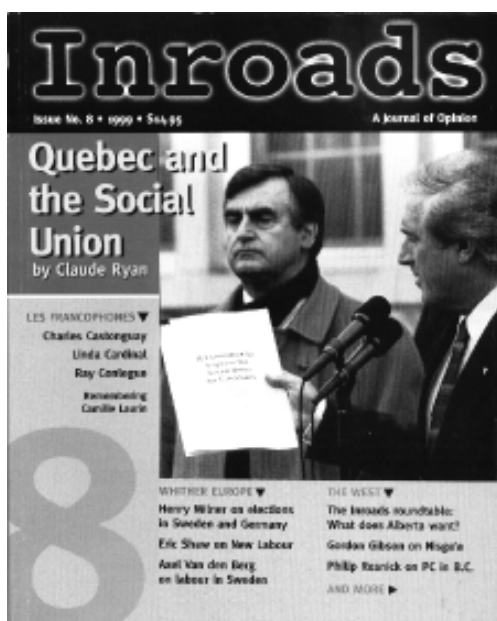


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LES FRANCOPHONES

JOURNAL Inroads 8

Charles Castonguay

Charles Castonguay teaches mathematics at the University of Ottawa. He has written extensively on linguistic assimilation and the status of French in Canada.

Getting the facts straight on French

Reflections following the 1996 Census

ABSTRACT

OFFICIAL COMMENTATORS IN Ottawa have consistently interpreted census data on the status of French optimistically,

implying that francophone concerns for linguistic survival are misplaced and that Canadian language policy is successful. This article is a rigorous rebuttal to Ottawa's optimism.

Analyzing census data from 1961 up to 1996, Castonguay finds that the prospects for French are "disquieting in Quebec and New Brunswick, and disastrous in the remaining provinces." Ottawa's language policy is not protecting francophones outside Quebec from assimilation to English, and their numbers are dwindling. By contrast, Quebec's language laws have had some success: they have increased assimilation to French among allophone immigrants, though not enough to forestall a coming decline in francophone numbers within Quebec itself. Castonguay concludes that Ottawa must readjust its policy along territorial lines to further enhance the assimilating power of French in Quebec.

A WORD ABOUT PRINTING THIS ARTICLE: These pages are intended to print on legal (8.5 x 14 inch) paper, two pages per sheet, in a horizontal landscape. Pages can also be printed onto letter sized paper at a reduced size.

NO DURABLE UNDERSTANDING between English and French Canadians can come about without first getting the facts straight on language. This article is an attempt to do that, using census data through 1996.

An appropriate point of departure is the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (the “B&B Commission”) which in the 1960s researched the status of Canada’s two principal language groups. Its findings, based largely on the 1961 census, subsequently determined major aspects of Canadian language policy.

The commission’s most fundamental decision in this respect was to reject what it called the “territorial principle” adopted by countries such as Switzerland and India. Under this principle, jurisdiction over most aspects of language use is devolved to regional governments with the full expectation that they adopt divergent policies reflecting the interests of the local majority language community. This principle still requires language communities to effect a workable compromise applicable to national institutions and also to define some set of minority-language services.

Since the 1970s, Quebec governments – both federalist and sovereigntist – have *de facto* insisted that the territorial principle apply within Canada. The preamble to Bill 101, for example, explicitly states a commitment to promote French within the provincial territory:

The National Assembly of Quebec recognizes that Quebecers wish to see the quality and influence of the French language assured, and is resolved therefore to make of French the language of Government and the law, as well as the normal and everyday language of work, instruction, communication, commerce and business.

In rejecting the “territorial principle,” the commission opted instead for what it defined as the “personality principle.” Under this alternate principle, language rights adhere to individuals, not to territories. Ottawa should, the commission recommended, recognize the formal equality of Canada’s two official languages within federal jurisdiction and promote English-French bilingualism across the country.

Under the British North America Act (now the Constitution Act), Quebec is required to conform to a number of bilingual provisions. The commission recommended that Ontario and New Brunswick, home to the great majority of francophones living outside Quebec, accept similar bilingual obligations. It allowed some deviation from the personality principle inasmuch as the remaining seven provinces (other than Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick) need accord lesser rights to their official-language minorities.

The report of the B&B Commission was the intellectual foundation for the Official Languages Act and the language provisions (sections 16 through 23) of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. By insisting on

individual language rights as the basis for policy, the commission has gradually led Ottawa’s language policy to focus on official-language minority communities: on the promotion of English in Quebec and French elsewhere. Furthermore, the logic of the commission has created an aura of illegitimacy around Quebec’s language regime, because it is so obviously a manifestation of the “territorial principle.”

Who’s right in this debate? More specifically, have the Official Languages Act and the Charter succeeded in ensuring the future of the francophone minorities outside Quebec? Have Bill 101 and linguistic immigration criteria preserved the French-speaking character of Montreal? Census data can cast decisive light on these fundamental questions.

The collapse of Canada’s French-speaking populations

The demographics of French in Canada have changed totally since 1961. At the time of the B&B Commission, virtually all of Canada’s francophone[†] populations were sufficiently prolific to ensure future growth in Quebec and New Brunswick, and even to make up for losses incurred through the assimilation of francophones to English in the other provinces. Today, the data show an entirely different reality. All of Canada’s francophone populations are demographically at bay. The prospects are disquieting in Quebec and New Brunswick, and disastrous in the remaining provinces. Table 1 sums up the demographic collapse of francophone populations since 1961.

