

# LANGUAGE

## and Society

No. **15** Winter 1985

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## Editor's note

It is fitting that this issue of *Language and Society*, the first to be published under the auspices of the new Commissioner of Official Languages, opens with remarks written by Mr. D'Iberville Fortier. While the text appropriately serves as an introductory article, it also introduces the new Commissioner as he begins his term of office. It is eminently evident by Mr. Fortier's remarks, that in spite of his several years' absence from Canada, he has never lost touch with the Canadian linguistic reality.

In 1984, the Translation Bureau celebrated a double anniversary: the 50th of its foundation and the 25th of parliamentary simultaneous interpretation. And yet, this important event in the annals of Canada's history, has passed by with little or no mention by the press. To give the recognition it richly deserves, Jean Delisle offers us an interesting account of the founding and development of the Bureau as well as its rapid necessary expansion. Delisle not only points out the fact that the Bureau has become the porte-parole for the Canadian government on the international linguistic scene, but also identifies the many services it provides and concludes that translation cannot be dissociated from the Canadian way of life.

But if translation has become an integral part of Canada's way of life, the French language, regrets Solange Chaput-Rolland, has not. She praises the gains made by Francophone groups but laments that their dearly acquired historical rights still do not always enjoy official recognition.

The loss of the mother tongue is the theme of the next two articles: in a statistical survey, Gordon E. Priest mourns the erosion of aboriginal languages to English and suggests that aboriginal people themselves must decide whether they wish to attempt a revival of their languages. In the second article, Terence MacNamee and Hilary White identify the concern about the learning and maintenance of the ancestral language at preschool age. Community input, they suggest, greatly helps to build a stimulating bicultural environment in which the children feel supported in their linguistic and cultural identity.

The issue closes with a number of sample letters to the Editor. Space restriction compels us to share only a few; they are, nevertheless, an excellent representative sample of correspondence which reaches our Office. We urge our readers to continue to express their opinions and to identify topics of interest to them.

Anthony Mollica



is a magazine of information and opinion published by the Commissioner of Official Languages, D'Iberville Fortier. The quarterly magazine encourages a reflective approach to language matters, both Canadian and international, while providing a forum for informed debate on the issues.

The opinions expressed by contributors are their own, and do not necessarily reflect the views of the Commissioner.

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## A time for reassessment and renewal

**L**et me take advantage of this first issue of *Language and Society* to be published during my term to share some thoughts with you on language reform. My first thoughts must be of continuing the fine tradition established by my predecessors, Keith Spicer, who established the Office, and Max Yalden, who further developed its effectiveness and founded this magazine.

It is my duty to be outspoken in letting Parliament know how the Act it adopted unanimously in 1969 is being carried out. It seems to me clear that we cannot yet boast of having judiciously, steadily, and unmistakably translated the Act into a living fact. Great improvements have been made in extending services to the public in both languages; that is perhaps our leading achievement; but even here, we cannot yet speak of equality of services to English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians. Fair participation by each official-language group in the public service has been achieved in some situations, not in others. Progress in enabling public servants to work in their own language has been unsatisfactory, since Francophones continue to work in English to a large extent. We must ensure that a renewed effort is made to achieve equality in all these areas.

From the first report of the first incumbent of this office some 15 years ago, Commissioners have recognized each year that, important as the Official Languages Act may be, Canada must seek what Keith Spicer called "deeper solutions" to our country's linguistic problems. Each Commissioner has drawn attention to the needs of the linguistic communities for educational, cultural, and social services in their own language, beyond the administrative requirements of the Act. It has been generally accepted that the Commissioner in his ombudsman's role should take this larger view rather than seek to operate the Official Languages Act in a social vacuum. I propose to uphold and if possible amplify the tradition. Unfortunately, the main characteristic of the national context today is that our official-language minorities on the Francophone side continue to be assailed by the unrelenting forces of assimilation.

On balance, then, I feel there remains a dangerous gap between the hopes officially held out for linguistic equality and everyday Canadian realities. It is therefore a time for reassessment and renewal of our efforts. It seems to me that one key to renewal is the passage in last November's speech from the Throne that stresses the Federal Government's commitment to "breathe a new spirit into federalism." The speech goes

on to state that "National unity also demands that the two levels of government co-operate in supporting official language minorities and in fostering the rich multicultural character of Canada". Through federal-provincial concertation, we can see the way clear toward a combined effort to provide services to minority communities, as was envisaged in the Official Languages Act. This will no doubt require the parties to agree on some more flexible arrangement than the bilingual districts originally provided for in the Act.

If we can get over the bilingual-districts stumbling block, the way will then be open for real grassroots co-operation at the local level, where services in the two official languages are needed by the people. Our equal partnership of Anglophone and Francophone Canadians will only function if the partners reach an understanding at the level where misunderstandings usually arise.

Since the passage of the Official Languages Act 15 years ago, there has been a strengthening of the kind of organization that can foster this more meaningful partnership. The many and scattered Francophone minority associations have joined forces in a strong and active *Fédération des Francophones Hors Québec*. Minority associations for English-language rights hardly existed 15 years ago; now there is Alliance Quebec, with its many affiliates, and other Anglophone associations as well. The representatives of the people in Parliament now have a Permanent Joint Committee on Official Languages of the Senate and House of Commons to assure the kind of continued attention that partnership demands.

Active groups such as Canadian Parents for French are anxious to co-operate with Francophone groups to assure the health of French culture. In Quebec, opinion polls show convincingly that the Francophone majority favours proper Anglophone rights. There are hopeful signs, but they need, as never before, to be brought together in a purposeful way, for there are also ominous signs that the linguistic partnership is not working as well as Parliament intended. We must draw from the wells of goodwill in Canada to strengthen co-operation. *We must build our partnership from the people up, not from the bureaucracy down.* We must do so with a sense of urgency.

These are but a few thoughts about our programme. You will find them discussed at greater length in my Annual Report for 1984. In the months to come, I hope you will help us go farther in shaping recommendations for a renewal of grassroots partnership in language matters. I would greatly appreciate receiving any suggestions or comments you would like to contribute. They will receive careful consideration.

In 1984, the Government of Canada's Translation Bureau celebrated a double anniversary: **fifty years of translation and twenty-five years of parliamentary interpretation**. In this article, the author chronicles the highlights of the Bureau's development and offers some thoughts on official translation in Canada.

## Serving official bilingualism for half a century

JEAN DELISLE



A graduate of the Sorbonne-Nouvelle (Paris III) and associate professor at the University of Ottawa's School of Translators and Interpreters, **Jean Delisle** has written several books and articles on translation history and pedagogy. He recently prepared a brief history of the Translation Bureau entitled *Bridging the language Solitudes/Au coeur du dialogue canadien*.

**R**iddle: name the giant that has 900 translators, about 100 interpreters, a similar number of terminologists and managers, and a support staff of 550 serving 150 client organizations; three terminals — Victor, Hortense and Penelope — linked to a computer that translates over 8,000,000 words each and every year; dozens of word processors with video display screens; a computerized terminology bank that boasts 1,500,000 entries; seven Grapho-Braille terminals enabling visually handicapped users to access this electronic dictionary and over 400 data bases; 16 word-counters; and regional offices located across the country from Chilliwack, British Columbia to Halifax, Nova Scotia and in Toronto, Montreal, Quebec City and Moncton.

The answer, as you have probably guessed, is the Government of Canada's Translation Bureau, a component of the Department of the Secretary of State administered by an Assistant Under Secretary of State (Official Languages and Translation).

In 1984, the Bureau celebrated 50 years of operation. Like the translator's daily work, this fiftieth anniversary passed unnoticed by the media. In their defence, however, 1984 was an unusually eventful year: visits by the Pope and the Queen, the federal election and the Olympic Games, to mention only a few. *Language and Society* has decided to fill the breach and pay homage

to the Translation Bureau's unsung but vital contribution to Canada's federal institutions.

### The Cahan Bill: a bombshell

In 1934, fewer than 100 translators were responsible for the French translation of House of Commons debates, departmental annual reports and other major public documents. As a result, only one-third of government publications appeared in French, sometimes two years or more after the English version. For many years, journalists and political figures from French-speaking Canada denounced this situation. Within the federal apparatus, English was the only language of work and, in the view of many public servants, translation was little more than a "necessary evil." Sweeping language demands by the Francophone minority were yet to come.

On January 29, 1934, during the height of the economic depression that gripped the country, Charles Hazlitt Cahan tabled a bill proposing that all translators working in the federal public service be centralized into a *single bureau*.

Largely motivated by reasons of administrative efficiency and economy (11 translator positions had already been eliminated and the decision to abolish another 20 section chief positions was in the works), this initiative immediately raised a public outcry. The French-language press, associations for the protection of Francophone interests in Canada and the Quebec contingent of R.B. Bennett's Conservative government joined forces to oppose the bill which, they feared, would cause a serious setback to French services within the federal apparatus.

Journalists capitalized on the controversy by accusing the government of disregarding the provisions of the

British North America Act and by demanding safeguards for French rights in Canada. The translators, who were the most directly concerned, became disturbed with the change of events. Those employed by the parliamentary divisions (Laws and Debates) feared they would lose certain benefits such as their six or seven months of leave while Parliament was not in session.

To the great surprise of Minister Cahan, his proposed administrative reorganization was seen as "the most devastating blow dealt to French influence in the federal government in a long time."<sup>1</sup> The Minister, however, saw numerous advantages in the proposed reform. He declared in the House of Commons:

A reorganization such as that proposed in this bill (...) will avoid duplication of translation services and research work in relation thereto. It will ensure the effective co-operation of all officers and employees in the existing translation services. It will establish co-ordination and uniformity in the proper use of technical terms. (...) It will tend to remove all discriminations in working hours and working conditions, and it will promote — and this is essential — the contemporaneous publication of public documents in both English and French for the use of Parliament and of the public.<sup>2</sup>

Despite opposition, the bill limped through all steps of the parliamentary process and was finally adopted in its original form on June 13. It received royal assent on June 28. Section 3 of the new Act respecting the Bureau for Translations lists, in general terms, the duties and functions of the new agency:

...collaborate with and act for all departments of the public service, and both houses of the Parliament of Canada and all bureaus, branches, commissions and agencies created or

appointed by Act of Parliament, or by order of the governor-in-council, in making and revising all translations from one language into another of all departmental and other reports, documents, debates, bills, acts, proceedings and correspondence.

