

Language Policy in Canada: Demographic Trends

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Introduction

In Canada, the Official Languages Act was adopted by the Parliament in 1969, and English and French were confirmed as official languages for all purposes of the Parliament and Government of Canada.¹ The 2001 Census reveals that Canadians reported more than 100 languages as mother tongues, and that about 90% of people speak English or French most often at home. The two official languages, English and French, have become pervasive in Canada. Jean Chrétien is quoted in 1995; "Linguistic duality has always been a cornerstone of the Canadian Constitution. I am convinced that, to survive, we need a Canada in which Francophones and Anglophones can feel comfortable, wherever they are in Canada."² Both history and demography are significant factors to understand the present linguistic situation in Canada. In this paper, a historical overview of language policy, demographic trends, and official language minorities will be examined by analyzing census data on language in Canada.

Historical Overview of Language Policy in Canada

In 1534, French explorer, Jacques Cartier reached what is now Canada and sailed along the west coast of Newfoundland. In 1608, Samuel de Champlain established a French settlement now known as Quebec City. Later, England won control of most of North America in the 1750s and 1760s. In 1867, Canada consisted of a confederation of the mostly French-speaking provinces of Quebec, and the predominantly English-speaking provinces of New Brunswick, Ontario and Nova Scotia.³ In Canada, the English and French languages have been spoken for centuries, and the coexistence of two significant linguistic communities is vital in Canadian society.⁴ In 1867, Section 133 of the British North America Act, now the Constitution Act, recognized official status for English and French in the Parliament of Canada, the legislature of Quebec, and in the courts of Quebec and Canada. Today's language policies have developed from the framework provided by

the Constitution Act, 1867.⁵ The Canadian Bill of Rights (1960) was the first attempt by the Parliament of Canada to declare that Canada was founded on principles including fundamental rights and freedoms.⁶ Although language rights were not specified, the Bill was greatly significant for the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), which constitutionalized fundamental rights and freedoms and provided for the constitutional protection of language rights.⁷ In 1969, following recommendations from the Bilingualism and Bicultural report, Parliament adopted the first Official Language Act, and confirmed English and French as official languages for all purposes of the Parliament and Government of Canada. The principles of the current official-languages policy are stated in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982) and the new Official Languages Act (1988).⁸ The Official Languages Act (1988) recognizes that "the Constitution provides that Canada has two official languages, English and French, and that both languages have equal status, rights and privileges as to their use in federal institutions."⁹ The Act sets out the rights of individual Canadians, the obligations of federal institutions and the official languages commitments of the federal government. The Act enhanced the language rights provisions stated in the 1969 Act and provided for the right of federal employees to work in the official language of their choice in designated regions.¹⁰ In 1992, the official languages regulations were enacted under the Official Languages Act (1988) "to provide better guidance on requirements for official languages services to the public."¹¹ Burnaby elucidates that "Reaction to federal government reforms was sometimes extremely negative," and that tensions between Quebec and the rest of Canada "still dominate Canadian national politics," whereas efforts were made to resolve differences between them.¹²

New Brunswick enacted its first Official Languages Act in 1969, making the province Canada's first, and only, official bilingual province. Today, English and French are the official languages of Canada and New Brunswick. While the remaining nine provinces are monolingual, with eight recognizing English and one, Quebec, recognizing French as the official language, certain government services are available in both English and French in many provinces.¹³

Demographic Trends

In 1666, the population of New France was just 3215, and most of them were single and male.¹⁴ At the end of the Seven Years' War (1756-63), there were about

80,000 French and 20,000 British in the territory when the British won political control from the French.¹⁵ By 1850, the French population comprised 30% of the Canadian population and it fell to less than 25% of the total by 1991.¹⁶ In the 1960s, the French group lost their fertility advantage, whereas the English group kept the immigration advantage and therefore language transfer favored English over French, especially outside of Quebec.¹⁷ The 1991 census shows that Francophones (the population with French as mother tongue) accounted for 24.2% of Canada's population. The proportion of Anglophones (the population with English as mother tongue) was 60.6%, and that of Allophones (the population with a non-official language such as Chinese, Punjabi or Tagalog as mother tongue) was 14.9%.¹⁸ While the English-speaking community is spread quite evenly across Canada, French-speaking Canadians are concentrated in Quebec, Ontario, New Brunswick, and parts of Manitoba.¹⁹