Table 1: Intergenerational replacement of French mother-tongue populations, Canada and regions, 1961 and 1996

| | | Children (0-9) | Adults (25-34) | Replacement rate (0-9 / 25-34) (per cent) |
|-------------|----------------|-------------------|-------------------|---|
| 1961 | Canada | 1,281,600 | 710,800 | 180 |
| | Quebec | 1,092,700 | 586,400 | 186 |
| | New Brunswick | 59,200 | 22,800 | 260 |
| | Rest of Canada | 129,700 | 101,600 | 128 |
| 1996 | Canada | 834,700 | 1,015,100 | 82 |
| | Quebec | 746,900 | 864,600 | 86 |
| | New Brunswick | 26,400 | 36,900 | 72 |
| | Rest of Canada | 61,400 | 113,600 | 54 |

Note: Claims of two or more mother tongues in 1996 were apportioned in equal measure to the languages reported. Figures within the nearest hundred.

Source: Censuses of 1961 and 1996.

[†] See page 60 for definition of key terms.

Defining language use

This glossary defines the key language terms employed in this article.

A **francophone** is an individual whose mother tongue is French. Similarly, an **anglophone's** mother tongue is English. An **allophone** is a person whose mother tongue is any language other than English or French.

A person's **mother tongue** is the first language learned at home in childhood and still understood by that person at the time of the census.

A person's principal (or current) **home language** is the language spoken most often at home by that person at the time of the census.

French-speaking refers to a person who speaks French as a first language, that is, whose mother tongue or current home language is French. Similarly, an **English-speaking** person's first language is English.

Linguistic **assimilation**, or **language shift**, refers to a person's adopting a principal home language which is different from that person's mother tongue. As a consequence, such a person's children will often have the new home language as their mother tongue.

Anglicization refers to the adoption of English as principal home language by a person who is not of English mother tongue. Similarly, **francization** occurs when an anglophone or an allophone adopts French as current home language.

For a given language, **net language shift** equals that language's total home language count minus its total mother tongue count. When positive, the language is gaining through assimilation; when negative, it is losing.

The **anglicization rate** of a given francophone minority equals that minority's total mother tongue count minus its total home language count, divided by its total mother tongue count. As such, this is a net rate, equal to the minority's net loss through language shift relative to its mother tongue count. The same calculation can be carried out for language shift pertaining to a given francophone age group.

The **replacement rate** of a given francophone population refers to the number of young francophone children (aged 0 to 9) relative to the number of francophone adults who are, on average, 25 years older (i.e. one generation older and aged 25-34). The replacement rate for an anglophone population is defined analogously. Due to linguistic assimilation, the mother tongue of children need not be that of their parents.

The upper half of Table 1 summarizes the census information available to the B&B Commission. Francophone children far outnumbered young francophone adults in all regions of Canada. For example, in Quebec the number of francophone children (aged 0 to 9) was 186 per cent that of young francophone adults (aged 25 to 34) who were on average 25 years – or one generation – older. In total contrast, the 1996 data in the lower half of the table confirm the reversal of the francophone age pyramid. Already clearly under way by the time of the 1981 census, the demographic collapse is now thoroughly established in all regions. Intergenerational replacement rates are well below 100 per cent everywhere. Assimilation to English and low fertility have combined to create especially staggering intergenerational deficits outside Quebec.

For instance, the present francophone replacement rate of 72 per cent in New Brunswick means a current intergenerational shortfall of 28 per cent for the francophone minority in that province. A deficit of this size inevitably portends dwindling numbers in the future. In fact, New Brunswick's francophone population shows a very slight decrease between the censuses of 1991 and 1996. This marks the reversal of an historical trend of continual growth.

To complete the picture summarized in Table 1, the francophone intergenerational replacement rate in 1996 was only 49 per cent in Newfoundland, 43 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 45 per cent in Nova

Scotia, 60 per cent in Ontario, 56 per cent in Manitoba, 42 per cent in Saskatchewan, 36 per cent in Alberta, and 28 per cent in British Columbia. The number of francophones is dropping in each of these provinces except B.C. Interprovincial migration has been keeping the francophone population afloat in B.C., but an intergenerational shortfall of 72 per cent means that the French-speaking minority in that province is definitely not viable.

Official commentators in Ottawa continue to minimize the import of these data.¹ Though committed to “presenting in a straightforward manner the country's basic demolinguistic reality,” the 1996 census monograph on language remains characteristically silent about the alarming age profile of Canada's francophone populations, and similarly reticent about the resulting swiftness with which most minorities are declining.² Statistics Canada officials even refuse to admit what their data show to be happening. Questioned on the drop in francophone numbers outside Quebec, Réjean Lachapelle, Statistics Canada's Director of Demographics and chief spokesperson on census language data had this to say:

It is certain that we are now seeing a decrease, but is it 20 or 25 per cent over one generation? I don't believe there are many groups that have declined by 20 to 30 per cent over the past 20 to 25 years outside Quebec. That is certainly not the case overall, because in general they have been growing over the last 25 years. There may be certain provinces where that is not the case, yes.³

The survival of French as a first language is best weighed using the principal home language data. As the B&B Commission pointed out, mother-tongue data are “a generation behind the facts” and do not take into account assimilation to English among francophone adults. Over the 25-year period from 1971 to 1996, the French home-language population outside Quebec declined by eight per cent; the only French home-language minorities to have grown are those of New Brunswick (at least up to 1991) and B.C. (an overall increase of 5,077 in 25 years). Ontario’s French home-language population has dropped by 13 per cent. In the remaining six provinces, French home-language minorities show decreases of 20 per cent or more since 1971. The declines were 56 per cent in Newfoundland, 31 per cent in Prince Edward Island, 24 per cent in Nova Scotia, 42 per cent in Manitoba, 63 per cent in Saskatchewan, and 21 per cent in Alberta.

Contrary to what Statistics Canada would have us notice, the trend towards disappearance is thus already well under way among Canada’s French-speaking minorities outside Quebec and New Brunswick. In fact, with each passing census demographers foresee with growing certainty a decrease, beginning early in the 21st century, in the francophone population of Quebec itself.⁴ This means decline for the francophone population of Canada as a whole, beginning somewhat earlier. Nothing of the sort is forecast for Canada’s English-speaking populations.