The only direct effects of the Act were to place all federal translators under the authority of the Secretary of State, make them subject to the provisions of the Civil Service Act, establish a Bureau and create the position of superintendent. The Act did not lead to the centralization of all translators in a single location. Influential deputy ministers were able to convince the Secretary of State and the first superintendent, Domitien T. Robichaud, that it would be better to leave translators in the departments without necessarily

sacrificing administrative centralization in one unified service. The superintendent was thereafter charged with responsibility for coordinating all federal government translation services.

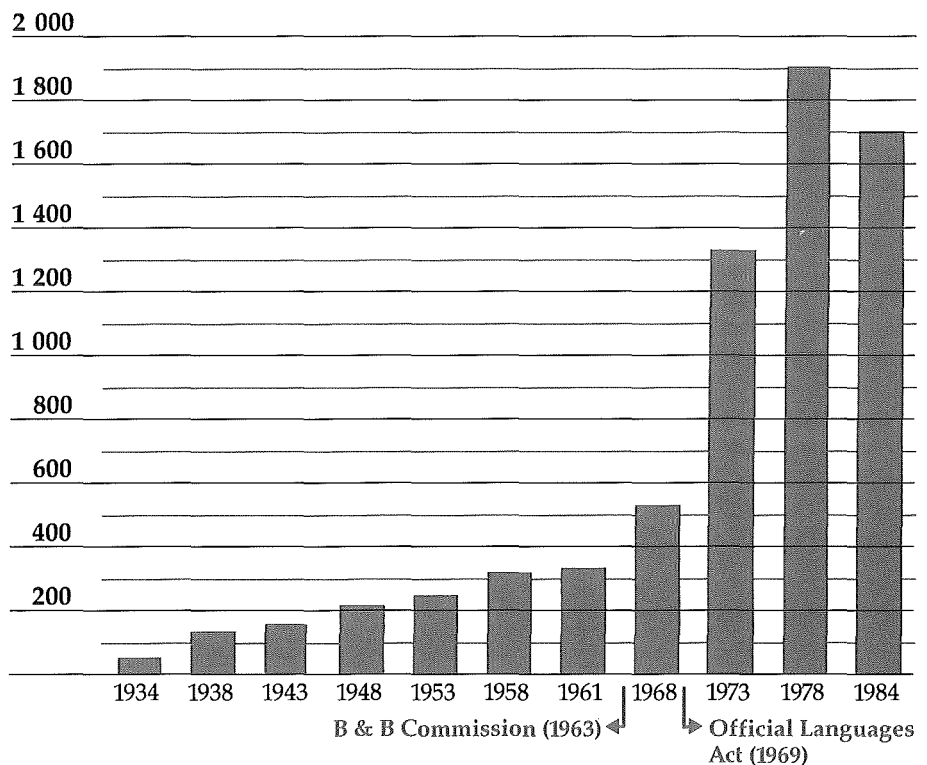
Over the past 50 years, the face of the Translation Bureau has changed considerably. Its transition can be divided into two major periods: the first covers approximately 30 years, from the date of its establishment to the mid-sixties, when the B and B Commission was created; the second covers the past 20 years, during which time the Official Languages Act (1969) has exercised a decisive influence over the Bureau's growth.

**Improvement and diversification of translation service (1934-64)**  
During its first 30 years of operation, the Bureau underwent slow

TABLE I

Staff of the Translation Bureau from 1934 to 1984.

Number of employees



but steady growth (see tables and charts). Its volume gradually increased, and stood at 119 million words in 1964. Staff increases were very gradual (an average of eight new recruits per year); from 1934 to 1964, its establishment grew from 74 to 320 employees. In their annual reports, superintendents repeatedly mentioned the difficulty of recruiting qualified translators, a permanent problem for the Bureau. The major concern of Bureau authorities during this period was to speed up publication of the French version of official documents. To achieve simultaneous publication — or close to it — in both official languages of deliberations of the two Houses of Parliament, the first superintendent introduced the system of night work in the Debates

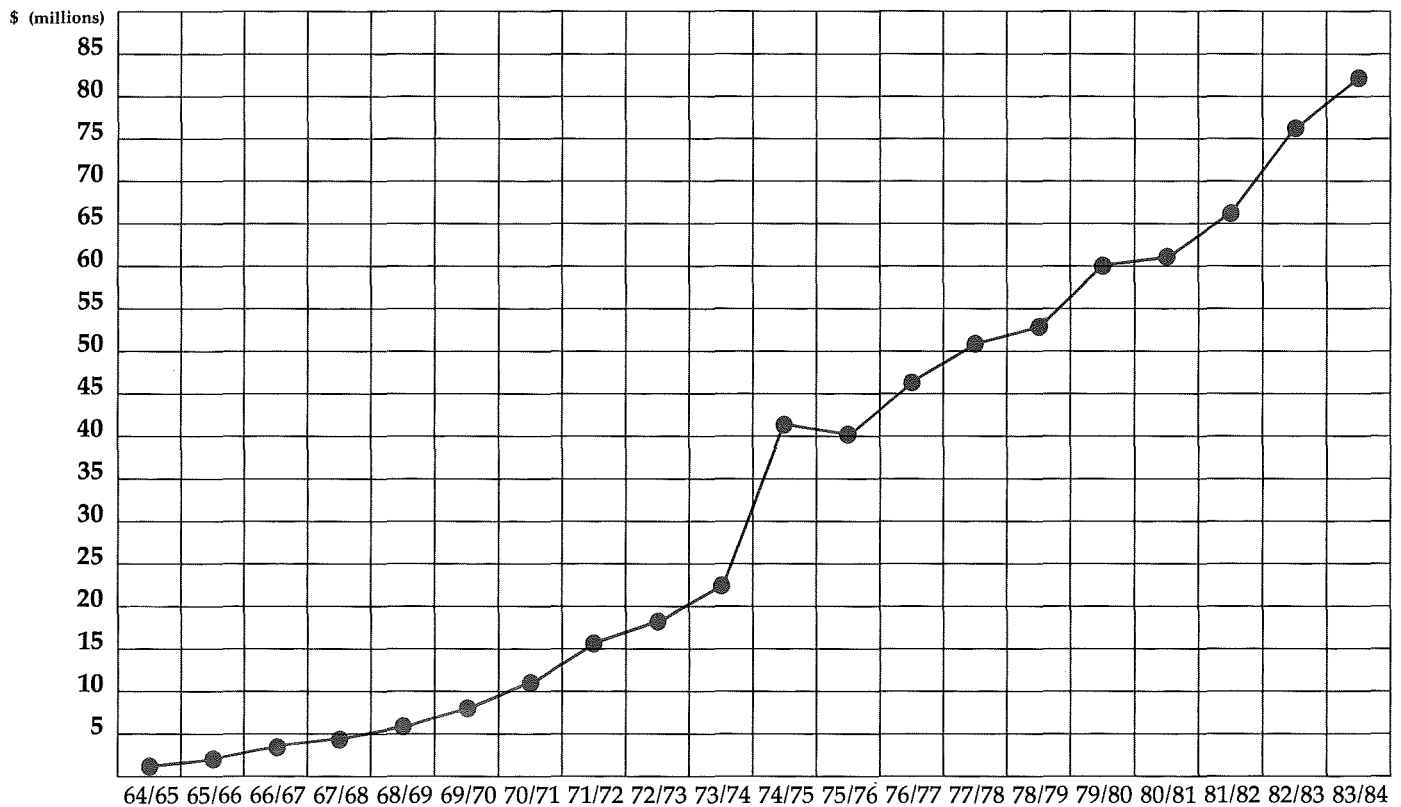
Division. This bold initiative produced the desired results and the nightly system of translating the utterances of our MPs from one official language to another for Canadians from coast to coast continues to this day.

As of 1935-36, the rational use of human resources also made it possible to publish simultaneous French and English versions of departmental annual reports, to the satisfaction of the Francophone press. This was not the case for all government documents. As one reporter wrote in 1948, "Still too often the French version is only available several weeks or months after the English version. However, there has been some improvement in this regard."<sup>3</sup>

During this period, the Bureau began to diversify and, albeit nervously, decentralize its services. In 1953, it established the beginnings of a terminology service to remedy the shortage of dictionaries and reference works from which divisions still suffer. Through its publications, the terminology service established the Bureau's first contacts outside the federal public service.

The inauguration of simultaneous interpretation in the House of Commons and the Senate was one of the most important events in the Bureau's history. The possibility of providing such a service was first raised by an MP in 1952. Over the next six years, the idea was taken up by several national associations

TABLE II  
Annual budgets of the Translation Bureau  
from 1964 to 1984.\*



\*In 1934-35, the Bureau's budget was \$265,608; it was not until 1953-54 that it reached \$1 million. Ten years later, it was slightly less than \$2 million.

who joined reporters in a campaign to install a simultaneous interpretation service in Parliament.

On August 11, 1958, Prime Minister John Diefenbaker tabled the following motion in the House of Commons: "That this House do approve the installation of a simultaneous translation system in this chamber and that Mr. Speaker be authorized to make arrangements necessary to instal and operate it."

