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Chair

The Honourable Denis Paradis

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• (1540)

[*Translation*]

The Chair (Hon. Denis Paradis (Brome—Missisquoi, Lib.)): Welcome to this meeting of the Standing Committee on Official Languages. Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing our study on the Translation Bureau.

We have with us Linda Cardinal, who is a titular professor with the School of Political Studies at the University of Ottawa, and Jean Delisle, professor emeritus of the University of Ottawa, who is appearing as an individual.

I would like to welcome you both.

In the first hour, you will both have about 10 minutes to make your presentations, and then we will have a period for questions and comments from committee members.

Please go ahead.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal (Titular Professor, School of Political Studies, University of Ottawa): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair and members of the committee.

Thank you for inviting me to offer my thoughts on the controversy surrounding the implementation of the Portage tool in the federal public service. I am delighted to be here today, as the debate about the Portage tool enables me to raise issues that go well beyond the deployment of the tool, but that the tool has unexpectedly crystallized.

Let me say at the outset that there is a real threat at our door, and that door leads to the federal public service, and to the Translation Bureau in particular. Where there is a threat, there is also an obligation to take swift action.

The debate on the implementation of the Portage tool has revealed that official languages are suffering in the public service, particularly the standing of French.

I will argue that we need to review the role of language technologies and better understand their impact on linguistic duality. We also need to rethink the Translation Bureau in order to give it the means to achieve its objectives and reverse the trend toward de-skilling translation professionals. And the decision to deploy the Portage tool must be rescinded.

First, I want to tell you about my experience as a former member of the working group on government transformations and the official languages, which was established by the Treasury Board in 1998-99, as that experience will provide the context for my remarks.

In 1998, the federal government launched transformation efforts to resolve its budget deficit problems. The government reviewed its programs and methods of delivering public services, resulting in a fundamental re-evaluation of the scope of government intervention in society.

The government transformations of the time included the creation of the Canadian Food Inspection Agency, the Parks Canada Agency, the Canada Business Centre and the Canadian Tourism Commission. In addition, corporations such as Petro-Canada, Air Canada, the country's airports, Canadian National Railway and Nav Canada were privatized.

The increased use of information technology in organizing public services was expected to improve the delivery of services to the public. Adopting new technologies would lay the foundation for a more effective government that was better connected with its citizens yet benefited from economies of scale.

In 1998, after condemning the government transformations, the Commissioner of Official Languages at the time, Victor Goldbloom, called for a working group to be established. The federal government accepted the commissioner's recommendation and ordered the Treasury Board to create the working group—on which I served—to study the impact of the government transformations on linguistic duality, particularly as regards Part VII of the Official Languages Act.

In carrying out our mandate, we found people were tired of dealing with official-language minority issues, we confirmed the concerns raised by the commissioner, we saw in very concrete terms the negative impact of the government transformations on official-language minorities and we proposed ways to turn things around. The working group made a number of recommendations in its report. For example, it asked the Treasury Board to report on the impact of the government transformations on official languages, create a mechanism for consulting with official-language minorities as part of the review of the transformations and continually remind the institutions subject to the Official Languages Act of their obligations.

Unfortunately, the working group did not raise the issue of the Translation Bureau at the time. I see today that the bureau's difficulties also began around that time. These problems grew under the previous government, which did not hesitate to cut staff and privatize services that support official languages in the public service, such as the privatization of language courses, which can be assumed to mean French courses.

•(1545)

Following the working group's review, the Action Plan for Official Languages was published in 2003. It included measures to promote research into language technologies. At the time, the action plan was a new tool to help the government meet its obligations to support the development and enhance the vitality of Canada's official-language minorities. However, today we have an impoverished vision of official languages. This vision is based on a utilitarian logic that puts private interests ahead of the public interest. Here are some examples.

In Blueprint 2020, the government explains that it must be innovative in the realm of technology and equip public servants with technological tools. Yet, in 2016, the media have revealed that the Translation Bureau has abolished 400 positions since 2010. Is that accurate? Moreover, 140 more positions will be eliminated by 2017–2018. It is fair to ask whether equipping public servants is really about promoting the use of both official languages or whether the government is gradually shuttering the bureau.

Let us turn to the Portage tool. I fear that the implementation of this tool not only violates the Official Languages Act, but also reveals an ignorance of the issues associated with translation. On the one hand, the government thinks translation is important because it wants to provide a tool that everyone can use. On the other hand, the government is devaluing the role of translators and the specialized knowledge they possess. The government seems to believe that everyone can translate even though there are inherent requirements for translation that only translators have mastered. If I were to venture a parallel, it would be to journalism and social media. On Twitter or Facebook, anyone can call themselves a journalist. But we know full well that the journalism profession is demanding and requires hard work, thoughtfulness and writing skills. Twitter's 140 characters will never replace investigative journalism, analysis or lengthy editorials.

The Portage tool is a troubling sign for official languages. If public servants need such a tool, it is because they do not know enough French to write emails or draft internal communications. What happened to promoting linguistic duality within the federal public service? I ask this question because of the asymmetrical position of two official languages in the public service. After 10 years of Conservative government, what is the status of French in the public service? What has happened to Part V of the act and public servants' right to work in the official language of their choice?

I propose two recommendations in order to formalize my arguments and encourage you to take action.

My first recommendation is that the Government of Canada reverse its decision to implement the Portage tool.

Granted, this is not an original recommendation, but it is a necessary one. I join many other translation and official-languages stakeholders in calling for a reversal. The new government is not bound to the decision of the previous government, especially when it comes to linguistic duality.

My second recommendation is that the Government of Canada establish a working group on the status of official languages in the public service and that this working group devote particular attention

to the role of language technologies in promoting linguistic duality, the situation at the Translation Bureau and the impact of the privatization of services, such as French courses, on official languages.

My recommendation is ambitious, but essential. A working group on the status of official languages in the public service must reaffirm the language rights of francophone public servants and the right of francophones to receive communications in French that has not been produced by a machine, as my colleague Jean Delisle emphasized recently in *Le Droit*.

I agree with Jean Delisle that respecting language rights means ensuring idiomatic French and that we must not let French be turned into a robot language. In an asymmetrical context like the public service, where French is a translated language—85% of French documents are translations—we cannot sit on our hands while the government deploys a tool that could reduce French to a bastard language.

One way to change the status of French in the public service would be to encourage francophone public servants to prepare documents in French in order to counter the asymmetry and recognize their right to draft documents, messages, notes and presentations in French.

•(1550)

Thank you for your attention. I will answer your questions later.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Cardinal.

We now go to Mr. Delisle.

Mr. Jean Delisle (Professor Emeritus, As an Individual): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you for inviting me to appear before your committee to participate in the discussion about the Translation Bureau. I hope to provide a relevant, if not original point of view.

I myself was a translator at the Secretary of State early in my career, and I recently finished a book on the Translation Bureau's first 100 years entitled *Les douaniers des langues: grandeur et misère de la traduction à Ottawa, 1867-1967*.

In 1984, I published a history of the bureau on the occasion of its 50th anniversary. I have dedicated some 40 years to translation history and teaching, which supports my testimony.

We all know that a lot of translation goes on in Canada. Translation is part of this country's DNA, even though many Canadians consider it to be a necessary evil of Confederation. The same could be said of official bilingualism because translation and bilingualism go hand in hand. Translation is not a by-product of bilingualism; it is a manifestation of bilingualism.

What should we think of the Portage machine translation software? Modern technology is marvellous, but it must be used wisely. We need to differentiate between the availability of Portage to all federal public servants and its use by professional translators.

Let's start with federal public servants.

There are risks associated with machine translation software such as Google Translate and Portage in their current incarnation because they are unpredictable and unreliable and there are no clear guidelines for their use by federal public servants. Canada's three largest translators' associations—Ontario, Quebec and New Brunswick—have expressed significant concerns about Portage. Even the government's informatics services have not recommended using it for email communications. If Portage were to become widely used, it would signal a return to the days when translation was entrusted to bilingual secretaries who were not equipped to perform such tasks.