The demographic advantage of English

The overall English mother-tongue population of Canada is, to be sure, in the process of aging and has a below-replacement birth rate. Nonetheless, it is expected to continue growing in the foreseeable future. Thanks to the power of assimilation of English, anglophone populations nowhere suffer an intergenerational shortfall as marked as those eroding francophone populations. Assimilation of young francophone and allophone adults (that is, their adoption of English as principal home language) generates nearly enough anglophone children to compensate for low birth rates among Canada’s – and Quebec’s – English-speaking populations. In 1996, the anglophone intergenerational replacement rate was 98 per cent in Canada and 92 per cent in Quebec.

To elaborate, Quebec’s English home-language population decreased by 14 per cent between 1971 and 1991; the 1996 data show that it has now stabilized. The temporary decrease in Quebec’s English-speaking population was due to significant out-migration. It is well known that some 200,000 Anglo-Quebecers left the province over the decade following 1976. It is less well known that the decline was fuelled by just as many departures between 1966 and 1975, in the wake of the Quiet Revolution. As early as the time of the B&B Commission, Richard Joy had observed that the English-speaking minority within Quebec was being weakened by heavy out-migration, and foresaw that this movement could well

accelerate as the French language increased in power and prestige following the *Mâtres chez nous* campaign.⁵

The so-called “Anglo exodus” thus began well before election of the Parti québécois in 1976. Since the mid-1980s, it appears to be a thing of the past. The stabilization of Quebec’s English-speaking population suggests that the language shift to English, notably in the Montreal area, is compensating, first, for low anglophone fertility which, over the past 25 years, has remained well below the replacement level of 2.1 children per woman and, second, for the continuing (but now slower) out-migration among anglophones.

The impact of allophone language shift

From Confederation right through to 1996, the anglophone component has maintained its share of the Canadian population at around 60 per cent, despite at times heavy allophone immigration. High fertility kept the francophone share of the population close to 30 per cent up to the middle of the 20th century. Since then it has been dropping significantly at each census, falling overall from 29 per cent in 1951 to 23.5 per cent in 1996. Lachapelle explains this downward trend in terms of inadequate francophone fertility and insufficient francophone immigration to Canada, and side-steps the central role of linguistic assimilation:

Language transfers have played an almost negligible role in the decline of

francophone weight over the last twenty-five years: this decline is more due to a low birth rate and inadequate representation among international immigrants ... language policies seem to be more effective than we thought in containing language assimilation [of francophones to English].⁶

The flaw in this self-congratulatory analysis is the failure to take into account the almost nonexistent power of assimilation of French among Canada’s allophone population compared to that of English. At the time of Lachapelle’s study, the censuses showed only one allophone shifting to French for every 30 shifting to English. The percentage weight of francophones in Canada would not have dropped any more than that of anglophones since the Second World War – had French enjoyed its fair share of allophone assimilation. Based on the long-standing split of 30 per cent

All of Canada’s francophone populations are demographically at bay. The prospects are disquieting in Quebec and New Brunswick, and disastrous in the remaining provinces.

francophone and 60 per cent anglophone, this would have required one allophone assimilating to French for every two choosing English.

To see the impact of assimilation on the widening gap between anglophone and francophone shares of the Canadian population, it helps to contrast the age

profiles of the two language groups, as in Figure 1. The two profiles are substantially different. Their topmost blocks approximately reflect the 2 to 1 ratio between Canada's anglophone and francophone populations which survived for close to a century after Confederation. The lower blocks, which largely determine present and future population trends, show that the number of francophone children has been dropping markedly over the past 30 years, while the number of anglophone children has remained more stable. At the very bottom of Figure 1, anglophone children (aged 0 to 9) now outnumber their francophone counterparts in the ratio of 3 to 1.

The difference between the respective shapes of the lower portions of these profiles is necessarily due to a difference in

fertility or to the intergenerational impact of linguistic assimilation. Now, a difference in fertility cannot alone explain the growing imbalance between the two profiles. Francophones were more fertile than anglophones until the mid-1960s, and by the early 1970s both language groups had dropped below the replacement level total fertility rate (of 2.1 children per woman). Since then, anglophone fertility has generally exceeded that of francophones, but on average by little more than five per cent. In particular, over the 10 years preceding the 1996 census, anglophone fertility exceeded francophone fertility by only six per cent.⁷

The lower blocks of Figure 1 show a much greater difference in intergenerational replacement rates. This can be estimated by simply comparing the

lowest block in each age pyramid with a 10-year slice through the pyramid's lower middle. As noted above, this yields current intergenerational replacement rates of 98 per cent and 82 per cent respectively for Canada's anglophone and francophone populations. In relative terms, the anglophone replacement rate is almost 20 per cent higher than the corresponding rate for francophones, a percentage substantially greater than the recent anglophone advantage in fertility. The extra demographic advantage is the intergenerational consequence of linguistic assimilation.

In detail, what is happening is that almost all young allophone adults who shift away from their mother tongue choose to adopt English rather than French as their main home language. This can be termed individual language shift. When anglicized allophones become parents, they normally transmit English as mother tongue to their children. This is called intergenerational language shift, and transfers a number of children who would otherwise have been of other mother tongue from the base of the allophone age pyramid (not shown in Figure 1) to the base of the anglophone pyramid. Similarly, young francophones outside Quebec may anglicize on an individual basis, then raise their children in English. This subtracts children who would otherwise have been of French mother tongue from the base of the francophone age pyramid and adds them to the base of the anglophone pyramid. Though much less common in Canada as a whole than the shift among allophones to English, this shift

from French to English contributes doubly to the growing imbalance between anglophone and francophone populations.