Some feared that such a move would entice members to slacken their efforts to learn the other official language<sup>4</sup>; others felt the cost of installing such a system was prohibitive (\$39,375). Notwithstanding these few reservations, the motion was greeted with enthusiasm by the large majority of Members and, in the end, received unanimous approval. Parliamentary interpretation was seen by some as a symbol of national unity and as a means of bringing Canada's two major language groups closer together.

Seven interpreters, four of them "recycled" translators, were the country's first team of parliamentary interpreters. On January 16, 1959, after five months of training, these pioneers made their debut in the House of Commons. Since then (and especially since televised coverage of House of Commons debates in 1977), parliamentary interpreters have helped convey the image of official bilingualism to the Canadian people.

#### Twenty years of rapid expansion (1964-84)

As of 1964, the Bureau was caught up by the bilingualism and biculturalism movement that swept the country. Political leaders of the day displayed a distinct desire to affirm Canada's bilingual character. Riding on this powerful tide, the Bureau's mandate and spheres of interest were broadened, its staff quadrupled within the space of 10 years, and its budget soared from \$2 million to \$82 million. Some went so far as to suggest the

creation of a Department of Translation. The magnitude of this expansion can be seen in the attached tables and charts.

In 1964, growth in the volume of federal government translation obliged the Cabinet to approve regulations under the Translation Bureau Act to tighten up translation co-ordination and establish an order of priority for the translation of official documents.

In November, 1974, the Cabinet gave the Bureau responsibility for "verifying and standardizing English and French terminology used throughout the federal public service and in all government agencies reporting to the Parliament of Canada." This Cabinet directive gave the Bureau the task of promoting good usage in administrative language and terminology and, in a sense, a large degree of authority over matters concerning the quality and evolution of administrative language.

Earlier the same year, Treasury Board had asked the Bureau to establish "a bank of terms and equivalents to meet the needs of Parliament, the Government and public bodies coming under its authority, in order to increase the efficiency of translation in all fields, especially the sciences and technology."

The Bureau immediately began to develop a computerized data bank which currently contains over 1,600,000 terms. Besides translators, the bank is used by all public servants engaged in drafting or adapting administrative texts, those involved in language training programmes and those responsible for implementing legislation and regulations. The general public also has access to the bank, which is linked to more than 160 terminals across Canada and throughout the world. The creation of this modern terminological documentation tool has helped give recognition to a new profession, an offshoot of translation, that of the "terminologist."

TABLE III

#### Number of words translated annually by the Translation Bureau from 1954 to 1984.

Year	No. of words	Year	No. of words
1954*	75,964,846	1969/70	102,511,387
1955	72,479,331	1970/71	134,615,149
1956	79,108,910	1971/72	130,630,682
1957	72,743,548	1972/73	134,119,431
1958	81,660,805	1973/74	173,334,742
1959	86,904,175	1974/75	186,465,865
1960	90,756,192	1975/76	210,214,691
1961	97,845,281	1976/77	232,021,391
1962	104,762,390	1977/78	251,451,956
1963	111,976,104	1978/79	254,000,000
1964	119,158,393	1979/80	225,000,000
1965	113,890,331	1980/81	253,000,000
1966	137,104,350	1981/82	276,000,000
1967/68	146,418,139**	1982/83	290,000,000
1968/69	89,404,983	1983/84	300,000,000

\*Before 1954, the translator's production was measured in pages and statistics are very fragmentary.

\*\*Covers the 15-month period from January 1, 1967 to March 31, 1968. As of 1967-68, the Bureau's production coincides with the fiscal year.

During the same period, the Bureau successfully experimented with the first operational applications of machine translation. Since June, 1977, 5,000 Environment Canada weather forecasts have been translated by computer, resulting in substantial savings and establishing Canada's place as a leader in machine translation.<sup>5</sup>

While the Translation Bureau is a good indicator of the progress of official bilingualism in Canada, the Multilingual Services Directorate is a reliable measure of our country's international interests: "Translators Carry Canada's Good Name" (*The Citizen*). Its growth runs parallel to that of Canada's political and trade relations with foreign countries and is indicative of the interest of Canadian scientists in the work of their foreign counterparts. The technical and scientific translations performed by this Directorate far outnumber those of any other type of text. Besides its 80 or so permanent staff, the Directorate also uses the services of approximately 500 free lances. It translates roughly 20 million words a years from approximately 60 languages and into about 15.



Over the years, the Translation Bureau has become a truly multi-purpose national language service. In addition to its traditional functions (translation and interpretation of official and foreign languages), the Bureau currently offers sign-language interpretation to the hearing-impaired, provides research services and disseminates terminological data.<sup>6</sup> It also subsidizes research into artificial intelligence to improve machine translation, is responsible for standardizing administrative language, and provides writing assistance services and suggestions, not only to federal public servants, but also to some provincial governments who wish to take advantage of the experience and skills of its staff.

The scope of its activities is by no means limited to the federal public service; it participates at the provincial level and in private industry. The current Assistant Under Secretary of State, Alain Landry, is responsible for developing and updating the Department's policy for the promotion of official languages both in the private sector (non-profit organizations and corporations) and in non-federal public sectors (provincial, territorial and municipal administrations, schools, hospitals and social service agencies).

TABLE IV

**Parliamentary interpretation:  
number of Interpreter-days  
from 1964 to 1984.**

Year	No. of days	Year	No. of days
1964*	267	1974/75	12,244
1965	447	1975/76	13,314
1966	405	1976/77	13,377
1967/68	702**	1977/78	11,063
1968/69	1,227	1978/79	12,742
1969/70	1,608	1979/80	8,340
1970/71	4,873	1980/81	11,900
1971/72	6,619	1981/82	13,200
1972/73	5,765	1982/83	13,246
1973/74	7,170	1983/84	13,200

\*No statistics available for 1959-63.

\*\*Covers the 15-month period from January 1, 1967 to March 31, 1968.

Lastly, the Bureau has become the federal government's principal representative on the international language scene. It maintains regular contact with major international organizations working in its areas of specialization: the large European terminology banks, the *Association française de normalisation* (AFNOR), the International Standards Organization (ISO), the International Centre for Terminological Information (INFOTERM), and so on.

The work of its terminologists, its accomplishments in machine translation, its technological innovations and its novel, modern organization of work have firmly established the Translation Bureau's reputation both within Canada and abroad.

**Food for thought**

The Translation Bureau is now a key instrument in the application of federal official bilingualism and multiculturalism. If Canada's reputation for translation is one of the best in the world, it is partly because the major objectives of its language policy are *political* objectives. Translation is not conducted here solely for economic or cultural reasons. Canada has chosen to "entrench" its dual cultural heritage in its institutions and, as a result, official translation has taken firm root. While it would be an exaggeration to say "No translation, no Canada", by the same token it could be said that, without the army of translators working for the federal government, Canada would have a totally different character. Translation is an inalienable part of the *Canadian way of life*.

The current Commissioner of Official Languages, D'Iberville Fortier, aptly stated in a speech that "the statistics on how translation is used speak volumes on the relative standing, weight, vitality and independence of one language vis-à-vis another."<sup>7</sup> Although the Translation Bureau has changed profoundly over the past half-century, one thing remains unchanged: the proportion of official translation from French to English *has never exceeded*

15 per cent in spite of the B and B Commission and the Official Languages Act. Needless to say, the Bureau, which only translates what it is asked to do, is not responsible for this situation. However, many observers of the Canadian scene have noted this very significant disproportion over the past twenty years.

In 1969, in a study prepared for the B and B Commission, René de Chantal made the following comment on writing practices in the federal government:

Why must texts be originally drafted in English? /.../ Why is the English-speaking Canadian considered able to create and the French-speaking Canadian to translate? /.../ It is not up to me to provide the answer to these questions. In my view, however, when the federal government defines its policy of cultural and linguistic equality for the two founding peoples, it will have to take appropriate measures to ensure that translation is not a one-way street.<sup>8</sup>

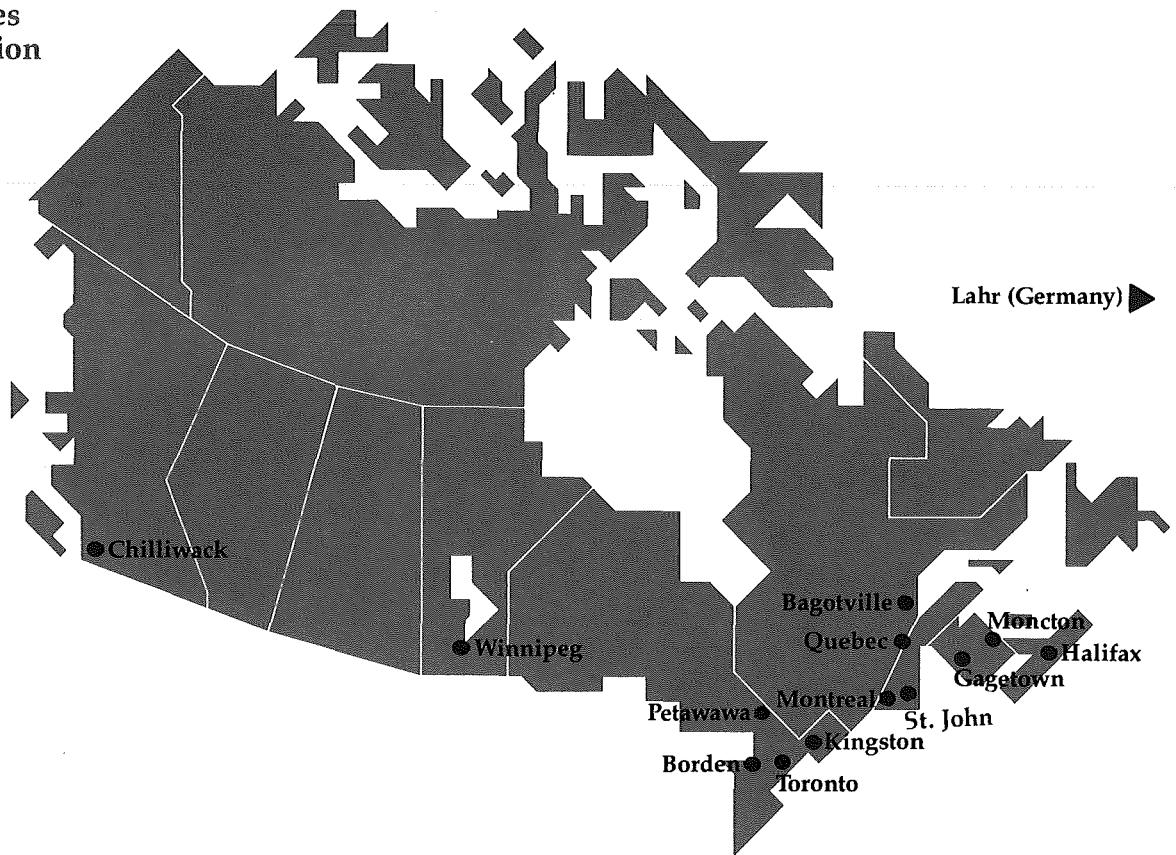
Max Yalden voiced a similar observation in his Annual Report for 1980: "It is a melancholy fact that a very large proportion of the written material which the Federal Government puts out in French is not originally drafted in that language but is the product of translation. /.../ No matter what the quality of the translated text, the public service overwhelmingly conceives and expresses its ideas in what might be called an English style."<sup>9</sup> Perhaps both official languages have equal status, but one seems more equal than the other.