We know that, for several years now, public servants have been using Google Translate for internal communications, often with disastrous results. I provide some real examples of these kinds of emails in my brief.

Canada's official languages are English and French. Machine language is not an official language, and neither is it “good enough”. For whom is that language supposed to be good enough?

Because both languages are equal under law, Portage could produce errors with legal consequences. Such errors could discredit the Translation Bureau and tarnish Canada's image.

I think it's unrealistic to believe that machine translation can improve communication among public servants or encourage them to work in their language. What is preventing them from working in their language right now?

A unilingual public servant who is unable to read the original message could be misled by an unrevised machine translation. If all Portage translations must be revised, there will have to be a considerable number of bilingual revisers, and that entails extra cost. Will the government really save money? Who will those revisers be? What skills will they be required to have? These are some questions that will need to be answered.

What about professional translators? For over a century, federal translators have specialized in language and translation. Because of them, Ottawa has become a centre of excellence for translation and interpretation. They professionalized the profession in the 1920s and pioneered translation teaching in the 1930s.

• (1555)

Lawmakers in three provinces have granted the reserved title of certified translator to translators who are members of professional associations in those provinces. They are recognized as professionals. Translators play an essential role in ensuring Canada's linguistic duality and practise a profession with a strong symbolic value. They are considered by many MPs, ministers and senators as the cement of national unity. Dozens and dozens of testimonies attest to that.

Their primary complaint is the lack of respect for their professional status: they are being told not only what to do, but also how to do it. Decisions about how to work must remain the professional's prerogative. The fact that they are public servants is irrelevant. Does anyone tell accountants how to perform their work?

Federal translators are certainly not hostile to new technology, but they are very aware that these new tools, Portage in particular, could have a detrimental effect on language, translation and translation as a profession. They are willing to use machine translation, but they do not want to be turned into machines themselves.

Let's look now at the Translation Bureau, which seems to be at a crossroads.

The Translation Bureau Act, enacted in 1934, requires the organization to make and revise all translations for all government organizations. In the years following the Official Languages Act, the bureau flourished. The bureau expanded the range of services available to public servants and all Canadians. In 1974, it even acquired oversight over linguistic standardization within the federal government.

As a public organization, the Translation Bureau has demonstrated dynamism, leadership and innovation in the last 50 years. My brief contains an impressive list of these innovations.

The Translation Bureau is responsible for producing quality translations, but the law does not say that this must be done at the lowest possible cost. Quality comes at a price, but translation is actually not very expensive.

Historically, the bureau's budget has always represented less than 1% of the national budget, which is currently \$296 billion. Is accounting expensive? How about consultants? We rarely ask the question in those terms, but when it comes to discussing translation, the financial aspect is raised immediately.

Over the past 10 years or so, there has been a clear desire to reduce translation-related expenses as much as possible. There is talk of cutting bureau staff by 60%. Over the past three years alone, the bureau looked to save \$50 million thanks in some measure to new technology. Is it purely by chance that this cost-cutting coincided with the plan to roll out machine translation software on April 1?

We need to give control over all translation within the federal public service back to the Translation Bureau in accordance with the act that has governed it since 1934. If not, the anarchic system that prevailed in the pre-bureau days will return. I think we're already there. I could answer that question if you ask it later. I could tell you how we currently have the anarchic system we wanted to avoid in 1934.

The bureau is a public organization and, as such, it has a mission that differs from that of a private translation company. I could also explain that more later.

I may be mistaken, but for a number of reasons, I get the strong impression that there are forces seeking to dismantle the Translation Bureau. The bureau is not recruiting; its workforce has been shrinking steadily. It has offered no internships in four years and has stopped funding the Traduca internship program. Is this because it foresees a need for fewer translators?

•(1600)

In addition to excellent interpreters who accomplish masterful feats of communication on a daily basis, the bureau had a team of terminologists who literally invented this new profession and whose remarkable achievements have garnered worldwide recognition. However, I'm told that the number of terminologists has shrunk to the point that terminology is practically endangered and significant expertise has been lost, as significant as the loss of scientific and technical translators who must retire or who are being fired.

I believe that the bureau's status as a special operating agency—or SOA—prevents it from fulfilling a public organization's mission in terms of innovation, training and terminology. As in any field, failure to innovate means falling behind. The Translation Bureau's history is part and parcel of the evolution of our bilingual nation. It reminds me of a grand heritage building that developers want to demolish for the sake of financial gain.

To conclude, I'd say that translation is an excellent indicator of the relative standing, weight and vitality of one official language vis-à-vis the other. The first language to suffer the detrimental effects of machine translation would be French, which is the main language that is translated. There were 325 million words translated into French compared to 23 million into English in the last fiscal year. Francophones in this country will reject cost savings and productivity as excuses to relegate their language to the ranks of technobabble.

Thank you. I would be pleased to answer all your questions.

The Chair: Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Delisle.

Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal.

Since we are running a little behind, we will go directly to the first round of questions, with six minutes for each member.

We'll start with John Nater.

•(1605)

Mr. John Nater (Perth—Wellington, CPC): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their presentations.

As you can hear, French is not my mother tongue. I am taking French courses, but I don't have the vocabulary to speak fluently in French. So Google Translate is my best friend. I use it often. It's an aid for me, and for my colleagues. I was a public servant at the Treasury Board for two years, and I would have liked a translation tool.

[English]

For me, any tool that can help promote bilingualism is useful, especially for those of us who may not have had the advantages of French immersion or the opportunity to use our second national language when we were growing up and had to find alternative means to use our second language.

We've heard opposition to tools such as this from a couple of witnesses now, and I'm a little concerned about that. It will never replace translators or the professionalism of translation. I accept that

100%. We've used the services of the Translation Bureau in our office. I used them as a public servant, and they provide exceptional quality. There's nothing I could say wrong about that.

I want to focus on a couple of things that Madame Cardinal spoke about.

The comparison to social media is actually a worthy comparison, but I come to a conclusion that is different from yours. Yes, there are differences between social media and journalism, but they go hand in hand. We see the tools and the way in which social media are being used as a journalistic tool in the same way that professional public service-endorsed translation tools could find worthwhile use in the public service.

Do you see any role for a machine translator tool that could be used by public servants themselves in our day-to-day operations or in our day-to-day lives as public servants?

[Translation]

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you for your question.

I didn't say that all tools were bad. We use many tools in our life, including to wash clothes, clean the house or read. You have a tablet. Technology is a part of our life. No one here is saying that we need to go back to the stone age; even then, people developed tools. Tools are part of us, and we cannot do without them, but it depends on the context in which the tool is used because a tool is not neutral. Right now, the approach for the proposed tool is a utilitarian one that aims to gradually get rid of translators, to replace the translators.

Even if social media makes people want to become journalists, it isn't in the process of replacing the profession of journalist. Just because I use a tool to do my accounting, that doesn't mean there won't be any accountants tomorrow. Just because I am versed in law, that doesn't make me a lawyer. We can make these parallels with professions *ad infinitum*, and we will always come back to the same thing, which is that the tools aren't there to replace people, the professionals; they are there to help do the work.

Certainly, in the past, some tools have meant that businesses needed fewer workers, among other things.

I'm not here to give you a background on technology, but in this case, it's also important to look at the context and the purpose behind these tools. Then we have to see how a policy in this area interacts with the Official Languages Act. I have the impression in this case that the interaction is jammed. In other words, some aspects don't go together. People want to use a tool for utilitarian purposes to promote official languages, when the goal of official languages is to enhance the vitality and development of official languages and to encourage their use. That isn't the case here.

[English]

Mr. John Nater: I accept your argument, but—actually, I don't accept the argument. I don't think anyone is arguing that professional translators will become irrelevant. Quite the contrary; there's an essential role that professional translators must play in translation.

