoism [...] when going into second language training. [...] All your Ph. D’s and theoretical physics or

CEO of this or that corporation counts for nothing. [...Therefore] I wasn't too concerned about my image (---) so I just let loose and didn't care what people thought (p.2).

This participant also strongly emphasized the importance of the context and culture when learning a language. He believed it is essential to "try to develop a milieu around yourself" (p.3). He admitted that in his case it was very difficult because he did not have French contacts: "I didn't have a [mental] image of a French person, and for me to speak a language I have to have [...] some '*appartenance avec la langue*', so I had to develop that" (p.3). He strongly emphasized the fact that:

One cannot treat language like mathematics. It's a living organic thing, right, which is situated in a certain social context, certain cultural context. [...] I formally believe that you cannot learn a language without the context. If you do not have the context, it's just mechanical and you'll forget it. If you've got the context, you've got an appreciation above and beyond the language (p.10).

He went on to discuss the ways in which he and some of his teachers created a cultural, meaningful environment in order to better learn the second language. For instance, he believed that to be fluent and natural, "I have to kind of (---) transition into that character, and the only way to do it is if I've got something that grips me [like] literature, music, poetry, things that I love in my ordinary life anyway" (p.5). He raved about certain teachers who gave him some books on poetry and showed him French art, thus encouraging him to discover French singers, musicians and poets. He further found a website in which he "could go and look at the words to the songs, and that's how [his] vocabulary enriched"(p.4). He is convinced that one could easily immerse him/herself in the language

and that “it doesn’t take a lot of effort; it’s a trip to the library, sitting on the Internet, reading the paper, (---) and going to Hull” (p.4).

In addition to creating a positive learning environment, participant ‘Mms’ talked about specific learning strategies that he used to acquire new material:

I used to keep a tape-recorder and I would record into it all the time, [... for instance] I would record the interviews with our teachers. I would recite phrases [that] they teach us [in the] bureaucracy language [and...] I would repeat those (p.7). I would memorize the [...] idioms [such as] “par contre, d’une part” [and] I’d repeat them when I’d walk home from school. I [also] watched a lot of movies from the period of Louis XIV, that era, [so] I could speak it right; [...] I wanted to speak the proper French (p.8).

He believed that the “bottom line is immersion” when learning a second language (p.14); hence, he went on an immersion course in Quebec City to really understand who the French people were. In his words, the experience was ‘a novelty’ that allowed him to taste the culture (p.9). He was able to live with a “family [that] was very cultural. The woman’s son was a full time musician and she was a dancer. They took [him] around everywhere. [He] gained quite a lot from that experience” (p.9). The different style in the immersion teaching in Quebec City also allowed him to focus on his pronunciation because “they force you to speak slowly and to think before the words come out”(p.9). He told me that he felt much more competent when returning for his oral exam.

During his L2 learning experience, participant ‘Mms’ did not feel frustrated. He explains, “in my mind, I’ve already accepted that it’s a never-ending journey, [...so] why would [I] be frustrated? [I] took it easy and enjoyed the experience” (p.6). He did,

however, sometimes feel resentment towards his peers, especially when they criticized the teachers: “Students complained about the teachers all the time. It’s a phenomenon that I couldn’t get over” (p.11). He believed that the teachers were the experts and one should trust them because as students, “you don’t even speak the language [...so] don’t complain” (p.11). He adds that this caused negative dynamics in the classroom.

He also felt very stressed when having to prepare for the oral exam: “Stress [was] limited to the oral exams. I used to really get nervous before the exam [and] it used to kill me”(p.6). He adds, “the focus becomes passing the exam so much that it overwhelms you”(p.11), and when “you’re attached to the outcome, you’re going to fail (---) because that’s what you’re focused on” (p.17). Laughingly, he admitted that he finally passed the test when he did not care anymore; there was no pressure as he reminded himself “if they fail me, what the hell, I’m just going to do my best” (p.6). Despite successfully completing the language training, he confided, “I don’t consider myself bilingual yet [and] now [that] the constraint is gone of having to pass the test, I’m going to learn French, [...it’s] a new beginning” (p.6, 11).

In order to maintain his second language, participant ‘Mms’ sought out opportunities to use the L2 every chance he gets. He explained that at his workplace, his boss also went on language training; therefore, they speak French together, and his support staff are mostly Francophone so he gets opportunities to speak with them in French. In addition, when he answers the phone and the other person says “bonjour, [he’ll] always reply in French”(p.13). Moreover, when taking development training, he registered himself in the French course. He considers finding opportunities as “a challenge, [and he...] wants to maximize these opportunities”(p.14). He explained that when attempting to speak French to others, people

recognize that he is making an “effort, (---) and they really appreciate it, [so...] they forgive everything else” (p.14).

On the whole, this participant “surrendered himself, [...] lived the experience for himself [and...] savoured it” completely (p.10, 17). He felt that this experience has given him a fuller sense of himself as “someone who represents the new Canada: visible minority person who speaks both the official languages”(p.15), and the treatment he gets today is very positive.

Participant ‘Rmt’.

This participant has been in the federal government for approximately fifteen years and has been “asking for language training ever since [he] started” (p.2). One of the reasons he took his present position was because of this opportunity to learn French. He confirmed that language training “wasn’t imposed on me, it was my decision” (p.2). He actually told his supervisor, “I’m not going on language training to get my level ‘C’, I’m going on my language training to learn something” (p.19).

When talking about his experience, participant ‘Rmt’ expressed that the learner needs to have “an interest, a desire to learn [the language], and a curiosity” (p.4). It also became obvious to him that in addition to learning the language itself, he needed to “understand better where the Francophone culture is coming from” (p.4). For instance, in his office, he noticed that sometimes Francophones reacted “somewhat negatively to something which [he] didn’t perceive negative at all [and] neither did the Anglophones” and he wanted to understand why this was so (p.4).

In order to better understand, he immersed himself in the culture. He “spent two weeks with a Francophone family” in the province of Quebec and declared that “it was

definitely one of the more interesting parts of the language training” (p.4). It was also during this time that this participant experienced a breakthrough. He had made a pact with his peers that during class as well as outside of class, they would not speak “a word of English, and after three or four days, [...] all of a sudden, it dawned on [him...] at the end of the day [that he] didn’t think one word in English” (p.4)

Participant ‘Rmt’ believed that practice outside of the classroom is essential to language learning. He accentuated on several strategies that he used in order to enhance his L2 learning. He first explained that the oral part of communication comes later so reading is extremely important in the early stages of the learning process because it is relatively easy and “really builds your confidence” (p. 5). He gave an example where “someone [might] like to learn about things, not necessarily the language per se, but maybe (---) an interesting article on space [...] and when they] read it, they’d take the time to look up new words to understand the context”, and thus enhance their vocabulary (p.5).

He also “watched the news at say, nine o’clock with the French close-captioned” so that he could both read the words and hear how they were pronounced (p.11). He explained, “I saw the word on the screen, I knew what the word meant when I read it, but I had never heard it pronounced before”(p.5). Then at ten o’clock, he would watch the news again, “without the close-captioned and just practice [his...] aural skills” (p.11). In addition, he created a binder of words (in French and in English), which included idioms and vocabulary pertaining to his job. He affirmed, “direct translation means nothing [therefore...] to use idiomatic expressions properly, you have to memorize [them]” (p.5). Finally, he spoke French with his “Francophone brothers-in-law [...] whenever he had a chance” (p.12).

Participant 'Rmt' emphasized, "the teacher has a huge impact on the experience" (p.6). They "need to be the experts in distilling what the issues are and pulling the person back (---) to coach them through it a little bit" (p.11). He added, "some teachers are very successful [and...] they need to mentor some of the lesser successful [teachers]" (p.16). He discussed the reasons why his teacher was good:

My teacher was very sarcastic but very good, and he was a stickler for pronunciation. He was good because he realized that the class was visual so he'd always write the corrections on the board. [...In addition,] during the [oral] practice sessions, [...he] gave you really good critique. (p.7).

In his group, there were four students and they all passed their oral exam the first time, and they had different evaluators. He claimed, "it's a question of slotting people in, trying to get a good team, creating good dynamics" (p.8). He gave an example where his teacher was also able to recognize that the "dynamics [had] changed in a negative way" due to a new student joining the group, and he "reacted very quickly to restore that equilibrium" (p.19). Participant 'Rmt' also strongly felt that teachers should "have a handle on how people learn" (p.16). In other words, teachers "have to realize how difficult it is for some students, and [...] be experts in different approaches to teaching different types of students" (p.10). They also need to be "able to motivate the class" (p.17). He believed that teachers "should be measured against what their success rate is" (p.16).

Despite the fact that he successfully obtained his oral "C" level on his first attempt, participant 'Rmt' shared that "the test [...] was] by far the most stressful thing I've ever done in my life" (p.8). He added, "my entire career rested on the opinion of someone who

doesn't know me, (---) doesn't understand my occupation and he has to make a judgment of my language skills in thirty minutes" (p.8). In his opinion:

There has to be a better way. [...] The process [is] set up for failure as opposed to helping you gradually learn and absorb the language and be able to be comfortable in it. In a way, it's set up [so that] you go through, boom, [and] you pass or you fail and most people fail, [...] more than fifty percent fail [...] and] that's hard personally (p.9). Some incredibly brilliant people I know have taken eight times to actually pass (p.10).