Even more recently, D'Iberville Fortier's comments strike a similar note:

The fact of the matter is that French in Canada has long been, especially in matters of public administration, the language *into* which one translates. /.../ There will always be a major need for translation in our country, but so



## Regional offices of the Translation Bureau



long as the *one-way street phenomenon* remains so powerfully rooted in our national reality, one can hardly speak of linguistic equality, notwithstanding all our efforts.<sup>10</sup>

These people in positions of authority are not alone in pleading for more "French-language drafting" within the federal government. What is the cause of the inertia? The answer to that question is surely food for thought and a subject for many a good article yet to come.

Like the railroad a century ago, official translation helps bind the country together. What is difficult to understand, however, is why the language trains do not run in both directions.

### Notes

1. Charles Gautier, "Le bill Cahan", in *Le Droit*, January 30, 1934, p. 3. This editorial writer was one of the most ardent opponents of the centralization of federal translation services. Ironically, as fate would have it, he ended his career as a section chief of translation in the Department of the Secretary of State.
2. Charles Hazlitt Cahan, *House of Commons Debates*, February 27, 1934, p. 986.
3. Pierre Vigeant, "Un siècle après la reconnaissance officielle de la langue française", in *L'Action Nationale*, No. 31, 1940, p. 300.
4. We should here note the words written last year by the publisher of *L'Actualité*, Jean Paré, himself a translator and twice winner of the Canada Council's translation award: "These (translation and parliamentary interpretation) services were not created so that political figures could avoid learning the official languages. They are intended for the citizens of Canada. And they should enable public servants to work in their mother tongue. In a bilingual nation, it is up to institutions and political figures to be bilingual so that citizens can remain unilingual." [trans.] ("La plume de ma tante...", in *L'Actualité*, August 1983, p. 8.)
5. *Language and Society* has already dealt with this topic. Cf. Marcel Paré, "The letter, the spirit and the machine", No. 3, 1980, p. 19-22). Literary translation (not covered here) was also the subject of an article in this magazine. Cf. Philip Stratford, "A bridge between two solitudes", No. 11, 1983, p. 8-13.
6. *Terminology Today and Terminology Bulletin* (bilingual vocabularies devoted to various fields of activity such as statistics, finance, social services, electronics, flora, etc.) are two publications through which the Bureau disseminates this information. The terminology bank performs the same function.
7. D'Iberville Fortier, *Of Realism in Language Policy*. An address by the Commissioner of Official Languages before the National Symposium on Linguistic Services. Ottawa, October 10, 1984, p. 1.
8. René de Chantal, *Rapport sur la qualité de la langue de quelques publications du gouvernement fédéral*. Task Force on Government Information, 1969, p. 32-33 (Unpublished).
9. Max Yalden, *1980 Annual Report*, Ottawa, Department of Supply and Services, 1981, p. 63.
10. D'Iberville Fortier, *op.cit.*, p. 1.

*When the premiers of our Anglophone provinces speak French because they truly wish to understand their compatriots, minorities will no longer need laws, subsidies and consolation.*

## French from coast to coast

SOLANGE CHAPUT-ROLLAND



Solange Chaput-Rolland is a well-known author, freelance journalist for *Le Devoir* and *Dimanche Matin*, and political commentator on radio and television. She was a member of the Task Force on Canadian Unity and holds an honorary doctorate from Queen's University. She is currently at work on her eleventh book: *Les Sources Perdues*.

**F**or at least a hundred years, pessimists have been issuing dire warnings that Francophones in Canada are an endangered species, and that sooner or later, they are bound to be swamped by the relentless forces of assimilation of Anglophone North America. It is not surprising that these people are the first to claim that the Official Languages Act does not work. I do not share that belief. Since its adoption by the Parliament of Canada in 1969, the Official Languages Act has greatly furthered the cause of bilingualism. Anyone who denies that fact must either be blind or dishonest. Progress has been slow and sometimes painful. But progress there has been — real progress, full of promise for the future.

We must let time accomplish its task and, above all, use every means at our disposal to depoliticize the bilingualism issue. For over twenty years, I have travelled from one end of Canada to the other; I have seen the situation evolve and mentalities change. The fact that people who were once hostile or critical toward the official languages policy now recognize the importance of French in English Canada and English in Quebec makes me extremely happy. The efforts made to further official bilingualism have not been in vain.

### A new face

Despite its "inconveniences" and despite the bad humour of some federal public servants obliged to

work in French where that language predominates, the Official Languages Act has changed the face of Canada. It has given Canada a modern flair, a fraternal allure which, perhaps in another decade, will emerge as a genuine sense of unity between French- and English-speaking Canadians.

Francophones across Canada are not, as many believe, a single homogeneous entity. Those living outside Quebec do not do so just to show they can resist assimilation or to prove their courage by living individually or collectively in French. Just like Francophones in Quebec, they move and relocate. They all assume their "Frenchness" in their own way and with varying degrees of conviction. Nor are they all filled with the desire to move to Quebec. Francophones from St. Boniface are, I believe, as much Manitobans as I am a Quebecer. The difference is that living in French is more difficult for them than for me and my children. Theirs is a daily struggle. They must have a clearer definition of their aspirations as Francophones and must frequently remind their neighbours of those aspirations, neighbours who are not always inclined to listen.

In this regard, Francophone groups living outside Quebec have acquired a new assurance, a feeling of confidence that is the result of the Official Languages Act, the extension of bilingualism and the resurgence of Canadian regionalism. Not long ago, French-speakers felt obliged to keep their identity a secret and left their language in the cloakroom during working hours, only to restore it to its place of honour in the safety of their homes. Thanks to the respect they are now given by the federal government, they voice their opinions openly, write bold and cutting memoranda, bring attention to century-old injustices and demand respect not only for their language and culture, but

above all for their inalienable right to live in French on Canadian soil. Such a positive attitude augurs well.

For this reason, I do not like the expression "official-language minority". "La Francophonie" is not simply a question of language, but is a condition intimately linked to a vision of this land. The quality of cultural life constitutes the essence of a people; laws provide the political framework. When I speak of the Francophone minorities, I am not speaking of an anonymous mass. I am speaking of people with faces, smiles, personal tragedies, homes and cities. I have French-speaking friends who are seeking to affirm their Francophone identity, gain the respect of others and be accepted for what they are.

#### The third solitude

Experience shows that coercion to use either official language produces rebellion, spawns prejudice, prolongs misunderstanding and sometimes even leads to racism. In this country of vast solitudes — human as well as geographic — bilingualism is still too often a source of conflict and disagreement rather than of cultural enrichment. Indeed, the British are more willing to speak French than English-speaking Canadians because they see French as a world language, written and spoken by great writers, artists and statesmen. English-speaking Canadians see French as a constraint, and those who show keen interest in speaking it with us, their French-speaking compatriots, are rare indeed.

Despite the undeniable progress of bilingualism in this country, there remains one sad and unavoidable fact: although French immersion education is excellent and beneficial to the children involved, Francophones outside Quebec are still not respected, listened to or asked to become part of the new group of French-speakers emerging from this system. I have always been shocked and disappointed to see that the parents of these fortu-

nate children, for whom speaking, studying, writing and conversing in French has become a matter of daily routine, carry on as though Francophones did not even exist in the provinces in which they live and work. It has been said that there are two solitudes in Canada: French-Canadian and English-Canadian. It appears that a third is taking shape: children from immersion programmes. This is what I perceived during the tempestuous hearings of the Pepin-Robarts Commission. The commissioners heard testimony of this nature from people who were experiencing and being subjected to the consequences of this regrettable situation. Things may have changed since 1978. If so, I would be the first to applaud.

#### Pressure tactics: plus and minus

I remain convinced that the more the federal government tries to control provincial language policy from Ottawa, the more the provinces will resist. Ontario provides a striking example. Right up to his resignation, Premier Davis (who nonetheless strongly supported the Trudeau clan during the dark days of repatriation of the Constitution) never wanted to institutionalize bilingualism in his province as the federal government so ardently urged him to. He preferred to grant privileges and recognize rights through the back door. Our Francophone friends in Ontario have nevertheless made significant linguistic progress, but it is dependent on the goodwill of their leaders. Their dearly-won historical rights still do not enjoy official recognition.