A machine tool will never be used to translate any number of official documents or legalistic documents, but it is an essential tool, I would say, especially—and again, I give credit to Minister Brison for his promotion of more millennials in the public service.

A machine tool, an online tool, a computer program for translation, I would argue, is a promotion of the French language, or of both official languages. I'm not saying there are not challenges. I know when I use Google Translate, I have trouble with the translation, but what I am saying is that it is essential to have that option of short translation with a tool. We don't bemoan the loss of telegraph machines, and in the same way we evolve. There is an essential use for an online tool such as this.

I want to touch on something else, though. You brought up the idea that a tool such as this may violate the Official Languages Act. I was hoping you could expand on that. How exactly would the use of an online translator, an online tool or computer tool such as this, violate the Official Languages Act, especially when it's not necessarily being used to translate official documents?

•(1610)

[Translation]

The Chair: Please give a very short answer, Mrs. Cardinal, because we have gone over time.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I will answer very quickly then.

I think translators need to be given tools to help them do their job. What you are saying runs counter to the solid evidence that shows that the Translation Bureau's workforce is continuously shrinking.

Internal work isn't innocuous. Short emails aren't innocuous. You're all on your iPhones, and you can send thirty, forty, fifty emails a day. Writing all those emails in French, or at least even some of them in French, is still a lot of work.

For the last point, I think there's a problem in terms of the Official Languages Act. Under the Official Languages Act, French and English must be treated equally. A machine language and an idiomatic language are not equal. There is an asymmetry of the French and English, and that's the problem French faces in the federal public service. You will increase this asymmetry; you won't be helping to reduce it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mrs. Cardinal.

Let's move on to the next person.

Mr. Lefebvre, I believe you are going to share your time.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre (Sudbury, Lib.): Yes, I'll share it with Mr. Fergus.

I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here today.

You make a few strong conclusions with the title of your brief: "Linguistic duality imperiled by utilitarian logic in the federal public service."

Mr. Delisle, you said, "Francophones in this country will reject cost savings and productivity as excuses to relegate their language to the ranks of technobabble." Those are strong words.

You also said that, in your opinion, the purpose of this technology is to replace humans.

What are you basing this statement on? Is it a fact, or are you assuming that? Where does that comment come from?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Who is the question for?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: For you, Mrs. Cardinal.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Okay.

I said this during an exchange with Paul Gaboury in *Le Droit*. When we look at the decline in the Translation Bureau's staffing levels over several years, we have to ask the question: is it to replace humans? There are humans behind the tools. Are the tools being used only to replace translators?

Once again, I come back to the idea that everyone thinks translation is important. That's why people want tools. At the same time, why is a translation tool used to replace translators, while an accounting tool isn't used to replace accountants?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: How do you think this translation tool should be used? What is the ultimate goal of this tool?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: A translation tool is used to help the translator. The tools we use should not have an official status to replace translation work and change translators into post-editors.

The translation profession needs to be protected. Mr. Delisle can also tell you about that. Canada's image is at stake. It's important to remember that language is not economics; language is politics, language is used to unite this country. If we start fiddling with official language issues for utilitarian reasons, the country's unity will be at stake. This isn't because of Quebec; it's because French and English are Canada's two official languages. I don't have to convince you.

Mr. Jean Delisle: I'd like to add something if I may.

It all depends on how the tool is used. One person uses it to understand certain texts. That isn't a problem. It becomes a problem the moment someone uses the tool to communicate messages or to do published professional translations.

You have here the employee separation document for a public service employee. The machine was used to translate one part into French. It reads "L'achèvement de la "émis" des composantes de ce formulaire". Do you understand anything? The form is printed in English on one side and French on the other.

This is what we want to condemn, using the machine to publish texts.

•(1615)

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: That was why I asked you what you thought the purpose of the tool was, and if the tool was used for external communications.

I think Mr. Fergus will continue now.

The Chair: First, though, I'd like to ask you, Mr. Delisle, to provide the clerk with the document you just referred to.

Mr. Fergus, you have the floor.

Mr. Greg Fergus (Hull—Aylmer, Lib.): I'd like to thank the witnesses for being here.

I fully agree with your basic analysis and what you both propose in your presentations. Perhaps it's because I grew up in the western suburbs of Montreal. I was the only Black person in a White neighbourhood. I was the only anglophone among many franco-phones. So I'm quite sensitive to the issue of minorities.

What I like about your contribution to this discussion is that you are asking what the purpose of these tools is, what the purpose of translation is. I think the purpose is to ensure that anglophone or francophone public servants have the right to express themselves and be understood in their own language. So I don't fully agree with your recommendations, but I do with most of them.

Mr. Delisle, you mentioned that modern technology has accomplished marvellous things, but it must be used wisely. I think you're absolutely right. What kind of guidelines do we need? I maintain that it is important to use this tool as a tool for understanding and not for translation. We know quite well that if people start doing that, francophones will start writing messages in English.

Mr. Jean Delisle: I fully agree with you.

One of my recommendations is that the roll-out of the software be suspended until further notice so a study can be done on the consequences it may have and how public servants might use it. If it is to read a message and understand a text, that's not a problem, but if it is to publish things, that becomes problematic. Guidelines should be established to have the texts revised by qualified people.

Mr. Greg Fergus: It's important to mention that this applies to both official communications and informal communications.

Mr. Jean Delisle: Absolutely.

In some way, a guide on the proper use of technology should be developed. That's what I think about it.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Mr. Choquette, you have six minutes.

Mr. François Choquette (Drummond, NDP): Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I also want to thank our guests, who have made some very interesting presentations on a topic arising from the controversy over the use of this tool.

It has been said that the tool could be used to write short texts and even promote official languages. It was actually mentioned once again that it could be useful for official language promotion.

I asked all the other guests whether risk assessments have been done on the use of the Portage tool or Google Translate by public servants in terms of respect for official languages, including parts IV and V. You are experts on this issue. Have any risk assessments been carried out? If not, how can we explain the eagerness to deploy this tool, when the Liberals were elected by saying that they would now respect science? It is very important to base our decisions on science. So, if we are making our decisions based on science, let's wait for scientific studies or let's do those studies.

Who could carry out those studies?

•(1620)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: Thank you for your question, Mr. Choquette.

Evidence is crucial to making public policies that can serve the common good. Generally, in official languages, there is no analysis that could be referred to as language-based, downstream and not just upstream. When a disaster occurs, we often look into why it happened after the fact, when we could have prevented it.

In this case, I think that we are in a scenario that would have needed a linguistic lens, a lens of official languages, to ensure that this tool would not negatively affect the promotion of official languages, even if it is just used to write emails.

The federal government currently has what is referred to as “a filter” in place. After the Desrochers decision, the government established a filter to ensure that its programs—especially in terms of the vitality and development of official language minority communities—are not negatively affecting those minorities. That's called “a filter”.

Public servants have to put programs through that filter. I find that, in the federal public service, we don't just need a filter for all programs. We need a language-based analysis, similar to gender-based analysis. The idea is to ensure that the government's programs and policies are compatible and do not conflict with the promotion of official languages. This would have been useful for the entire federal public service, but it would have been essential to do that kind of work beforehand in this case. Official languages are too delicate of an issue to tinker around with.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Delisle, would you like to add anything?

Mr. Jean Delisle: No, I have nothing to add.

Mr. François Choquette: Mr. Delisle, I would like to come back to what you said about the Translation Bureau's mission.

Over the last several years, not only has there been attrition in terms of staff, but there has also been no hiring of new translators. The Translation Bureau is not even taking on interns any longer.

I would like to hear what you have to say about the consequences on the Translation Bureau's primary mission. You have written many articles on the topic. You are an expert. I would like to hear your thoughts on this.

Mr. Jean Delisle: Thank you very much for your question. It really goes to the heart of the debate. It will help me summarize my brief, which is much longer than the presentation I made.