Moreover, he believed that the 'B' level was perhaps too simple as opposed to the 'C' level. He states, "going from a 'B' to a 'C' is huge; [there] is a huge gap between those two [and] perhaps there should be an increment between them where you feel that you're actually progressing" (p.10). He also felt that in the system, "feedback is missing to a large extent" (p.18). He suggested that someone examine situations where groups of individuals were successful in order to determine what worked and why it did. Then, this information should be fed back into the system. (p.18).

When returning to work, he wanted to "raise the level of linguistic capabilities in the office" so he encouraged his staff to "pursue their French" (p.15). He realized, however, that when "you've only got a certain amount of time, the communication has to happen quickly, [so...] the conversation goes where both people are most comfortable", and this was usually English (p.13). He recognized that although not much time had elapsed since he obtained his oral "C" level, he had already lost some of the L2 now despite his efforts to speak in French as much as he could (p. 12, 13). He explained that, "when you've passed the test, [you need to...] now get back to work, sort of thing" (p.12). He added that

language training is not looked at through a “long-term point of view”, and unfortunately, this does not allow individuals to be proficient in the L2 (p.14). The training “gives you an excellent base, but in [his] opinion, you’re still not fully bilingual” (p.12), and “it’s difficult to maintain”(p.13). If he had a choice, he would “be working in Montreal or Quebec City now” <laughs> (p.12) to “drive it home with practice” (p. 13). In his opinion, if you “work in a French environment, then you [become] bilingual” (p.14).

Although he admitted the training “was tough [...and] in hindsight, there was more than one time [he] thought, ‘well maybe my career isn’t in the public service’”, he finally decided to “persevere and get the job done [because] this was important” to him (p.9), and sure enough, he was one of the few that succeeded on his oral examination the very first time.

Participant ‘Vft’.

This participant came from the private sector where she “never had to speak any language other than English”, so when she applied for a bilingual position within the government, her “inability to speak French was a contributing factor” in sending her on language training (p.2). She therefore began L2 training at the ‘BBB’ level and went directly into her L2 training for the ‘CBC’ level prior to commencing her new position. She explained that having “made the conscious decision up front” to take on L2 training, she was willing to invest in it and believed it was “a wonderful opportunity and a daunting task” (p.2).

In her opinion, proper pronunciation was extremely important and in order to achieve this, language learners needed a “phonetic comprehension [...] to actually pick up and mimic nuances” (p.3). Personally, she would try to “hear the difference between what the

student was saying and what the professor was saying [...and] re-adjust how [she] pronounced something” (p.4). She believed that one needed “patience as well, because you can’t use the logical part of your brain to learn a language” (p.4). She explained:

You’re talking about something that is free flowing and dynamic, so when you have to engage in a conversation, it can go in any number of directions and so you can’t study. [...] You’re building a reflex or a new habit, [and] like anything that is psychological; you have to have the will to want to change (p.4).

She added that one must truly have the desire to learn and if “they resent being there (---) there lies the primary barrier” (p.4).

For participant ‘Vft’, the whole L2 learning experience was “a constant cycle between feeling great [...and] finding it just brutal” (p.4). For instance, in her opinion, one of the most useful things the school did was to “show tapes of oral exams in both French and English”. She added, “this was an incredible experience [...and] we should have been able to see them repeatedly throughout the training process because unless you understand what it should look like, how can you build towards it?” (p. 13). She felt that “it was beneficial for an Anglophone to watch a Francophone pass the Anglophone test” and vice-versa. On the other hand, she felt “there was no incremental testing along the way that provided meaningful feedback [...so it] was extremely difficult to assess [her] own progress” (p.4). She explained that coming from a “culture where you go through an academic system (---) where you have a mid-term exam, you have tests along the way, and then you have a final exam”(p.5), it was difficult to prepare for the oral exam because “the only way to test your progress is to go through the exam” (p.4). She added that the one-on-one ‘mock’ oral exams done in class with her language professor were “not comparable [because] they just scaled it

back, (---) it's programmed" (p.5). As the following remarks illustrate, the most stressful moment for this participant was indeed the oral exam:

There was no prep for the final exam, [...] there was no link between the testing school and the language school [...so] walking into the exam [was] a big black hole. [...] There's absolutely no understanding or comprehension of expectations when you walk into the exam, and the variables that play in are the time of day, the personality of the tester, [and] the types of questions the tester wants to ask. [...] You'll always get a different tester every time you go to the testing facility [...and] so much depends on [their] personality (p.5).

She strongly believed that "the test shouldn't be a hundred percent of whether or not someone should pass because what if they had a bad day [or] a bad twenty minutes" (p.5). She added that "the input of the teachers [...and] the students' performance in class" should be relevant (p.6). Unfortunately, she felt that suggestions like these were never considered because:

The students' feedback was irrelevant; nobody wanted to hear the input that they had to say. [...] The administrators of the program were unapproachable, inflexible [...and there was] just a complete lack of respect. [...] The students were never treated as though they were partners in a system (---) trying to meet a goal of the government, which is how I viewed it (p.7).

She also explained, "the training is centered on passing the [oral] exam. [...] The school would like you to think that you're there to learn the language, but [...] everything zones in on that one piece – you've got to pass the exam" (p.8, 9). She therefore adapted to this approach and affirmed that her objective became "passing the [oral] exam and now that

[she's] passed [...her] objective is to be able to speak. [...She] looks at being able to speak and communicate as being a totally separate piece than the training" (p.8).

Participant 'Vft' was frustrated by the fact that throughout the L2 training, "they kept changing our professors. As soon as we felt we were building momentum and we were happy, the administration would just change the professors and this created a lot of upheaval" (p.10). In her opinion, students always needed to adjust because the professors' "styles were different, their accents were different [and] their priorities were different" (p.10). She believed that when a professor "had been with us for a couple of months, she knew what our faults were [and] she knew where (---) each one of us needed to focus" (p.11). She added, therefore when "you change a professor two weeks before your (---) exam, you tend to relapse back a bit because you need to get that professor up to speed on where you need help" (p.11).

During her L2 training, she tried different strategies to enhance her L2. For instance, she would sometimes "watch French news or French T.V. if something interesting was on [and] listen to CBC radio in French when [she was] in the car" (p.13). When returning to work, however, she recognized that "as an Anglophone attempting to speak French, if there's any delay, the person that you're speaking to will automatically switch to English every time [because] there's a general lack of patience" (p.3). In other words, her opportunities to practice were "extremely rare [because...] Francophones around here speak English very well", and unless her "French was better than the person's English", the conversation remained in English (p.3). She also admitted, "I'm not going to engage in a language where I'm not a hundred percent confident that I'm going to get my message across [because in...] my new position [...] I need to be clear and concise" (p.13).

Hence, to maintain her L2, she continued to take French courses one hour per week, which are available at her workplace through the PSC program (p.15). She wished to keep up her L2 so as to “be able to engage people in a meaningful way in French in the office, [...and to] never go back into the French language training again” (p.8).

When wrapping up, she expressed that her experience might be different than some colleagues because she had made the conscious decision to undergo L2 training. She stated, “it was my choice to do it [...and although] doing French language training was harder than having kids <laughs>, [...it was] probably the best professional present I’ve ever been given” (p.11).

Participant ‘Wfs’.

This participant’s background is actually French, but she was raised in Nova Scotia and therefore never had the opportunity to speak it. She took L2 training as a job requirement for the position she was in.

When discussing learner abilities she pointed out, “I think almost anybody is capable of learning a second language given a certain amount of time and given the interest and the willingness” (p.3). She added that it was important to be “able to identify the best methods of learning the language because it varies with different people” (p.3). She did remark, however, that it helps if there is an inner “capacity there” (p.3).

In addition, she believed that “having the right attitude” is an important factor when learning a L2 (p.13). She stressed, “You really need to be willing” (p.13) because “if you’re not motivated, then honestly, I don’t think [...] that you’re going to achieve the language required in any reasonable length of time” (p.9). She also chuckled, “time is [also] a big

factor [...especially] when you get older because it just seems to take longer to do anything!” <laughs> (p.13).

Participant ‘Wfs’ also emphasized that one has to be immersed in the L2 to learn it (p.6). She added, “if I hadn’t made a lot of effort outside of the language training, I’d still be there I think” (p.6). She shared with me the strategies that she used to learn new material, broaden her vocabulary, and enhance her L2:

I was listening to the radio whenever I was in the car and I tried to listen to the television in French as much as I could. [...]. I practiced [speaking] whenever I could [because...] for me it was really a question of getting comfortable speaking. I practiced with all the other students, [and] certainly with the other teachers. I took notes where I’d made mistakes (---) and the next time I was speaking to the teacher, I always tried to make sure that I corrected that error. [...] I asked certain professors to give me advice on what I really needed to correct and then I would take each of those chunks one at a time and (---) practice in the car [...] so it became automatic and that definitely helped <laughs>. [...] Repetition worked for me (p.5). I would [also] go to the library and get French books [and found...] that was another tool that helped” (p.6).

In her opinion, teachers “are a big factor” in a good L2 learning experience (p.8). She confided that during “the training itself, the professors were excellent (p.4); they were really positive [...and] tried to find ways to help” (p.6). For instance, they would identify the participant’s weaknesses and give good feedback after listening to the tape from the mock oral exams (p.13). In addition, “there was a lot of custom made materials that they came up with that really related more to us as government employees” (p.7). Personally, she

enjoyed having a change in professors periodically and explained, “I found that you tend to get comfortable speaking with one professor and then I’d get somebody else and I’d be a little uncomfortable, [...but] it almost benefited me because it pushed me a little further” (p.4).