The day the Premier of Ontario addresses the legislature at Queen's Park *in French*, Francophones will have reason to sing, dance and hold their heads high: victory will then be theirs. Once that happens, I do not for an instant doubt that the other Premiers would be tempted to hasten the pace and make a commitment to bilingualism, which I prefer to call *natural* rather than *official*.

The situation in Quebec, however, is another story. The Charter of the French Language, which sent so many Anglo-Quebecers running to Toronto, protects and reassures French-speaking Quebecers. It gave the majority language of Quebec official recognition. The Charter came under heavy fire from politicians who, unfamiliar with the text, blindly and vehemently criticized its spirit. However, in its amended form, the Charter has gained wider acceptance.

The federal government will never be able to grant Francophone minorities the cultural presence or the political clout so often promised in many reassuring speeches. Nonetheless, I have no hesitation in stating that Prime Minister Mulroney, an Anglophone by birth, shows greater respect for the intent and spirit of the Official Languages Act by speaking French with evident pleasure, than all the members of the former Trudeau government to whom we must credit its enactment, as well as the blunder of having imposed it without adequate explanation.

#### Sculpting the Canadian soul

What role does television play in all this? What influence does it have on French language and culture in Canada? Does it work in favour or against Francophone interests? Here, my diagnosis is more ominous. During prime time, the French-speaking public, young people especially, give priority to American programmes. It is upsetting that they no longer wish to think, dream, read, dance, love, or dress in a French or even "Canadian" style, in the old sense of the term. If Francophones in Quebec or the other provinces let themselves be influenced or dominated by American products, no law, however restrictive, will manage to make the French language and culture flourish in Canada.

Television also has a detrimental effect on the quality of English spoken by young Canadians.

Whereas the use of "joul" is finally declining in Quebec, American slang penetrates every corner of English Canada, from the university campus to the discotheque. It is very difficult for any Canadian, Francophone or Anglophone, to resist the cultural invasion of our neighbours. American values are not bad in themselves, but they are suffocating our own.

To preserve what we might call the Canadian identity, I believe it is essential to strengthen Canadian radio and television. I hope the new government is aware that the CBC/Radio-Canada is one of the great sculptors of the soul of the Canadian people. To a large extent,

minorities owe the recognition of their talents and preservation of their culture to this institution. The CBC/Radio-Canada is a symbol of Canada's linguistic duality and cultural diversity. Its leaders, employees, journalists and directors have played a prime role in the history of Canadian unity by cultivating and disseminating the distinctive characteristics of the Canadian nation.

#### Conclusion

The future of our Francophone minorities and our entire country is based on communication. The quality of this communication depends on the clarity of economic, social, linguistic and cultural

policies. Ambiguity and evasiveness only serve to harbour mistrust.

When the premiers of Anglophone provinces are bilingual and speak French, not as a vote-catching manoeuvre, but out of concern for understanding their compatriots, minorities will no longer need laws, subsidies and consolation. When elected officials at all levels of government are able to converse directly with their electorate in both of Canada's official languages, institutional bilingualism will have reached new heights and French will finally be on an equal footing with English.

put it in  
words

### A Creative Writing Contest about living in a bilingual country

To celebrate International Youth Year, the Commissioner of Official Languages would like to hear your thoughts about living in a country with two official languages. If you are between 15 and 24 years old, we invite you to share those thoughts through a piece of fiction: short story, poem, play, comic strip, scripts for TV, video, radio or film.

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**International Youth Year**  
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*Michael Foster's excellent article on Canada's indigenous languages in our seventh issue was warmly received by our readers. The present article on the same subject constitutes a fascinating follow-up.*

## Aboriginal languages in Canada

GORDON E. PRIEST



Gordon E. Priest is the Director of Housing, Family and Social Division at Statistics Canada. He has represented the country in Geneva, Weisbaden and even Beijing, China, where he was a delegate at an international seminar. Whenever possible, he pursues his special interest in the history of the Canadian Pacific Railway.

When we speak of aboriginal languages in Canada we are referring to the languages spoken by the Inuit, Indian and Métis peoples. The 1981 Census shed considerable light on hitherto undocumented questions. We are now able to determine where the aboriginal peoples live, their number, their mother tongue, their home language, whether their languages are endangered or if language transfer is a common occurrence.

In comparison to previous censuses, the 1981 Census provided a much more accurate picture of aboriginal languages in Canada by identifying eleven language families as opposed to simply two broad distinctions: Indian and Eskimo (Inuktitut). These language families are as follows: Algonquian languages - Cree (65,995) - Ojibway (19,540) - Other (13,715); Athapaskan languages (11,720); Haida languages (335); Iroquoian languages (5,930); Kootenayan languages (85); Salishan languages (740); Siouan languages (1,560); Tlingit languages (125); Tsimshian languages (1,545); Wakashan languages (945); and Inuktitut (18,770).

### Mother tongue

For census purposes, **mother tongue** is defined as the language first learned and still understood, and **home language** as the language most often spoken at home. The mother tongue concept is not an entirely accurate measure. The census respondent must report only one

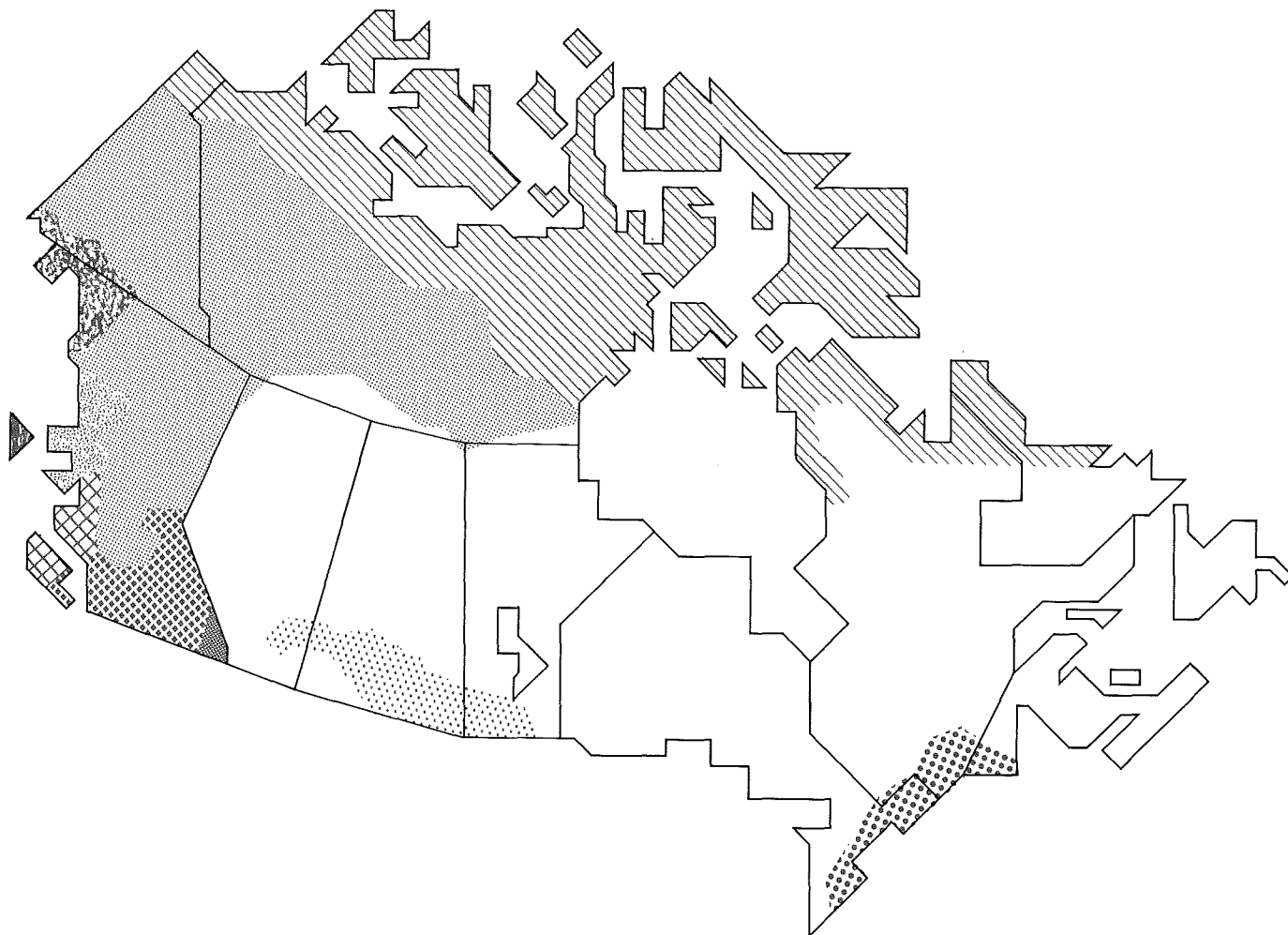
mother tongue<sup>1</sup> even though some people learn two or more languages simultaneously from infancy. Nor is it uncommon for the *first* language no longer to be *understood* at the time of the census. While it is difficult to take these factors into consideration and make the necessary adjustments, the mother tongue concept does provide an indication of the status of various languages.

Table 1 shows the geographic distribution of the major aboriginal language families in Canada. In 1981, the aboriginal population was 492,000. Of that number, 140,975 (less than 30 per cent) identified an aboriginal language as their mother tongue and an even smaller number, 108,620 (22 per cent), reported that language as their home language. The vast majority reported English as their mother tongue and home language.












Census results show that 62.4 per cent of respondents reported English as their mother tongue, compared to 28.7 per cent an aboriginal language, 4.6 per cent French and 4.3 per cent another language<sup>2</sup>. The largest number (99,210) of those who reported an aboriginal mother tongue spoke an Algonquian language. This can perhaps be explained by the fact that the Algonquian-speaking people are spread over a large geographic area extending from the Atlantic to the eastern foothills of the Rocky Mountains. Inuktitut, the second largest aboriginal language group, was reported as the mother tongue of 18,770 of the 25,390 Inuit.