My current diagnosis is that the bureau is in a precarious situation, as it is both a private company—or likes to define itself as such—and a public service. As a public service, it has to translate texts with a security rating that are therefore more or less confidential. It must also update terminology—it has a terminology bank, Termium, the bureau's jewel—and must provide parliamentary interpretation. We know that there are only two interpretation programs in the entire country: one at the University of Ottawa, and the other, since very recently, at York University's Glendon College. Those two programs are funded extensively by the federal government. If the funding was cut, no university would have the means to provide a training program for conference interpreting, as the program brings in seven, eight, nine or ten candidates in the best years. That's not profitable for a university. The bureau's responsibilities I just listed are part of the mission of the government and the bureau itself, in my opinion.

Another aspect related to this mission is the training of the new generation. It was said last Monday that technical translators are retiring and there is no one to replace them. The situation is serious. We know that the bureau has not been taking on co-op students for at least four years. As a private company, it aims to provide translation at the best possible cost. What has the bureau done to achieve that? It has reduced recruitment, as any large company trying to rationalize its productivity does. Cuts have been made to the terminology service, which is currently doing about 10% of the work it used to do. Internships are no longer provided to train the next generation. Therefore, a number of areas are affected.

In addition, an anarchic situation has developed within the public service in terms of translation. Departments have phantom services, where people are translating even though they shouldn't be. Others have language advisor in their title, when they are actually translators. They are also in the wrong position. Translation is being done in all departments, and does not seem to be coordinated like it should be under the Translation Bureau Act.

I think that the Portage software is a symptom rather than a cause of the current volatile situation at the Translation Bureau. Why was the Translation Bureau created in 1934? It was created because the situation was as anarchic as it is now. The then secretary of state, Mr. Caan, said that an organization had to be created to coordinate translation across the public service and prevent the disorderly development of translation. He used the word disorderly. I am under the impression that we are currently going through the same type of disorderly development. Those are my thoughts on the issue.

• (1625)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Delisle.

Since time is flying, Ms. Lapointe will have the floor for two minutes. She will be followed by Mr. Arseneault for another two minutes.

Ms. Linda Lapointe (Rivière-des-Mille-Îles, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I want to thank the witnesses for joining us today. I appreciate your analyses, which frankly seem to be very accurate, and I am sure that you have taken the time to establish your positions.

Earlier this week, we heard from the representatives of the Language Technologies Research Centre. You are probably familiar

with Mr. Barabé and Mr. Bernardi. They warned us about the Portage software and suggested that, if public servants were to use it, they should be told that it is a tool to help with comprehension and not a translation or communication tool. I would like to hear your opinion on that.

They also told us that public servants already use Google Translate extensively. With Google Translate, as soon as a text is submitted for translation, it no longer belongs to anyone and ends up on other servers. I would also like to know what you think about that.

Mr. Jean Delisle: It would be a good idea to issue an advisory that the translation was done by a machine so that it would not be disseminated. You are right. Google Translate translations belong to Google. The advantage of the Portage tool is that it will be on a Canadian server. When it comes to government texts, it is completely reasonable to feel that the information should stay in the country. I was very much in favour of that. In fact, I am not opposed to Portage in principle, but I am opposed to its use. I do not want to come back to that.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: I think I have some time left.

Ms. Cardinal, you were saying that French courses were no longer being provided to public servants. You said that French was hit hard. Do you have any figures to support that statement?

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I said that the media told us about that. A few years ago, it was announced that language teaching would be privatized. As I was saying, we can assume that French courses are the ones that were privatized because we know that it is an official language, but the second official language.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: That was assumed, but it was not supported by a study.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: No, but you will find it all over the media. It was reported a few years ago, when the former government did it. It was a very sad day when an aspect of official languages within the public service was privatized.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Okay.

Thank you very much.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Arseneault, you have the floor for two minutes.

Mr. René Arseneault (Madawaska—Restigouche, Lib.): Ms. Cardinal and Mr. Delisle, thank you for being with us today.

I am from New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual Canadian province. I am extremely sensitive to everything you have told us today and everything you have highlighted. I am seeing it back home. We have the same concerns.

Ms. Cardinal, my colleague, Mr. Nater, asked you a question about legislation earlier, and you did not have time to answer. You said that the Portage tool may be in contravention of the Official Languages Act. Can you elaborate on your answer?

•(1630)

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I do have some doubt. I was rushing my answer because our time is limited. I say that we should look at the interaction between the policies being adopted and the Official Languages Act. We have to ensure that the objectives of the Official Languages Act are still being met. In this case, I said that something was off. I am not convinced that the tool helps strengthen francophones' right to communicate in the official language of their choice or that it helps public servants work in the official language of their choice. We have to try to analyze a proposal, such as the Portage tool, in light of its interaction with the Official Languages Act. I don't feel that this has been done and, if it has, it should be redone.

Mr. René Arseneault: Yes, but there is no known study on the issue.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: No study has been conducted. I think you should perhaps go back to the DesRochers decision, which resulted in the filter I was talking about earlier. The DesRochers decision indicates that communications should be of equal quality. There is no equality when we are dealing with a robot language and an idiomatic language. All that does is reinforce asymmetry in terms of official languages.

Mr. René Arseneault: I completely agree with your comments.

Mrs. Linda Cardinal: I am sure I don't have to convince you.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Arseneault.

We are a bit rushed, as we have two more groups appearing after you.

Thank you both so much for your excellent presentations.

We will break for a few minutes to give the other witnesses the time to take their seats.

• _____ (Pause) _____

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•(1635)

The Chair: Order, please.

Pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), we are continuing the study on the Translation Bureau.

We are welcoming Sylviane Lanthier, President of the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, or FCFA, and Suzanne Bossé, the federation's Executive Director.

Welcome, ladies.

We are also hearing from Maryse Benhoff, Vice-President of the Language Industry Association, or the LIA.

Welcome, everyone. You have 10 minutes to make a presentation. Afterwards, we will move on to questions and comments.

We will start with you, Ms. Lanthier.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier (Chair, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): Mr. Chair, committee members, thank you for once again inviting the FCFA to appear before you today. Given that this is the second invitation you have extended to us in two months, I am very encouraged by this

committee's willingness to listen to francophone and Acadian communities.

Like a number of other stakeholders in linguistic duality, we have closely followed the case of the Translation Bureau and the Portage automated system. For the FCFA, this issue is part of a much broader context—the pervasive erosion of federal institutions' capacity to communicate in both official languages. That erosion has increased since cuts were made to fight the deficit, in 2011-2012.

In the wake of the strategic and operating review of spending, the federation was actually among the first stakeholders to express concern over the cumulative impact of the budget cuts on the federal government's ability to meet its language obligations. In fall 2012, the Commissioner of Official Languages said that he received a series of complaints about the cuts and that public servants were worried that those cuts would result in their losing their right to work in the official language of their choice.

Every year, the FCFA deals with about 20 federal institutions. Therefore, we can see first-hand that reduced capacity among federal institutions. Last year, the federation submitted three complaints about communication only in English or faulty translations. For example, it is confusing when, in an official document intended for the general public, a minister talks about a “*modèle de réseau en rayon de bagnole*”. That is not so funny. When we look at the English version, we see that he was trying to translate “hub and spoke model”, which is “*réseau en étoile*” in proper French.

In a context where several federal institutions have lost resources and where 31% of Translation Bureau jobs have disappeared, it is not surprising that corners are often cut in the federal government when it comes to communication in both official languages. However, that changes nothing in terms of institutions' language obligations, and that is where we share the concerns of many stakeholders regarding the Portage tool.

When we look at all the testimony provided before your committee, two things jump out: there is a lack of clarity when it comes to the problem the Translation Bureau is trying to resolve, and there is confusion over how the tool should be used. If, as the Translation Bureau says, the tool is supposed to be used only for informal exchanges among public servants, there is a risk of violating part V of the Official Languages Act and public servants' right to work in the official language of their choice.