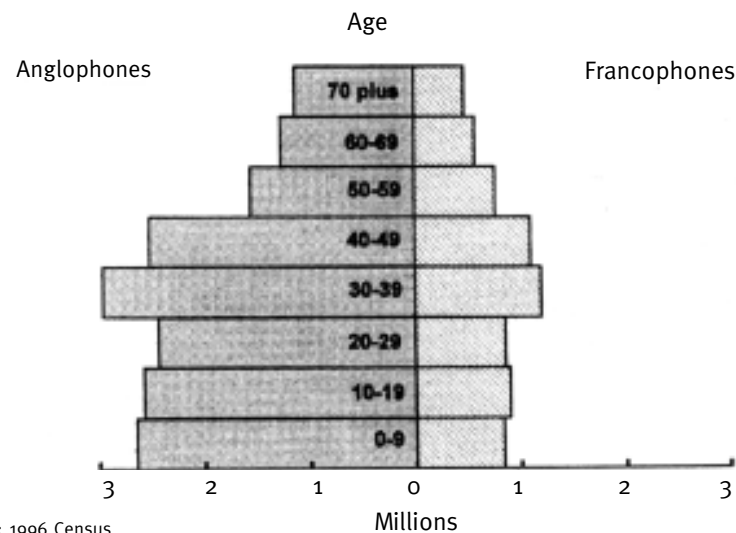
However obvious – and decisive – is the overall impact of linguistic assimilation, Statistics Canada continues to dodge the issue. Once again, here is Lachapelle:

There are many factors that contribute to the fact that the proportion of francophones among the young is lower than among adults. One of the important factors is fertility. There is also the fact that the mothers or the fathers do not always transmit the French language to the children, but that is a factor that, in Canada as a whole, is completely minor.⁸

As if failure to attract a fair share of allophone language shift were not to be taken into account when evaluating the demographic situation of French in Canada.

As further food for thought, Figure 2 brings out the age profiles of the official-language minorities (the anglophone

Figure 1: Anglophone and francophone populations by age groups, Canada, 1996



Source: 1996 Census

Almost all young allophone adults who shift away from their mother tongue choose to adopt English rather than French as their main home language.

population in Quebec and the francophone population in the rest of Canada). The profile of Quebec's anglophone population resembles that of the anglophone population outside Quebec. Likewise, the age profiles of francophones both inside and outside Quebec are similar. Above all, the

narrowness of the vertical central corridor in Figure 2 eloquently highlights the small – and dwindling – portion of the overall anglophone and francophone populations which benefits directly from Canada’s present policy emphasis on official-language minorities.

Ottawa and Quebec pursue their respective “distinct societies”

As the B&B Commission proceeded, it became clear that the bilingual, bicultural, and binational view of Canadian society which had informed its mandate was being shelved, and that its recommendations would provide little more than a linguistic face-lift vis-à-vis French Canada’s aspirations for an equal partnership. According to its terms of reference, the B&B Commis-

sion was “to recommend what steps should be taken to develop the Canadian Confederation on the basis of an equal partnership between the two founding races.” Consequently, insofar as language policy was concerned the Quebec government struck its own commission of enquiry into the situation of French in the province (the Gendron Commission). And, as everyone now knows, Quebec decided in a series of laws enacted in the 1970s to go its own way, in effect asserting the “territorial principle” rejected by the B&B Commission.

That the modernization of Quebec society was bringing the traditional excess French-Canadian fertility to an end had become obvious. Simultaneously, the St-Léonard crisis confirmed that Montreal’s French school system had lost its only significant non-French-Canadian clientele: the Italians were having their children

schooled in English.⁹ The Gendron Commission and the Quebec government grasped perfectly well that to ensure the future of an inadequately fertile language group, assimilation is the name of the game. At the same time, publication of the 1971 census results, the first to offer up-to-date information on individual language shift, revealed the full extent of English Canada’s – and English Quebec’s – success at playing that game, as well as French Canada’s – and even French Quebec’s – utter ineptness at the same. The necessity of a profound change, including compulsory public schooling in French for children of future allophone immigrants, was clear to all francophone leaders in Quebec, federalist and sovereigntist alike.

Having rejected the general principle of territoriality, even in the mild form of bilingual districts for the larger francophone populations outside Quebec, Ottawa’s language policy is simply not geared to bolstering French that significantly. Consequently, it is hardly surprising that census after census shows that Ottawa’s linguistic face-lift has not reduced, nor even capped, the anglicization of young francophone adults of child-bearing age outside Quebec and New Brunswick.

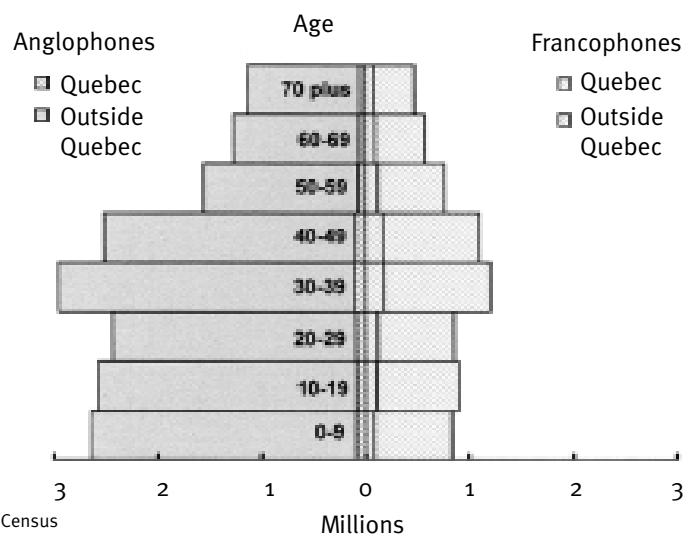
Increasing anglicization of francophones outside Quebec

Table 2 shows that anglicization rates among all provincial francophone minorities have increased since 1971, save in New Brunswick. British Columbia is not really an exception: the anglicization rate among

francophone adults aged 25 to 44 and born in B.C. was nearly 90 per cent at the 1996 census. The slight decline for the B.C. rate in Table 2 merely reflects the fluctuating numbers of young francophone adults from Quebec temporarily drawn to the West Coast climate and cultural scene.