It is probable that the Haida, Kootenayan, Salishan, Tlingit, Tsimshian and Wakashan languages never had as large a population base as the more widely dispersed Athapaskan and Algonquian. The physical barrier to communication posed by the western cordillera region is no doubt partially responsible for this. With the number of people reporting Haida at 335,

Distribution of aboriginal  
linguistic families



Legend

 Inuktitut	 Tlingit	 Tsimshian	 Salishan	 Siouan	 Iroquoian
 Athapaskan	 Haida	 Wakashan	 Kootenayan	 Algonquian	

Tlingit at 125 and Kootenayan 85, these languages would appear perilously close to disappearing as living languages, particularly in light of the average age of the population reporting these mother tongues.

The average age of the aboriginal population taken as a whole 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. The figures reveal that these languages are spoken by the older age groups, a fact that leads us to wonder if the languages will disappear as the population dies off.

The only West Coast language that still appears to be retained by relatively younger people is Tsimshian, where the average age is 33. The average age of the population reporting other aboriginal languages falls in the late twenties, the one exception being for Inuktitut, where the average age is 23.

#### The erosion of French

In the Prairies, three out of every four Métis reported English as their mother tongue, fewer than 20 per cent an aboriginal language and 3 per cent French. The average age of these three groups is 19, 31 and 41 respectively. The use of French seems to be eroding much faster than that of the aboriginal language.

In Quebec, 33 per cent of the aboriginal population reported French as their mother tongue, but their average age was 27 compared to 22 for speakers of Inuktitut and 23 Algonquian and English.

The situation in Quebec revealed some interesting features: almost half of the aboriginal population in Quebec reported an aboriginal mother tongue, and it is the only region where a significant proportion reported French (33.1 per cent). In Ontario, only 15.2 per cent retained their aboriginal mother

TABLE 1

### Aboriginal peoples by type, Canada, Provinces and Territories, 1981.

Area	Total population	Total 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 per cent 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.

tongue compared to 35.5 per cent in the Prairies and 8.8 per cent in British Columbia. In the Yukon and Northwest Territories, this percentage climbed to 58.7 per cent. The geographic remoteness of the Inuit seems conducive to language retention.

#### Home language

As in the case of mother tongue, the concept of home language also has limitations in that it does not necessarily provide an indication of general usage of any given language. Languages used for instruction, ritual or commerce are not necessarily used in the home. The concept does, however, provide an indication of the degree to which various languages are used in daily conversation in the home environment. The home is an important point of transfer of language skills from one generation to another.

Nationally, 71.7 per cent of the aboriginal population reported English as their home language, whereas only 62.4 per cent reported English as their mother tongue; 22.1 per cent reported an aboriginal language and 3.9 per cent reported French. Again we find that English seems to be replacing the aboriginal languages even in the home, a shift most apparent in Ontario, the West and the far North. In Quebec, there may be a shift from both aboriginal and French as mother tongue to English as home language. This situation is somewhat surprising given that Francophones form a majority in the province.

The aboriginal peoples of the cordillera region use their own languages very little in the home, bringing even more closely into focus the plight of their languages.

TABLE 3  
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		Algonquian - Cree		Algonquian - Ojibway		Algonquian - Other		Athapaskan		Haida	
Number	Age	Number	Age	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	3,630	29	265	52
French	1,030	28	17,440	28	460	34	100	39	15	67	320	21	20	59	—	—
Other non-aboriginal	1,620	31	245	25	8,950	33	80	37	220	48	40	29	35	34	5	32
Algonquian - Cree	2,910	22	185	22	225	28	47,945	25	55	41	5	12	5	50	—	—
Algonquian - Ojibway	1,225	27	5	71	125	39	65	37	11,895	28	5	3	130	34	—	—
Algonquian - Other	1,125	21	760	22	230	29	10	49	—	—	10,805	25	—	—	—	—
Athapaskan	405	23	10	45	40	63	15	54	110	21	—	—	7,895	29	—	—
Haida	10	64	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70	40
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	8,035	29	70	40
Total aboriginal peoples	306,775	20	22,685	30	21,025	34	65,955	26	19,540	29	13,715	26	11,720	29	335	49
% speaking mother tongue as home language	97.1		76.9				72.7		60.9		78.8		67.4		20.9	

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



<i>Iroquoian</i>		<i>Kootenayan</i>		<i>Salishan</i>		<i>Siouan</i>		<i>Tlingit</i>		<i>Tsimshian</i>		<i>Wakashan</i>		<i>Inuktitut</i>		<i>Total</i>		<i>Total aboriginal peoples</i>	
Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age	Number	Age
3,290	31	70	40	515	40	755	31	100	43	565	31	745	37	1,970	25	39,410	30	352,185	22
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	5	37	10	13	465	28	19,400	28
—	—	—	—	20	19	—	—	—	—	40	47	10	68	5	36	450	42	11,255	33
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	48,010	25	51,325	25
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	12,100	28	13,455	28
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	10,810	25	12,925	25
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	8,030	29	8,475	29
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	70	40	80	42
2,630	40	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	2,645	40	2,705	40
—	—	20	58	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	20	58	25	58
—	—	—	—	205	52	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	205	52	305	46
—	—	—	—	—	—	810	30	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	810	30	985	31
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	30	64	—	—	—	—	—	—	30	64	35	59
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	940	34	—	—	—	—	945	34	1,040	34
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	190	54	—	—	195	54	270	49
—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	—	16,780	22	16,790	22	16,995	22
2,630	40	25	58	205	52	810	30	25	64	940	34	190	54	16,785	22	100,655	26	108,620	26
5,930	35	85	44	740	43	1,560	30	125	47	1,545	33	945	40	18,770	23	140,975	27	491,460	23
44.4		23.5		27.7		51.9		24.0		60.8		20.1		89.4		—		—	

**TABLE 2**  
**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 <sup>(1)</sup>	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
Prairies	39,084	24,738	14,346
British Columbia	13,481	9,483	3,998

(1) Excludes Yukon and Northwest Territories.

An unspoken language is a dead language. Some aboriginal peoples have learned their aboriginal language as a *second* language, either at school or through a heritage programme.

The average age of those 66 per cent of Inuit who speak Inuktitut in the home is only 22. Of the 8,050 who use English in the home, the average age is 20.

In the Prairies the situation is reversed. Over 85 per cent of Métis reported English as their home language compared to fewer than 13 per cent who reported an aboriginal language. Again the average age of those speaking English was considerably lower than those speaking either Algonquian or French.

In Quebec, French was reported as the home language by 32 per cent of the aboriginal population, the average age of that population being 28. Those who reported English or Algonquian had an average age of 25 and 23 respectively.

The acquisition, retention and loss of language skills are very complex

phenomena. Accordingly, it is difficult to measure general usage, levels of understanding or language use in the home, at work or at school. In the case of French and English, the census can provide a partial measure of such linguistic activity. However, for non-official languages, there is a lack of detailed data. For instance, it is impossible to know the proportion of the aboriginal population that learned an Indian or Inuit language as a second language.

The census does, however, enable us to determine those who reported an aboriginal mother tongue but who speak some other language in the home. This would imply that some sort of language transfer is taking place.

Table 2 indicates the number of students enrolled in native language programmes in the 1981-82 school year<sup>3</sup>. Close to 34,000 persons received at least some instruction in aboriginal languages. In some cases the aboriginal language was taught only as a subject but in other cases it was also used as a language of instruction. Unfortunately, we do not have statistics

for specific aboriginal language groups. Such statistics would have been useful, especially if one considers that for some languages, instruction in the school is their last hope of survival. When a language is not spoken in the home or workplace, its chances for survival are bleak.

Table 3 reflects the cases where the mother tongue has been retained or lost as the home language. Of the 140,975 aboriginal peoples who reported an Indian or Inuit language as their mother tongue, only three out of four (100,655) reported that they still spoke an aboriginal home language<sup>4</sup>.

Close to 28 per cent (39,410) of the population reporting an aboriginal mother tongue have apparently "transferred" to English as their home language. Less than 0.5 per cent (465) have transferred to French. Of course, there is a reverse transfer as well: persons with English or French as mother tongue who speak an aboriginal language at home. There is also a shift from French to English. Generally speaking, however, there is an overwhelming net shift to English.

In terms of the use of the mother tongue as the language of the home, it seems that the larger the population group the more likely the mother tongue will also be spoken in the home. For example, 97.1 per cent 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 per cent of the 85 persons reporting Kootenayan as mother tongue also reported it as their home language (20).

#### Home language and average age

As noted above, the average age of persons reporting Haida (49), Kootenayan (44), Salishan (43), Tlingit (47) and Wakashan (40) as mother tongue is considerably higher than the aboriginal population as a whole. Even more

significant for these threatened languages is the fact 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 the older generation dies, there will be even fewer persons to pass on these languages in the tradition of home usage. Haida is an exception in that the average age of those still using it as the 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 revival among the Haida-speaking people.

For the larger language families, such as Inuktitut or Algonquian, the population who have retained their aboriginal mother tongue as their home language have a lower 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 who have switched to English 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 purposes.

For other larger minority language groups such as Italian, Chinese and Ukrainian, the average age of those retaining their mother tongue is considerably higher than those who have switched to English or French<sup>5</sup>. However, these languages are not in danger of

extinction in Canada given the influx of new immigrants. 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 coming from the United States.

#### The moment of decision

The 1981 Census data provide a fairly clear indication that aboriginal languages in Canada are eroding, with a net transfer to English.

While Inuktitut with its relative geographic isolation and the Algonquian languages with their broad base are relatively healthy with respect to continued usage, it is also evident that virtually all aboriginal languages are losing ground to English. In the short run, Athapaskan remains relatively secure, but is questionable whether the several language families of the western cordillera can survive for long as living, working languages.

