

Note to accompany revised Table 4

Please find attached a revised page to be inserted in the report "Aboriginal Languages in Canada". The figure which appeared in Table 4 of the first release for the Yukon and Northwest Territories was inaccurate. We have deleted it from the revised table and changed the totals accordingly. The previous Table 4 should be removed from your copy of the report.

## ABORIGINAL LANGUAGES

## IN CANADA

Gordon E. Priest

Housing, Family and Social Characteristics Division

October 1983

Table 4. Student Enrolment by Region Indicating Use of an Aboriginal Language in School, 1981-1982 School Year

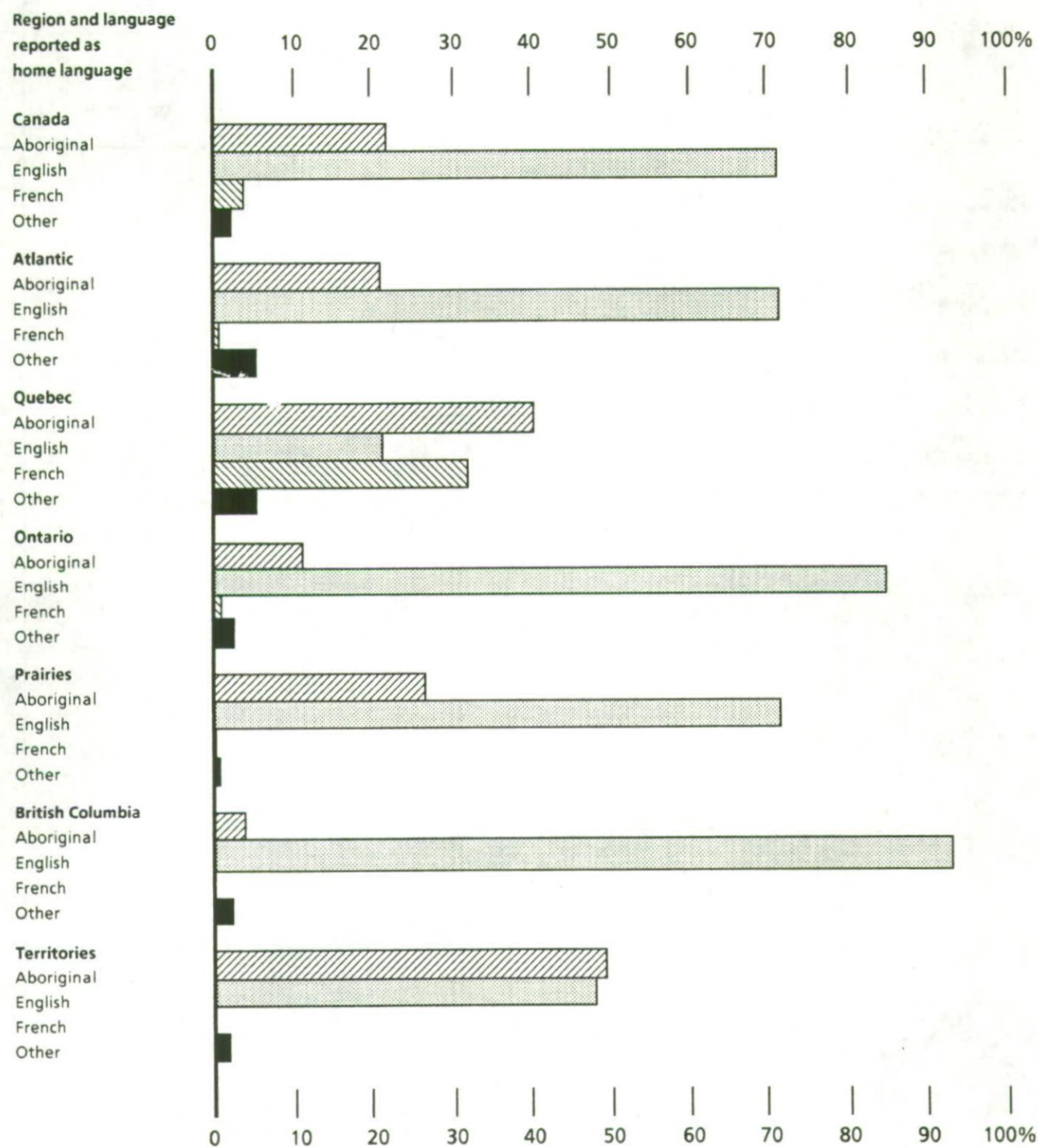
Region	Total enrolment	No instruction in aboriginal language	Aboriginal language taught as a medium of instruction or as a language
Canada(1)	80,398	46,518	33,880
Atlantic	3,420	2,518	902
Quebec	10,724	2,473	8,251
Ontario	13,689	7,306	6,383
Prairie	39,084	24,738	14,346
British Columbia	13,481	9,483	3,998

(1) Excludes Yukon and Northwest Territories.