To blunt the bad news, the Commissioner of Official Languages has suggested that the increase in anglicization is at least slowing down, since the anglicization rate of the total francophone population outside Quebec increased eight percentage points (from 29 per cent to 35 per cent) between 1981 and 1991, but rose only two points (from 35 per cent to 37 per cent) between 1991 and 1996.¹⁰ However, the acceleration in assimilation rates between 1981 and 1991 and subsequent decelera-

Figure 2: Anglophone and francophone populations by age groups and regions, Canada, 1996



Source: 1996 Census

Table 2: Anglicization rate[†] among young Francophone adults outside Quebec, 1971 and 1996

| | Age Group | | | |
|---------------|------------|------|-------|------|
| | 25-34 | | 35-44 | |
| | 1971 | 1996 | 1971 | 1996 |
| | (per cent) | | | |
| Newfoundland | 44 | 58 | 35 | 63 |
| P.E.I. | 47 | 54 | 50 | 43 |
| Nova Scotia | 42 | 48 | 42 | 50 |
| New Brunswick | 11 | 9 | 12 | 9 |
| Ontario | 36 | 44 | 38 | 45 |
| Manitoba | 47 | 64 | 45 | 64 |
| Saskatchewan | 64 | 74 | 60 | 81 |
| Alberta | 66 | 71 | 64 | 76 |
| B.C. | 71 | 69 | 77 | 73 |

[†]See definitions on page 60.

Source: 1971 and 1996 censuses

tion between 1991 and 1996 is a statistical artifact, created by the introduction of a new module of language questions in the 1991 census questionnaire. More careful comparison of the data shows a continual increase in the overall anglicization rates of francophones outside Quebec throughout the 25-year period from 1971 to 1996. Unfortunately, Statistics Canada has never seen fit to warn users of census statistics that its 1991 questionnaire substantially inflated assimilation rates of all of Canada's regional language minorities, compared to the levels observed at previous censuses.¹¹ The commissioner's ray of hope is just another red herring.

The Department of Canadian Heritage also participates in Ottawa's stalling tactics. Michael O'Keefe, manager of policy analysis

The acceleration in assimilation rates between 1981 and 1991 and subsequent deceleration between 1991 and 1996 is a statistical artifact, created by the introduction of a new module of language questions in the 1991 census questionnaire.

and promotion in the department's Official Languages Support Programs, sees a strengthening of French within the home on the basis of a slight decrease in anglicization rates among young francophone children aged 0 to 9 outside Quebec between 1971 and 1996, and quickly attributes this to the promotion of

francophone minority education and to increasing bilingualism among non-francophones.¹² However, the drop in question does not stand up under closer examination. Broken down by province, the data show a slight decrease in anglicization among francophone children in New Brunswick, but not in Ontario, home to more than half of all francophones outside Quebec. And the number of young francophone children among each of the remaining six provinces is now so tiny as to render any comparison with the 1971 data statistically inept.¹³

The one positive trend in anglicization rates of francophones outside Quebec remains the slight decrease in New Brunswick, evident in Table 2. There are several reasons for this. New Brunswick's francophones have gained far more in the way of language rights and institutional completeness than any other provincial francophone minority. They have even received recognition as a kind of collectivity – if not as a people or nation – under 1981 New Brunswick legislation (Act Recognizing the Equality of the Two Official Linguistic Communities in New Brunswick), subsequently entrenched in the Canadian Charter of Rights. This is more than the francophone minority of Canada as a whole has itself obtained thus far from English Canada.

None the less, at nine per cent in 1996, the anglicization of young adult francophones in New Brunswick still remains substantial and continues to contribute significantly to the provincial minority's important intergenerational

deficit of 28 per cent. It can likewise be expected that rising anglicization rates will reinforce the trend towards disappearance among the other provincial francophone minorities in the future.

To blur this bottom line, O'Keefe harps on the saving grace of community vitality. Inspired by a quip from playwright René-Daniel Dubois: "Survival is not a goal," he comes up with the ultimate placebo, namely the concept of sustainable assimilation:

*Just as we speak of a sustainable rate of development, perhaps we should be asking ourselves what is the rate of assimilation compatible with a sustainable minority community...the debate about the vitality of these [francophone] communities cannot and should not be reduced to mere numbers. The vitality of any community is reflected by its spirit, determination and sense of identity, not merely by numbers.*¹⁴

It must be great to be the last of the Mohicans. Imagine the subsidies!

The francization of allophone immigrants to Quebec¹⁵

Census data allow us to monitor Quebec's attempt to go its own way and orient allophone language shift in a direction more favourable to the maintenance of its francophone majority – which, it should be emphasized, is crucial for the future of the French-speaking minority of Canada as a whole. The 1971 census revealed that the French share of individual allophone

assimilation in Quebec was only 28,000 persons, leaving the lion's share of allophone shift to English (75,000 persons). Quebec's French-speaking majority also suffered a net loss of some 24,000 anglicized francophones in the to-and-fro of language shift between English and French, basically in the Montreal region. Hence, the overall result was a net gain of merely 4,000 persons for French; a net gain of 99,000

In 1971, most francized allophones in Quebec were of Italian mother tongue, and the new generation of italophones in Montreal were being schooled in English.

anglicized allophones and francophones for English; and a total net loss for other languages of 103,000 anglicized or francized allophones.