Linguists and anthropologists will mourn the passing of these languages and the consequences for aboriginal cultures. It is therefore up to the aboriginal peoples themselves to decide whether it is in their interest to allow their languages to fade into disuse or to revive them. If they choose the latter, they deserve the support of all Canadians for whom multiculturalism is a matter of national pride.

#### Notes

1. As per the Official Languages Act.
2. This figure is known to be inflated by respondent error on the part of immigrants from the Indian subcontinent.
3. This table is based on information provided by the Education Directorate of the Department of Indian and Northern Affairs.
4. In fact, these people number only 100,215 (71.1 per cent), the difference being that 440 people spoke an aboriginal language other than their aboriginal mother tongue. In Table 3, 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.
5. 1981 Census of Canada, unpublished data.

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*Too often, the public school has tended to drive a wedge between children and their immigrant parents. This article demonstrates that an appropriate preschool programme can help make truly bilingual/bicultural lifestyles possible for the young.*

## Heritage language in the preschool

TERENCE MacNAMEE  
AND HILARY WHITE



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**"I** want my child to learn my language first". Immigrant parents are generally quite concerned about the learning and maintenance of the ancestral language at preschool age. They fear that if their child learns English before he masters the ancestral language, he will not learn the ancestral language at all. Is this an unreasonable fear? Hardly. Research suggests that less than five per cent of Canadian adults who speak a non-official language have learned it after the age of five<sup>1</sup>. Ethnic parents are all too aware of the devastating effect of an exclusively Anglophone school environment on the child's first language in later years. Like generations of immigrants before them, they have the bitter experience of speaking to the child in the ancestral language and being answered in the language he hears in the classroom and on the playground.

Too often, the public school has tended to drive a wedge between children and their immigrant parents. School and immigrant home are pitted against one another in a tacit struggle for the minds and hearts of children, with the home standing for linguistic particularism and the school for communicative conformity. There can be no doubt that this situation has in the past put great strain on ethnic families, both

parents and children. Today, the ethnic child in English Canada may go to daycare or kindergarten, which provides the possibility of a more gradual transition to the English-speaking environment of the school than was possible in previous generations. But the situation which results is still that the child participates in two social environments — domestic and educational — where two different languages are spoken; and he is participating earlier, at an age when the basics of the home language are still being acquired. We feel that preschool education has great potential for mediating the linguistic and cultural differences between ethnic home and public school, but we are also convinced that it carries a great danger for the cultural identity and self-image of minority children unless ethnic minorities themselves have a say in the design and implementation of programmes.

### An educational programme with family involvement

On the basis of a preliminary survey<sup>2</sup> of its member ethnic groups, the Inter-Cultural Association of Greater Victoria implemented an educational programme involving Punjabi-speaking families with preschoolers. The Hindu Parishad and the Sikh Temple helped to bring members of their communities into the programme. In the Indo-Canadian community, with its strong extended families, grandparents often act as caregivers for young children while fathers and mothers are out working during the day. Our programme was designed to meet some of the needs of these older family members as well as the preschool children.

The programme took place Mondays and Wednesdays for two hours of the afternoon in a local church hall used as a meeting place by the Hindu Parishad. It was here that the children had a programme of activities supervised by a preschool teacher and members of the



Punjabi-speaking community. The adults (mostly grandparents, as we have said) got together in the meeting-room upstairs for some basic instruction in speaking, reading and writing English with a teacher of English as a second language<sup>3</sup>. These older family members tend to be quite isolated at home, and as they are not in the Canadian workforce they are not eligible for Manpower Language Training; hence they usually know little or no English. The opportunity provided by this basic English instruction would enable them to expand the range of their lifestyles, overcome isolation, and function more effectively in the wider community.

#### Rejection of the home language

The initial goal of the preschool programme had been to help the children make first steps in using English while stimulating and reinforcing their command of the home language, but with the first children who began to come to the programme we found a situation just about the opposite of what had been expected: these children — who had already had some preschool experience — did not need help with English, but had to be encouraged to use Punjabi. With the help of community input, we attempted to build a stimulating bicultural environment in which the children would feel supported in their linguistic and cultural identity.

The children's initial unwillingness to use the home language, or to discuss Indian themes, extended to an attitude of rejection towards the older people when they contributed traditional songs and stories.

Meanwhile, the children were encouraged to build a play house, and painted a mural on Indian national themes. We used the device of trilingual English-Hindi-Punjabi<sup>4</sup> labelling in the preschool space to encourage the development of prereading skills in both Roman and Devanagari or Gurmukhi scripts.

By the third week, we noticed that the language balance was gradually shifting, with a lot more Punjabi being used by the children in the preschool space — in play interaction, in spontaneous presentation of song and rhyme, and so on. It was found important to take a direct interest in the children's linguistic accomplishment, for with a little encouragement they provided Punjabi words for a wealth of items. That the previous preschool experiences these children have had — enriching though they may undoubtedly have been in many respects — did not come across as being supportive of a bilingual/bicultural lifestyle is suggested by an exchange that occurred during play. Two children are talking in Punjabi. A third child interjects (in English): "No Punjabi in the school!" The preschool teacher talked with them about how not everyone can speak two languages and how lucky they are that they can; and how many children in their other preschool can speak two languages. This seemed to give rise to much thought over the following weeks as the children brought it up again and again. They became more willing, even eager, to talk about their language and culture.

As more families participated in the programme, we also met children who had had little exposure to English. Some younger women with children in the programme joined the song and story circle time. The children began to show a greater interest in stories, songs and games initiated by these women, and when one of the older people joined the circle with them he was given more respect and attention.

At first we heard a lot of negative comments from the children about their ancestral culture and language and their grandparents. As the programme continued these things started to change, very gradually, but they did not disappear by any means.

The dress-up and play-house area especially encouraged conversation

in Punjabi. The roles taken and assigned during dramatic play reflected the family structure, the roles of grandmother and grandfather being the most sought after, with sister, brother and baby following. Aunts and uncles entered into it sometimes, but rarely the mother or father also. When playing with playdough the children turned to making *roti* and this promoted discussion in Punjabi too.

The children referred to the programme as their "India school", and while they did not always converse in Punjabi they felt comfortable doing so. Within this preschool setting, they enjoyed using Punjabi and discussing Indian customs, but in the presence of unfamiliar, non-Indian visitors they adopted a show of indifference and even scorn: "Hindu — that's stupid!" (from a Hindu six-year-old). Like so many children, these too seem very anxious not to be "different": they want to fit in and be like all their friends at their other preschools. Their "India school" was a place where they could relax and be free of those pressures to conform.

#### The need to explain the home culture

Our programme has not continued due to lack of funds for the present, so we are unable to report on further progress. Nevertheless, some conclusions are quite clear. In describing the preschool programme, we emphasized the children's rejection of the language and culture of their community as represented by their elders, once they had had some preschool experience outside the home. The Indo-Canadian community, like numerous other ethnic groups<sup>5</sup>, has tended to avoid any systematic use of daycare since it is not part of their cultural tradition and since older family members are available to look after children. Such caregiving arrangements have the benefit of strengthening family ties and (to an extent determined by the cultural awareness of the caregiver) of allowing the child to

acquire the language and become rooted in the culture. There is likely to be a weakness in the outcome, however, if the caregiver does not realize the necessity, in a new country, of explaining the culture in detail to the child. When living our own traditions in our country of origin, we pass on culture to the younger generation by a kind of osmosis.

However, if immigrant parents want their children to learn their culture in a new land, it becomes essential that the culture be clearly and carefully explained — and the language consciously and actively cultivated.

In our opinion, to understand what it means to cultivate a home language consciously and actively in this way requires an appreciation of the way in which these ancestral languages are so easily lost in English-speaking North America. For languages to respect each other's boundaries and rights to existence, they must have their own "spheres of influence". To put it another way, languages are like businesses competing for a share of the market: if they are competing for the same restricted market, the strongest will win and the others will go bankrupt; but if their markets are different or only overlap, there will be room for more than one in the marketplace. The best hope for stable bilingual or multilingual lifestyles is if the languages involved occupy particular social spheres, clearly defined functions, roles and contexts.

#### The "kitchen German" phenomenon

If each language — according to a widely held view — provides its speakers with a unique linguistic world to live in, then that world must be populated — it must be sufficiently rich in topics to discuss, things and events to refer to — so that the language has function and use. The young ethnic child begins to lose the first language mainly because of impoverishment of reference. What

this means is that as the child becomes more and more exposed to English outside the home, he lacks the linguistic resources to deal with many topics in the first language, which tends to become restricted to household matters. We call this phenomenon "kitchen German", from the observation among many adults of European background in Western Canada whose only remembrance of their parents' language consists of a few words or phrases to do with household chores. Language competence is always tied to particular contexts of living by habitual associations. The "linguistic world" is, in the final analysis, a "concrete world" in that language refers to, or is associated with, real-world objects and events. Languages are lost if they no longer refer to anything. They are maintained if they have a sufficiently rich power of reference, and if they make particular contexts and functions their own. The ethnic child is apt to lose his language when he finds that he is not able to use it for enough topics of conversation. It becomes "kitchen German", and English takes over its lost functions.

In successful bilingual or multilingual situations, then, languages are maintained distinct because they have distinct contexts and ranges of functions. A preschool programme focussing on heritage language development can have an important role in the ethnic child's integrative social development in so far as it works on the principle of language context. Such a programme can show the child that the learning and use of English is associated with a well-defined situational context with its own communicative roles and functions, while the first language is firmly associated with the home environment and the ethnic community. It can make true bilingual/bicultural lifestyles possible for the young by demonstrating that two languages can be learned in tandem, with the development of one contributing to

the development of the other. In this way, preschool education, however alien it may be to the cultural tradition of an ethnic community such as the one involved in our programme, can be a valuable supplement to the family's efforts to implant and develop language and culture in the young child. Through it, the ethnic community can encourage parents to provide a wide range of stimulating language activities in the home and outside: conversation, children's books, films and educational events in the first language. But the ethnic community itself must be in charge of the programme. Nor is the possibility of a proliferation of ethnic preschool programmes unreasonable or unworkable in a society such as Canada which has enshrined multicultural principles in its Constitution.