Source: Nominal role  
Education Directorate  
Department of Indian and Northern Affairs

Figure 3

**Percentage Distribution of Aboriginal Peoples Showing Percentage Reporting Aboriginal, English, French and Other Home Languages, Canada and Regions, 1981**



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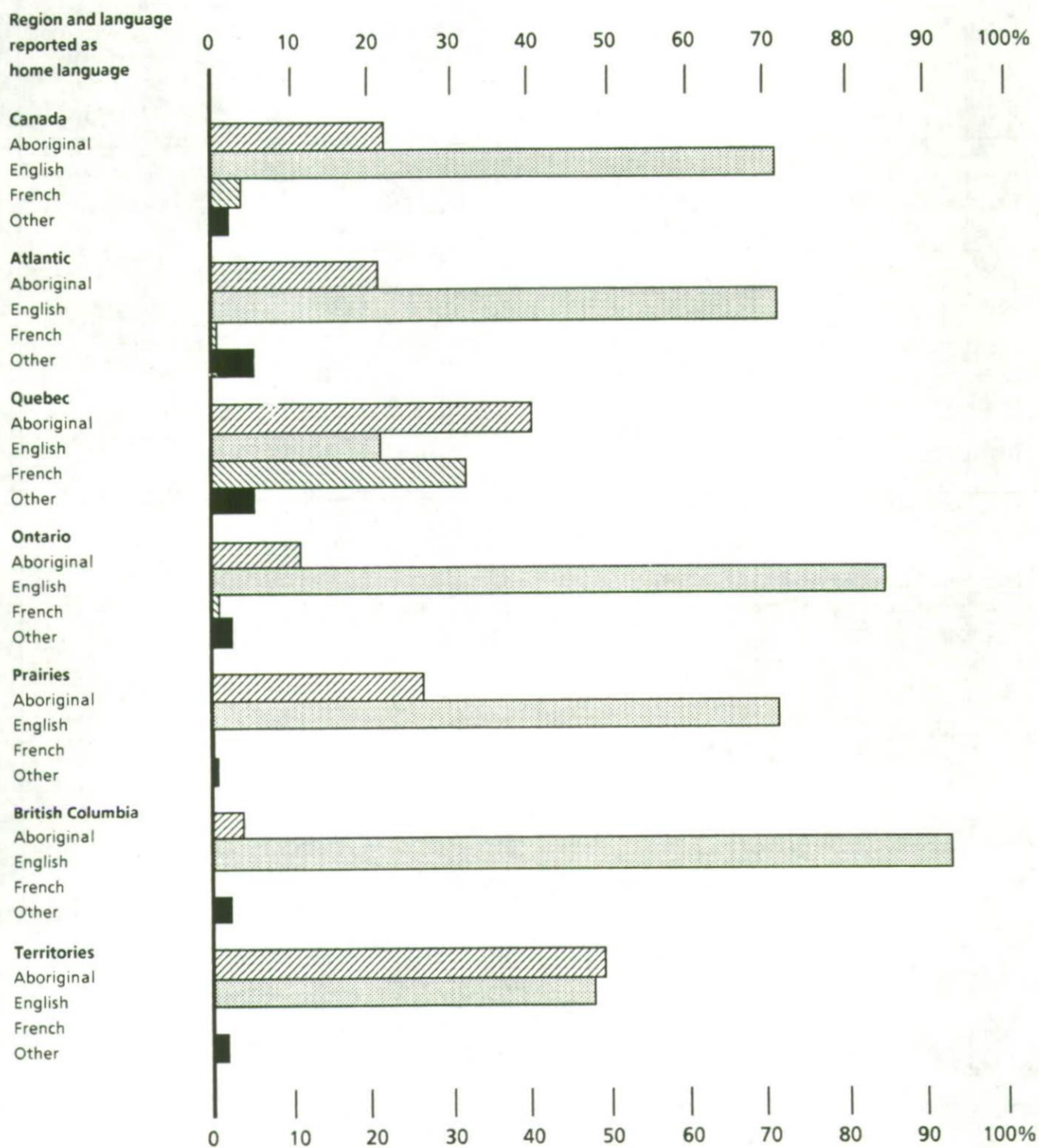
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## INTRODUCTION

The 1981 Census of Canada marked a significant improvement over earlier censuses in the amount of detailed information provided for the native languages of the aboriginal peoples of Canada. Previously, while considerable detail was provided on European and other languages, the distinction for aboriginal languages was solely between Indian and Eskimo (Inuktitut). In 1981, the identified aboriginal languages (in addition to a broad range of other languages) included the following:

Algonkian - Cree

Algonkian - Ojibway

Algonkian - Other

Athapaskan languages

Haida languages

Iroquoian languages

Kootenayan languages

Salishan languages

Siouan languages

Tlingit languages

Tsimshian languages

Wakashan languages

Inuktitut

These language families are identified for both mother tongue, defined as the language first learned and still understood, and home language, defined as the language spoken most often at home. Each of these language variables, in themselves, provides an insight into the degree to which they are currently understood and used.

When the two variables are cross-classified we may observe apparent shifts between languages. That is, we see cases where a first language, although still understood, is not commonly used in the home.

Historically, the geographic distribution of the major aboriginal linguistic families has generally been as shown in Figure 1. This remains the essential distribution of these linguistic families today, although the number of aboriginal peoples reporting that they speak them is generally not large. In some cases, so few speakers remain that these languages have become nearly extinct. In 1981, the census counted just under 492,000 aboriginal peoples in Canada including Inuit, Indians and Métis (Table 1). Of this population, fewer than 30% (140,975) identified an aboriginal language as their mother tongue. Fewer still (108,620) identified an aboriginal language as the language they speak most often at home. Generally, English is the language most often identified as mother tongue and home language by the aboriginal peoples, although, as we shall see, this varies considerably by linguistic family and geographic location.