She realized that one of the reasons she may have had difficulty with the oral exam was because her self-confidence was low. She stated that to succeed in the oral exam, it was “a matter of confidence, and how much confidence you have in speaking” (p.3). She also claimed that during the oral exams, “you’re always trying to sort of cushion things [...because] as civil servants, we’re very used to being politically correct and trying to sort of answer what people want to hear” <laughs> (p.11). Participant ‘Wfs’ recalled that one of her professors picked up on this and strongly suggested that she give her real opinion when asked (p.11), which is what she did during her last interview, and it “came across a lot more natural” (p.12). Furthermore, in preparation for the last interview, this participant boosted her self-confidence by thinking, “I’m going to talk and I’m going to make mistakes and either I make it or I don’t, and that time I made it” (p.3, 4). In hindsight, she believed that she, “probably could have gotten out earlier if it was just a matter of somehow increasing [her] confidence” (p.8).

She expressed that “for most people, the reading and the writing is not an issue” (p.7). The oral exam, however, was the most stressful part of the L2 experience (p.4). She recalled the evaluation being an “artificial kind of environment because I’m speaking to somebody who knows nothing about me, nothing about my job” and the conversation could go anywhere (p.9). She believed the evaluation process “seemed so subjective [...since] there’s nothing you could point your finger at to say ‘you need to improve this type of

thing” (p.3). She further expressed, “there was a lot of frustration because [of the] not knowing what I had to do” (p.4) in order “to really get over the hurdle”(p.6). This frustration was felt by many students and was brought back to the teachers, “which certainly affected the latter [...because they] didn’t always agree” with the evaluation process; “they knew us personally, they were talking to us on a daily basis [...and] they would think that we were at a ‘C’ level” (p.6). She concluded that there seemed to be a “disconnect between the training and the evaluation” (p.9).

The only stress she felt during the training “other than the evaluation [was...] the idea that [her] job was sitting here and [she...] couldn’t take forever to do this” <laughs> (p.4). Although she felt supported by her supervisor, she also recognized that her L2 training “was affecting other people [who were...] having to act for me” (p.10). She further remarked, “we are the government and people have to get their levels and we can’t wait forever” (p.10). When she finally obtained her oral level “C”, she felt “relieved and also somewhat frustrated” (p.7), because since “this was a fairly high level of competence, (---) it was going to be tough to maintain” (p.8). She explained:

You need to be immersed in French [...] and when you’re back on the job, most of the job is not in the second language and you just don’t have the time or the contact enough in the second language to maintain it (p.8).

Although she occasionally spoke with colleagues “for fifteen minutes” here and there, and she still listened to French radio and television, she felt “the abilities are being eroded” because she hasn’t “been using it enough” (p.8). Jokingly, she added:

I feel that I should now be seeking out a position where I would have a chance to [...become] even more proficient so that it wouldn’t become an issue that I’m going

to lose it over the next few years. But then again, do you make career moves based on that <laughs> (p.8)?

In retrospect, she found that the language training did not promote self-confidence very much. She strongly felt that “you’re still a student of the language, [and] you’re not going to be perfect; you’re going to make mistakes, but that’s o.k.” (p.9). She believed that if the component of raising self-confidence had been included in the training, it “would have helped a lot” (p.9). Nonetheless, she reiterated, “the language training itself was a very positive experience” (p.4), consisting of “very motivated teachers and students” (p.10).

Participant ‘Xmt’.

This participant’s French background was quite limited since he hadn’t studied it in thirteen years. When told he was going on French training, he “was extremely happy that [he] would get the opportunity to do it on a full-time basis [...] because [he] wanted to improve [his] French skills” (p.3). Furthermore, he was pleased that “it wasn’t something that he had to do exclusively on his own time” (p.3).

He believed that “a positive attitude is critical” when learning a L2 (p. 4). As he put it, “I saw a few people that really didn’t want to be there; that resented being there (---) and it was hard for them, so my approach was always to try to make the best of it” (p.4).

Throughout his recollection of the L2 learning experience, he often brought up the fact that one should “try to keep a positive attitude (---) and you are likely to be successful at the end” (p.15).

He also commented that age was an important factor when learning a L2. Some of his teachers remarked, “younger people tend to do better because their language acquisition skills are fresher or perhaps they’re less ingrained in their ways” (p.5), and he believed there

was some truth in such comments (p.15). Whether it was his age or other factors, this participant admitted, “language came fairly easy to me [...] so] I didn’t do any outside effort” during the full-time language training <laughs> (p.10). He added, “I’ve always been fairly good at school [...] so in spite of some problems, I did fairly well” (p.11). Nonetheless, he suggested that in order to accelerate the L2 learning process, “it wouldn’t hurt to listen to some French radio (---) or read the French newspaper” (p.15)

Participant ‘Xmt’ felt that teachers were a key element in his L2 learning experience. As he mentioned:

You have to be a pretty good teacher to be able to manage a class of five or six adults, all at different levels, all at different learning styles and abilities, but still follow a program and still make it relevant to each student (p.12).

He spoke of two teachers in particular, and in his opinion, one of them “was quite good; she was a professional instructor [...] and] she had a great attitude” (p.5). In addition, she encouraged students to ask questions and adjusted the class to each student’s level (p.6). The other instructor, however, “had no formal training in teaching, or instruction or let alone adult education” (p.5), and as such, this resulted in a “totally negative experience” for participant ‘Xmt’ (p.6).

He stated that, on the whole, class dynamics were good. He explained that although the students are “highly competent professional individuals with a lot of responsibilities at work, when you get them in the classroom situation [...] you’re all equal” (p.7). Despite the sense of homogeneity, this participant felt that sometimes “there was a little bit of frustration” when some individuals were struggling and he was not (p.7). Moreover, he

recognized that the whole classroom atmosphere became negative when students returned to class and had not passed their oral exam, and teachers also took it personally:

There were teachers that were getting burnt out as well, because [they] spent that much time with somebody over the course of [several] months, everyday, and [...they] hope their students are going to do well [...but] the students fail [...so] you can almost see the teachers starting to question themselves (p.12).

When describing the training program, participant 'Xmt' claimed, "it's very prescribed and you (---) cannot deviate from it. You can start at different places, but ultimately you have to follow it out to its conclusion" (p.5). He added that the level 'C' program he followed was adapted to the 'EX' work world and therefore was more relevant in terms of "responsibility, budgeting, higher level policy, functions, etc." (p.6).

According to him, the most "stressful thing is this fear about the whole language training and it's mostly centered around the test; the eventual testing" (p.7). He emphasized that the program ultimately prepared you for the test and "a lot of times [...] the test got in the way of the learning" (p.8). He explained, "bilingualism is good for its own sake, and I think sometimes people lose sight of that fact because it becomes a job requirement, and I don't know how you ever get past that" (p.16). In his view, individuals were "clearly frustrated [...and] emotionally damaged by their experience, depending on the number of years that they'd been there" (p.8). He added that there was this pressure "to get the job done [in order to] get everyone back to work" (p.8). In his opinion, the L2 training should "be presented in a positive way [...rather than] a do or die thing", which is presently the way many civil servants perceive L2 training (p.14). He acknowledged that this was unfortunate because:

It's not the French language that's the problem, it's the fact that (---) we're in a bureaucracy and the bureaucracy works in certain ways and we have to have the test, and the test has to be done this way because it has to be objective and so on, and you can see people being resentful. [This] resentment at the situation or fear about failing the test the first time, or the second time could affect their attitude in general, [...because] they are stuck in this kind of career limbo. [...] That's something that can't be good for a person's psyche (p.8).

He confided that he did not want to "become that bitter person", and so at some point he thought, "just teach me how to pass the test and let me get out of here" (p.9). In the end, his most rewarding moment was also related to the test. As he put it, "finding out you're done ends up being the biggest prize" (p.9). Despite the fact that he was successful in obtaining his oral "C" level on his first attempt, participant 'Xmt' felt that it was "slipping away" (p.9). He explained, "the job that I'm actually doing at the present time is conducted exclusively in English" (p.9). He further commented, "I'd have to be functioning at a much higher level than the test ever would have gotten me in order to do my job in French" (p.13).

Participant 'Xmt' also claimed that once "you get through the test, [...] the follow through is completely up to the employee" (p.13). Hence, in order to maintain his L2, he affirmed that he was attending weekly one-hour sessions with a French instructor, who is a member of the PSC language training department (p.13). He also acknowledged that he would likely have to "go back for training again to brush up on [his] oral skills" before his next testing in five years (p.10) since opportunities to use the L2 at work were "fairly limited" (p.13). He was thankful to have received an exemption when tested for both the reading and writing skills; he will therefore no longer be tested for these skills (p.10).

On the whole, this participant attributed the fact that he successfully obtained his oral “C” level to his younger age and his positive attitude (p.16). He hoped to be “lucky enough to get an exemption in oral” (p.13) next time round.

Summary

In this chapter, I laid out the steps of an ongoing data analysis during data collection (e.g., creating a profile for each of the six participants; writing many observer comments during and after each interview and keeping an ongoing literature review). Next, I discussed the procedures of transcribing and coding of the data. Lastly, I presented thick, descriptive narratives in an attempt to give the reader a holistic portrait of how six individuals experienced their French L2 training.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusions

This chapter will discuss how the above individual case reports were compared and contrasted in order to extract related ideas and draw out themes. These themes will then be examined and any links to the literature will be put forward. The last section of this chapter will offer suggestions regarding possible future research in this area. Finally the conclusions of the study will be brought forth.

