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**“On Mature Reflection”:
Commentary on Ballinger Dissertation**

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1. Introduction

The synopsis of Susan Ballinger’s dissertation here is an appropriate inclusion in the first issue of this journal, since it offers a timely review of some of the central issues in immersion education research forty years after Lambert and Tucker’s (1972) seminal publication. As might be expected in a field that is entering its more sober middle years, there is acknowledgement that some of the assumptions of youth were overambitious: reviewing the literature, Ballinger highlights the need to temper the heady optimism of the early days of immersion research with the evidence that its outcomes in terms of productive proficiency in the L2 are not as native like (i.e. accurate) as were originally expected, and that the classroom processes needed in immersion to facilitate a focus on form as well as meaning are far more complex than originally envisaged.

Ballinger’s central research question focuses on something of a ‘pressure point’ in current discussions of immersion (particularly across the researcher-practitioner divide): the issue of whether the L1 and L2 should be kept separate or not in the classroom. Both Cook (2001) and Cummins (2007) have noted that the rigid separation of the two languages [the “two solitudes assumption” (Cummins, 2007, p. 223)] became axiomatic in second language immersion from its first formulation by Lambert and Tucker (1972). Today, however, this separation is seen as misguided by them and other researchers, such as Cenoz and Gorter (2011), García (2009) and Lyster, Collins and Ballinger (2009), both in failing to recognise the pedagogical value of crosslanguage transfer and building skills in both languages, and in overlooking the artificiality of obstructing contact between a multilingual’s languages. It is fascinating that it is demographic change across a wide range of geographical contexts that is, to some extent, forcing the hand of immersion researchers and practitioners to reconsider “parallel monolingualism.” The neat picture associated with ‘classic’ French immersion, of all children being at the same stage of learning the target language as their L2, is less often found in the fuzzier real world where native speakers and L2 learners frequently end up side by side, and with children who are learning the target language as their L3 or L4. As Ballinger notes, French immersion now more often approximates the experience of immersion in parts of Ireland or Wales, for example, in needing to group learners of widely different levels of proficiency together in one class, and Ballinger’s thesis deals with the resulting need to adjust immersion pedagogy in order to support more effectively these pupils’ actual language learning needs. She argues forcefully that we need to move away from fitting pupils to the immersion model, towards fitting the immersion process to the pupils’ needs.

Ballinger adopted a mixed methods approach to examine the value of teaching collaborative strategies to her young learners aged 9-10 years, collecting interview data from the pupils and their teachers, and quantifying the pupils’ use of particular strategies, such as corrective feedback, in their transcribed interactions over a set of tasks. In her summary here, based on a full dissertation, certain issues are necessarily dealt with only briefly and remain unclear, such as whether there were differences in results on different tasks, and whether there was a language effect on the interaction in each pair (did they behave differently when

the novice in one language became the expert in the other?). She notes that there was a 'noticeable task effect' without elaboration, and hopefully future publications will address this interesting point. Recognising these inevitable gaps arising from abridgement, the discussion here will focus on considering linkages to some other contexts as well as some other possible influences on such collaborative interactions within a translanguaging approach. Specifically, it will consider issues relating to the pairings of children, and the impact of differences in language status on this process.

2. Discussion

2.1. Pairings

Ballinger's intervention set up eight pairs of students, with most pairs having one French-dominant and one English-dominant pupil, each alternating being expert or novice across tasks in English and French. Pupils were assigned to pairs on the basis of their language proficiency, and the pair and individual data were examined across tasks in both languages to assess their use of questions, corrective feedback and overall collaboration. She noted some differences in how these pairs operated, with rates of collaborative turns ranging from 49-77% between pairs and similar variation between individuals' rates of collaborative turns (although it is not clear if these were significantly different), and also differences in their rates of corrective feedback. To explore these individual and pair differences, Ballinger presents excerpts from the audiotaped data, showing illuminating glimpses of differences in dynamic between two of the pairs. These examples point to both individual and gender differences in interactive style in these pairs. It is relevant to consider here Murphy and Faulkner's (2006) study of L1 communicative effectiveness in somewhat younger children (aged 5-7), which also measured collaborative speech such as questions, directives and elaborations. That study found a significant interaction between gender and popularity on children's production of language behaviours that aided communication, in that popular girls used the most, while unpopular girls and all sampled boys had similar and lower levels of these behaviours. It would be interesting to consider the impact of factors such as gender and popularity in collaborative L2 learning tasks also, and consider whether collaboration on L2 tasks between children of this age could be improved for all dyads if, for example, they had some input into their partner selection, either before the task ('choose between X and Y', selected to meet the criteria of expert) or allowing them some alternation of partners from the relevant category of novice or expert.

