Living and working in immersion French

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ABSTRACT

Our study presents a variationist analysis of lexical variation in L2 immersion in French. Two variables are considered: a) words referring to remunerated work, e.g. *travail*; b) verbs used to indicate one's place of residence, e.g. *habiter*. One linguistic factor, priming in the interviewer's question, is shown to condition both variables. A number of social factors are also considered. The only correlation that obtains with a social factor is speakers' home language for the 'work' variable. The main finding from our study is that in comparison to L1 Canadian Francophones, the immersion students make use of a limited number of lexical variants and show no knowledge of highly frequent non standard L1 forms.

I INTRODUCTION

Our study presents a variationist analysis (cf. Sankoff, 1988) of two cases of lexical variation in immersion French using a corpus of forty-one speakers enrolled in an extended French programme in Ontario, Canada. Variation within two lexical fields is considered: a) the work domain, i.e. nouns referring to 'work', e.g. *travail*, and b) the living domain, i.e. verbs used to indicate one's place of residence, e.g. *habiter*. Variationist studies of these variables exist already for native speakers of Canadian French. These studies will serve as a benchmark against which to compare the sociolinguistic competence of our immersion students. Results for the same variables also exist for Anglophones residing in Montreal, Quebec. As such, we will be able to examine the importance of residing in the target language community for the use of standard and non standard lexical variables and to see whether this results in a difference between the two groups of L2 speakers.

The primary purpose of our study is to determine to what extent the distribution of variants in our immersion corpus resembles that which is found in the speech of native speakers of Canadian French. We are interested in the number of variants used by immersion students within these lexical fields as well as in the presence or absence of variants typical of an informal register in native Francophone speech. This goal is all the more important given the Ontario Ministry of Education's guidelines for the teaching of French which stipulate that at the end of their studies, immersion students should control both formal and informal registers and demonstrate familiarity with the local (i.e. Canadian) variety of French. A second

goal of our study is to compare results for lexical variation with that of variables from other linguistic levels in order to determine if similar results obtain at the lexical level. Finally, we will consider a number of social factors to examine their relative influence on sociolinguistic variation in L2 speech.

2 BACKGROUND

As Gass and Selinker (1994) note, studies of the acquisition of L2 lexical items are clearly less numerous than those focusing on other linguistic levels, for example L2 grammar. Furthermore, those studies that have examined the lexicon have concentrated primarily on accuracy, i.e. on variation between native and non-native forms (cf. Dickerson, 1975; Wolfram, 1989; Young, 1991). Relatively few studies have actually delved into cases of sociolinguistic variation in the spontaneous oral discourse of L2 speakers where the variants at hand are both possible in the target language, but distributed according to social factors (cf. Regan, 1996).

While previous studies of French immersion have provided us with a wealth of information regarding these students' receptive and productive skills (cf. Lambert and Tucker, 1972; Harley and Swain, 1984; Swain and Lapkin, 1986; Rebuffot, 1993) little is known about the variable use of native variants, though it is an essential aspect of sociolinguistic competence and understanding variation in the spontaneous oral discourse of second language speakers is necessary for a complete understanding of their linguistic system (cf. Bailey and Preston, 1996).

2.1 *Methodology and Corpus*

The data on which our analyses are based come from Mougeon and Nadasdi's (1996) corpus of semi-directed interviews with 41 speakers enrolled in immersion programmes in the greater Toronto area, where they receive 50% French medium instruction from grades 5 to 8, and 20% in grades 9 through 12 (see Table 1). Our speakers are, in fact, from both grades 9 and 12 (i.e. 13–17 years of age) and are from homes where neither parent is a native speaker of French and where French is not spoken. While it is true that these students are not from French-speaking homes, their home environments are not exclusively Anglophone. Fifty-one per cent of our subjects come from homes where a language other than English is spoken to varying degrees. Of these students, 39% are from homes where a Romance language is spoken and the rest are from non-Romance language homes. Concerning the social distribution of our speakers, there are approximately the same number of grade 9 and grade 12 students, there are more females than males, and the majority are from middle class families.[1] Most of the students have received between 26–37%

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[1] As Mougeon *et al.* (2002) point out, these latter two characteristics are typical of the students enrolled in Ontario's French immersion programmes.