There is another benefit in preschool programmes focussing on heritage languages that should not go unmentioned. The learning of two languages immeasurably facilitates the eventual learning of a third. Young ethnic Canadians who have acquired and maintained their ancestral language are more likely to acquire a second official language and make it a part of their adult lives in the future.

#### The preschool years are crucial

Today in Canada there is much talk of "heritage language programmes" in public schools where numbers warrant. Programmes to teach heritage languages to ethnic youngsters in upper elementary or high school are all quite laudable, but if it is merely a question of trying to reinforce or replant first language competence already lost for all practical purposes, then this is rather like shutting the stable door when the horse has bolted. For ethnic communities with a high proportion of young families, the crucial time for establishing heritage language is in the preschool years. This fact should be respected and given priority by policy makers.

It is a well-documented fact<sup>6</sup> that the English-speaking public school has tended to alienate children from immigrant parents. Nonetheless, the evidence emerging that children whose language and thought are only developing can, following preschool experiences in majority-culture settings, already be rejecting their own families' language and culture is nothing short of astounding. Clearly, remedial action is called for, not only by the affected communities themselves, but also by responsible educators. As a result of our involvement in the programme described above, we believe that a bilingual/bicultural approach to preschool education with ethnic community involvement is feasible and provides constructive solutions to the problem.

#### Notes

1. Reitz, J.G., "Language and ethnic community survival". *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Canada*. J. Goldstein and R. Bienvenue, eds. Toronto, Butterworths, 1980, p. 128.
2. MacNamee, T., "Language needs of preschool immigrant children in Victoria", 1982, available from the Inter-Cultural Association, Victoria, B.C.
3. The preschool teacher for the project was Judy Harms, and the adult ESL teacher was Denise Klinge. We are indebted to both of them for their careful and sensitive observations which are reflected in these pages.
4. Punjabi-speaking Hindus tend to follow a diglossic pattern, using Punjabi as the spoken medium, Hindi as the written standard. The Sikh community, on the other hand, tends to use Punjabi as their written language also, writing it in the Gurmukhi script rather than in the Devanagari used for Hindi. Prereading skills for a Punjabi-speaking group must therefore refer both to Devanagari and Gurmukhi scripts as well as Roman.
5. Ethnic caregiving preferences have been documented by S. Li, *Between Neighbours, Between Kin: A Study of Private Child Care Arrangements in Metropolitan Toronto*, Toronto, Project Child Care, 1978; and by L. Johnson and J. Dineen, *The Kin Trade: The Day Care Crisis in Canada*, Toronto, McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1981, p. 33.
6. For a broad-ranging and meticulously researched historical treatment of the issues in an American context, see S. Sarason and J. Doris, *Educational Handicap, Public Policy and Social History*, New York, Free Press, 1979.

# Letters

## TO THE EDITOR:

I write to ask if it is possible to replace some copies of *Language and Society* that have disappeared as a result of student usage. So useful are the articles to students in the Canadian Studies Programme that the library copies are always in use and the demand for my own file has become considerable.

Edward J. Miles

The University of Vermont

This morning, I received a poster from your Office, proclaiming that a bilingual country occupies a special place at table. The colour picture is of a well-set table without guests.

I am horrified to think of the thousands of dollars of taxpayers' money that is spent on weird propaganda of this sort. As the newly-appointed Commissioner, I would hope that you will soon have your Office operating on a somewhat more orderly and rational basis.

In my view, bilingual countries are infirm hybrids in which one of the two competing linguistic groups has failed to assimilate the other. As a result, linguistic warfare persists from generation to generation. In Canada, it started in 1764 and has never stopped since.

Whenever I hear someone claim that the survival of two languages in one country is a source of cultural enrichment, I like to remind that individual that, of all the different species, mankind alone grants special privileges to infirmities.

Michel Brunet  
Laval, Quebec

P.S. I am sending a copy of this letter to the Honourable Marcel Masse, Minister of Communications. M.B.

*The above letter was sent to the Commissioner of Official Languages. We have invited Professor Brunet to submit an article for publication in a future issue of Language and Society. (Ed.)*

The texts appearing in your Special Issue show that participants in last May's colloquium at Edmonton were giving astonishingly divergent meanings to the word "Francophone".

Perhaps the most remarkable example of this confusion of language can be found on page 10, where a single sentence contains the word twice, with two completely different meanings. The sentence reads: "A Manitoban might well ask: are our 30,000 Francophones of more importance . . . than the million or so Francophones who live in unilingual Ontario?" Both figures are from the 1981 census but the first "Francophone" refers to the number of Manitobans using French in their own homes while the second "Francophone" has a vastly different and much broader definition: one million is the total number of persons in Ontario who claim to be able to carry on a conversation in French, regardless of how seldom they actually make use of this language. Of the million, fewer than 350,000 reported French as the language they were using in their own homes.

A third sense of the word appears on page 17, where Edgar Gallant states that "27.4 per cent of the federal workforce was Francophone." This percentage was calculated using a formula developed by the Public Service Commission and having no relationship to any of the census definitions.

Meanwhile the co-chairmen were using "Francophone" in a fourth sense of the same word, completely different from any of the previous three. When they claim that there are "185,000 Francophones in Western Canada," they are quoting the 1981 census figure for the number of Westerners who reported French as the language they had first learned in childhood and still understood, even if they no longer spoke it. The Laurendeau-Dunton Commission warned that this criterion "does not tell us which language the respondent most commonly uses. The information is a generation behind the facts." (Report, Book I, para 51).

Nowhere in the Special Issue is it mentioned that only 86,000 persons in the four western provinces reported French as the language they use in their own homes. This figure appears to be of considerable relevance to the subject of the colloquium and its omission from the record is rather surprising.

Richard J. Joy  
Ottawa

Mr. David King, Minister of Education, has asked me to extend to you his appreciation for the opportunity to contribute in a small way to your magazine. The experience has been an enriching one and the special issue which has been made available to us attests to the constructive nature of this undertaking. The copies of the magazine you have provided have been made available to appropriate individuals in Alberta Education.

The relevance of the articles in the magazine provides a high level of interest to all Canadians.

Adrien L. Bussière  
Alberta Education

I would be interested in receiving copies of *Language and Society* on a regular basis. I am particularly interested in receiving issue No. 12, dated Winter 1984, which deals with the concept of immersion, but would be pleased if it were possible to "subscribe" to the publication.

Keith Morrow  
The Bell Educational Trust

Thank you so much for having sent me issues No. 12 and 13 of *Language and Society*, along with the Annual Report. I have found these publications extremely interesting and consider them to be valuable teaching aids as well. The "Immersion" issue is of particular interest to those of us who wish our students to learn a second language and increase their knowledge of life in Canada, our next-door neighbour. The articles on the situation in Manitoba and Ontario are equally commendable.

Sister Mary Henry Nachtsheim  
The College of St Catherine  
St. Paul, Minnesota

There appeared an interesting article in the *Western Mail*, the national English-language daily newspaper for Wales (5.9.84), based on the findings of the investigation into the use of French in English-speaking Ontario which are published in *Language and Society*. As a cultural movement working towards the restoration of Welsh as a social medium in *Y Fro Gymraeg* (Welsh-speaking Areas), we would be very interested in studying the report.

Ieuan Wyn  
Mudiad Adfer

The National Clearinghouse for Bilingual Education, which was authorized by Congress and established in 1977, is the national information center for the education of language minority students. Our primary purpose is to provide information to teachers, students, project directors, administrators, librarians, researchers — anyone who has an interest in bilingual education.

To provide access to this information, the Clearinghouse has created a computerized database, "Bilingual Education Bibliographic Abstracts" (BEBA). Our goal is to maintain a complete and up-to-date record of information relevant to bilingual education.

We have found your journal, *Language and Society*, to contain important articles on bilingual education and would like to index it in our database. We are particularly interested in the recent special issue, *The Immersion Phenomenon* (No. 12, Winter 1984). We would like to request a complimentary subscription to your journal, starting with this issue, in order to keep current and to make the references available to our users. We believe that the opportunity to receive your journal will help us to announce valuable materials in bilingual education.

Christiane Paulos  
National Clearinghouse for  
Bilingual Education

I was delighted to receive the special issue of *Language and Society*. I will be meeting with my national executive shortly and would appreciate receiving 40 copies so that I can give one copy to each of them. I also enclose a mailing list of our member associations across Canada. I would appreciate if you were to forward a copy of the magazine to each club.

The Colloquium was a most enlightening experience. I am pleased that the proceedings are being preserved in print as they provide a wealth of knowledge for those interested in the topic.

Joseph Slogan  
Ukrainian Canadian Professional and  
Business Federation

*In the above letter, Mr. Slogan refers to issue No. 14 containing the proceeding of the Colloquium sponsored by the Commissioner of Official Languages in Edmonton, Alberta. (Ed.)*

I greatly appreciated the opportunity to participate in the colloquium in Edmonton last May on Official Languages and the West. The need for informed and open debate on this sensitive topic remains with us and I look forward to the stimulation of fresh ideas which your journal should inspire.

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, P.C., M.P.  
House of Commons

Thank you for your excellent publication, *Language and Society*. I especially enjoyed in issue No. 12, Winter 1984, the article by James Jones, "Multilingual approach reflects Canadian mosaic."

I have shared your magazine with leaders in Manitoba's English/German Bilingual Programme, who have also appreciated your work.

Bruno Dyck  
Manitoba Parents for  
German Education Inc.