Figure 1

# Distribution of Aboriginal Linguistic Families



## Legend



 Inuit	 Haida	 Salishan	 Algonkian
 Athapaskan	 Tsimshian	 Kootenayan	 Iroquoian
 Tlingit	 Wakashan	 Siouan	



Table 1. Aboriginal Peoples by Type, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981

Area	Total population	Total(1) aboriginal peoples	Inuit	Status Indian	Non-status Indian	Métis
Canada	24,083,496	491,460	25,390	292,700	75,110	98,260
Newfoundland	563,747	4,430	1,850	1,010	1,185	385
Prince Edward Island	121,223	625	30	400	140	50
Nova Scotia	839,801	7,795	130	5,905	1,155	605
New Brunswick	689,373	5,515	5	4,235	865	415
Quebec	6,369,068	52,395	4,875	34,400	5,810	7,310
Ontario	8,534,263	110,060	1,095	70,190	26,090	12,680
Manitoba	1,013,703	66,280	230	39,710	5,855	20,485
Saskatchewan	956,441	59,200	145	37,470	4,135	17,455
Alberta	2,213,651	72,050	510	35,810	8,595	27,135
British Columbia	2,713,615	82,645	515	54,085	19,085	8,955
Yukon	23,074	4,045	95	2,770	990	190
Northwest Territories	45,537	26,430	15,910	6,720	1,205	2,595

**Note:** The figures in this report are based upon the population in a 20% sample of private households. They exclude inmates in institutions. In order to protect confidentiality, the last digit is randomly rounded to "0" or "5". The "true" estimate, therefore, falls within plus or minus five of the figure shown.

(1) Excludes inmates in institutions.

## Mother Tongue

As noted earlier the concept of mother tongue involves the reporting of the first language learned and still understood. As such it has limitations. For example, some persons may learn two or more languages simultaneously. In the context of census reporting the respondent must choose one.<sup>1</sup> Furthermore, the concept does not provide an indication of languages that were first learned but are no longer understood nor does it provide an indication of languages that have been acquired subsequently; however, despite these limitations, the concept does provide an indicator of the status of various languages.

Table 2 provides counts of the aboriginal peoples of Canada showing the languages they reported as their mother tongue. The majority (62.4%) reported English as the language first learned and still understood while somewhat more than one-quarter (28.7%) reported an aboriginal language. Only 4.6% reported French as mother tongue. Of the aboriginal languages, Algonkian (with its components of Cree, Ojibway and other) was reported by the largest number of persons (99,210). This is perhaps understandable given the broad geographic base occupied by Algonkian-speaking people: in effect, from the Atlantic coast to the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Inuktitut, the language of the Inuit, was the second largest aboriginal language group. It was reported as the mother tongue of 18,770 (73.9%) of the 25,390 Inuit. Aside from the Barrenlands of Keewatin District the majority of the Inuit are located primarily in northern coastal settlements of the Arctic Ocean, Hudson Bay and the northern coast of Labrador.

Given the physical barriers to communication in the western cordillera region it is understandable that more unique, individual languages developed there compared to the relatively open central plains and eastern woodlands. It is probable, therefore, that the Haida, Kootenayan, Salishan, Tlingit, Tsimshian and Wakashan language families individually never had as large a population base as the more widely dispersed Athapaskan and Algonkian. The recent census data show just how small some of these groups have become. With Haida at 335, Tlingit at 125 and Kootenayan at 85, unless these languages have a broader base in the United States (likely in the case of Tlingit), they are perilously close to disappearing as living languages.

This possibility is reinforced in examining the mean or average age of the population reporting these mother tongues. While the average age of the total aboriginal population is 23 (the non-aboriginal population has an average age of 32), the average age of the population reporting Haida is 49, Tlingit 47, Kootenayan 44, Salishan 43 and Wakashan 40. This would indicate that it is primarily the older members of the relevant populations who first learned and still understand their aboriginal languages. When those generations pass the language may well pass with them. The only West Coast language that would appear to be still retained by younger people is Tsimshian where the average age is 33. The average age of the population reporting other aboriginal languages falls in the late 20s. The one exception to this is Inuktitut where the average age is 23. Again here, however, there is evidence of erosion since the 6,150 Inuit who reported English as their mother tongue had an average age of 18.

In the Prairie region fewer than 20% of the Métis people reported an aboriginal language as their mother tongue (mostly Algonkian). French was reported by just over 3% while over 75% reported English. It is interesting to note that the average age of the francophones was 41 while the average age of the anglophones was 19. The average age of those with Algonkian as mother tongue was 31 indicating that French may be eroding much faster than the aboriginal language.



Even in Quebec, French is reported as mother tongue by aboriginal peoples in the older age groups. The average age of those reporting Inuktitut was 22, followed by Algonkian and English at 23. French was reported as mother tongue by 33% of the aboriginal population of Quebec but their average age was 27.

The only older group was the Iroquoian at 34 but the non-response on the part of the Iroquois of Kahnawake (Caughnawaga) may have seriously distorted this figure.<sup>2</sup> With over 5,000 persons in that community it is, therefore, difficult to determine whether the Iroquoian language remains strong or whether it may be at risk of disappearing.