Table 1 *Chief characteristics of the student sample*

Grade	Sex	Social Class†	Average amount of French medium schooling (%)	Exposure to T.V. & radio in French	Time in Francophone environment	Length of stay with Franco. family
9 (N = 21)	F (N = 13) M (N = 8)	Middle (N = 10) LoMid (N = 9)	0–25 (N = 2) 26–37 (N = 14) 38–100 (N = 5)	Never (N = 16) Occasional (N = 5)	oh–1d (N = 8) 1–7d (N = 6) 7d–3w (N = 6) over 3w (N = 1)	oh (N = 15) 1–13d (N = 5) over 2w (N = 1)
12 (N = 20)	F (N = 17) M (N = 3)	Middle (N = 14) LoMid (N = 5) Working (N = 1)	0–25 (N = 6) 26–37 (N = 13) 38–100 (N = 1)	Never (N = 9) Occasional (N = 11)	oh–1d (N = 4) 1–7d (N = 3) 7d–3w (N = 9) over 3w (N = 4)	oh (N = 12) 1d–13d (N = 1) 2w–up (N = 7)
Total N = 41	F = 30 M = 11	Middle = 24 LoMid = 14 Working = 1	0–25 = 8 26–37 = 27 38–100 = 6	Never = 25 Occasional = 16	oh–1d = 12 1–7d = 9 7d–3w = 15 over 3w = 5	oh = 27 1–13d = 6 over 2w = 8

of their schooling through the medium of French. Note also that the vast majority of our speakers' exposure to French has in fact taken place within the confines of the immersion classroom, although the grade 12 students in particular have spent some time in Francophone environments. These stays in a Francophone environment or with a Francophone family are, for the most part, in Quebec and are of an average length of 16 days. Note finally that the semi-directed interviews which provide the data for our analyses were conducted by a native speaker of French, and centred on a range of topics concerning students' interests and hobbies.

2.2 *Previous studies on variation in the Toronto immersion corpus*

A number of studies have already been conducted on the Toronto immersion corpus.[2] These studies have investigated cases of both grammatical and phonetic variation. The general results of this research are that students do make use of informal/non standard variants. However, their use of such forms is much less than what is found in native speakers' discourse. For example, in their study of the alternation between first person plural pronouns *on* and *nous*, Rehner, Mougeon and Nadasdi (1999) found that immersion students use the informal form *on* in 56% of occurrences, while native speakers use this form almost categorically in an interview situation (98.4% of the time, cf. Laberge, 1977). Similar results have been found for cases of phonetic variation. For example, Uritescu, Mougeon and Handouleh (2000) examined schwa deletion in both native speaker and French immersion data. Their results show that while native speakers delete schwa 65% of the time, the rate of deletion in the immersion corpus is only 15%. Also of note, in both of these studies, is that the amount of time students have spent in a Francophone environment has a positive impact on variation. For example, in the case of first person plural variants, those having spent the most time in a Francophone environment use the informal *on* variant 92% of the time! As for the deletion of schwa, those having spent several weeks in such an environment also make increased use of the informal variant (24% deletion). The present study will further explore the role of stays in a Francophone environment by considering cases of lexical variation.