The *1996 Census: Mother tongue, home language and knowledge of languages* reveals that the multilingual nature of Canada is growing as a result of increased immigration. In 1996, there were 4.7 million Allophones, a 15.1% increase from 1991. This increase was 2.5 times faster than the overall growth rate of the Canadian population (5.7%). Anglophones increased 4.7%, while Francophones increased 2.3%. The proportion of Francophones declined gradually between 1971 and 1996 to less than 24%. The census shows that the rate of English-French bilingualism has increased between 1991 and 1996 across Canada except Saskatchewan. The proportion of bilingual Francophones was almost five times that of bilingual Anglophones.²⁰

The 2001 Census shows that both Anglophones and Francophones recorded a smaller gain than in the previous five-year period. There were 17.5 million Anglophones, representing 59.1% of the population. The number of Francophones was 6.8 million, representing 22.9% of the population, while allophones represented 18.0% of the population, up from 16.6% in 1996. The slowdown of the growth rate of Francophones is due to a decline in the number of children aged four and under as well as the aging of the Francophone population. The Census also shows that 67.5% of the population spoke English most often at home, while the proportion of French was 22.0% and that of a non-official language was 10.5%. Since the people who reported a non-official language as mother tongue was 18.0% of the population, they chose one or the other official language as home language at the time of the census. Statistics Canada states that "The longer immigrants stay

in Canada, the more likely they are to speak English or French at home." About 89.5% of Canadians spoke English or French most often at home at the time of the 2001 Census.²¹

The Official Language Minorities

The official language minorities in Canada (English speaking in Quebec and French speaking elsewhere in Canada) represent only a small proportion of the Canadian population, although they live in every province and are sometimes a majority in their respective regions.²² The status of these linguistic minorities has been vital to the future of Canada. Cardinal and Hudon report that numerically small communities often receive little legal protection aside from measures adopted by the federal government, and that the situation of Francophones is difficult, "requiring well-integrated and coordinated government action to compensate for their numerical weakness."²³

The French Language in Quebec and Francophone Minorities

The historical background of Quebec shows that "the French language was associated, from the time of the Conquest, with the exercise of a political power collectively assumed by a society already greatly conscious of its distinctness."²⁴ In 1867, the population of Quebec was 33% of the Canadian population, and the proportion in 1962 was 28.8%.²⁵ In 1851, the population of Anglophones accounted for 55% of the Quebec metropolis, and their economic dominance continued into the 1970s.²⁶ During the 1960s, when economic strength of Francophone Quebecers deteriorated compared to that of Anglophones, "a popular consciousness of the quality of spoken and written French developed in Quebec." In July 1969, Prime Minister Trudeau's federal government passed the Official Languages Act of Canada, and "this law acted as a powerful lever for the promotion of French, especially in Quebec."²⁷ Bill 101, which became law in 1976, declared that French was the only official language of the province of Quebec, and it made education in French compulsory for immigrants.²⁸ Because language policy strongly influenced education policy, the status of the French language began to rise in the 1970s. The proportion of allophone students who studied in French at the primary and secondary levels increased from 38.7% in 1980-81 to 75.8% in 1990-91.²⁹ In the mid-1960s, English-speaking students who graduated from English schools in

Quebec did not have sufficient proficiency in French to function effectively in a Francophone community.³⁰ For these Anglophone students, the first French immersion class started in 1965. French immersion has expanded dramatically and has had significant effects on the educational system in Canada and important social effects.³¹ The proportions of the nonfrancophones of Quebec who can speak French increased from 33% in 1961 to 64% in 1986.³²

In Canada as a whole, English-French bilingualism rose greatly between 1951 and 2001.³³ The number of bilingual Canadians more than doubled during that period, rising from 1.7 million to 5.2 million, while their proportion rose from 12% to 17.7%. The majority of bilingual people live in Quebec, New Brunswick, Ontario and British Columbia. The rate of English-French bilingualism was highest in Quebec (40.8%). The rate for the Quebec Anglophones was 66.1%, while the rate for the Quebec Francophones was 36.6%. The rate of bilingualism differs by age group for Francophones and Anglophones, showing the manner in which two language groups learn a second language. Since the job market affects Quebec Francophones in learning English as a second language, the rate of bilingualism reached a peak in the age group 20 to 24, ages matching to high labor market participation.