The first column of Table 3 puts this into a Canadian perspective. It documents the further gains of English via the anglicization of a quarter million francophones and over a million allophones living outside Quebec. Clearly, in 1971 French was not in the game, not even in Quebec. Furthermore, most francized allophones in Quebec were of Italian mother tongue, and the new generation of italophones in Montreal were being schooled in English.

At the aggregate level displayed in Table 3, the only visible significant trends between 1971 and the 1981 census favoured English. In Quebec, however, the underlying process was changing. Because

of schooling in English, the French share of language shift among Quebec-born allophones dropped during the 1970s, notably among Montreal's Italians. But this was offset by a shift to French among the more recent immigrants, many of whom were from Haiti and Indochina, where French was once a colonial language.

In 1991, Table 3 shows a sudden increase in language shift to regionally dominant languages (English and French in Quebec, English in the rest of Canada) at the expense of the dominated minority languages (other languages in Quebec, French and other languages elsewhere). As mentioned above, the principal cause of this was the new 1991 questionnaire. Of course, Statistics Canada considers data secured via its new questionnaire to be of better quality than those from previous

censuses. However this may be, the 1991 results suddenly show a Canada-wide net gain for English of over two million anglicized allophones and francophones, the intergenerational fallout of which comfortably beefs up the base of the inadequately fertile anglophone majority's age pyramid. At the same time, French just as suddenly shows a net gain of 66,000 francized allophones in Quebec (the new questionnaire reduced net shift between French and English in Quebec to a few thousand cases). However, net losses of French to English outside Quebec jumped by about the same amount, once again leaving French with a Canada-wide net loss of some quarter million.

Using the same module of language questions, the 1996 census shows a much milder continuation of the 1981-1991

trends, which had been artificially inflated by the change in questionnaire. In Quebec, French gains from allophone shift rise to 89,000, still well below the score for English (141,000 in 1996). In Canada as a whole, the gains of English at the expense of French and other languages now surpass 2.2 million.

French has improved its showing in Quebec. However, the contribution of 89,000 francized allophones (of all ages) falls far short of eliminating the francophone intergenerational shortfall which, after the benefit to be gained from this francization has been drawn,¹⁶ remains of the order of 120,000 children (Table 1 shows 747,000 French mother-tongue children aged 0 to 9 in Quebec in 1996, as against 865,000 young adults aged 25 to 34). Whence the demographic forecast of a decline in Quebec's French-speaking population in the near future. The current 10-year francophone intergenerational deficit of over 180,000 children at the Canada-wide level (see Table 1) is, of course, even more insurmountable.

The greatest boost in the French share of language shift among allophone immigrants to Quebec comes from a change in the ethnolinguistic make-up of immigrants. Since its Quiet Revolution, Quebec has gained more say in the selection of immigrants and, among other things, now includes ability to speak French among its selection criteria. This has favoured immigration from other Romance-language countries (Portugal, Latin America) and from regions formerly under French influence (Haiti, Indochina, North

Africa, Middle East). From the 1971-1975 immigration period onwards, over half of allophone immigration to Quebec has been from these more easily francizable populations. The French share of language shift among allophone immigrants accordingly moved above the 50 per cent mark well before Bill 101 came into effect in the late 1970s. This fundamental change in the ethnolinguistic composition of immigration to Quebec actually began at the very outset of the Quiet Revolution, and explains the remarkable increase in the French share of linguistically assimilated allophones between those arriving pre-1961 and those arriving mid-1970s. (See especially the solid line in Figure 3.)

Figure 3 shows much more. It suggests that Bill 101 and subsequent efforts to promote French as the language of work in

Since its Quiet Revolution, Quebec has gained more say in the selection of immigrants and, among other things, now includes ability to speak French among its selection criteria.

the Montreal area have had no appreciable impact on language shift among allophone immigrants who arrived after 1975, aged 15 or more. On the other hand, it shows beyond the shadow of a doubt that compulsory public schooling in French – already partially implemented in the mid-1970s by the Bourassa government's Bill 22 – has had a decisive impact on language shift among allophones who arrive in

Table 3: Net language shift,[†] Canada and regions, 1971-1996

| | 1971 | 1981 | 1991 | 1996 |
|---------------------------|------------|------------|------------|------------|
| Canada | | | | |
| English | 1,479,000 | 1,591,000 | 2,129,000 | 2,222,000 |
| French | -247,000 | -258,000 | -274,000 | -263,000 |
| Other | -1,232,000 | -1,333,000 | -1,856,000 | -1,959,000 |
| Canada less Quebec | | | | |
| English | 1,380,000 | 1,477,000 | 1,994,000 | 2,082,000 |
| French | -251,000 | -257,000 | -340,000 | -352,000 |
| Other | -1,129,000 | -1,221,000 | -1,654,000 | -1,730,000 |
| Quebec | | | | |
| English | 99,000 | 113,000 | 136,000 | 141,000 |
| French | 4,000 | -1,000 | 66,000 | 89,000 |
| Other | -103,000 | -112,000 | -202,000 | -229,000 |

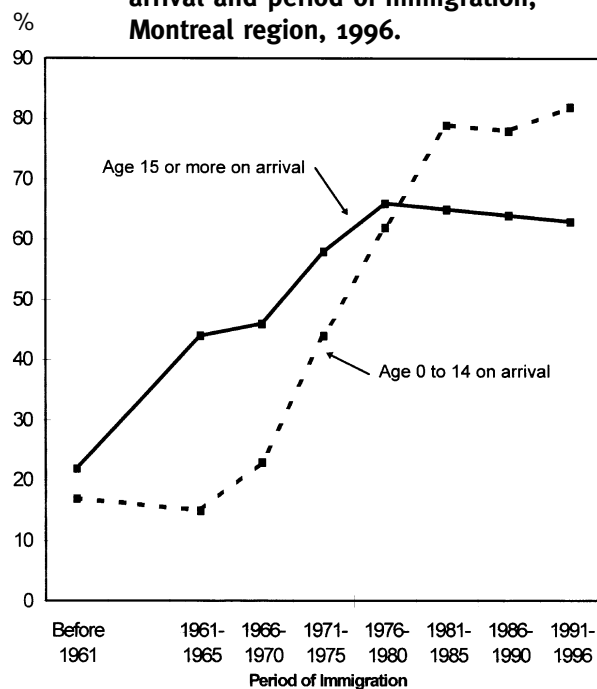
[†] See definitions on page 60. Figures within the nearest thousand.