Figure 2 shows that there is a considerable regional variation among aboriginal peoples who reported an aboriginal language as their mother tongue compared to those who reported English or French. Nationally, 62.4% of the aboriginal peoples reported English as their mother tongue with 28.7% reporting an aboriginal language and 4.6% French. The balance of 4.3% reported other mother tongues.<sup>3</sup>

While the distribution in the Atlantic region is similar to the national distribution the situation in Quebec is unique with close to one-half (46.2%) of the aboriginal peoples reporting an aboriginal mother tongue. Quebec was the only region where a significant proportion reported French (33.1%). In Ontario only 15.2% retained their aboriginal mother tongue and while this increased to 35.5% in the Prairie region only 8.8% of the aboriginal peoples in the cordillera region of British Columbia still understood their first learned aboriginal language. In the Yukon and Northwest Territories 58.7% of the aboriginal population reported an aboriginal mother tongue. The geographic remoteness of the northern communities may be significant in this regard but this raises the question: Is this similar relatively high proportion reporting aboriginal mother tongues in Quebec due to geographic remoteness, due to a cultural isolation from the larger francophone community, or due to an environment conducive to the maintenance of minority languages or perhaps some other reason?

Table 2. Number and Percentage of Aboriginal Peoples by Selected Mother Tongues, Canada, 1981

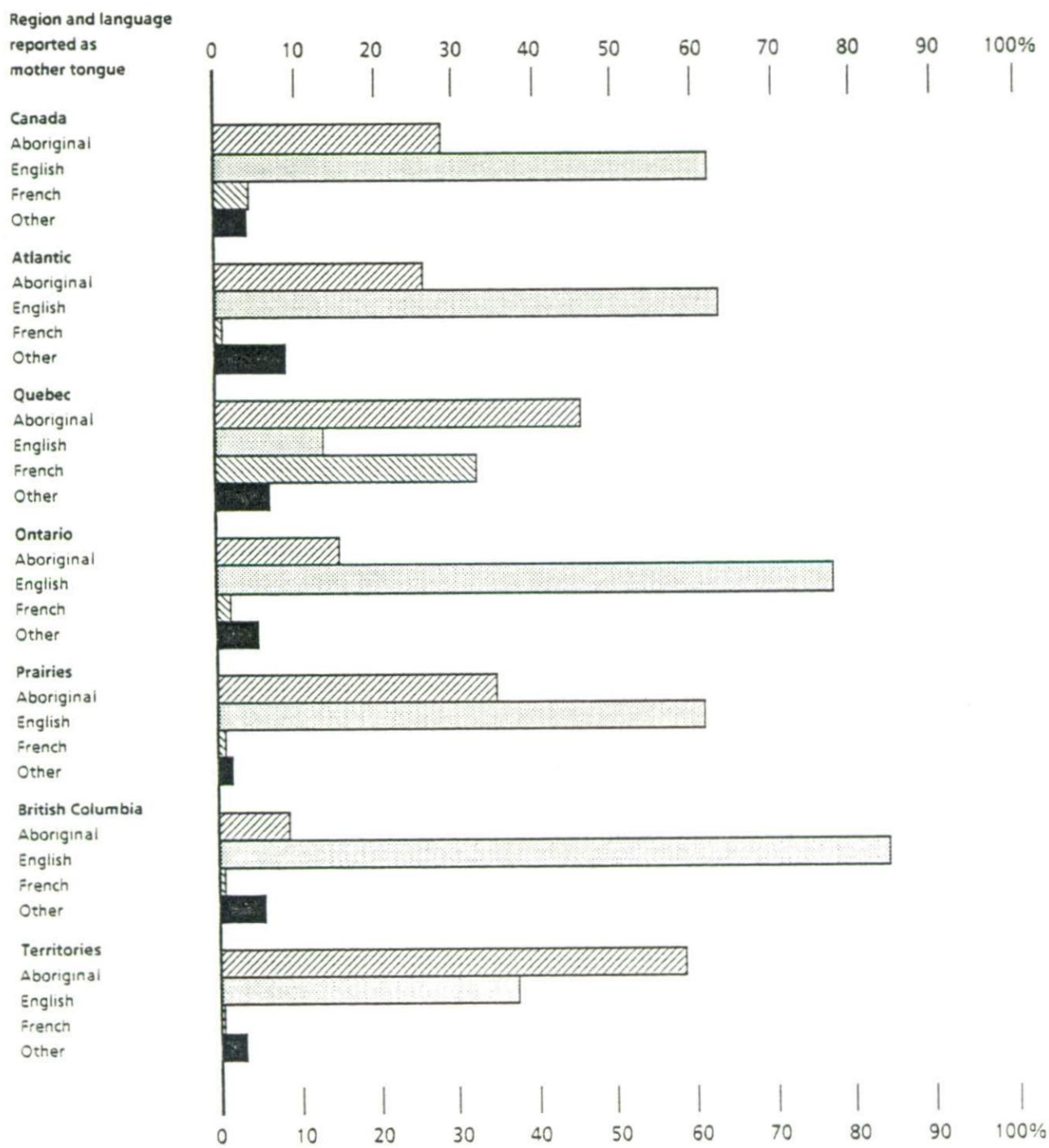
Mother tongue	Number(1)	%	Average age
Algonkian - Cree	65,955	13.4	26
Algonkian - Ojibway	19,540	4.0	29
Algonkian - Other	13,715	2.8	25
Athapaskan	11,720	2.4	29
Haida	335	-	49
Iroquoian	5,930	1.2	35
Kootenayan	85	-	44
Salishan	740	0.2	43
Siouan	1,560	0.3	30
Tlingit	125	-	47
Tsimshian	1,545	0.3	33
Wakashan	945	0.2	40
Inuktitut	18,770	3.8	23
Total aboriginal languages	140,975	28.7	-
English	306,775	62.4	20
French	22,685	4.6	29
Other	21,025	4.3	33
Total aboriginal peoples	491,460	100.0	23

(1) Excludes inmates in institutions.