As concerns the role of social class and sex, Mougeon *et al.* (2002) note that the majority of variables studied in the immersion corpus display an effect comparable to that found in the speech of native speakers: females and students from a middle class background tend to make greater use of standard and formal variants when compared to males and lower-middle class speakers. Mougeon *et al.* do point out, however, that this is not evidence that speakers have internalised the variants' social connotations based on interactions with native speakers, given the limited contacts students have had outside the classroom. Rather, it reflects their interpretation of

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[2] For a variationist analysis of L2 French in Ireland, see Regan (1996).

the variants based on the input in the teachers' discourse.[3] Standard variants are favoured by teachers, and students who favour standard variants in their L1 will also tend to do so in their L2. While we will examine the role of sex and social class for the lexical variable under study, it is unlikely that they will play a role since, as we will see, in neither case is there evidence that the teachers actually use the non standard variant of the variable.

3 VARIABLE 1: *TRAVAIL, EMPLOI, JOB, OUVRAGE*

Let us begin by examining the ways one refers to *work* in Canadian French since this will be the benchmark for our comparisons. This information is based on the findings of Sankoff *et al.* (1978) and Sankoff (1997) which examine cases of lexical variation in the French of Montreal, Quebec. As these studies point out, a number of lexical items are used to refer to 'work' in Canadian French, as in (1):

(1)   *travail, ouvrage, job, emploi, situation, position, poste.*

The first point that needs to be made is that the forms in (1) are not always interchangeable from a meaning perspective. For example, when referring to 'work' in its most general, abstract sense, only a subset of these forms is possible. For example:

(2)   a. c'est du travail!
      b. c'est de l'ouvrage!
      c. c'est de la job!
      d. *c'est de la position!
      e. *c'est de l'emploi!

In this most general of senses, three variants are in fact possible in Canadian French: *travail, ouvrage, job.* However, the immersion speakers only use *travail* in this general sense. They don't have the more vernacular *ouvrage* and they do not make use of the partitive structure *de la job.* As such, not all words referring to work belong to the same linguistic variable. The precise variable we have examined in our study is that of paid or remunerated work, which is not the case for the examples in (2) from which *emploi* is excluded. In this more precise meaning of paid work, all the variants in (1) are possible in Canadian French and three of them are found with this meaning in the immersion corpus. It should be pointed out that Sankoff *et al.* (1978) also make mention of the distinction between paid work for which there is a job title, i.e. *butcher, baker, candlestick maker*, and that for which there is not. They suggest that in this precise use, *ouvrage* may not be possible. However, in our study the distinction is less relevant since, as we will see, *ouvrage* does not occur in the immersion corpus. In defining the variable, then, we follow Sankoff *et al.* (1978): the variable under study is composed of those lexical items referring to paid work

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[3] While we do not have a corpus of the immersion students teachers' speech, we have consulted Allen *et al.*'s corpus of immersion teachers' discourse to gain insight into the forms used by immersion teachers in the classroom for comparative purposes.

Table 2 *Distribution of variants referring to 'remunerated work' in the Toronto immersion corpus*

Variants	Ns	%
travail	45/81	56%
emploi	31/81	38%
job	5/81	6%
ouvrage	0/81	0%

for which there may or may not be a title. Examples of the three variants found in the immersion corpus, are given in (3):

(3)   a. j'aime mon *travail*, c'est très intéressant. 'I like my job, it's very interesting'.
       b. mon oncle avait trouvé un *emploi* pour mon père. 'my uncle found a job for my dad'.
       c. ... une bonne éducation pour avoir une *job*. '... good education to get a job'.

3.1 *Social distribution of the 'work' variants in L1 Montreal French*

According to Sankoff *et al.* (1978) the most frequent variant is *travail*, which is used in 35% of occurrences and does not appear to be socially stratified. However, social correlations were obtained for the other variants. The principal results are that *ouvrage* and *job* are typical of working-class speech (though used by all speakers) and that *emploi* is used most often by speakers belonging to the professional class.

3.2 *General results for the 'work' variable*

The results for the 'work' variable in the Toronto immersion corpus are presented in Table 2. Note, however, that several of the *job* tokens are flagged and probably instances of codeswitching (cf. Poplack, 1980) for example:

(4)   Comment est-ce qu'on dit *job*? 'How do you say job?'.