Source: Censuses from 1971 to 1996

Quebec at school or pre-school age. Whereas schooling in English formerly directed eventual language shift among immigrant allophone children much more strongly towards English than was the case among their parents, the opposite is now the case: allophone children who arrived after the schooling provisions of Bill 101 came into full effect are markedly more prone to shift eventually to French than their parents.

This appears to be Bill 101's only real success in terms of language shift. A full 80 per cent of the shift among young allophones (aged between 0 and 14 years at time of arrival) who immigrated to Quebec

Figure 3: French share of assimilation of allophone immigrants, by age on arrival and period of immigration, Montreal region, 1996.



Source: 1996 Census Special Tabulation

over the past 15 years has regularly favoured French, leaving 20 per cent to English. Arguably, this could be considered a fair share; it comes close to the 5 to 1 ratio between the francophone majority and the anglophone minority in the Montreal region, where 90 per cent of allophone immigrants to Quebec choose to settle. But it is still below the 9 to 1 ratio between francophones and anglophones at the provincial level.

It must be kept in mind, too, that this success has been attained only among a minority of recent allophone immigrants. Over three quarters of allophone immigrants arrive aged 15 years or more. Figure 3 indicates that the French share of shift among the latter majority has levelled off below 70 per cent. At the same time, language shift among Quebec-born allophones (not shown in Figure 3) has continued through 1996 to favour English over French in the ratio of approximately 3 to 1. Whence the considerable overall advantage which English continues to enjoy over French in terms of language shift (a net gain of 141,000 for English compared to 89,000 for French in 1996, as indicated in the final column of Table 3).

In all likelihood, given the levelling-off of francization among the more recently arrived immigrants and the enduring dominance of anglicization among the native-born, allophone language shift will continue to undermine the percentage weight of the francophone majority in Quebec, which has been decreasing since the 1986 census.

The illusory progress of French in Canada

Réjean Lachapelle recently reported that “there has certainly been an increase in the number and proportion of people [in Canada] who speak French, who are able to speak French, either as their first or second language.”¹⁷ Again, this is only half true. The number of such persons has increased – Canada’s francophone population itself is, for the moment, still increasing – but their proportion has not. The percentage of Canadians able to speak French even appears to be slowly declining, from 31.8 per cent in 1981 to 31.3 per cent in 1996 (see Table 4). The statistics presented in Table 4 do not play the trick of looking only at bilinguals; the data also include French unilinguals (able to speak French, but not English). While the proportion of English-French bilinguals has increased, the

proportion of French unilinguals has been decreasing somewhat faster. In fact, the absolute number of French unilinguals in Canada dropped by 30,000 between 1991 and 1996. This is another historical first and, no doubt, the beginning of a permanent downward trend.

A downward trend is certainly not in store for English. Since 1951, the number of English unilinguals in Canada has increased on average by over one million every five years, and the proportion of English unilinguals has remained constant at 67 per cent. In particular, the 1996 census counted 1,027,490 more English unilinguals in Canada than in 1991. Consequently, the overall percentage of Canadians able to speak English – as unilinguals or as English-French bilinguals – has increased regularly at each census, rising from 79 per cent in 1951 to 84 per cent in 1996.

Table 4: Self-reported ability to converse in English or French, Canada and regions, 1951-1996

| | Canada | | Canada less Quebec | | Quebec | |
|------|------------|--------|--------------------|--------|---------|--------|
| | English | French | English | French | English | French |
| | (per cent) | | | | | |
| 1951 | 79.3 | 31.9 | 96.6 | 9.0 | 37.0 | 88.1 |
| 1961 | 79.6 | 31.4 | 96.8 | 8.7 | 37.0 | 87.3 |
| 1971 | 80.5 | 31.4 | 97.0 | 9.3 | 38.1 | 88.5 |
| 1981 | 82.2 | 31.8 | 97.7 | 10.0 | 39.1 | 92.5 |
| 1991 | 83.4 | 31.5 | 97.7 | 10.6 | 40.9 | 93.6 |
| 1996 | 84.0 | 31.3 | 97.5 | 10.7 | 42.9 | 93.9 |

Note: Figures on ability to converse, for example, in English include persons able to converse in English and French together with those able to speak English but not French.

Source: Censuses.

Table 4 also establishes that self-reported ability to converse in English and, especially, in French have both progressed more significantly in Quebec than in the rest of Canada. Since 1971 both statistics have increased in Quebec by some five percentage points; outside Quebec, the ability to converse in French rose by only 1.4 per cent.

There is a further sense in which the claim that “the French language is progressing in Canada”¹⁸ is an illusion. Statistics

Since 1951, the number of English unilinguals has increased on average by over one million every five years, and the proportion of English unilinguals has remained constant at 67 per cent.