Figure 2

Percentage Distribution of Aboriginal Peoples Showing Percentage Reporting Aboriginal, English, French and Other Mother Tongues, Canada and Regions, 1981



## Home Language

While the concept of mother tongue relates to the language first learned and still understood, the concept of home language relates to the language spoken most often at home.

As in the case of mother tongue, home language also has limitations in that it does not necessarily provide an indication of general usage of any given language (for example, languages used for instruction, ritual or commerce may not be used in the home). It does, however, provide an indication of the degree to which various languages are used in daily conversation in the home environment. This is an important concept since obviously the home is an important point of transfer of language skills from one generation to another. The census did not collect similar data on language of education or language used in the work place.

Table 3 provides a count of the aboriginal peoples of Canada showing the language they have reported as spoken most often at home. The majority (71.7%) have reported English as their home language (substantially more than the 62.4% who reported English as their mother tongue). Just over 22% reported an aboriginal language most often spoken at home while 3.9% reported French. Algonkian (Cree, Ojibway and other) was the most commonly reported aboriginal language with 77,705. Inuktitut was the second largest aboriginal language most often spoken at home (16,995).

The home language data reported here bring even more closely into focus the plight of aboriginal languages of the cordillera region where we find how little they are used in the home. The consistently lower counts for aboriginal home language compared to aboriginal mother tongue indicate cases where even when the mother tongue is still understood it is not commonly used in the home.

We find the number reporting Kootenayan to be 25 (average age 58), Tlingit 35 (average age 59), Haida 85 (average age 42), Wakashan 270 (average age 49) and Salishan 305 (average age 46). Since these numbers are so very small it is difficult to determine whether they accurately present a reliable estimate. They do, however, indicate clearly that whatever the "true" numbers, they must be very small compared to the total aboriginal population. While it can be speculated, based upon the mother tongue and home language data presented here, that these languages are all but extinct there is another factor to consider. As noted earlier, mother tongue does not measure an individual's ability to comprehend and speak languages other than the one first learned and still understood. Similarly, home language reflects only the language spoken most often in the home. Thus, we have no measure of those aboriginal peoples who may have reported English as their mother tongue but have since learned their aboriginal language as a second language. In many cases such persons may be children who have learned the language in an aboriginal cultural program in school. This language may well not be reported as the language most often spoken at home if the language predominantly used by the parents is English or French.

Table 3. Number and Percentage of Aboriginal Peoples by Selected Home Languages, Canada, 1981

Home language	Number(1)	%	Average age
Algonkian - Cree	51,325	10.4	25
Algonkian - Ojibway	13,455	2.7	28
Algonkian - Other	12,925	2.6	25
Athapaskan	8,470	1.7	29
Haida	85	-	42
Iroquoian	2,705	0.6	40
Kootenayan	25	-	58
Salishan	305	0.1	46
Siouan	980	0.2	31
Tlingit	35	-	59
Tsimshian	1,040	0.2	34
Wakashan	270	0.1	49
Inuktitut	16,995	3.5	22
Total aboriginal languages	108,620	22.1	-
English	352,185	71.7	22
French	19,400	3.9	28
Other	11,255	2.3	32
Total aboriginal peoples	491,460	100.0	23

(1) Excludes inmates in institutions.



Table 4, based upon information provided by the Education Directorate of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs, shows the number of students enrolled in native language programs in the school year 1981-1982. It would indicate that in that year close to 34,000 persons were obtaining at least some instruction in aboriginal languages. In some cases the aboriginal language was being taught only as a subject but in other cases it was also being used as a medium of instruction. Unfortunately, we do not have available similar figures for specific aboriginal language groups since it would appear that for some languages instruction in the schools offers the last hope that they will survive.

Returning to home language, the average age of Inuit speaking Inuktitut at home was quite young (22). The average age of the 8,050 Inuit speaking English at home was 20. Over 66% of the 25,390 Inuit reported speaking Inuktitut at home.

While just under 20% of the Métis in the Prairie region reported an aboriginal language as their mother tongue, fewer than 13% reported an aboriginal language as the language most spoken at home. Over 85% reported English. Again the average age of those speaking English was considerably lower (21) than those speaking either Algonkian (29) or French (41).

In Quebec, while French was reported as home language by 32% of the aboriginal population, the average age of that population was 28. The 21.8% of the population reporting English had an average age of 25 while the 27.3% reporting Algonkian had an average age of 23 and the 8.5% reporting Inuktitut had an average age of 22.

Figure 3 shows that there is considerable regional variation among aboriginal peoples who reported an aboriginal home language compared to those who reported English or French. Nationally, 71.7% of the aboriginal peoples reported English as their home language with 22.1% reporting an aboriginal language and 3.9% reporting French. A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 shows proportionally fewer aboriginal peoples reporting either French or an aboriginal language as their home language than as their mother tongue. In other words, a greater proportion of aboriginal peoples reported English (71.7%) as their home language than as their mother tongue (62.4%).