If an English-speaking colleague sends me an email and the translation is so bad that I have trouble understanding what they are trying to say, I may answer them in English just to make sure that I am understood. If, as the Association of Translators and Interpreters of Ontario fears, the public service started using this new automated tool more broadly, that would constitute a violation of part IV of the Official Languages Act. Either way, since the vast majority of translations are from English to French, francophones—be they public servants or not—will be the ones to suffer.

In a letter addressed to Minister Foote, the Corporation of Translators, Terminologists and Interpreters of New Brunswick said that the deployment of Portage, regardless of the proposed use, is a dangerous precedent. The FCFA agrees. There is a strong possibility that the implementation of Portage will be seen, within the public service, as the legitimisation of automated translation systems as perfectly acceptable tools to ensure communication in both official languages.

In her presentation before this committee, the Translation Bureau's chief executive officer established a direct link between the large number of searches done on Google Translate in the public service and the importance of providing a tool to at least guarantee that the translated content will remain behind the Government of Canada firewall. We are wondering what message the government is trying to send.

Is the Translation Bureau trying to say that, since public servants are already using automated translation systems extensively, we have to accept it as a done deal and give them a Canadian system? If so, they are starting from the wrong premise to resolve the problem. They should rather start by wondering why there are so many searches on Google Translate and other similar systems. We think that three factors contribute to that situation.

Earlier, I talked about the erosion of resources within the federal government. The cuts made over the past few years mean that federal institutions have to fulfill a variety of obligations with reduced resources.

• (1640)

At the same time, cuts to the translation bureau have weakened internal resources. The testimony of the Canadian Association of Professional Employees before the committee the day before yesterday was quite incisive.

I would note, in passing, that the budget cuts of 2011-12 also reduced the translation bureau's ability to offer work placements. The Traduca program came to an end, at nearly the same time, further limiting opportunities for internships in translation. Funded through the 2008-13 roadmap for linguistic duality and managed by the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, Traduca saw the creation of 344 internships in 3 years. For students, the end of the program meant a loss of opportunities, while the translation bureau lost access to a new generation of professionals.

The second factor is this. In addition to some public servants' lack of understanding of the language obligations of federal institutions, many do not recognize the limits of automated translation systems. It is easy to imagine that a unilingual anglophone, who is unable to check the quality of a translation, would sincerely believe that the tool is effective, especially if no one says anything to the contrary.

This is essentially the same problem the FCFA identified in a brief presented in 2009 to mark the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Official Languages Act. Without a central coordinating body to ensure that the act is understood and implemented consistently throughout federal institutions, they are often left to their own devices in determining how to fulfill their language obligations. For example, the Commissioner of Official Languages, himself, stated in January that, during the deficit reduction efforts of 2011-12,

Treasury Board had not provided federal institutions with any guidance as to their obligation to analyze and limit any potential negative impact on official language minority communities.

To recap, we have seen budget cuts, a lack of understanding, and no central coordination. These three facts create a perfect storm, or as Google Translate would no doubt turn up in French, "un orage parfait". As I said, since most translation is from English into French, francophones are the ones who suffer.

We know that Minister Foote has postponed the implementation of the Portage tool and we are very pleased. This is a good opportunity to take the necessary steps to get to the source of the problem as regards the erosion of communications in both official languages in federal institutions. In closing, I offer the following recommendations.

First, as I stated earlier, there is some confusion as to how Portage is supposed to be used. We recommend that the government begin by clearly identifying both the problem to be addressed and the support needed for communications in both official languages.

Second, we maintain this would be a very good time for a complete review of the translation tools and practices in federal institutions, including all efforts related to awareness and training around linguistic obligations and communications in both official languages.

Third, it is essential that all public servants, regardless of the nature of their work or their language of work, receive training on linguistic obligations and on the appropriate tools to fulfill these obligations.

Fourth, a number of witnesses have described the translation bureau as being in crisis. This raises significant doubts about the bureau's ability to appropriately fulfill its supporting role for all federal institutions, in the medium and the long term. Knowing that a number of federal institutions use the services of private translation firms, we recommend that the government conduct a study on the efficiency and effectiveness of both models, the public-sector one and the private-sector one.

Finally, and I cannot emphasize this enough, the government would avoid a lot of problems in fulfilling its linguistic obligations if it were to appoint a person or organization in government to ensure that these obligations were properly understood and that the Official Languages Act was consistently implemented.

Thank you.

• (1645)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Lanthier.

We will now hear from Mrs. Benhoff of the Language Industry Association.

[*English*]

Ms. Maryse Benhoff (Vice-President, Language Industry Association): Hello.

Thank you for inviting AILIA, the Language Industry Association, to lean in on these important conversations. Here is a quick brief about AILIA.

It was created in 2003, with a mission to increase the visibility of the language industry, promote and advocate for the language industry, increase competitiveness, act as a spokesperson for the industry, share information, and support high standards for quality, as with the development of the national standard CGSB 131.10. All the members of the board, our working board, are all volunteers.

Upon receipt of the request to speak today, we asked the entirety of the AILIA membership for their comments with regard to a few questions, and I will be presenting the responses to these questions.

These were the questions: What has been the impact of machine translation on your business, marketplace, and the Translation Bureau? What has been your experience working with the Translation Bureau? All of these comments are an amalgamation of all of those.

First, we encountered misguided beliefs that machine translation with post-editing can deliver results that are equivalent to professional translation. What we are seeing more and more in the industry is a belief that machine translation with post-editing can deliver results that are equivalent to professional translation or leveraging translation memory tools, which is not true. Clients are prepared to embark on this high-risk technological adventure completely uninformed. No matter how one uses it or looks at it, machine translation remains high-risk technology, for several reasons.

First and foremost, there is no actual translation or communication involved. There is a gross misinterpretation of the term “machine translation” by the public and how it works. As we know, machine translation works strictly by statistical matching, without any human comprehension, knowledge of language, or validation of meaning. As a result, machine translation tools generate all kinds of unpredictable errors and nonsensical output that can also be downright offensive.

We encountered a lack of understanding of the real implications of post-editing. Post-editing involves people reviewing and trying to improve the raw machine translation output, which is extremely tricky because of all the unpredictable mistakes and nonsense, things that you would never encounter in the work of human translators. The industry is faced with a complete lack of understanding by the public of the time involved in post-editing with uncontrolled use of machine translation.

In these discussions, we've heard about the pre-editing and post-editing required to successfully work with machine translation. This information is not in the sphere of understanding, even for many who are experienced translators in the industry. In other words, post-editing is a very different exercise from professional revision. It is a type of work for which there is little or no training. So very different is this work that there is now an ISO standard being prepared, a copy which I have provided to the *greffier* so that he can circulate it. It's at the DIS stage. I can't provide it to you. Only the link for consultation is available.

It's interesting how it is described. The section about pre-production processes begins with the concept of whether the source language content is suitable for machine translation, differing very much from other tools. Because the subsequent post-editing,

combined with machine translation efficiency, depends on the machine translation system, language combination, domain, style, and source language content, this is very complex, which is what I am trying to convey. There is a 20-page standard coming out about it.

It goes further to specify that requirements for post-editing must be identified, documented, and made accessible to the post-editor at the onset of the project. Post-editors must be informed of the level of estimated usefulness of the machine translation output.

• (1650)

The output must also be easily identifiable to the post-editor by way of indication marks to correctly distinguish between machine translation and output from other sources. That is how very different and difficult it is to use pure, raw machine translation.

There were a lot of comments.

We see requests for post-editing often turning into complete retranslation in the marketplace. Our most recent experience shows this happens primarily because most machine translation output is useless. It needs specialists at the onset, specialists using it, specialists programming it, and specialists inputting the information, which brings with it the complexity of explaining to clients that it's not faster or cheaper. This is a necessary burden for the industry in general.

The bottom line is that we're dealing with high risk that brings few efficiency gains when the need is for real translation.

The major strategic mistake is that language experts are made to work downstream, where they must find and fix machine-generated errors and nonsense.