Emerging Themes

Holliday (2002) claims that themes “are partly emergent and partly influenced by questions or issues that the researcher brought to the research” (p.108). As stated earlier, the research question that guided this study is: “What are the Canadian PSC statutory civil servants’ reflections on their second language training experience?” This general question sought to explore the participants’ experiences in any direction they wished to pursue. Furthermore, because of my mini-pilot project, I had some idea of what type of questions to include in my interview protocol so as to bring forth plausible themes, which were the foundation of my initial literature review. Ryan and Bernard (2000) argue, however, that although literature reviews are rich sources for themes, most often the latter are elicited from the text itself (p. 780), and such was the case for this study.

Merriam (1998) suggests five guidelines for determining the efficacy of themes: Firstly, they should reflect the purpose of the research; secondly, the themes and sub-themes should be exhaustive; thirdly, themes should be mutually exclusive, in other words, a particular unit of data should only be placed under one theme or sub-theme; fourthly, the labels given to themes should reflect the data they contain; and finally, all themes should be characterized by the same level of abstraction (p. 183-184). I tried to observe these

guidelines when determining this study's themes and sub-themes; however, I found that it was virtually impossible to contain certain data exclusively within one theme. There are clearly interactions between many aspects of language learning and as such, some of the themes and sub-themes in this study may overlap.

In the end, after countless readings of the data and numerous changes, I used five of the six umbrella themes from this study's literature review and within each of these, two to four sub-themes materialized and were assigned meanings. A sixth umbrella theme was added to include the participants' many comments regarding the language proficiency evaluation. Since the purpose of my study was not a program evaluation, this facet of the language learning experience was not included in the initial literature review. I have therefore included some literature regarding evaluation in this section in order to better comprehend the learners' remarks. It is important to note that the themes and sub-themes that emerged did so through *my* interpretation of the data. Others may interpret the same data differently and induce different themes. Having said that, the following are the general themes that I perceived to be most relevant: The PSC language Learner; Affective Factors; Cognitive Factors; Socio-Cultural Factors; Contextual Factors; and Evaluation Factors. (See Appendix K for a complete breakdown of themes and sub-themes).

The PSC Language Learner.

As Edwards (1977) pointed out, the PSC "represents a particular case of language users by virtue of its uniqueness of structure and context" (p. 5). Most of the participants agreed that indeed they were in a unique context. Despite the fact that they were all statutory language learners, their comments reflected both diverse and similar viewpoints

regarding the PSC *language policy*, feelings of *resentment*, feelings of *pressure* as PSC language learners, and the ability to *juggle responsibilities*.

Some participants felt that the PSC should re-think its *language policy* since, in their view, the present one did not promote learning. This notion was reflected in comments such as, “Why impose it on an individual? [There’s] this almost bull-headed approach [where they’re] going to ram it down your throats no matter what” (‘Lfs’); and “many civil servants perceive L2 training [as...] a do or die thing” (‘Xmt’). Knowles (1980) confirms that the emotional or psychological climate of a learning environment will either facilitate or inhibit learning.

According to some narratives, the negative climate led to a sense of *resentment* on the learner’s part and in turn, inhibited learning. For instance, participant ‘Mms’ shared that some individuals in his environment complained, “I don’t know why we have to learn this because even the French people speak English”. Participant ‘Xmt’ added, “you can see people being resentful [...] because they are stuck in this kind of career limbo”. On the other hand, other participants felt that they had had a say in becoming a statutory language learner. This was illustrated in comments such as “I made the conscious decision up front” (‘Vft’); “[It] wasn’t imposed on me, it was my decision” (‘Rmt’); and “I was recruited in the federal government with the promise that they would teach me French” (‘Mms’).

Whether statutory or not, a few participants felt strongly that “the students’ feedback was irrelevant; nobody wanted to hear what they had to say [and...] the students were never treated as though they were partners in a system” (‘Vft’). These comments tie in with Bash’s (2003) notion that adults wish to be respected and treated as equals. Knowles (1980) and Brookfield (1986) also maintain that it is important to view the learner as a mutual

partner in order to have a successful program. One has to remember that these learners are all “highly competent individuals with a lot of responsibilities at work” (‘Xmt’), and they are used to being in an environment where there is mutual respect and everyone works towards a common goal, in other words, they are *adult* learners (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991).

With the exception of one, all the participants felt immense *pressure* as PSC language learners. This was revealed in comments such as:

You’re expected to master this thing in the shortest amount of time (‘Lfs’); When you’ve passed the test, now get back to work (‘Rmt’); Get the job done [in order to] get everyone back to work (‘Xmt’) and; People have to get their levels and we can’t wait forever (‘Wfs’).

I asked myself, could this be reflective of the fact that these learners were statutory (i.e., they were obligated to undergo the L2 training and now have the added pressure to pass it quickly), or is it typical of adult learners? Bash (2003) argues that adults are often subject to external factors like workplace pressures, so they “almost always express a sense of urgency regarding their need to complete their schooling” (p.86).

Apps’ (1987) study revealed that adults perceived an increase in stress because they had to *juggle responsibilities* and time commitments. Indeed, this sense of juggling work and school responsibilities was present in some of my participants’ experiences. For instance, participant ‘Lfs’ acknowledged that she had been fortunate to be able to focus solely on her studies because a number of her colleagues had to contend with both their work and their language training. Participant ‘Wfs’ also shared that she was stressed about

the fact that her L2 training was affecting other people who had to ‘act’ in her management role, so time was crucial.

Affective Factors.

This umbrella theme encompassed variables such as the learner’s *motivation* and *attitude* with regards to the L2 learning experience. Comments regarding the participants’ *self-confidence* were also included. The last sub-theme deals with the learners’ *satisfaction* with their L2 after their language training.

Not surprisingly, almost all of the participants mentioned that an essential factor in getting through L2 training was some sort of *motivation*. As participant ‘Wfs’ mentioned, “if you’re not motivated, then honestly I don’t think that you’re going to achieve [...] the language required in any reasonable length of time”. Those participants who truly seemed to enjoy the experience made remarks such as, “I think you can’t just relate it to the job; you have to look at it more personally” (‘Lfs’); “it soon became entirely selfish” (‘Mms’); and “I’m going on my language training to learn something” (‘Rmt’). These comments resonate with Deci and Ryan’s (1985) self-determination theory indicating that intrinsic motivation results in a more rewarding experience than does extrinsic motivation.

Some of these participants admitted that there came a time during their L2 training when their motivation was put in question. For instance, participant ‘Xmt’ confided that he did not want to become “that bitter person” whom he saw around him, so he just wanted to pass the test and get out of there. According to Noels, Clément and Pelletier (1999) this type of motivation would be considered extrinsic. Participant ‘Vft’s’ comment stating that the L2 training was “probably the best professional present” she had ever been given is also linked to a motivation based on the extrinsic value of the language training (Eccles and Wigfield,

1995). The fact that participants in this study were statutory learners did not seem to have an impact on their motivation. All the participants in the study were committed to learning French, yet their learning outcomes varied.

Some participants also discussed the need to have a positive attitude in order to keep one's *self-confidence* high. Brown (2000) would agree that a strong sense of self-confidence would have a positive impact on L2 acquisition because it counters inhibition. Participant 'Wfs' affirmed that succeeding in the oral exam was a "matter of confidence". A few individuals offered tips on how to 'keep one's chin up'. Participant 'Xmt's' approach was to always "try to make the best of it". Participant 'Lfs' also stated that it was important to allow yourself to make mistakes, and participant 'Mms' suggested, "take it easy and enjoy the experience". He further commented that self-consciousness "holds people back"; therefore individuals need to "surrender themselves".

The participants' *satisfaction* of their achieved proficiency level was a topic of interest. Despite the fact that all of these participants were ultimately successful in obtaining their required proficiency levels, many of them did not consider themselves bilingual yet:

It gives you an excellent base, [...] but you're still not fully bilingual ('Rmt'); I'd have to be functioning at a much higher level than the test ever would have gotten me in order to do my job in French ('Xmt') and; I don't consider myself bilingual yet, and now [that] the constraint is gone of having to pass the test, I'm going to learn French, [...] it's a new beginning ('Mms').

These remarks are similar to comments made in both Kuttner's (1995) and Edwards' (1977) studies wherein their participants also claimed that they were not satisfied with the level of L2 proficiency they had achieved in their language training. Furthermore, similar to

Bibeau's (1976) study, the above comments raise concerns as to the actual threshold of language proficiency attained in these courses.

Cognitive Factors.

Sub-themes such as the learner's *prior knowledge* and *language aptitude* were included in this umbrella theme. In addition, the *learning strategies* and *learning styles* that were brought forth will be discussed under their respective sub-themes.

I reviewed the participants' in-depth questionnaires to see whether *prior knowledge* had any influence over the number of attempts that the participants needed to pass their oral "C" proficiency level. Unlike Kuttner's (1995) study, which revealed that individuals who did not pass the proficiency test were the ones who had little or no previous L2 exposure, the data in this study did not show any relationship between the above variables. For instance, according to participant 'Lfs', her prior knowledge of French was quite good, yet she still required seven attempts to successfully obtain her oral "C" proficiency level. On the other hand, participants 'Rmt' and 'Vft' both indicated that they perceived their prior knowledge of the L2 to be very poor and yet they passed their "CBC" levels on their first or second attempts, respectively.

A few participants spoke of some type of *knack*, or so called *aptitude*, for acquiring the language. Participant 'Wfs' believed that when learning a language, it "helps if there is an inner capacity there", and participant 'Xmt' admitted that language came fairly easily to him. As these comments indicate, aptitude was perceived by some learners to be an asset when learning a L2. The PSC has in fact included an aptitude test in its assessment tools in its language training programs. However, given the controversy in the literature regarding

the construct of aptitude, perhaps the current use of this test as an initial screening tool and as a predictor of L2 performance and success should be revisited.