In the Atlantic region the distribution of those reporting English or an aboriginal language was similar to the national picture but again a comparison with mother tongue suggests a shift from aboriginal languages to English. While this shift is visible in Ontario the West, and the North the situation in Quebec must be singled out for special mention. A comparison of Figures 2 and 3 suggests that there may be a shift from both aboriginal and French mother tongue to English home language. While this shift of both aboriginal and French to English may have been expected in other regions of the country it is worthy of note that it is also reported in Quebec.



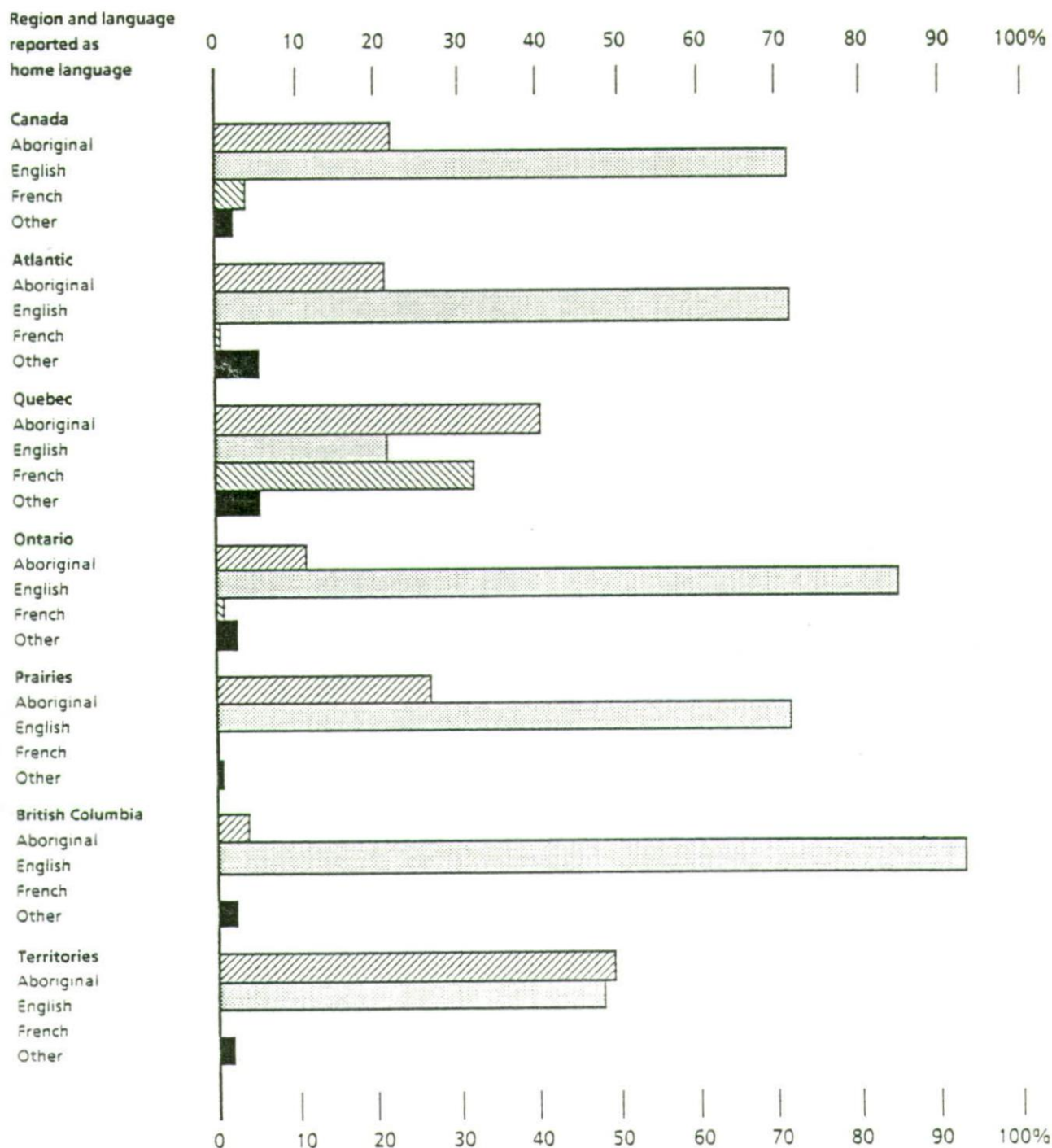
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British Columbia	13,481	9,483	3,998
Territories	68	68	-

Source: Nominal role  
Education Directorate  
Department of Indian and Northern Affairs

Figure 3

Percentage Distribution of Aboriginal Peoples Showing Percentage Reporting Aboriginal, English, French and Other Home Languages, Canada and Regions, 1981



## Shift in Language Use

The acquisition, loss, transfer, or retention of language skills involve complex processes. There are many ways in which common usage of a language might be measured. We may wish to know merely if a language is understood and there is a population with the ability to speak it or we may wish to know if the language is in common usage in the home, in the work place or in schools. We have no comprehensive data base for a wide variety of languages that enables us to look simultaneously at all these variables. In fact, using census data, only for the official languages of English and French can we examine the ability to comprehend and speak a language in connection with mother tongue and home language. For other non-official languages we must restrict our examination to mother tongue and home language. With respect to aboriginal languages this does not provide us with a measure of the population who may be learning their aboriginal tongue as a second language.