We fully understand the challenges of a nearly exponential rise in translation and multilingual communications needs in society and government as a whole. However, we strongly believe that the self-serve use of machine translation by Government of Canada employees who are not language experts, without any supervision or validation by language experts or stringent policies to prevent the sharing or circulation of machine translation output, entails unacceptable risks that would outweigh the expected benefits and convenience, all of which machine translation does not competently address.

What can we say about machine translation in the hands of the public?

It should be used only for gist translations, such as those Google has long provided. When someone gets the gist of a text they don't understand, it doesn't mean that it's going to be as useful as they think it will be. It can help them make decisions on whether texts are to be translated if the content of the text is such that they want to translate it, or they'll need it, or it's pertinent. Again, it's a bit of a fallacy. We can fall into not understanding sufficient content, even with machine translation.

The tool developed by the Translation Bureau lends itself to misuse and misinterpretation. It's relatively unknown to the industry. I had to knock on the door and ask to be let in to have a demonstration.

From what I saw, it seems to be very basic. It has no bitext ability and no pre-analysis content. It has only a Google-like statistical matching at best. For gisting of the content it's viable, but what is to say that civil servants who have this tool will not use it in their communications?

We've heard all about the phantom units all over the federal government. What is to say that if they're not respecting the actual law, they'll respect the intended use of this tool?

The message or image being sent to the public with this machine translation is that machine translation is now government approved.

As for our recommendations, the first is to educate. Educate parliamentarians, civil servants, and federal employees to start with. Continue to do so with all documentation on the Translation Bureau website. We're presuming this will not go away. Educate them on the philosophy, the concept, and the ultimate uses of machine translation. Educate them about the profession of translators, about revisers, and about post-editing. Educate the Translation Bureau about respecting their intended audience, about the gains and risks, and about creating access without chaos.

Inform the public. We must decide on the value we place on our language heritage and the quality of language with which we want to address our citizens.

• (1655)

We are convinced that any imposed reliance on machine translation post-editing by the Government of Canada is a hazardous strategy that would risk turning a world-renowned area of expertise built over decades into low-quality mass production work unworthy of Canada's proud cultural heritage, its government, its citizens, and its enviable place among the world's developed nations.

It would amount to the gradual destruction of a strong economic sector for Canada involving thousands and thousands of high-skilled jobs. It would be replaced with a low-paying, low-value industry that is likely to move entirely out of the country over time to parts of the world where wages reflect poor standards of living.

To set the record straight, put language experts at the forefront of the process. As we've heard, tools intended to be used for real communication must be put in the hands of professional translators. Therefore, what is required is to put language experts in control upstream of the entire process where they can analyze content and make optimal decisions before processing.

The Chair: We're out of time. Could you conclude now?

Ms. Maryse Benhoff: Well, you have everything in writing anyhow, so it's as you wish. I can stop now and the rest of the recommendations—

The Chair: Thank you. Maybe we can start with questions and comments right now, and you may be able to provide what you have to say in answering some questions.

Ms. Maryse Benhoff: Very good.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you very much.

We will now go immediately to questions, starting with Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Boucher, will you be using the full six minutes?

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher (Beauport—Côte-de-Beaupré—Île d'Orléans—Charlevoix, CPC): Yes.

The Chair: You have six minutes, Mrs. Boucher.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The witnesses have said a lot of things, and many issues keep coming up, but different realities must also be considered.

There is the reality of public servants, who have lengthy documents to translate and who have to render them in perfect French. Then, there is our reality as parliamentarians. When there are debates and the government has to draft speeches, we usually receive the texts through the usual administrative channels.

I experienced this when I was a parliamentary secretary, for official languages and for the status of women. We often received documents five minutes before we had to be in the House. Everything was in English. What choice did we have? We used Google Translate. We tried to get an overview of what the text said. Then we corrected it to the best of our abilities. That is our reality.

My question is the following. The people who spoke to the committee about Portage said that it was not intended to produce documents for wide distribution. So what would be the best way to proceed and to save time, for government workers and for us, as parliamentarians? Things happen quickly. We all have tablets, we receive documents, we share things, and sometimes we do not write very well in French. This is a problem we encounter frequently.

How can an excellent translation be produced if someone writes poorly in the language to begin with?

●(1700)

Mrs. Lanthier and Ms. Bossé, what, in your opinion, would be the best approach and the most effective way of protecting the French language in light of the advent of social media and the speed at which we often have to work in Parliament?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: That is a good question because it brings the issue back to the person who receives documents in one language, and who wants to understand them and carry on with their work. Our understanding is that Portage is a software program intended for unofficial communication that should address this kind of problem. Our question is the following: does using this tool truly address the problem or does it instead create other kinds of problems, which will mean that francophones will end up functioning in English with the help of a translation program rather than functioning in French? Does that really resolve an official languages problem? We have approached it from this perspective rather than in the way you presented it, focusing instead on the philosophical aspect and the impact.

I do not have an ideal solution but I think that, in considering the problem, we should be asking whether both official languages are being well served and whether dealings with the public will be well served. Are we creating a precedent that we will have difficulty coping with in the future? The program might not be used only for unofficial communications in the future. It is clear to us that something has been implemented, or could have been implemented, that raises all kinds of questions. They may not be easy to answer, but we must really take the time to consider how it will be used and to identify the source of the problem, or why it was implemented. What problem was it intended to address? Is this the best way to address that problem?

I have taken a few courses at the HEC and remember something from the management course: the worst decision we can make in addressing a problem is one that creates a problem even greater than the one we initially wanted to resolve.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: You have a point.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: In short, this is perhaps the question we are getting at: are we creating other more serious problems than the one we wanted to address? I am not a public servant and I am not in the situation on a daily basis, but I think the use of both official languages and public servants' right to use their preferred language are truly vital.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mrs. Lanthier.

You have the floor, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. Dan Vandal (Saint Boniface—Saint Vital, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the witnesses for their fine presentations.

I can't speak for everyone, but I think that perhaps this tool could be used as an aid to understanding; it should definitely not be used as a communication tool in government though.

Mrs. Lanthier, can you see a role for Portage in government?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Can you repeat the question?

●(1705)

Mr. Dan Vandal: Can you see a smaller role for Portage in government, not as a communication tool but perhaps as an aid to understanding?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Based on our current information and understanding, we would not recommend a major role for this tool; I think we have to be careful. We tend to agree with people who say that nothing compares to a human being when it comes to translating what another human being is trying to say and that a machine will not necessarily produce the same results. We have to be careful when considering how this tool will be used in the future. Once again, for a full understanding, we have to look at which needs the tool was intended to address and what problem it was intended to resolve. Is this tool the best way of resolving the problem? We must also remember that the federal government's bilingual capacity has been eroded in recent years, which is also part of the problem.

[English]

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Ms. Benhoff, you talked about a 20-page standardization document that you have been working on. Can you elaborate on that very quickly, please? Can you share with us how that project is coming along and basically what it is that you're trying to achieve with that document?

Ms. Maryse Benhoff: ISO responds, obviously, to the marketplace, and experts come together to create standards for the marketplace. Machine translation has been around for a considerable number of years, and post-editing is a reality. The industry now needs to structure itself in order to put best practices in place. That is what the post-editing standard is about.

It will help guide many companies or government organizations, legislatures perhaps, on how to best work with post-editing. An interesting part of the standard is that gisting was removed. Low-quality post-editing was also removed. Anything that would not render as high a quality as a professional translator would is not included in the standard.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: The reason I'm asking is that when they were preparing to launch the tool, *l'outil de traduction automatique*, that we're looking at, there was no standards guide or user's guide to go with it, so your experience or how you are standardizing your practice may be informative to us as to how you are going to go out on a private site.

Ms. Maryse Benhoff: I'm sure it will be. I've made it available.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Thank you.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lanthier and Ms. Bossé, the FCFA has expressed concerns about the introduction of this tool. You stated that the erosion of bilingual capacity is already evident in government documents. Can you give us some specific examples?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: In my presentation, I mentioned the *rayon de bagnole* example.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Yes, do you have others? We have heard that the tool is not intended to translate expressions. We all have our own expressions in various parts of the country. There are many in my colleague's region.