It was interesting, but not surprising, that all of the participants in this study had something to say about language *learning strategies*. As participant 'Rmt' pointed out, one essential type of language learning strategy is "practice outside of the classroom". The most popular means of finding opportunities to practice the L2 was by listening to the radio or watching television. Participant 'Rmt' added that by putting the close-captioned version on when watching television in French, he could not only work on his auditory skills, but on his reading and comprehension skills as well. Several participants also mentioned reading as another beneficial way to enhance their French. Furthermore, a number of participants sought out opportunities to converse in their L2, either with their teachers or family members. Oxford (1990) would categorize all these methods as 'significant practicing' of the L2 since they involve authentic situations.

Most of the participants reported that they found it useful to remember new information or augment their vocabulary by either repeating it over and over again or by paraphrasing it. Participant 'Wfs' even spoke of taking "chunks one at a time and practicing in the car so it became automatic". These chunks or sequences of multi-word units are what researchers refer to as formulaic expressions (Hickey, 1993). Research indicates that the use of formulaic expressions and lexical phrases enhances fluency (Bolander, 1989; Ellis, 1996). Monitoring one's speech was also offered as a type of strategy to enhance the accuracy of L2 production. For example, participant 'Lfs' mentioned needing time before she spoke and checking periodically with the interlocutor whether she was understood, and participant

'Vft' stated that she would re-adjust how she pronounced something according to what she heard the instructor say.

All of the participants felt that the above strategies were beneficial in their L2 learning process. These remarks appear to be in line with prior research suggesting that 'good learner' strategies can enhance L2 acquisition (Oxford, 1990; Rubin, 1975; Stern, 1975; Wesche, 1979). It is also worth noting that participant 'Rmt' suggested that someone examine situations where groups of individuals were successful and feed this back into the system. Breen (2001) believes that by recognizing strategies used by successful language learners, it may be possible to teach less successful learners how to become better language learners.

Some participants also recognized their own *learning styles*. For instance, participant 'Lfs' explained, "I need to listen, but I also have to write it down because I need both". Participants 'Xmt' and 'Rmt' both commented that there were different learning styles in a classroom, and it was important for the teacher to recognize these and adapt the class accordingly. These types of remarks support Merriam and Caffarella's (1991) principle that institutions could promote a more effective learning environment if they assisted both learners and instructors in becoming aware of their personal learning styles.

Socio-Cultural Factors.

This umbrella theme was the smallest of the six (i.e., it has only two sub-themes titled *cultural components*, and *social prejudices*). Nonetheless, the few comments pertaining to these topics are worthy of consideration.

The belief that language and *culture* are intertwined was the topic of conversation with several participants. It was reflected in comments such as, "You can't understand

where people are coming from unless you have some idea of the culture behind it” (‘Lfs’); and “It’s a living organic thing which is situated in a certain cultural context [so...] you cannot learn a language without the context” (‘Mms’). Participant ‘Rmt’ also felt strongly that in order to learn the language, he needed to better understand “where the Francophone culture was coming from.” These remarks lend support to the literature that argues that one cannot learn a L2 without considering its cultural component (Lantolf, 1999; Kramsch, 1993a). As participant ‘Mms’ expressed, you need to have some “*appartenance avec la langue*”. Finally, it was interesting to note that the cultural component had once been included in this L2 training program. Participant ‘Lfs’ recalled being on language training many years before when there were culturally oriented activities and opportunities. She added that this time round, the training simply focused on the language itself.

Although it was not a widespread opinion amongst the participants, one comment was striking. Participant ‘Mms’ talked about attitudes and the “prejudices towards the language”. He believed that the larger societal environment influences these *social prejudices*, and the latter carry negative baggage that gets in the way of learning. The reason that this comment stood out was because it was so similar to Ellis’ (1994) claim that learners’ attitudes towards the target language, its speakers and its culture are dependent upon social settings, and that positive attitudes generally enhance learning while negative attitudes may impede it.

Contextual Factors.

This umbrella theme is probably the broadest of the six themes. Sub-themes such as the *teacher* and *group* variables were included within this general theme because they pertain to the classroom context. Furthermore, the *immersion* and *workplace* contexts came

up quite frequently in the participants' narratives so these are included under this umbrella theme.

Dörnyei's (1994) motivational construct reflects the importance of *teacher-specific components*. In this study, the participants also considered the teacher to be a significant factor within their L2 learning experience. In participant 'Mms'' mind, "the teachers are the experts and you should trust them", and participant 'Rmt' emphasized that teachers definitely have a "huge" impact on the [L2] experience. His suggestion that the more successful teachers mentor some of the lesser ones, and that teachers should "be measured against what their success rate is" was surprising in light of the fact that according to the participants, teachers were constantly being changed throughout the L2 training. Moreover, research indicates that the success of L2 acquisition is dependent upon numerous variables, *one* of which is the teacher; hence, teacher impact could not solely be accountable for a successful or non-successful L2 learning experience.

Qualities that these learners recognized in good teachers included the capacity to motivate the class ('Rmt') and simply going beyond the call of duty. For instance, participant 'Mms' pointed out that teachers supplied him with extra books on French poetry and introduced him to French art. Another trait of a good teacher was the ability to promote self-confidence, as expressed by participant 'Lfs'. In addition, a teacher who offered valuable feedback was considered to be excellent by several of these learners. Participant 'Rmt' described his teacher as giving "really good critique", and participant 'Wfs' recalled that her teachers gave her good feedback after listening to the tape of the mock oral exams.

As we have seen in the literature, *group dynamics* are also quite significant in an individual's L2 learning experience (Breen, 2001; Dörnyei, 1994; Tennant, 1997) and this

was expressed by several participants. In some instances, the relationships that these participants had with their peers helped motivate them. For instance, participant ‘Rmt’s’ pact with his peers of only speaking French tightened group cohesion, created positive dynamics and promoted L2 acquisition. In other cases, peer interactions had a negative effect on these participants’ experience. This was the case in participant ‘Rmt’s’ story when a new student joined the group with some negative baggage. Moreover, participant ‘Mms’ sometimes felt “resentment towards his peers, especially when they criticized the teachers”, and participant ‘Xmt’ expressed the fact that there was tension within the group when “some individuals were struggling” and others were not.

The next sub-theme that I wish to discuss is *immersion* because it was emphasized in many of the participants’ stories. The following comments summarize these individuals’ feelings vis-à-vis their immersion training:

It was the highlight of my training; it was like night and day for me (‘Lfs’); It was a novelty that allowed me to taste the culture [...] and I gained quite a lot from that experience (‘Mms’) and; it was definitely one of the most interesting parts of the language training (‘Rmt’).

Once again, Knowles (1980) reminds us that the emotional or psychological climate of a learning environment will either facilitate or inhibit learning, and in this case it certainly seemed to have a positive contribution. Although their immersion training was relatively short, the intensity of being surrounded by native speakers seemed to have a positive impact on the participants (Genesee, 1987). Participants strongly emphasized that their self-confidence was boosted in an immersion type setting. For instance participant ‘Lfs’ recalled that when she came back, her “level of confidence was just unbelievable”, and participant

'Mms' indicated that he felt much more competent when returning for his oral exam.

Furthermore, it was during their immersion that these learners claimed to have experienced a breakthrough with the L2. As participant 'Lfs' put it, "there comes a time when you're not translating and you realize you're starting to think in the L2". A similar comment was made by participant 'Rmt' when he recalled that after three or four days of immersion, it suddenly dawned on him that he had not thought one word in English. The participants in MacFarlane's (1998) study had also reported an increase in self-confidence and improved speaking and listening skills after their immersion experiences. Such remarks also lend support to claims that intensive linguistic and cultural immersion is essential to L2 learning (Genesee, 1987; Harley, 1994; Tarnopolsky, 1999; Turnbull et al., 1998).

Some participants commented on the importance of being "immersed in [the L2] when you're back on the job" in order to maintain the language ('Wfs'). This brings us to the final sub-theme within the contextual factors – the *workplace*. All of the participants had something to say with regards to their workplace. Many admitted that the opportunities to use the L2 were not very frequent since the day-to-day operations were primarily conducted in English ('Lfs'; 'Xmt'). As participant 'Wfs' remarked, "you just don't have the time or the contact enough in the second language to maintain it", and participant 'Vft' added, "if there's any delay, the person that you're speaking to will automatically switch to English every time". Participant 'Lfs' also noted, "unless I personally make the point of looking for someone and initiating a conversation, it just won't happen".

MacFarlane (1998) argues that "the larger Anglophone population in Canada [and] the proximity of the United States [result in] many more L2 use opportunities for Francophone Canadians than Anglophone Canadians" (pp. 208, 209). The Francophones in

Edwards' (1977) study had had continuous exposure to their L2 in their workplace after language training and as such, they were able to maintain their English language.

Nonetheless, some participants in this study took on the challenge to seek opportunities to use the L2 and did not believe it took a lot of effort. For instance, participant 'Mms' has registered himself in a French development training course, and he consistently speaks in French with his boss and his staff. Similarly, participant 'Rmt' wanted to "raise the level of linguistic capabilities in the office" so he encouraged his staff to "pursue their French".

Whether or not these participants had much opportunity to use the L2, some of them voiced the concern that they were already losing some of their French since their language training. A final note regarding L2 retention was brought forth by participant 'Rmt'. He suggested that one needs to "drive it home with practice" by working in a French environment for a determined period of time (e.g., Quebec City). In MacFarlane's (1998) study, the exchange program proved to be beneficial both culturally and linguistically.