As such, we will limit our analysis to the binary alternation between *travail* and *emploi*. The general distribution of the variants is given in Table 3. As we can see, *travail* is the preferred variant, although both variants are frequent.

3.3 *Linguistic factors*

Relatively few linguistic factors seem to condition the choice of the variants. This is true not only in our own study, but also in findings from previous accounts of the variable (cf. Sankoff, 1997). One linguistic factor that does prove to be relevant in the immersion corpus is priming in the interviewer's discourse. Such examples were excluded from Sankoff's 1997 analysis. However, we have chosen to include

Table 3 *Overall distribution of travail and emploi*

Variants	Ns	%
travail	45/76	(59%)
emploi	31/76	(41%)

Table 4 *Effect of priming on use of emploi*

	Ns/%	Factor Weight[4]
primed by *emploi*	9/11 (82%)	.906
unprimed	22/65 (34%)	.405

them in our study since priming does not result in categorical use of the primed variant, even though it heavily favours it. In other words, there are instances of cross-priming as in (5):

(5)   Q: tu me dis qu'il va y avoir d'**emploi**? 'You say there was work?'.
      R: j'espère qu'il avait de **travail**. 'I hope there was work'.

In our analysis of the role of priming, we have considered those sentences with cross-priming, as in (5), without priming, as in (6), as well as those with priming by *emploi* as in (7) (since the interviewer does not prime with *travail*):

(6)   Q: ça c'est sûr (rire)/ et est-ce que tu penses que ça va t'aider dans la vie. 'that's for sure and do you think that will help you in life?'
      R: oui/ je penses que si tu savoir le plus langues/ tu peux avoir/ plus bon **emploi**. 'yes I think that if you know more languages you can get a good job'.

(7)   Q: si tu veux être médecin ou avocat penses-tu que tu auras de l'**emploi**?. 'if you want to be a doctor or a lawyer, do you think that you will find work?'.
      R: je pense que ça va être dur pour/ trouver un **emploi**. 'I think it will be hard to find a job'.

Let us consider the data presented in Table 4 which presents the results in terms of *emploi* usage. The effect of priming is obviously very strong. As revealed in Table 3, the overall percentage of *emploi* is 41%, but this soars to 82% in priming contexts. This result underscores the importance of taking lexical priming into account as a linguistic factor and it also illustrates the important influence interaction which a native speaker can have on the learner's output.

[4] This number is the product of regression analysis using GoldVarb. A number greater than .500 favours use of *emploi*, a number less than .500 disfavours it.

Table 5 *Use of travail according to home language*

Language	Ns	%	Factor weight
Romance	15/18	84%	.824
English	22/41	54%	.395
Other	8/17	47%	.353

3.4 *Social factors for conditioning the use of* travail *and* emploi

The following social factors were considered for the 'work' variable: social class, sex, length of stay in a Francophone environment and home language. However, none of the first three factors exercises a significant effect on variant choice. The lack of correlation with sex and social class is not surprising since the non standard variant *ouvrage* never appears in the corpus of immersion teachers' oral discourse and as such, it is unlikely that the students would have access to this form. As for the role of stays in a Francophone environment, this factor was not selected in regression analysis, which suggests that the short stays of the students have been insufficient for them to have acquired the non standard variant. This result is perhaps not surprising since in comparison to schwa or the use of first person plural pronouns (cf. section 2.2), lexical variables are infrequent. As such, it may only be through explicit instruction that students may eventually come to use non standard lexical forms. Another possibility would be for the students to experience longer stays in a Francophone environment since previous research suggests that this facilitates the acquisition of non standard forms (cf. Dewaele and Regan, 2000).