Do you have any other examples?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: One simply has to read the reports published by Commissioner of Official Languages in recent years. In an appearance before a Senate committee in 2013-14, the commissioner spoke about the subtle erosion of bilingualism in the public service owing to the transfer of federal offices from bilingual regions to unilingual ones. He spoke about the downgrading of the linguistic requirements of bilingual positions. He mentioned the pressure on public servants to produce documents in English only and the tendency to offer an insufficient number of training programs in French.

These are factors highlighted by the Commissioner of Official Languages. Another publication released by the commissioner's office in 2016 states that, during the budget cuts in 2011-12, Treasury Board did not give any guidelines to the public servants responsible for analyzing the implementation of the cuts or indicate how they should go about considering the potential impact of the cuts on official languages. That was also mentioned in writing.

For our part, we have received documents drafted in English only in the past year. We have filed complaints with the Commissioner of Official Languages. On two occasions, we were addressed in English only when we called departmental offices. We also found unacceptable translations on certain departmental websites. These are recent examples.

The Chair: Thank you very much, Ms. Lanthier.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor for six minutes.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Ms. Lanthier, you mentioned the reports of the Commissioner of Official Languages. If I understood correctly, you also submitted a brief in 2009 in which you referred to a lack of coordination and to the fact that no authority was responsible for the implementation of official language policies.

This leads me to understand why the Translation Bureau seems to be suffering, as we observe currently, from an official languages erosion. The situations described by the commissioner speak for themselves.

I asked officials from Canadian Heritage if they were considering establishing better coordination or designating an authority that would be responsible for official language compliance. They seemed to think that that was not necessary.

Why, in your opinion, is it so important to have a distinct authority responsible for applying official language policies, and how would this impact the Translation Bureau?

• (1710)

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: This would ensure a certain level of coordination, and see to it that within the public service as a whole, action plans would have a certain cohesion, a consistency, and would contain clear objectives for everyone. We would also be in a better

position to verify what is done or not done. We have been saying for a long time that it would be important that a federal authority, perhaps Treasury Board, be given a clear mandate in this regard.

We also have to remember that the Department of Canadian Heritage itself has quite a clear mandate, and a very important role to play in supporting part VII of the Official Languages Act. The department also has a horizontal coordination mandate for what is done throughout the provincial departments and institutions covered by the Official Languages Act. This is an extremely important role Canadian Heritage plays or should play.

Mr. François Choquette: Have you had the opportunity of submitting this recommendation to the Minister of Canadian Heritage, and if so, what was her response?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé (Executive Director, Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada): In fact, the brief presented by the FCFA in 2009 was in the context of the 40th anniversary of the adoption of the Official Languages Act. From 2009 until the elections last fall, we have repeatedly asked the government to appoint an authority responsible for enforcing the act.

Currently, as Ms. Lanthier said, Canadian Heritage has an important role to play, as do Justice Canada and Treasury Board. Those are the three federal institutions responsible for the enforcement of the Official Languages Act. Each one of them has a specific role to play involving different parts of the act.

However, none of these ministers, pursuant to their respective mandates, have the authority to tell their colleagues what they must do in their department, or to ask them to ensure that the legislation is applied. That is the authority we are asking for, or which we had been asking for up until the fall. The reply we got was that no such authority existed.

Mr. François Choquette: Who should have that authority?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: That authority used to belong to the Privy Council Office, in other words, to the Office of the Prime Minister.

Mr. François Choquette: Have you made any recommendations recently to the government on this issue?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We have not had the opportunity of discussing this matter recently.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: If I may, I would add that we intended to do so. We think that there has to be a better understanding of the Official Languages Act, of what it means and of how it could better be implemented within government structures.

Mr. François Choquette: How much time do I have left, Mr. Chair?

The Chair: You have two minutes.

Mr. François Choquette: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Let's go back to the translation bureau.

Ms. Lanthier, you talked a lot about the importance of the new generation. Over the past four years, there has not been any hiring at the translation bureau. The people who leave are not passing on their expertise to those who arrive. That is a real problem. In addition, they do not intend to hire anyone in the next few years.

What would your recommendation be in this regard? What are your comments with regard to the importance of young people having access to quality positions within the translation bureau, and to expertise?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: For us, it is important to think that there will be a new generation of translators in our country, and in the Canadian government in particular. There is such a crying need within the federal apparatus for good communication with Canadians in both languages.

There has been a change over the last few years. Calls for tenders had to be put out to the private sector. The translation bureau competes with private sector translation firms. This has all kinds of repercussions that are not necessarily the ones that were aimed for at the outset.

Competing with the private sector may be a good thing, but it also may not be. It may weaken the internal capacity within government of providing an important service. This is part of the things that should in our opinion be analyzed.

• (1715)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Choquette.

I am now going to give the floor to Ms. Lapointe, who will be sharing her time with Mr. Arseneault.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good afternoon ladies, I am pleased to meet you.

We have talked a lot about translation tools. I would like to hear your comments on Google Translate, which many people use.

Did you know that the data are kept outside the country? Would there not be an advantage to using the Portage tool, since the data would stay within Canada?

I like your recommendation to provide mandatory training on obligations regarding official languages. I find that interesting. It would ensure that everyone has a good understanding of their obligations.

If the Portage translation tool were used, there could be a notice indicating that this is a comprehension tool and not a translation tool. What do you think of that?

I mentioned three things.

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: To answer your first question, regarding the safeguard, we totally understand the problem there. Should we post a warning saying “Warning, danger” when we use—

An hon. member: Like for peanuts.

Ms. Sylviane Lanthier: That's it. Some people could be allergic.

It is interesting as a potential solution, but by the same token, this would be a type of admission that there is a problem there. I do not have any specific answers to give you, because we would really need to think about it.

When we do this type of thing, are we furthering the implementation of the Official Languages Act? That is our concern.

Are we promoting the right of public servants to work in the language of their choice?

I think this has to be analyzed using very concrete criteria that would allow us to see whether the Official Languages Act is being implemented and whether public servants' rights are being respected.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: You talked about mandatory training. In your opinion, should all public servants, both current ones and those to come, be given training so as to ensure that they have a good understanding of their obligations with respect to official languages?

Mrs. Sylviane Lanthier: Yes, we think that all public servants should be given training on the federal government's official languages obligations. In that way they could understand what this means for their department, what it means for them, their colleagues, and thus develop harmonious and respectful behaviours or work methods that would allow them to solve problems on a day-to-day basis more easily.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Thank you, that is interesting.

I am going to give the floor to my colleague.

[English]

Mr. René Arseneault: Madame Benhoff, do you want to add something?

Ms. Maryse Benhoff: I think there's a great opportunity here. This whole situation has created an explosion in the media and everyone's aware. We'll see the educating of the *fonctionnariat*, and it'll trickle down. Going further in the analysis of educating everyone on what a translator is, what a revisor is, what the documents that you have can do or will do for you and what their limitations are is a great opportunity, an excellent opportunity, for this country to actually bolster exactly what we're complaining about.

That's my comment.

[Translation]

Mr. René Arseneault: My question is addressed to Ms. Bossé or Ms. Lanthier.

There have been a lot of references to official languages obligations.

Do you know if there has been a study or a legal opinion on the Portage tool with regard to the respect of official languages rights and obligations?

Ms. Suzanne Bossé: We have not heard about a legal opinion on this. As the Commissioner of Official Languages said a few years ago, there is an erosion of tools related to official languages. Whether this is due to Treasury Board or another entity, there has been an erosion in training programs. Moreover, with the renewal of the public service — whether we like it or not, in fact, since 2012, especially in the wake of the budget cuts, there has been a big turnover in the public service — we are in the presence of a new generation which has neither the training, nor the tools, nor even the awareness needed regarding this topic. In that way, our recommendations on training and awareness-raising are important.