It does, however, allow us to isolate that population who reported that the first language they learned was an aboriginal language, that they still understand it but they speak some other language at home. This would imply that some sort of language transfer may be taking place. In those cases where programs have been initiated to teach aboriginal languages in the schools the question that remains to be answered is whether that language can survive if it is not reinforced by usage in the home or in the work place.

Table 5 reproduces data shown in Tables 2 and 3 but it also reflects those cases where the mother tongue has been retained as the home language (or conversely a language other than the mother tongue is spoken in the home). Of the 140,975 aboriginal peoples who reported an aboriginal language as their mother tongue, only 100,655 (71.4%) reported still speaking an aboriginal home language. In fact, even fewer, 100,215 (71.1%), still spoke their aboriginal mother tongue as their home language (the balance of 440 reported one aboriginal language as their mother tongue but a different aboriginal language as their home language).<sup>4</sup>

Close to 28% of the population (39,410) reporting an aboriginal mother tongue have apparently "transferred" to English as their home language. Less than 0.5% (465) have transferred to French. Of course, there is a reverse transfer as well, with 6,305 persons with English mother tongue speaking an aboriginal language at home. Some 960 persons with French mother tongue reported speaking an aboriginal language at home, indicating a net shift from French to aboriginal (there is also a net shift from French to English). In total there is an overwhelming net shift to English.

The Algonkian languages (Cree, Ojibway and other) were the greatest recipients of "in" transfers including over 5,000 from English and close to 1,000 from French but again the "out" transfers to English (27,495) were very high.

In terms of the use of mother tongue as the language of the home it would generally appear that the larger the population group with a given mother tongue, the better the chances that the same language will be spoken in the home. For example, 97.1% of the 306,775 aboriginal peoples reporting English as their mother tongue also reported English as their home language (297,820). On the other hand, only 23.5% of the 85 persons reporting Kootenayan as mother tongue also reported it as their home language (20). In fact, five language families (Haida, Kootenayan, Salishan, Tlingit and Wakashan) all reported retention rates of less than 30% and all had less than 1,000 persons reporting them as mother tongue.



In other words, it would appear that any language family with fewer than 1,000 persons reporting it as mother tongue will have a low rate of retention as home language and a high rate of transfer to English as home language. In effect, the smaller the language group, the faster the erosion of the language.

As noted earlier, the average age of persons reporting Haida (49), Kootenayan (44), Salishan (43), Tlingit (47) and Wakashan (40) as mother tongue is considerably older than the general aboriginal population. What is even more significant for these threatened languages is that (with the exception of Haida) the average age of those still speaking their mother tongue is even higher (Kootenayan, 58; Salishan, 52; Tlingit, 64; and Wakashan, 54). As a further example, 67.8% of those 205 persons who have retained their Salishan mother tongue in their home are aged 45 or over. Similar, or even more critical circumstances are seen for Kootenayan, Tlingit and Wakashan.

This would indicate that when the present older generation passes there will be even fewer persons to pass on these languages in the tradition of home usage. Haida is an exception where the average age of those still using it as home language is 40. It is difficult to say, however, whether this is due to the sampling bias which can affect small numbers or whether it may be due to a cultural reawakening on the part of Haida-speaking people.

For the larger language families such as Inuktitut or Algonkian and its components of Cree and Ojibway it is interesting to note that the population who have retained their aboriginal mother tongue as their home language have a younger average age than those who have switched to English. For example, the average age of the population reporting Cree as mother tongue and home language is 25 while the average age of those reporting Cree as mother tongue, but English as home language, is 30. On the basis of these data, however, it is difficult to determine whether this is due to a concerted revival of native culture on the part of younger generations or whether it represents a loss of native culture on the part of older generations who may have left native settlements for educational or employment opportunities.

It is known, for most other larger minority language groups such as Italian, Chinese and Ukrainian, that the average age of those retaining their mother tongue is considerably higher than those who have switched to English or French.<sup>5</sup> These languages are not in danger of extinction in Canada given continuing immigration. Thus, while second generation "new" Canadians may forsake their mother tongue for English or French in their homes, new waves of immigration will supplement the language patterns of the first generation immigrants as they die off.

For aboriginal peoples, however, there is no such pool to draw on (other than limited numbers in the United States).



Table 5. Number and Mean Age of Aboriginal Peoples by Selected Mother Tongues Showing Selected Home Languages, Canada, 1981

Home language	Mother tongue											
	Aboriginal language											
	English		French		Other non-aboriginal		Algonkian - Cree		Algonkian - Ojibway		Algonkian - Other	
	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age
English	297,820	20	4,040	35	10,915	34	17,715	30	7,240	31	2,540	27
French	1,030	28	17,440	28	460	34	100	39	15	67	320	21
Other non-ab.	1,620	31	245	25	8,950	33	80	37	220	48	40	29
Algonkian - Cree	2,910	22	185	22	225	28	47,945	25	55	41	5	12
Algonkian - Ojibway	1,225	27	5	71	125	39	65	37	11,895	28	5	3
Algonkian - Other	1,125	21	760	22	230	29	10	49	-	-	10,805	25
Athapaskan	405	23	10	45	40	63	15	54	110	21	-	-
Haida	10	64	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iroquoian	55	42	-	-	10	34	15	2	-	-	-	-
Kootenayan	5	57	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Salishan	90	29	-	-	10	59	-	-	-	-	-	-
Siouan	165	35	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tlingit	5	32	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tsimshian	80	30	-	-	15	57	-	-	5	38	-	-
Wakashan	50	33	-	-	30	45	-	-	-	-	-	-
Inuktitut	190	20	10	14	10	19	-	-	-	-	5	29
Total speaking aboriginal languages	6,305	23	960	23	705	34	48,055	25	12,060	28	10,815	25
Total aboriginal peoples	306,775	20	22,685	30	21,025	34	65,955	26	19,540	29	13,715	26
% speaking mother tongue as home language	97.1		76.9		-		72.7		60.9		78.8	