One social factor, 'home language', does exercise a significant effect on variation. The distribution of the variable according to home language is given in Table 5. While the number of tokens is relatively modest, there is nonetheless a striking and statistically significant preference for *travail* among the Romance speakers. Most of the Romance speakers of our corpus speak either Spanish or Italian as a home language, both of which have cognates which are used frequently in these communities, namely: *trabajo* and *travaglio*. This result is reminiscent of previous results which underscore the important role home language plays; for example, in a study of the alternation between *ne que, juste* and *seulement*, it was found that Romance speakers displayed a clear preference for *seulement* which can be attributed to the existence of the cognate *solamente* (cf. Mougeon and Rehner, to appear). In our study and that of Mougeon and Rehner, the L1 influence is quantitative rather than qualitative since the forms in question are possible L1 variants, however their high frequency remains attributable to the speakers' L1. We see then that even in the case of advanced L2 speakers, L1 influence remains an important influencing factor.

Table 6 *Variants of 'remunerated work' in three French-speaking populations*

Corpus	% travail	% emploi	% job	% poste	% ouvrage
Toronto immersion	56	38	6	0	0
Montreal immersion	40	34	14	12	0
Montreal French	35	14	29	8	14

3.5 *Comparison with other results*

Let us now compare our immersion results with previous studies of the variable. In this comparison, we will consider results for native speakers as well as immersion students living in the target language environment (i.e. the Montréal immersion students, cf. Sankoff, 1997). This comparison is presented in Table 6. The first point to make is that the Toronto immersion speakers resemble the others since, like the Montreal Francophones, *travail* is the most frequent variant in their discourse, although the reason for this is not evident. Perhaps it is related to the fact that *travail* is the more general term of the two and that L2 speakers learn the more general term earlier and use it more frequently. Note also, in the immersion teachers' corpus, *emploi* is never used while *travail* occurs more than fifty times, although only once with the precise meaning of 'remunerated work'. Still, its high frequency in the input may be sufficient to have an influence on the use of the variant with the meaning of 'remunerated work'. Although immersion students resemble L1 speakers by their high use of *travail*, both immersion groups, and the Toronto immersion students in particular, stand out since they have a limited number of items to refer to 'work'. And, more importantly, neither group of immersion students makes use of the non standard variant *ouvrage*. Note that *ouvrage* is not marginal in L1 Canadian French, not even in the professional classes. Sankoff *et al.*'s 1978 study of the variable found it to be used in 17% of cases, which is almost on an equal footing with *travail* (at 20% in the professional class). Previous studies of our immersion corpus have documented a complete absence of non standard grammatical features, for example *rien que* (meaning 'only') and *m'as* ('I'm going') (cf. Mougeon, Nadasdi and Rehner, 1998). Our study is the first to replicate this same finding with a lexical variable.

4 VARIABLE 2: *HABITER, VIVRE, RESTER, DEMEURER*

Let us now consider a second lexical variable, namely, verbs used to indicate one's place of residence. It differs from the first in that it is a verb, but resembles the 'work' variable since, here too, L1 speakers possess a range of variants, one of which is non standard. As was the case with 'work', 'living' can be a fairly general notion and in its most general sense, i.e. that of existence, there are several translations

Table 7 *General distribution of variants meaning 'to dwell' in the Toronto immersion corpus*

Variants	Ns	%
habiter	67/112	60%
vivre	45/112	40%
rester	0/112	0%
demeurer	0/112	0%

of 'live', not all of which can be rendered by verbs of residence, as illustrated in (8):

(8)   a. c'est ma décision et je dois **vivre** avec 'It's my decision and I have to live with it'.

      b. *c'est ma décision et je dois **habiter** avec *It's my decision and I have to dwell with it'.

The variable we have examined for the present study involves a particular sub-meaning of *vivre*, i.e. that of 'to dwell'. Sankoff (1997) points out that in this semantic domain four possibilities exist in Montreal French, given in (9):

(9)   *rester, vivre, demeurer, habiter*

4.1 *Social distribution of variants in L1 French*

Sankoff *et al.*'s (1978) study reveals that the most frequent variant in L1 Montreal French is *rester* since it is used in 64% of occurrences. On the other hand *habiter*, with a rate of occurrence of 6%, occurs in the speech of only a small number of individuals and it is used first and foremost by highly educated women belonging to the professional class. As for *demeurer*, these authors describe it as 'a stylistic resource . . . particularly as a "high-style" form for those who usually use *rester*'.