Evaluation Factors.

Since the purpose of this study was not a program assessment, evaluation factors such as curricular and instructional validity were not explored in the literature review. However, these will be addressed in the following section because evaluation and its surrounding components emerged as this study's strongest theme and as such, it has been given a label of its own. The sub-themes included under this umbrella theme include: the *apprehension* surrounding the evaluation, the *disconnect* between the training and the testing, and the *oral evaluation* itself.

Every single participant commented that they were *apprehensive* with regards to the evaluation, and that it was the most stressful moment in his/her L2 learning experience. The following are a few quotes to illustrate this:

We can't show in any way that we're vulnerable. [...] It's like you have to be perfect ('Lfs'); The focus becomes passing the exam so much that it overwhelms you ('Mms'); My entire career rested on the opinion of someone who doesn't know me ('Rmt'); and the most stressful thing is this fear about the eventual testing ('Xmt').

Furthermore, these individuals indicated that there seemed to be a *disconnect* between the language training objectives and the evaluation objectives:

There's absolutely no understanding or comprehension of expectations when you walk into the exam [...it's like] a big black hole" ('Vft'); There seems to be a disconnect between the training and the evaluation ('Wfs'); You don't know what their procedures are since it did not seem to be shared with the teachers, and in turn, not fed back to the students ('Lfs'); and feedback in the system is missing to a large extent ('Rmt').

This sense of frustration repeatedly came forth and was even reflected back in the classroom: "teachers were questioning themselves because their students often failed" ('Xmt').

One must keep in mind that the language training and the language testing are two separate departments within the PSC. Nonetheless, at this point I wish to bring forth some literature regarding curricular and instructional validity. Black (1999) states that curricular validity emphasizes the link between what is taught and what is evaluated. He cautions, "there is a danger when the syllabus writers think they are implying one cognitive level for a

topic while the teacher is inferring another” (p.300). In the case of the PSC, the lack of harmony seemed to be between implementation and evaluation, which resulted in curricular validity issues. Furthermore, Stiggins (2001) argues that performance assessments need to be practical, in other words, they need to be spelled out “in a manner that makes them helpful to teachers and students in real classroom settings” (p.298). Bash (2003) adds that since adults are goal-oriented, they value an educational program that has clearly defined expectations and objectives. This did not seem to be the case in these participants’ experiences; hence raising concerns regarding instructional validity.

It was apparent from these participants’ stories that the *oral evaluation* was the sole determiner of whether or not individuals passed their oral proficiency level. Many participants shared their concern with regards to this. Participant ‘Wfs’ stressed, “the evaluator knows nothing about me, nothing about my job”, and participant ‘Rmt’ continued in the same line of thinking when he said, “my entire career rests in his hands”. Moreover, participant ‘Vft’ remarked that as adults having gone through an educational system that uses ongoing assessment procedures (i.e., mid-term exams, class assignments, and a final exam), it was difficult to comprehend and adapt to the evaluation procedures used by the PSC testing department. In fact, many participants questioned why the success of their language training and, in turn, their careers rested solely on a summative evaluation consisting of a thirty-minute (or so) interview.

Stiggins (2001) claims that a valid assessment should, in fact, reflect the learner’s true knowledge of the valued target and that one may need to “use several different assessment methods to properly reflect them”(p.22). Fraenkel and Wallen (2003) add that if only easy questions or very difficult ones are included in an evaluation, the latter “would be

unrepresentative and hence not provide information from which valid inferences could be made” (p.159). The very fact that the PSC evaluation is a one-shot, high stakes artificial conversation leads to much controversy on whether or not it is representative of the learners’ true knowledge of French. The oral interview is just one genre of evaluation and perhaps other oral genres might be taken into consideration when evaluating the civil servants’ oral proficiency level. For instance, students may be required to read an article and summarize it in front of an evaluation panel. This notion of using a variety of evaluation procedures was also brought forth by participant ‘Vft’ who strongly suggested that oral proficiency assessment involve the teacher’s input, the student’s in-class progress, and ongoing testing (i.e., a series of oral interviews).

Bachman (1990) states that a major problem of language testing “is that of defining language ability in such a way that we can be sure that the test methods we use will elicit language test performance that is characteristic of language performance in non-test situations” (p.9). According to participant ‘Rmt’, the summative evaluation used for the oral proficiency exam can not be reflective of people’s knowledge of the L2 because “some incredibly brilliant people have taken eight times to actually pass”. Furthermore, as participant ‘Vft’ pointed out, some students may have “a bad day or a bad twenty minutes”. Furthermore, some participants believed this type of assessment was quite subjective since it consisted of only one evaluator; hence, variables such as the latter’s personality, the types of questions asked, and the time of day could all influence the outcome of the exam. An example of this subjectivity emerged in participant ‘Lfs’ story where she encountered the same evaluator in two different attempts, and yet his “style was completely different” each time. In order to avoid bias and subjectivity during the oral examination, perhaps more than

one evaluator could be present during the oral interview, or the candidate could undergo a series of oral interviews with different evaluators.

With comments such as, “get the job done” (‘Lfs’); “the training becomes centered on passing the exam” (‘Vft’); and “a lot of times the test got in the way of learning” (‘Xmt’), it is not surprising that the learners’ stress level increases, which will most likely cause anxiety and deter self-confidence (Cheng et al. 1999; Cross, 1991; Gardner et al., 1997; Krashen, 1981). This had indeed happened to some civil servants: “For many people, the testing in particular has caused health problems, mental problems” (‘Lfs’) and; “Individuals were [...] emotionally damaged by their experience depending on the number of years that they’d been there” (‘Xmt’). Once again, we are reminded of the importance of having a relaxed, non-threatening environment in order to promote learning (Cross, 1991; Hedge et al., 1984).

Summary

The above sections compared and contrasted each participant’s unique experience and identified six emerging themes. Within each of these, two to four sub-themes were thoroughly examined in the context of the relevant literature. The next section will propose several directions for future research and finally, the conclusions of the study will be presented.

Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to explore *statutory* civil servants’ recollections on their French language learning experience. The study has indicated that *statutory* L2 learners have both diverse and similar viewpoints regarding different aspects of their French language training within the PSC context. While some individuals thoroughly savoured the

experience, others were left with a somewhat bitter taste. Nonetheless, there was a strong sense of agreement with regards to specific issues (e.g., the need for immersion in a French milieu, evaluation of oral French proficiency). On the whole most participants had a combination of positive and negative thoughts with regards to their experience. The results from this study have brought forth valuable insights, concerns and suggestions to maximize these learners' positive French language learning experience.

One such insight concerns the importance of an intensive French cultural and linguistic immersion experience to supplement the learners' formal L2 training. Such immersion provides the learners with an opportunity for intensive use of French in real communication situations, and allows them to fully experience the L2 culture, which, in turn, may lead to more effective communication. Interacting with French native speakers on a day-to-day basis may also significantly increase their confidence in using their French and result in self-perceived linguistic breakthroughs. It is important to note, however, that prior classroom instruction is essential to learners' being able to communicate in an immersion context (MacFarlane, 1998). The PSC should thus consider combining classroom instruction with a short-term intensive French cultural and linguistic immersion for all its learners. Participant 'Rmt's' suggestion of allowing managers to work in cities where their L2 is prominent should also be explored. In the end, the cost of an immersion experience, for a determined period of time (e.g., two weeks, one month), may not be any greater than having civil servants continuously return to language training. The PSC should also consider reintroducing a strong cultural component and socially oriented activities in its language training programs.

Fear of L2 attrition was a valid concern brought forth by the participants in this study. Learners felt that they were solely responsible for maintaining their French, and that opportunities for practice in the workplace were scarce. They also believed that the level of language proficiency that they had attained did not enable them to function effectively in French at the workplace. Second language learning is not a defined phase with a beginning and an end; rather it is an ongoing process requiring constant nurturing and reinforcement. Furthermore, there needs to be a genuine need as well as a strong learner desire in order to maintain the L2. Within the PSC context, the mindset of 'being finished with language training' needs to be redirected, and the promotion of the L2 use in the workplace needs to receive more attention.

The final oral evaluation, which provoked troubling learner feelings of apprehension, stress and anxiety, also brought forth justifiable concerns. The participants stressed the need for curricular and instructional validity and a clear link (harmony) between instruction and evaluation, and they questioned the one-shot summative nature of the evaluation. They argued that the type of assessment used to evaluate learners' oral proficiency should be reflective of their true knowledge of the L2. Suggestions for improving the language testing procedures within the PSC context included the use of alternative evaluation techniques and multiple assessment methods such as the teacher's input, the student's in-class progress, ongoing evaluations, as well as having more than one evaluator during an oral exam session.

This study has brought forth a unique perspective on the L2 learning experience by giving a voice to statutory French language learners at high management levels within the PSC context. The findings of this study have contributed insights to the growing literature on factors affecting the L2 learning processes and outcomes. Furthermore, these findings

may prove to be valuable for future candidates, language teachers, L2 program planners and curriculum designers within the PSC and similar contexts.

Future Research

Future research might take on the challenge of revisiting the government sponsored L2 training programs from the teachers' perspective. According to these participants, teachers were a significant factor within the L2 learning experience and such a study would certainly bring forth a new dimension to the overall picture. It may also be interesting to examine the L2 learning experience of statutory civil servants who occupy positions other than the upper management ('EX') status. Moreover, one could conduct further research on this topic by choosing a particular umbrella theme and exhaustively examining it. For instance, the issue of L2 retention and the extraneous variables that promote or deter it could be the focus of a study. Finally, it may also be fruitful to exclusively target unsuccessful candidates and explore their ongoing emotional roller-coaster ride as they experience it. In this case, unsuccessful candidates would be defined as those civil servants who have not yet been able to obtain their oral proficiency level after several attempts and are, therefore, back in L2 training.