Note: Figures may not add due to rounding.  
Excludes inmates in institutions.

Table 5. Number and Mean Age of Aboriginal Peoples by Selected Mother Tongues Showing Selected Home Languages, Canada, 1981 - Continued

Home language	Mother tongue											
	Aboriginal language											
	Athapaskan		Haida		Iroquoian		Kootenayan		Salishan		Siouan	
	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age
English	3,630	29	265	52	3,290	31	70	40	515	40	755	31
French	20	59	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Other non-ab.	35	34	5	32	-	-	-	-	20	19	-	-
Algonkian - Cree	5	50	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Algonkian - Ojibway	130	34	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Algonkian - Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Athapaskan	7,895	29	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Haida	-	-	70	40	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Iroquoian	-	-	-	-	2,630	40	-	-	-	-	-	-
Kootenayan	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	58	-	-	-	-
Salishan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	205	52	-	-
Siouan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	810	30
Tlingit	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Tsimshian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Wakashan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Inuktitut	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Total speaking aboriginal languages	8,035	29	70	40	2,630	40	25	58	205	52	810	30
Total aboriginal peoples	11,720	29	335	49	5,930	35	85	44	740	43	1,560	30
% speaking mother tongue as home language	67.4		20.9		44.4		23.5		27.7		51.9	

Note: Figures may not add due to rounding.  
Excludes inmates in institutions.

Table 5. Number and Mean Age of Aboriginal Peoples by Selected Mother Tongues Showing Selected Home Languages, Canada, 1981 -  
Concluded

Home language	Mother tongue											
	Aboriginal language										Total aboriginal peoples	
	Tlingit		Tsimshian		Wakashan		Inuktitut		Total			
	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age		
English	100	43	565	31	745	37	1,970	25	39,410	30	352,185	22
French	-	-	-	-	5	37	10	13	465	28	19,400	28
Other non-ab.	-	-	40	47	10	68	5	36	450	42	11,255	33
Algonkian - Cree	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	48,010	25	51,325	25
Algonkian - Ojibway	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	12,100	28	13,455	28
Algonkian - Other	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	10,810	25	12,925	25
Athapaskan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	8,030	29	8,475	29
Haida	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	70	40	80	42
Iroquoian	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,645	40	2,705	40
Kootenayan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	20	58	25	58
Salishan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	205	52	305	46
Siouan	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	810	30	985	31
Tlingit	30	64	-	-	-	-	-	-	30	64	35	59
Tsimshian	-	-	940	34	-	-	-	-	945	34	1,040	34
Wakashan	-	-	-	-	190	54	-	-	195	54	270	49
Inuktitut	-	-	-	-	-	-	16,780	22	16,790	22	16,995	22
Total speaking aboriginal languages	25	64	940	34	190	54	16,785	22	100,655	26	108,620	26
Total aboriginal peoples	125	47	1,545	33	945	40	18,770	23	140,975	27	491,460	23
% speaking mother tongue as home language	24.0		60.8		20.1		89.4		-		-	

Note: Figures may not add due to rounding.  
Excludes inmates in institutions.

## CONCLUSION

Unfortunately, we do not have a comparable historical series of data on aboriginal languages other than a limited series for Inuktitut. Nevertheless, on the basis of the 1981 Census data and the concepts of mother tongue and home language it appears that there is an erosion of aboriginal languages with a net transfer to English. While Inuktitut with its relative geographic isolation and the Algonkian languages with their broad base are relatively healthy with respect to continued usage it is also evident that virtually all aboriginal language families are giving ground to English. Athapaskan remains relatively secure in the short run but for the several linguistic families of the western cordillera it is questionable whether they can survive for long as living, working languages.

Certainly, linguists and anthropologists would mourn the passing of these languages and all that this implies with regard to the associated culture. It would seem that the aboriginal peoples themselves must decide if it is in their interests to allow the languages to pass into distantly remembered history or whether they wish to attempt a revival. If they choose the latter they deserve the support of all Canadians in the interests of maintaining a richer, multicultural society.



## References

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## Footnotes

- <sup>1</sup> This is to meet legal requirements of the Official Languages Act.
- <sup>2</sup> There was a serious non-response problem on the part of the residents of the Kahnawake reserve.
- <sup>3</sup> This balance is known to be inflated to a certain degree by respondent error on the part of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent.
- <sup>4</sup> In Table 5, the number of persons still speaking their mother tongue as their home language can be determined by reading the diagonal cells from English - English to Inuktitut - Inuktitut.
- <sup>5</sup> 1981 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

Ca OOS *C.B.*

DATE DUE

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