4.2 *General results for the 'live' variable*

Inspection of the immersion corpus reveals that once again the students make use of only two variants, namely, *habiter* and *vivre*. *Rester* is found, but never with the meaning 'to dwell', and *demeurer* doesn't appear at all in our corpus. Examples of the variants found in the corpus are provided in (10) and (11):

(10)   Elle **habite** dans Toronto. 'she lives in Toronto'.

(11)   Je vais **vivre** en Afrique. 'I'm going to live in Africa'.

Let us now turn to the overall frequencies of these variants to consider the distribution of these forms in the immersion data. General results for the distribution of the variants are presented in Table 7. As we can see in Table 7, the variants are fairly evenly distributed, although *habiter* is clearly the preferred variant. This may

be surprising given the tendency of L2 speakers to prefer more general variants and the fact that in English, there is more overlap between *vivre* and the English verb *live* (since both also function as verbs of existence). One possible explanation is that *habiter* is in fact the preferred variant of the immersion teachers. Our consultation of Allen *et al.*'s 1987 corpus of immersion teachers' discourse provides few examples of the variable (four in all), and all are instances of *habiter*. It seems therefore likely that the role of teacher input and the prevalence of *habiter* in pedagogical material may be responsible for the preponderance of *habiter*, however, this latter influence remains a hypothesis that still needs to be verified.

4.3 *Linguistic factors*

As for the previous variable, one linguistic factor group is selected as exercising a significant effect on variation. Once again, the factor group concerns priming in the interviewer's questions. However, unlike in the case of *emploi*, the interviewer primes with both variants. Examples of the unprimed occurrences as well as those primed with *habiter* and primed with *vivre* are given in examples (12), (13) and (14):

(12) **unprimed**
    Q. tu peux me raconter l'histoire de 'Green Card'?. 'Can you tell me the story of "Green Card"'?
    R. . . . Gérard Dépardieu était un caractére qui ahm ahm qui a besoin d'un 'green card' pour ahm pour **habiter** dans un pays. 'Gérard Dépardieu was a character who ah ah who needs a "green card" to ah, to live in a country'.

(13) **primed with *habiter***
    Q. et tu *habites* où?. 'and you live where?'
    R. j'*habite* à 'Mavis' et 'Eglinton' dans 'Mississauga' 'I live at "Mavis" and "Eglinton" in "Mississauga"'.

(14) **cross–primed**
    Q. Tu voudrais aller tu connais quelqu'un qui *vit* au Québec? 'Would you like to go do you know someone who lives in Quebec'.
    R. Ahm /je ne sais pas mais il y a des amis de leur famille qui **habitent** là mais . . . 'I don't know but there are friends of their family who live there but . . . .

The results for priming are given in Table 8. These results underscore once again the important role priming plays in the use of lexical variants in L2 speech. For example, while *habiter* is used in 60% of occurrences, this number falls to 14% when primed by *vivre*. Still, priming alone cannot explain the overall preponderance of *habiter* since even in unprimed examples, *habiter* remains the preferred variant (57%).

4.4 *Social factors conditioning the use of* habiter *and* vivre

As with the previous variable, no significant correlations between the 'live' variable and sex or social class obtained. We attribute the absence of such effects to the fact

Table 8 *Use of habiter according to priming*

	Ns	%	Factor weight
Primed by *habiter*	16/17	94%	.904
unprimed	50/88	57%	.438
Primed by *vivre*	1/7	14%	.090