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Appendix A

Example of Scale for “CBC” Proficiency Level within the Canadian PSC

Taken from website: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/sle_pg_01_e.htm

Table 1

Reading:

Level C	Ability to understand texts on a wide variety of work-related topics; ability to understand most complex details, inferences and fine points of meanings; ability to read with good comprehension specialized or less familiar material.
----------------	--

Examples of Reading tasks required for the “C” proficiency level:

- reading policy papers, research or technical reports, correspondence or other documents in order to assess implications, provide comments or make recommendations;
- skimming books, articles and reports in order to have an overview of the content;
- reviewing correspondence or other texts prepared by an employee for meaning and tone;
- reviewing contracts or specifications for completeness and accuracy; and
- reading in depth such documents as files or regulations in order to extract details for action or interpretation.

Writing:

Level B	Ability to write short descriptive or factual texts in the L2; ability to write with sufficient mastery of grammar and vocabulary to deal with explicit information on work-related topics.
----------------	---

Examples of writing tasks required for the “B” proficiency level:

- preparing short, routine administrative correspondence to request or give information, explanations or instructions;
- writing brief reports to explain or request that action be taken on work-related matters;

- writing a telex or using a terminal to communicate within a particular system;
- filling in forms where brief written descriptions and comments are required;
- formulating observations or presenting conclusions summarizing a text or a meeting in point or note form;
- preparing a simple factual information bulletin or directive; and,
- adapting texts such as model letters by adding a few words or slightly modifying the content.

Oral Interaction:

Level C	<p>Ability to converse: can participate effectively in discussions on a broad variety of topics, and can expand on topics with ease.</p> <p>Ease in using the language: has a natural delivery; seldom hesitates except to look for ideas.</p> <p>Clarity of communication: has a precise vocabulary to convey exact meaning; can link sequences of facts and events in time (i.e. has mastery of more complex verb forms); can link sentences effectively to convey complex ideas; can readily and accurately interpret what the assessor says; can be easily understood, pronunciation does not interfere with communication.</p>
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Examples of oral interaction tasks required for the “C” proficiency level:

- giving and understanding explanations and descriptions which may involve complicated details, hypothetical questions or complex and abstract ideas;
 - giving and understanding detailed accounts of events, actions taken, or procedures to be followed;
 - discussing or explaining policies, procedures, regulations, programs and services relating to an area of work;
 - participating effectively in discussions which involve the rapid exchange of ideas;
 - supporting opinions, defending a point of view, or justifying actions in meetings or discussions with employees, colleagues or superiors;
 - counselling and giving advice to employees or clients on sensitive or complex issues;
 - participating in selection boards;
 - making presentations, giving training courses or defending appeals; and,
 - dealing with situations which require quick and accurate use of both languages in rapid succession (such as those faced by a receptionist in a busy office).
-

Appendix B

Composite Descriptions of a Positive and Negative Language Learning Experience
(Taken from Pilot Study)

Table 1

Description of Factors affecting Positive Language Training Experiences

In a positive experience, the participants showed an intrinsic motivation for taking the language training. Meaningful goals were set and with perseverance, achieved. A positive attitude towards the new culture and language were present. Feelings of personal satisfaction, pride and fulfillment arose when a breakthrough was experienced. The participants expressed a desire to maintain the L2 after the training and felt that their family and workplace were very supportive.

Description of Factors affecting Negative Language Training Experiences

In a negative experience, the participant was required to attend the language training the motivation was extrinsic. A high level of stress was present due to pressure to complete the training on time and some participants felt a need for stress release. Feelings of resentment and frustration emerged since it was alleged that there was no need to learn the L2. No desire to maintain the language was expressed and the participants felt that the workplace did not promote the maintenance of the language.

Appendix C

Gardner and MacIntyre's (1992, 1993) Socio-Educational Model of SLA

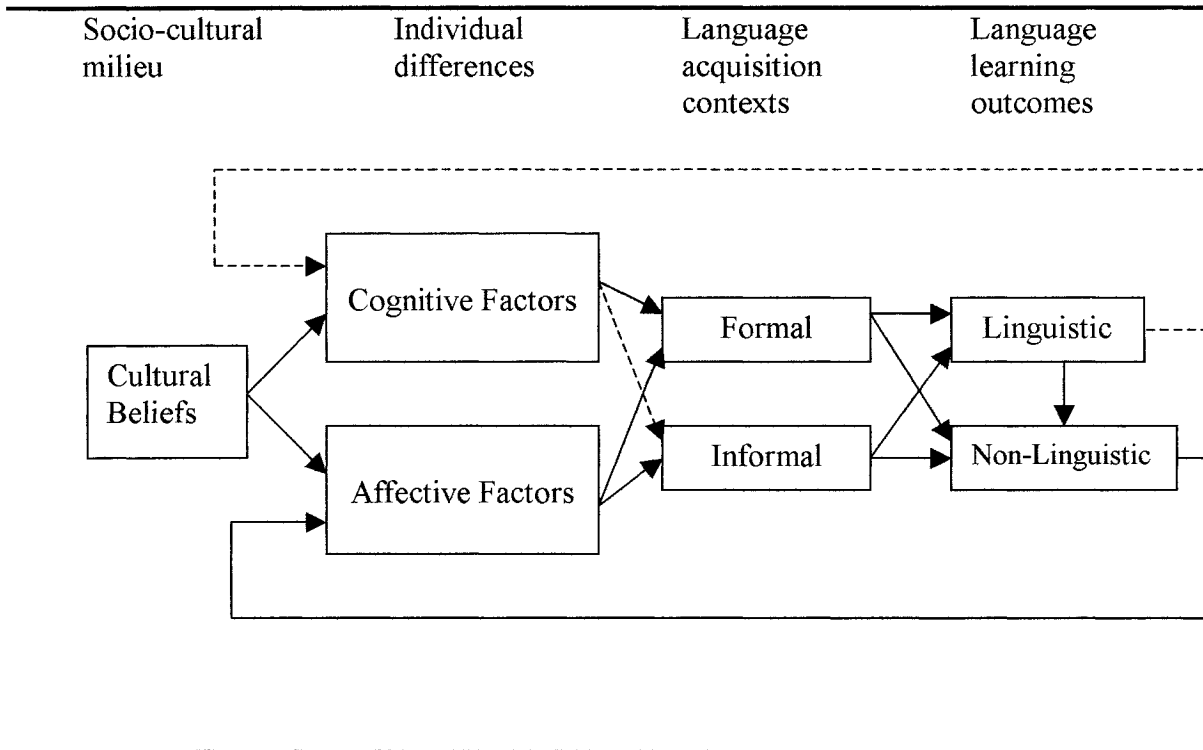


Figure 1 Schematic representation of the socio-educational model of second language acquisition.

Appendix D

Dörnyei's Motivational Construct

Language Level	Integrative Motivational Subsystem
	Instrumental Motivational Subsystem
Learner Level	Need for Achievement
	Self-Confidence *Language Use Anxiety *Perceived L2 Competence *Causal Attributions *Self-Efficacy
Learning Situation Level	
<i>Course-Specific Motivational Components</i>	Interest Relevance Expectancy Satisfaction
<i>Teacher-Specific Motivational Components</i>	Affiliative Drive Authority Type Direct Socialization of Motivation *Modeling *Task Presentation *Feedback
<i>Group-Specific Motivational Components</i>	Goal-orientedness Norm & Reward System Group Cohesion Classroom Goal Structure

Figure 1 Dörnyei's (1994, 1998) Components of Foreign Language Learning Motivation



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Appendix E

Information Letter

Monday, May 3rd, 2004

Sir/Madam,

My name is Josée Bessette and I am a Masters student at the University of Ottawa. I am commencing my research to fulfill my thesis requirement for an M.A. degree within the Faculty of Education, and my thesis supervisor is Dr. Sima Paribakht. The topic of my thesis is "Government French Language Training Programs: *Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences*". I wish to conduct a qualitative collective case study wherein I will explore the learners' perceptions of their second language learning experience, and in particular factors that affect the learners' perceptions of this experience.

In the context of the PSC's Language Training, teachers, students, program planners, and curriculum designers each have their role to play in attaining a common goal – that of a desired language proficiency for the students. However, it is the language learners who have first hand knowledge of this experience and know best what helps them learn. For this reason, I would like to invite you to participate in this study and offer you an opportunity to voice your reflections on your language learning experience.

I have approached the PSC's Language Training at L'Esplanade and have obtained their permission to conduct this research. In turn, they have contacted potential participants, like yourself, to request written permission so that I may contact you in order to carry out my data collection, and as such I am now writing to you. You are free to participate or not participate in this research. At this time, if you were willing to participate, I would ask you to take approximately 20 minutes of your time and complete the two questionnaires that are enclosed and return them to me before May 14th, 2004. Completed and returned questionnaires will be taken as consent to participate in this research.

Once I have received your completed questionnaires, I will randomly select the participants for the interview section of the research. If you are selected, I will contact you to set up an informal, tape-recorded, individual interview session lasting approximately one hour. This interview will be conducted at your convenience, and at your choice of location. Participants who are not selected will be notified by mail.