Many Canadians speak a language at home that differs from their mother tongue, and this is referred to as a "language shift" (Statistics Canada). The difference between the number of people using a language at home and the number of those who have it as mother tongue is a barometer of the net impact of language shifts. In 2001, 22.0% of the population spoke French most often at home at the time of the census, lower than the 22.9% who reported it as their mother tongue. Even in Quebec, where Anglophones represent a minority, the proportion of the people who spoke English most often at home was higher than the proportion whose mother tongue was English. "This was due to the attraction of English for members of other language groups."³⁴

In New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province, the proportion of Francophones was 33.2% in 2001.³⁵ Although the French-speaking minority in New Brunswick is the second largest, in absolute numbers, in a Canadian province, it is the most important because of its proportion of the provincial population (34.6% compared to 5.4% for the Franco-Ontarians in 1991).³⁶ Allard and Landry, analyzing the Acadian population of New Brunswick and of their language, French, assert that "in spite of important gains in certain domains, their future vitality is

threatened by a number of demolinguistic, economic, political and cultural factors.”³⁷

Canadians living in a minority setting often use at home a language other than their own mother tongue, and this shift is referred to as “language transfer” (Statistics Canada).³⁸ Statistics Canada states that language transfer is important since the language spoken most often at home is most likely to be passed on to children in families as their mother tongue. Beaujot notes that French language minorities outside of Quebec and New Brunswick have decreased due mainly to language transfer. Beaujot also cites the following as the factors resulting in the decline of Francophones: “the reduced role of religion in defining communities”; “the broader scale of social interaction”; and “intermarriage” in which individuals tend to adopt English as the home language.³⁹ Similarly, the 2001 census reveals that the increase in language transfers among Francophones outside Quebec was partly because of the growing proportion of Francophones who married Anglophones, and that many of Francophone spouses speak English most often at home. The new detailed data of the 2001 Census indicate that “the proportion of francophones who spoke a language other than French most often at home increased again in every province and territory except the Northwest Territories” between 1996 and 2001, and also show that those who have made a language transfer still use their mother tongue on a regular basis at home.

Ontario is Canada’s second largest province and the country’s industrial base. While the Francophone population in Ontario is a small minority, Ontario is “home to by far the largest (and the healthiest) francophone population in Canada outside of Quebec.”⁴⁰ Ruth King concludes in her article that “linguistic exogamy and increased urbanization” have negatively affected the French language in Ontario; however, over half a million Franco-Ontarians give “the language a better chance of survival than in any other Canadian province outside of Quebec.”⁴¹ According to the 2001 Census, the transfer rate among Francophones was much higher in Ontario (40.3%), and yet 42.7% of these people reported that they spoke French on a regular basis at home.

English Quebec

In 1931, 95% of the English mother-tongue population of Quebec was British ethnic origin, and at the time of the 1986 census only about 42% of English mother-tongue Quebecers reported that they were of English or British ethnic

origin.⁴² Caldwell describes the following as factors of this transformation: “large scale non-British, non-French immigration which later assimilated to the English-language milieu; anglicization of the Yiddish-speaking Jewish community; the assimilation of some French-Canadians to English;” and out-migration and American immigration.⁴³ Caldwell defines English Quebec as “being composed of those born in Canada and having as their mother tongue English,” and in the 1980s English Quebec consisted of people of British (50%), Jewish (10%), and European, Asiatic and central Caribbean and American cultural origins (40%), and he also states that this language group has experienced decline because of out-migration to other Canadian provinces and to the United States, and language assimilation.⁴⁴

