

Chapter 6

Belonging and Legitimacy for French Language Teachers: A Visual Analysis of Raciolinguistic Discourses

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ABSTRACT

With the ongoing French as a second language (FSL) teacher shortage crisis driving multi-million-dollar expenditures from governments, professional associations, and school boards, little attention has turned towards identifying systemic issues, rooted in racial ideologies, which may be impacting FSL teachers' desire to stay (or even enter) into the profession. In this chapter, using visual narratives and arts-based research methods, the authors applied LangCrit and raciolinguistics to examine future FSL teachers' discourses about French as a language/culture and learning French and teaching French. The data collected over a year, showcasing three participants, reveal the vastly different positionalities entrenched in complex interactions with language standard ideologies, native-speakerism, colonialism and racism. The authors ask, then, how stakeholders and teacher education programs might account for these differing lived realities when it comes to recruiting and preparing future FSL teachers for long-term success in the profession.

INTRODUCTION

In response to the ongoing French as a second language (FSL) teacher shortage crisis in Canada (Masson et al., 2019), governmental and educational institutions have been focusing on recruiting more French language speakers to the profession. While specifics vary across provinces and territories, teacher educa-

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tion programs are generally about two years in length, after an initial four years at university. They offer general pedagogical and subject-specific methodology (didactics) courses, often in English and when possible in French, as well as practicum in schools where future teachers can practice teaching in FSL programs (see Smith et al, 2023 for a detailed pan-Canadian comparison of programs). Recruits are usually either graduates of French immersion programs, or individuals from French-speaking nations around the world with whom the government is forging agreements so that French-speaking individuals may immigrate to Canada to become practicing teachers. This signals a shift in the make-up of the French teacher population, with large numbers of FSL learners becoming French teachers and an increasing number of potential French teachers immigrating from Africa, South America, the Caribbeans and Asia, some of whom may speak non-standard forms of French. Standard forms of French considered ‘appropriate’ or ‘correct’ those from France, Belgium, Switzerland or Québec. In Canada, while research has focused on the professional needs and linguistic profiles of FSL teachers (Jack & Nyman, 2019; Masson et al., 2019), it has overlooked their intersections with racial identity. In fact, there is little understanding of who are FSL teachers and what issues they must negotiate as they develop their practice (Byrd Clark, 2010; Tang, 2020), particularly through a raciolinguistic lens. Indeed, the ways in which issues of race, racism and colonialism are tied up in FSL teaching and learning is just emerging as a field of research in Canada (Wernicke et al., forthcoming). With this chapter, we seek to examine how raciolinguistic issues might have a bearing on future FSL teachers’ identity formation, and how well they are able to establish a sense of belonging and legitimacy which may shed light on another dimension affecting their long-term desire to remain in the profession.

While we reference the literature on the FSL teacher shortage across Canada, our study took place in Ontario (a province in Canada) where many of the issues identified in the pan-Canadian literature also surface. Our intention is to challenge and nuance general discourses about who are FSL teachers in Canada using a raciolinguistic lens. Below, we outline key socio-historical and socio-political realities in the Canadian context. Having these in mind, it is important to facilitate the process of looking at the intersection of racializing discourses associated with French and the professional identity construction of novice FSL teachers and the possibilities of them developing a sense of belonging in the French-speaking community.

SITUATING FRENCH WITHIN THE CANADIAN COLONIAL PROJECT

Embarking on an exploration of FSL teacher identity requires imagining possibilities for becoming a professional who teaches language within intersections of language and race in Canada. It also requires an understanding of the socio-historical context of French in Ontario and Canada more broadly. A few pertinent facts stand out.

First, we will study the unique history of French in Canada. Longstanding fighting between the British and the French for dominance of stolen Indigenous lands in Canada, and the subsequent dominance of English-speaking peoples, contributed to the progressive marginalization and oppression of French speaking communities by the British and their settler descendants (Haque, 2012; Makropoulos, 2004). At the same time, its status as one of the first colonizing languages on Canadian soil is also what afforded French its official language status. Second, historical conceptualization and theorization of the French language and second language acquisition rely on deficit-oriented perspectives towards competency, fluency and legitimacy. These epistemes have carried on in the field of FSL education (Wernicke et

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