To ensure confidentiality and anonymity, you will be given a pseudonym that will be used on the questionnaires and during the interview. Furthermore, my thesis supervisor and I will be the only people to have access to these instruments and they will be kept in a secure location. Lastly, you will be given access to your interview transcripts to ensure validity and accuracy.

Appendix F

Government French Language Training Programs: Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences

Preliminary Questionnaire (Q1)

Participant _____

Circle the appropriate answer for your particular case:

1. Are you: a. Male b. Female
2. What is your native language?
a. French b. English c. Other (specify) _____
3. Do you speak any other languages?
a. yes (specify) _____ b. no
4. What is the highest level of education you have obtained?
a. high school b. college c. university d. other (specify) _____
5. Is your position designated bilingual?
a. yes b. no
6. Which L2 training program did you take?
a. Continuous b. Cyclical c. Combination of programs (specify) _____
7. Where did you attend the language training course?
a. Asticou b. l'Esplanade c. Other location (specify) _____
8. Did you successfully obtain a 'C' proficiency level in your oral interaction skill?
a. yes, the first time b. yes, after _____ attempts c. no
9. How many months of language training did you take to obtain a 'CBC' proficiency level?
a. 3-5 months b. 6-8 months c. 9-11 months d. 1 year e. other _____
10. Would you be willing to participate in an individual interview, at your convenience, to share your L2 training experience more in depth? (This interview would last approximately one hour and be tape-recorded)
a. yes b. no

Appendix G

Government French Language Training Programs: Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences
In-Depth Questionnaire (Q2)

Participant _____

Circle the appropriate answer for your particular case:

1. What do you think was your knowledge of French prior to taking the language training course?
 a. very poor b. poor c. adequate d. good e. very good
2. Foreign languages interest me. I like to learn and use new phrases in any language.
 a. Not important b. somewhat important c. quite important
3. I am interested in having first-hand contact with French Canadian people and culture.
 a. Not important b. somewhat important c. quite important
4. If the PSC language training did not exist, I would:
 a. Not bother to learn French b. Try to obtain lessons elsewhere c. Try to pick it up on my own

Check-off the appropriate answer for your particular case:

5. In your current work, to what extent: Never Rarely Occasionally Frequently Always
- | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------------|-------|-------|-------|-------|-------|
| a. Do you have to read in French? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. Do people speak to you in French? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. Do you speak French with others? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. Do you write in French? | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

6. During the training, how much effect on your rate of progress in the course did the following have:

	mainly positive effect	neutral	mainly negative effect
a. Teacher's motivation	_____	_____	_____
b. Teacher's rapport with the class	_____	_____	_____
c. Presentation of material	_____	_____	_____
d. Homework	_____	_____	_____
e. In class exercises/activities	_____	_____	_____
f. Teacher's feedback	_____	_____	_____

Additional comments pertaining to question #6: _____

7. During the training, how much effect on your rate of progress in the course did the following have:
- | | mainly
positive | neutral | mainly
negative |
|------------------------------------|--------------------|---------|--------------------|
| a. Class schedule, size & location | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. Other students' attitudes | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. Group dynamics | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. Group support | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Additional comments pertaining to question #7: _____

8. During the training:
- | | definitely | somewhat | not at all |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------|------------|
| a. Material was interesting | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. Material was relevant | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. Material was meaningful | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. Material met my expectations | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Additional comments pertaining to question #8: _____

9. During the training:
- | | definitely | somewhat | not at all |
|--|------------|----------|------------|
| a. My self-confidence was enhanced | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| b. I was apprehensive to speak in French | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| c. I felt relaxed most of the time | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| d. I felt stressed when tested | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| e. I felt supported by my peers | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| f. I felt supported by my teacher | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| g. I felt supported by my family/friends | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| h. I felt supported by my workplace | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| i. I felt the pressure of my regular job | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| j. I could juggle my homework
and family responsibilities | _____ | _____ | _____ |
| k. I was motivated to learn | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Additional comments pertaining to question #9: _____

10. Do you think that the level of **knowledge** of the French language that you gained during the language training was high enough to allow you to function effectively:
 When immediately returning to work? Today in your workplace?

Reading	_____ yes	_____ no	Reading	_____ yes	_____ no
Writing	_____ yes	_____ no	Writing	_____ yes	_____ no
Listening	_____ yes	_____ no	Listening	_____ yes	_____ no
Speaking	_____ yes	_____ no	Speaking	_____ yes	_____ no

11. Do you think that the level of French **practice** that you acquired during the language training was high enough to allow you to function effectively:
 When immediately returning to work? Today in your workplace?

Reading	_____ yes	_____ no	Reading	_____ yes	_____ no
Writing	_____ yes	_____ no	Writing	_____ yes	_____ no
Listening	_____ yes	_____ no	Listening	_____ yes	_____ no
Speaking	_____ yes	_____ no	Speaking	_____ yes	_____ no

Additional comments pertaining to questions 10 or 11: _____

Circle the appropriate answer for your particular case:

12. I prefer to listen and absorb the language rather than speak it.
 a. never b. rarely c. occasionally d. frequently e. always
13. I hesitate to speak unless I can speak correctly.
 a. never b. rarely c. occasionally d. frequently e. always
14. I monitor my speech when I interact with others
 a. never b. rarely c. occasionally d. frequently e. always
15. The most important thing for me is to get my message across.
 a. never b. rarely c. occasionally d. frequently e. always
16. I strike up conversations with my peers/teacher in my second language
 a. never b. rarely c. occasionally d. frequently e. always
17. When I do not know how to say something, I will: (Circle all that applies)
 a. guess b. consult a book c. ask the teacher d. ask a fellow student

Additional comments pertaining to any question in this questionnaire (use back of page if necessary): _____

Appendix H

The Interview Protocol

Government French Language Training Programs: Statutory Civil Servants' Experiences

Time of interview: _____ Date: _____ Place: _____

Interviewer: Josée Bessette

Interviewee: _____ A.K.A.: Participant _____

Welcome the participant and briefly describe project. Assure them of anonymity, confidentiality and have them sign the consent form.

Opening Questions:

- Which program of French language training did you take? (immersion, continuous, cyclical or a combination) Was it private/semi-private or in a group? How many students were in your class?
- When did you begin the program? When did you complete it? Where did you take the program?

Questions pertaining to *before* the lg. training:

- How did you feel towards the target language? Its culture?
- What were your reasons for taking the French language training course?
- Do you have any Francophone friends/family?
- What was your background knowledge of the French language prior the course?
- What abilities of learners do you think are most important in learning to speak a second language?

Questions pertaining to *during* the lg. training

- Was there ever a time or incident where you felt stuck – no progress? Were you able to overcome it?
- Could you describe your most stressful moment in French language training?
- How did this make you feel? What was your level of confidence at that time?
- Could you describe your most rewarding moment in the L2 training? (break-through?)
- How did this make you feel? What was your level of confidence at that time?
- When learning new written material, how did you try to remember it? Oral material?

- Do you think it is possible to become operationally bilingual by following the PSC language training without outside effort?
- What did you do outside of class to enhance your language learning?
- How did you find the L2 instructor(s)? (with respect to their knowledge, teaching ability and style, personality, and methodology)
- How did you find the dynamics of the class?
- How did you find the course textbooks and activities overall?
- Which materials were the most useful for you? Which were the least useful? Why?
- Did you successfully complete the language training? (yes/no) How did this make you feel?

Questions pertaining to *after* the training

- What was your level of satisfaction immediately after the training? Today?
- Describe the opportunities you have to use your L2 now – at work/ at home.
- How useful do you think this training will be in attaining future professional goals? Other goals?
- In your opinion, what would be the ingredients of a good language learning experience?
- What advice could you give individuals, like yourself, who are about to begin language training?
- In your view, how can the language training program be improved for students like yourself? In general?
- Would you be willing to take another course through the PSC training program? Why or why not?

Any additional comments?

Thank individual for participating in this interview. Again assure him/her of confidentiality of responses.

Appendix J

Participants' profiles based on Q1 and Q2

Table 1

Participant	Gender	Level of Education	Position designated bilingual?	Type of L2 training	Obtained a "C" level in oral communication skill after	Total months in training	Prior knowledge of L2
'Lfs'	female	university	Yes	continuous/ immersion	7 attempts	13	Good
'Mms'	male	university	Yes	continuous/ immersion	3 attempts	13	Very poor
'Rmt'	male	university	Yes	continuous/ immersion	1 attempt	14	Very poor
'Vft'	female	university	Yes	continuous	2 attempts	11	Very poor
'Wfs'	female	university	Yes	continuous	5 attempts	12	Poor
'Xmt'	male	university	Yes	continuous	1 attempt	10	Poor

Appendix K

List of Themes and Sub-Themes Emerging from this Study

The PSC Language Learner – “PSC”

- PSC-a: PSC language policy
- PSC-r: resentment
- PSC-p: pressure to get it done/time
- PSC-j: juggling responsibilities

Affective Factors – “A”

- AFF-m: motivation/attitude
- AFF-sc: self confidence
- AFF-sat: satisfaction

Cognitive Factors – “COG”

- COG-pk: prior knowledge
- COG-ap: aptitude
- COG-str: learning strategies
- COG-l: learning styles

Socio-Cultural Factors – “SC”

- S-C-c: cultural component
- S-C-s: social prejudices

Contextual Factors – “CON”

- CON-t: teacher component
- CON-g: group component
- CON-i: immersion
- CON-w: workplace /opportunities

Evaluation Factors – “E”

- E-a: apprehension
 - E-d: disconnect – training/testing
 - E-e: oral evaluation
-