

SPECIAL ISSUE

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OF THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT**

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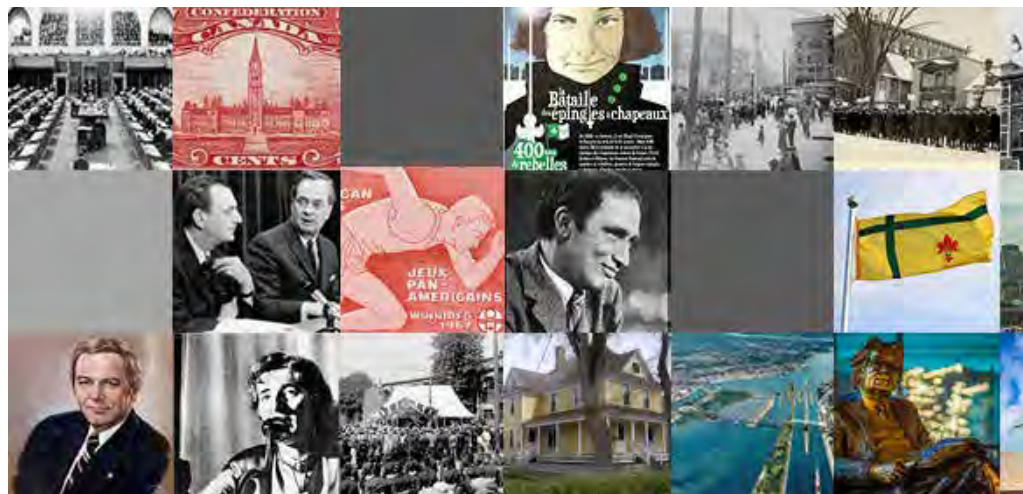
**EDITOR'S NOTE**

Fifty plus years ago, Canada was a truly divided country split primarily by linguistic fault lines. The gap between Anglophones and Francophones seemed to widen perilously. The government of the day became very concerned and needed some mechanism to remedy the problem. Thus, Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson created a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-1969). The recommendations on the part of the Royal Commission led to the Official Languages Act and the creation of the Office of the Official Languages Commissioner.

To commemorate the recognition of official languages and the office to go along with it, TEACH is dedicating this special issue entirely to exploring the importance of bilingualism, the impact of the legislation over time and where it may go in the future.

It is also with great thanks that we wish to acknowledge the support of the federal government in helping fund this issue. In particular, we are grateful to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, for the guidance, insight, and information that was provided in helping to put this special issue together. We are especially grateful to Commemorate Canada, the Department of Canadian Heritage, that provided the means to produce this special issue on Official Languages. Without that generous support, producing this issue, in this way, would not have been possible.

We begin from the beginning with a contextual piece by Robert J. Talbot, manager of research for the Office of the Official Languages Commissioner and an historian. Robert expounds on the history of French-English relations through the ages beginning with the seventeenth century, tracing progress up until the present day. This article forms the foundation of the entire issue.



Freelance writer, Carolyn Gruske contributes two articles. She explores the Official Languages Act itself as a living document that is changing, has been updated and will evolve as Canada continues to develop as a multicultural nation. Carolyn also explores the high-tech world of coding. If language is code and code is language, what language do we use to code? And how does this differ from English to French? Figure out the conundrum and read the article.

Meagan Gillmore cogently interviewed the Official Languages Commissioner, Raymond Th  berge, to explore his views and perspectives on the importance of the Act and its role in an ever changing and evolving society. The conclusion? Official languages truly represent a window on the world.

Martha Beach takes a look at minority language communities across the country and illuminates the challenges they often face when it comes to accessing basic services in their language of choice. That there is a pragmatic purpose to this legislation and it is intended to serve the population from coast to coast.

Educator Christine Cho relates her personal story of struggling with bilingualism and the challenges and obstacles she has faced.

Nonetheless, she has persevered and makes a compelling case for making the effort so succeeding generations may benefit.

This issue also lays bare language rights as enshrined in the Official Languages Act and delivers a snapshot of bilingualism across the country using a compelling infographic. As always, we feature a practical teaching component in the form of CURRICULA, delivering a template for teachers to thoroughly explore the topic of official languages in classrooms across the nation.

For those of you who are interested in knowing precisely what your language rights entail, please visit the website for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages.

Thank you for taking the time to dive into this issue. Official Languages cuts to the heart of who we are as Canadians. To understand us, we need to understand our languages, their impact, and meaning. Please read on. You won't be disappointed.

*Wili Liberman*  
Editor



Image source: [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline)