The 2001 Census shows that the decline in the Anglophone population accelerated in Quebec between 1996 and 2001. People reporting English as a mother tongue decreased by about 30,500 to 591,400, compared with a decline of 4,300 in the previous five-year period.⁴⁵ This decline is mainly due to net outflows from Quebec (a net loss of 29,200) to other provinces and the decline in the number of Anglophone children aged four and under. While almost one-third of Anglophones in Quebec have a Francophone spouse, the rate of language transfer among Anglophones in Quebec changed little. Anglophones accounted for 8.3% of the Quebec population, and municipalities with the highest proportions of people with English as mother tongue were located mostly in the Montreal region. Cardinal and Hudson, analyzing official language minorities, state that the Anglophone minority in Quebec is the only one where the rate of individuals having the minority language as their home language is higher than the number of individuals who have it as their mother tongue.⁴⁶ However, in the Eastern Townships, Gaspé and northern and western Quebec, “the existence of Anglophone communities seems increasingly threatened because of the rural exodus, the drop in the birth rate, and the aging of the population.”⁴⁷

Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages points out “the unique situation of the anglophone community in Quebec.” Generally it is understood that “the anglophone community in Quebec needs no special protection, because it is part of the national majority.” However, Alliance Quebec asserts that its community has considerably declined since the 1970s. “At the moment, English and not French is at risk in Quebec.” The Committee states that “the anglophone community in Quebec should be recognized as an official language minority community,” and that “rights must be applied with equal symmetry.”⁴⁸

The Influence of Assimilation

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL) delineates in "Our Official Languages: As a Century Ends and a Millennium Begins," that the goal of official languages policy is not only to promote the two official languages, but also to help the two communities to grow. However, "a great many Francophones still give up their first language" because of the influence of the majority and the pervasiveness of English in Canada. Seven out of ten families of French origin do not teach French to their children in Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia. In Canada as a whole, the rate of assimilation among minority Francophones was 37% in 1996 and this trend is accelerating. The rate of assimilation for the Anglophone minority in Quebec was 10.2%, three times slower than for Francophone minorities. OCOL states that thirty years after the first Official Languages Act was adopted, Canada's linguistic landscape has markedly changed because of the "people who give up their first language," the low birth rate, and immigration.⁴⁹

Conclusion

Canada has experienced significant change since Parliament adopted the 1969 Official Languages Act. Today, both English and French are languages of service and of work in government, and the networks of minority language institutions have been strengthened.⁵⁰ English-French bilingual individuals represented 17.7% of the Canadian population in the 2001 Census. However, the general linguistic trends in Canada indicate the decline in the official language minorities (English speaking in Quebec and French speaking elsewhere in Canada). The number of Francophones outside Quebec and that of Quebec Anglophones dropped during the past three decades. Also the latest statistics show that Canada is becoming more and more a multilingual society due to an increasing number of immigrants whose mother tongue is neither English nor French. As Castonguay states in "The fading Canadian duality," it is likely that "language duality in Canada will continue to wane, making way for an ethnically more diversified, yet more broadly English-speaking population," and this trend has a great influence on Canadian identity, including its political aspects.⁵¹

Notes

¹ Minister of Supply and Services Canada (MSSC), *Official Languages: Towards a National Understanding*, Cat. No. CH14-1/1995 (Ottawa: MSSC, 1995) 8.

² MSSC 1.

³ Historical descriptions in this paragraph are based on the following references. Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOLA), *Official Languages: Basic Facts*, Cat. No. SF31-13/1992, (Ottawa: MSSC, 1993) 7. Jan Palmowski, *A Dictionary of Twentieth-Century World History*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997) 97.

⁴ MSSC 8.

⁵ MSSC, *Official Languages: Towards a National Understanding*, 8-9.

⁶ Commissioner of Official Languages (COL), *Government Transformations: The Impact on Canada's Official Languages Program*, 1998, 29.

⁷ COL 29.

⁸ MSSC, *Official Languages: Towards a National Understanding*, 8-9.

⁹ Commissioner of Official Language, *Official Languages Act, 1988, Synopsis*, Cat. No. SF31-17/1992, MSSC Canada 1990, 3.