Table 9 *Use of vivre according to home language*

Language	Ns	%	Factor weight
Romance	6/12	50%	NS
English	22/62	35%	NS
Other	17/38	45%	NS

that the teachers' discourse provides no examples of the non standard variant. As indicated in section 3.4, the students' home language was relevant for the 'work' variable and the influence was in the predicted direction, i.e., *travail* was used most frequently by speakers from a Romance background since cognates of *travail* are frequent in such languages. This suggests that a similar pattern should obtain for the 'to dwell' variable since *vivir*, or some version thereof, is frequent in Spanish and Italian. If we look at the percentages of the variants, the predicted pattern does arise, as revealed in Table 9.   However, these results are by no means conclusive given that this factor group is not selected in regression analysis. The absence of significant results may be attributed in part to the fact that Italian also has a cognate of *habiter,* namely, *abitare*. In other words, for a number of the Romance speakers, there is a potential L1 influence for both French variants.[5]

Concerning the role of stays in a Francophone environment, our results are the same as for the first variable. In other words, even those students who report having spent several weeks in a Francophone area do not use the typical Montreal variant *rester*.

4.5 *Comparison with other varieties*

Let us now compare the use of the variants meaning 'to dwell' with those found in previous studies. The relevant data are presented in Table 10. Here, we see that our immersion students make massive use of *habiter* in comparison to L1 Montreal Francophones. Its frequency of use in the Toronto immersion corpus is ten times

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[5] Unfortunately, we do not have separate results for the subgroups of Romance speakers.

Table 10 *Variation of verbs meaning 'to dwell' in three populations*

Corpus	*habiter*	*vivre*	*rester*	*demeurer*
Toronto immersion	67/112 (60%)	45/112 (40%)	0/112 (0%)	0/112 (0%)
Montreal immersion	76/116 (45%)	42/116 (25%)	46/116 (27%)	2/116 (1%)
Montreal French	47/836 (6%)	85/836 (10%)	537/836 (64%)	167/836 (20%)

greater than in the Montreal L1 corpus! Conversely, we also see that the highly frequent *rester* is entirely absent from the immersion interviews, in spite of the fact that it is clearly the variant preferred by L1 speakers (with the exception of the immersion teachers). Table 10 also reveals an important difference between the two groups of immersion students: while the Toronto immersion students make no use of *rester*, this form is the second most frequent in the Montreal immersion speakers' data. This difference can be attributed to the fact that these latter speakers reside in the target language environment and have had greater interaction with native speakers.

5 CONCLUSION

The main linguistic factor that conditions variant choice for both variables is priming by the interviewer. Results reveal that if a question is phrased using one variant, this variant is likely to occur in the students' reply, regardless of the overall frequency of variants in the corpus. Our results also suggest that in the case of the 'work' variable, home language influences variant choice. Concerning sex, social class and stays in a Francophone environment, none of these factors were found to exercise a significant influence on lexical variation.

For both variables, we have shown that immersion speakers have a limited number of variants compared to L1 speakers. In particular, the immersion students lack lexical variants which can be categorised as informal or non standard. In a model of communicative competence that includes sociolinguistic competence (in particular, skills concerning naturalness and knowledge of dialect variants, see Bachman, 1990), the immersion students do have some progress to make. We believe this is particularly important in the case of the 'to dwell' variable where the students make frequent use of *habiter* a form that is almost entirely absent from L1 speech and is considered 'unnatural' in informal conversation for Canadian Francophones. As such, it is evidence that the immersion students' sociolinguistic competence is inadequate, even though their grammatical competence is often impressive (cf. Knaus and Nadasdi, in press; Nadasdi, Mougeon and Rehner, to appear). This is obviously not a feature particular to the speech of immersion students and is typical of L2 speech learned within an academic setting. For example similar results have

also been reported in Dewaele and Regan (2000). We believe that high frequency lexical variables such as the ones we have studied could easily be acquired if they were present in the input students receive. Evidence for this is in fact provided by the results concerning Montreal immersion students who do make use of the *rester* variant. It is also likely that such forms could be learned through explicit instruction. Students merely need to be made aware of these 'different ways of saying the same thing'.

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