2.2. Collaboration and Relative Status

Ballinger's close analysis of the data of Pairs 5 and 6 showed differences in their levels of conflict and resolution of the language-related problems that arose. The excerpts from the children's interactions raise some interesting questions about differences in their sense of authority or ownership of French: in the successful pair (Pair 6) the (female) novice showed deference towards the (male) French speaker's expertise, while in the less successfully collaborative pair the female novice disputed the (female) French speaker's linguistic authority. It is interesting that this touches on an issue regarding authority that is becoming more urgent in high contact language situations for endangered languages such as Irish and Welsh. For example, Nic Fhlannchada, Coleman and Hickey (2012) carried out a qualitative study on the question of 'who decides what is correct in Irish' among young adult native speakers of Irish and fluent L2 immersion speakers. They found a reluctance on both sides to view the native speakers' language as expert, more accurate or authentic, with the perceived lower status of the native Irish speakers appearing to call into question their linguistic authority, even among themselves, and their own higher rates of code-switching, supporting their belief that they have smaller Irish vocabularies than some immersion peers. It is

interesting that Ballinger noted that in all of the pairs she studied where the partner's knowledge was not acknowledged, the interaction tended to end in conflict. Of some relevance here is a study by Gaudet and Clement (2005), who found that the perceived status of French in a French-Canadian, French-medium high school affected teens' use of the language. They noted that social support aided language confidence and was an important factor in shaping identity among the minority Francophone teenage population in the school. They found that the more involvement the Francophones had with their ingroup (other Francophones), the more they self-identified as Francophone, which, in turn correlated with higher self-esteem. Subtractive bilingualism in terms of decline/regression in French proficiency was seen where there were higher levels of contact with the Anglophone outgroup, and this was found to have a negative correlation with the development of a Francophone identity and a positive correlation with the development of an Anglophone identity. This serves to remind us of the impact of the wider sociolinguistic context on classroom interactions, and this is surely one of the factors that we must take into account more in immersion research, since children do not leave the prevailing attitudes of the wider community to high-status and lower-status languages at the classroom door.

It should be emphasized that this is not to argue against the benefits of translanguaging exercises, which, as Lyster, Collins and Ballinger (2009) showed, generate high levels of motivation and enthusiasm among teachers and learners. Rather it is to sound a note of caution with regard to assuming that expertise is equally recognised and valued in both minority and majority languages. In further developing such pedagogical approaches, the recognition of such inequalities will help to ensure that pedagogical approaches that are effective in improving L2 learning among majority language children do not inadvertently undermine L1 maintenance among minority language children. Valdés (1997) sounded a 'cautionary note' about two-way immersion with regard to language minority children, and it may be worthwhile to examine whether there are unintended consequences in translanguaging as currently implemented that need to be addressed proactively in order to optimise learning for all children.

3. Conclusion

Overall, Ballinger's thesis shows that the translanguaging exercise she carried out was viewed positively by the teachers and pupils in her study— that is, reading and working on tasks on the same topic through the two languages at different times seemed to deepen learning without boring children with double exposure. This of course supports Cummins' (2007) contention that the rigorous segregation of a bilingual's two languages imposes an artificial separation of their language capacity and their striving to make meaning. In this regard it must also be noted that such harnessing of the child's total linguistic capacity to support learning offers a valuable opportunity to enlist greater parental involvement in children's immersion schooling among those lacking target language proficiency, though schools need to take the lead in helping immersion parents to build this into their role construction (as shown by Kavanagh & Hickey, 2012). With regard to the attempt to get the children to collaborate and offer each other corrective feedback in expert-novice pairs, other issues that are highly interesting to those of us working with minority endangered languages appear to become salient, in particular the possibility that the tension between the status of the two languages can create a backwash effect that may impact on the authority of the native speaker of the locally 'lower status' language and the fragilities of identity formation among minority language speakers in close contact with speakers of higher status languages. This may point to a need to consider more explicit discussion with learners about such issues, and also consideration of some counter-balancing in the grouping of the minority language dominant children for language enrichment activities in a way that is supportive of their

group identity. Ballinger is to be congratulated for her timely contribution to such urgent issues in immersion research.

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