¹⁰ COL, *Government Transformations: The Impact on Canada's Official Languages Program*, 30.

¹¹ COL 30. It should be noted that in this paper, the author (published by Commissioner of Official Languages) clearly states that "although both levels of governments have a role to play in the area of official languages and language rights, the jurisdiction of the Commissioner of Official Languages is limited to the activities of federal institutions and agencies in this field (30)."

¹² Barbara Burnaby, *The Canadian Encyclopedia (CE): year 2000 edition*, (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart Inc. 1999) 1294.

¹³ Fred Genesee, "French Immersion in Canada," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 306.

¹⁴ Warren E. Kalbach, *CE*, 1867.

¹⁵ Jacques Henripin, *CE*, 1295.

¹⁶ Roderic Beaujot, "Demographic Considerations in Canadian Language Policy," *Language and Politics in the United States and Canada: Myths and Realities*, eds., Thomas Ricento and Barbara Burnaby (Mahwah: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc., Publishers, 1998), 72.

¹⁷ Beaujot 72.

¹⁸ Statistics Canada, the 1991 Census. Cited by Beaujot, 73.

¹⁹ Burnaby, *CE*, 1294.

²⁰ Data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 1996 Census. Mother tongue is defined as the first language at home in childhood and still understood by the individual at the time of the census. Home language is defined as the language spoken most often at home by the individual at the time of the census. Bilingualism is defined as the ability to speak both English and French, based on the self-assessment of respondents. *The Daily*, Tuesday, December 2, 1997 "1996 Census: Mother tongue, home language and knowledge of languages."

²¹ Data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census. Statistics Canada, "Profiles of Languages in Canada: Canada," "Profiles of Languages in Canada: Provinces and Territories," 20 Sept. 2004 <<http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/products/analytic/companion/lang/c...>>.

²² Linda Cardinal and Marie-Eve Hudson, *The Governance of Canada's Official Language Minorities: A Preliminary Study*, Cat. Number: SF31-57/2001, (Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada, 2001) 3, 15.

²³ Cardinal and Hudson 15.

²⁴ Philippe Barbaud, "French in Quebec," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 177.

²⁵ Barbaud 179.

²⁶ Barbaud 181.

²⁷ Barbaud 181, 183.

²⁸ Genesee 309.

²⁹ Barbaud 192.

³⁰ Genesee 310.

³¹ Genesee 318, 322.

³² Beaujot 75.

³³ Data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census and the Atlas of Canada. The Atlas of Canada, "English-French Bilingualism," Oct. 4, 2004 <<http://atlas.gc.ca/site/english/maps/peopleandsociety/officiallanguages/englishfr...>>.

³⁴ Statistics and descriptions in this paragraph are based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, "Profile of Languages in Canada: Canada."

³⁵ Data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census unless noted otherwise.

³⁶ Real Allard and Rodrigue Landry, "French in New Brunswick," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 202. Statistics are based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census.

³⁷ Allard and Landry 220.

³⁸ Data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census unless noted otherwise.

³⁹ Beaujot 74.

⁴⁰ Ruth King, "Language in Ontario," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 400.

⁴¹ King 411.

⁴² Gary Caldwell, "English Quebec," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998) 275.

⁴³ Caldwell 275.

⁴⁴ Caldwell 276-78.

⁴⁵ Unless otherwise indicated, data in this paragraph is based on Statistics Canada, 2001 Census, "Profile of Language in Canada: Provinces and Territories."

⁴⁶ Cardinal and Hudson 15.

⁴⁷ Cardinal and Hudson 15.

⁴⁸ Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages, *The Official Language Minority Communities Told Us...*, Parliamentary Research Branch of the Library of Parliament, April 2002, 3.

⁴⁹ Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages (OCOL-b), *Our Official Languages: As A Century Ends and A Millennium Begins*, Cat. No.: SF31-56/2001, Ministry of Public Works and Government Services Canada 2001, 19-20.

⁵⁰ OCOL-b 27.

⁵¹ Charles Castonguay, "The Fading Canadian Duality," *Language in Canada*, ed., John Edwards, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988) 58-59.