Canada’s 1988 test of a more precise question on ability to speak Canada’s official languages must be kept in mind. The new formulation read: “Can this person speak English or French well enough to conduct a fairly long conversation on different topics?” Compared to the data obtained via the usual census question – “Can this person speak English or French well enough to conduct a conversation?” – the results from the “long conversation” question reduced by fully one half the number of non-francophones outside Quebec who claimed to be able to speak French. In this light, to maintain that the spread of French as a second language has made up for the decline of French as first language is absurd.¹⁹

Ottawa has not got it all right, nor Quebec all wrong

Since the B&B Commission, Ottawa has – notably via the Official Languages Act and the Charter of Rights – materially improved the status of French within the federal government and encouraged the English-majority provinces to increase French-language services provided to their francophone minorities. But, if Canadians genuinely want to ensure a future for French in Canada, the demographic results clearly demonstrate that the “personality principle” approach to official bilingualism will not suffice.

In the long run, Quebec may also fail to preserve a viable French-speaking community in North America. But in the short run, Quebec language policies have achieved some success by applying the “territorial principle” within the limits of provincial jurisdiction. They have to a certain extent helped preserve Montreal as a majority francophone metropolis.

Where do we go from here?

Language policy in Canada has always been a contentious matter; there are no simple solutions. To begin, Ottawa could conduct a dispassionate discourse on language that admits the demographic realities and the genuine threats to the survival of French. Such a discourse would require that Ottawa acknowledge that as a first language, French is on the ropes outside Quebec and – most importantly – in the Montreal

metropolitan area, and cease pretending that the status of English-speaking Quebec is comparable to that of the French-speaking minorities in the rest of Canada. More specifically, it would require that Ottawa legitimize and promote application of the “territorial principle” within Quebec, and actively support the francization of allophones in the key Montreal area.

Such a change of heart is nowhere in the offing. Ottawa continues, for example, to subsidize Alliance Quebec, the province’s dominant English-language pressure group, on grounds that it is formally equivalent to organizations representing francophone minorities elsewhere. Thereby, Ottawa in effect finances a Trojan horse. The goal of Alliance Quebec is straightforward enough: its aim is wall-to-wall application of the “personality principle.” From this point of view, the Quebec government should treat speakers of English and French identically; it should not “discriminate” on behalf of either. Such a policy condemns Quebec francophones to a demographic fate similar to that which has befallen francophones elsewhere.

Many Quebecers have come to the conclusion that the current Canadian language regime is inherently assimilationist. Indeed, if it were to endure in its present form, Ottawa’s language policy could well turn out, in the long run, to be no more than a subtle manner of securing the slow but sure anglicization of French Canada so firmly recommended by Lord Durham. ■

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Notes

- ¹ E.g. “The slight decrease in the size of French-speaking communities [outside Quebec] may be only temporary” (Victor C. Goldbloom, *1997 Annual Report* (Ottawa: Commissioner of Official Languages, 1998), p. 16).
- ² See Louise Marmen and Jean-Pierre Corbeil, *Languages in Canada: 1996 Census* (Ottawa, Canadian Heritage and Statistics Canada, 1999).
- ³ *Proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee of the Senate and the House of Commons on Official Languages*, February 17, 1998, 5:18.
- ⁴ See for example Marc Termote, *Perspectives démologiques du Québec et de la région de Montréal 1991-2041* (Québec: Ministère de la Culture et des Communications, 1996).
- ⁵ See his remarkable book *Languages in Conflict: The Canadian Experience* (Ottawa: Richard J. Joy, 1967 and Toronto: McClelland and Stuart, 1972).
- ⁶ Réjean Lachapelle, “Discussion,” in *Demolinguistic Trends and the Evolution of Canadian Institutions* (Montreal: Association for Canadian Studies, Department of the Secretary of State, and Office of the Commissioner for Official Languages, 1989), p. 161.
- ⁷ More exactly, 1.68 children per woman compared to 1.58. See Marmen and Corbeil, *Op. cit.*, Table 5.1.

- ⁸ Réjean Lachapelle, in *Proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages*, *Op. cit.*, p. 18.
- ⁹ For a play-by-play description of the moves then being made, see Marc V. Levine, *The Reconquest of Montreal: Language Policy and Social Change in a Bilingual City* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990).
- ¹⁰ *1997 Annual Report*, *Op. cit.*, p. 16.
- ¹¹ This major break in comparability was spelled out in Charles Castonguay, "Assimilation Trends Among Official-Language Minorities 1971-1991," in *Towards the 21st Century: Emerging Socio-Demographic Trends and Policy Issues in Canada* (Ottawa: Federation of Canadian Demographers, 1996), pp. 201-205. See also the discussion of trends regarding Table 3.
- ¹² Michael O'Keefe, *Francophone Minorities: Assimilation and Community Vitality* (Ottawa: Canadian Heritage, 1998), p. 44.
- ¹³ One must bear in mind that the mother tongue and current home language data required to calculate individual assimilation rates are derived from a census sample of only one out of every five households.

- ¹⁴ Michael O'Keefe, *Op. cit.*, pp. 53-54.
- ¹⁵ This section is a summary of analyses I have developed in "Evolution de l'assimilation linguistique au Québec et au Canada entre 1971 et 1991", *Recherches sociographiques*, 38:3 (1997), pp. 469-490 and "Tendances de l'assimilation linguistique des allophones dans la région de Montréal," *L'Action nationale*, 88:7 (1998), pp. 55-68.
- ¹⁶ All French mother-tongue children of francized allophone parents are already included among the francophone children in both Figure 1 and Table 1.
- ¹⁷ Réjean Lachapelle, *Proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages*, *Op. cit.*, p. 13.
- ¹⁸ Réjean Lachapelle concurs with this way of summing up the situation. See *Proceedings of the Standing Joint Committee on Official Languages*, *Op. cit.*, p. 28.
- ¹⁹ The new formulation was, of course, discarded.

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