French is a rich and very nuanced language. That is why, on the website of a department as important as the Immigration Department, we do not want to read “*nouveaux arrivés*” instead of “*nouveaux arrivants*”. And yet the term “*nouveaux arrivés*” was the one that was used recently on the Immigration Canada website. And there were other similar terms. Whether we are talking about the citizen, the person we are receiving, the public servant who works in that language or, as madam said, the country as a whole, I think that the French language really merits our full attention.

• (1720)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Arseneault. That was an excellent question.

I am going to ask the clerk to put the question to the lawyers of Justice Canada so that we may obtain a reply.

As I was saying, we are somewhat pressed for time. So we are going to move on to Mr. Vandal's motion.

The clerk tells me that you received it on Monday. It reads as follows:

That the committee undertake a study to examine the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, as well as the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013, particularly in their effects on English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada; that the committee identify initiatives and opportunities for the next Official Languages Plan to support and enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and foster the full recognition of both English and French in Canadian society; and that the committee report its findings to the House.

Mr. Vandal, you have the floor.

Mr. Dan Vandal: I think it is time we were proactive in preparing the next official languages plan. I think we must also evaluate the two previous roadmaps.

Good work has no doubt been done, but things are not perfect. It is important that we consult the official language minority communities, discuss things with them, listen to them and note their recommendations.

I suggest that we begin this process in the month of June, that we hold consultations and perhaps visit official language minority communities. The chair of the committee and I are going to work together to prepare a schedule for June or September.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Vandal.

Mr. G n reux, you have the floor.

Mr. Bernard G n reux (Montmagny—L'Islet—Kamouraska—Rivi re-du-Loup, CPC): I want to be sure I understood correctly.

The motion says: “That the committee undertake a study to examine the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018, [...]”

Mr. Vandal, the roadmap is not completely finished. There are still two years left. Our objective is to analyze what has been done over the past three years with the roadmap that is already in place. The roadmap's implementation is not complete. It is still ongoing. You want the committee to analyze what is being done currently. I am trying to understand the meaning behind your motion.

Mr. Dan Vandal: There are two roadmaps.

The first one went from 2008 to 2013, it covered a five-year period. The current roadmap is still being used, but I am sure that we can obtain some relevant information about it. The purpose is to be proactive and get ready for the next one.

• (1725)

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Fine.

I was not here in the past when the 2008-2013 roadmap was in place. There are surely members around the table who were here.

Mr. Choquette, you sat on this committee over the past four years, didn't you?

Mr. Fran ois Choquette: Yes.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Did the Standing Committee on Official Languages do a study on the 2008-2013 roadmap?

Mr. Fran ois Choquette: I have to admit that I don't know.

The Chair: Our researcher wants to say something on this topic.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Did the committee submit a report over the past three years on the 2008-2013 roadmap?

Ms. Chlo e Forget (Committee Researcher): In 2012, there was a study on the 2008-2013 roadmap.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: We don't want to redo something that has already been done. Unless I'm mistaken, the motion asks the committee to analyze the 2008-2013 roadmap, but such an analysis was already done in 2012.

Ms. Chlo e Forget: It would always be possible to do a follow-up on the study and make recommendations.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: If I may, Mr. Chair, I would like to put the question to Ms. Lanthier and Ms. Boss  of the FCFA.

Were you ever questioned about the 2008-2013 roadmap?

The Chair: Ms. Lanthier or Ms. Boss , would you like to answer the question?

Ms. Suzanne Boss : An evaluation was done by Canadian Heritage and by all the departments involved in the 2008-2013 roadmap. In fact, we did appear once before the committee regarding that.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: I am not against the committee doing analyses and studies, but I don't want it to redo something that was already done.

I propose that we work together on an analysis of the last report on the 2008-2013 roadmap and that we begin analyzing the current roadmap to prepare for the tabling of the 2018-2023 roadmap.

The Chair: First, perhaps we could send you the document on the study that was done in November 2012.

Mr. Bernard G n reux: Perfect.

Ms. Linda Lapointe: Mr. Chair, I must say that this really interests me, since the last study on the roadmap was done in 2012. We are in 2016. Some people spoke about this in the House today.

I would like to know where the planning is at on this and what has been done and what remains to be done. I find my colleague's suggestion very interesting, because it would allow us to know what has been done and what has not been done. We can certainly begin with 2012. What is being proposed is interesting, in light of what we heard from the witnesses who appeared before the committee and given, let's put it this way, that the translation valve has been turned off considerably over the past few years. This interests me. I am in favour of the motion. We can start with 2012, but let's study the roadmap.

The Chair: Thank you, Ms. Lapointe.

Mr. Choquette, you have the floor.

Mr. François Choquette: I am also in favour of the motion.

It doesn't matter to me if we spend less time on the 2008-2013 roadmap, as Mr. Généreux said, since it has already been analyzed. We could do that part more quickly. However, I would like us to set a time limit on that study. We don't need to spend a year on that. That is what Mr. Généreux was trying to say, I think. We have to give ourselves a limit. Perhaps Mr. Vandal could give us some idea of the time limit he would like to put on the motion.

I would like to make an aside, quickly.

I know we had planned to have Ms. Achimov return to the committee to talk to us about the Translation Bureau. At the last meeting, we said this was not necessary. However, I was wondering if we could receive Minister Judy Foote or some officials from the Department of Public Services and Procurement, since that is the department responsible for the Translation Bureau. It would be interesting to hear from one or all of these officials. I know it might be difficult to have the minister come here, but perhaps we could hear from some executives to find out what is being planned for the Translation Bureau. That is what I am proposing, but I will speak about it again later. I just wanted to float the idea.

The Chair: I would like us to get back to the motion.

We have to decide how many meetings we want to hold on the topic of the motion.

Mr. Vandal, do you have some idea?

• (1730)

Mr. Dan Vandal: In my opinion, we could begin the process before summer, continue in the fall and produce a report before Christmas. As to the number of meetings we need to do that work, could you give us a realistic figure? We could consult each other on that.

The Chair: Simply as an indication, we had planned to hold five meetings on the Translation Bureau.

Perhaps we could also opt for five meetings on the roadmap?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, I think we need much more than that. I think my colleague's idea is that we will produce a report, submit it to Canadian Heritage, and so on.

The Chair: According to what I understood, there would also be some travel.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: You mean that there would be more trips?

The Chair: We talked about a travel budget for the committee.

According to what I understand from the motion, there would be some travel involved.

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Mr. Chair, in fact, there would be more than five meetings, in addition to the travel.

I agree with my colleague. I think we have a certain amount of leeway here. If we finish what we have to do earlier, we can move on to something else. In addition, if an urgent matter crops up, we can interrupt this study.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Lefebvre.

Ms. Boucher, you have the floor.

Mrs. Sylvie Boucher: I am not at all against the motion, but I am not the kind of person who likes to do the same thing 28 times over, either. We prepare endless reports, but no one reads them. Could we begin by reading them and then discussing them?

A report was published on the 2008-2013 period. Could we obtain it and read it? Then we could come back here to discuss it, rather than holding meeting after meeting. If we want to review certain points on which we disagree, we can do it then.

However, to get back to what Mr. Lefebvre was saying, since the roadmap is an extremely important matter, we should spend more than five meetings on it.

The Chair: According to what I understand, everyone is in agreement to adopt the motion and consult the 2012 report. So we are going to ask the clerk to send it to us. You will have time to acquaint yourself with it quickly. Then we will start this next study, which is the topic of Mr. Vandal's motion.

Does that suit everyone?

Mr. Paul Lefebvre: Regarding that study, we are going to have to determine what our starting point will be.

The Chair: That is correct.

Are we all in agreement on this matter?

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: We are going to consider the dates of the meetings and trips together.

Ladies and gentlemen, thank you very much. See you next week.

The meeting is adjourned.

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