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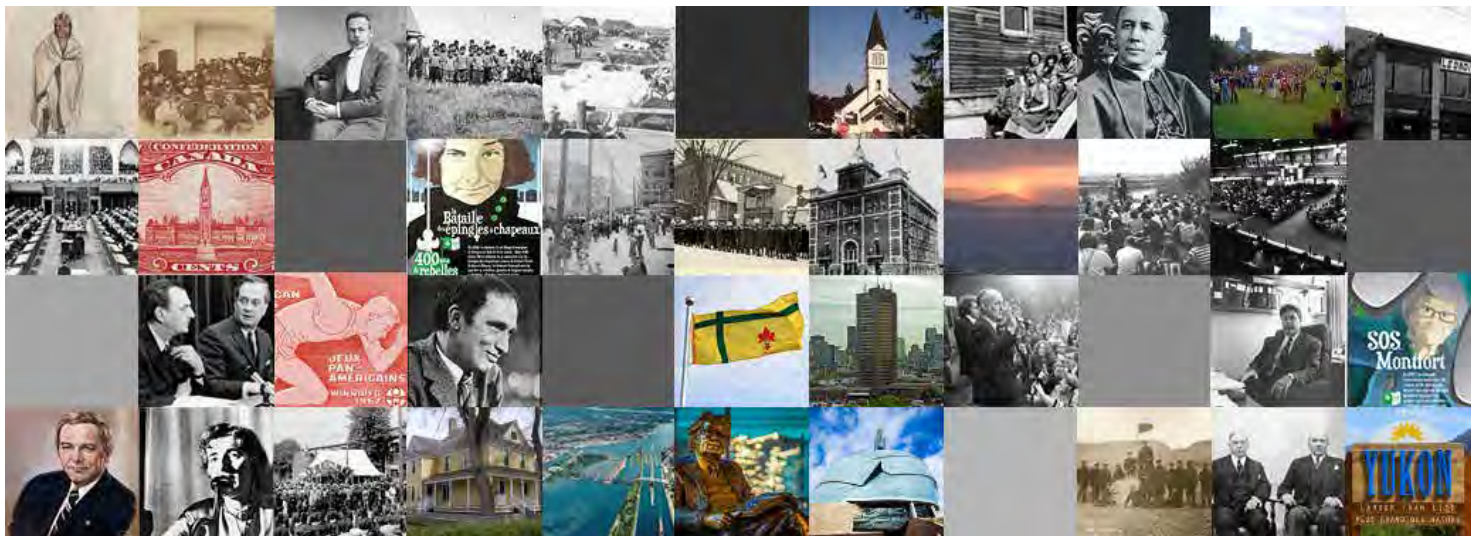
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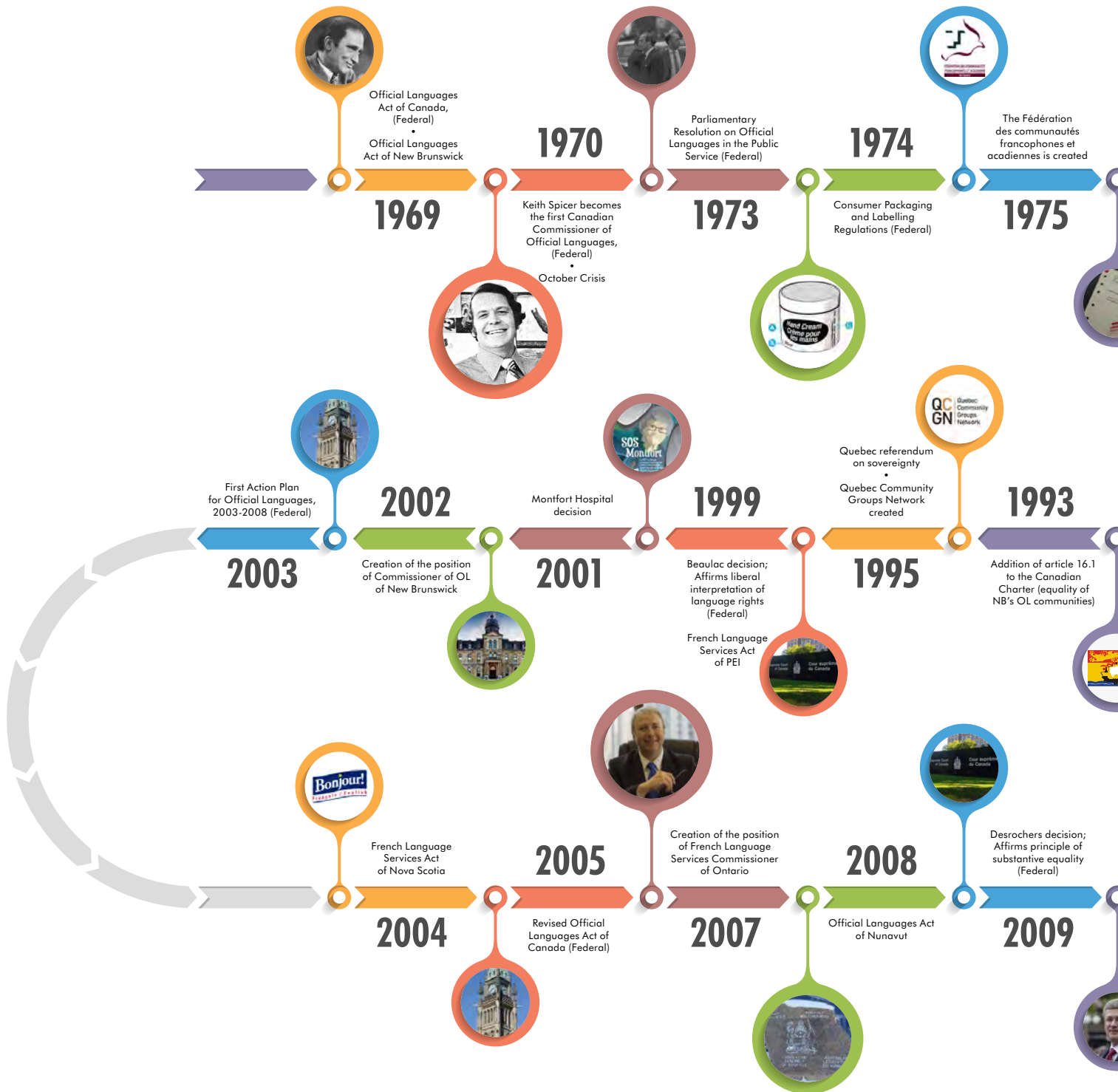
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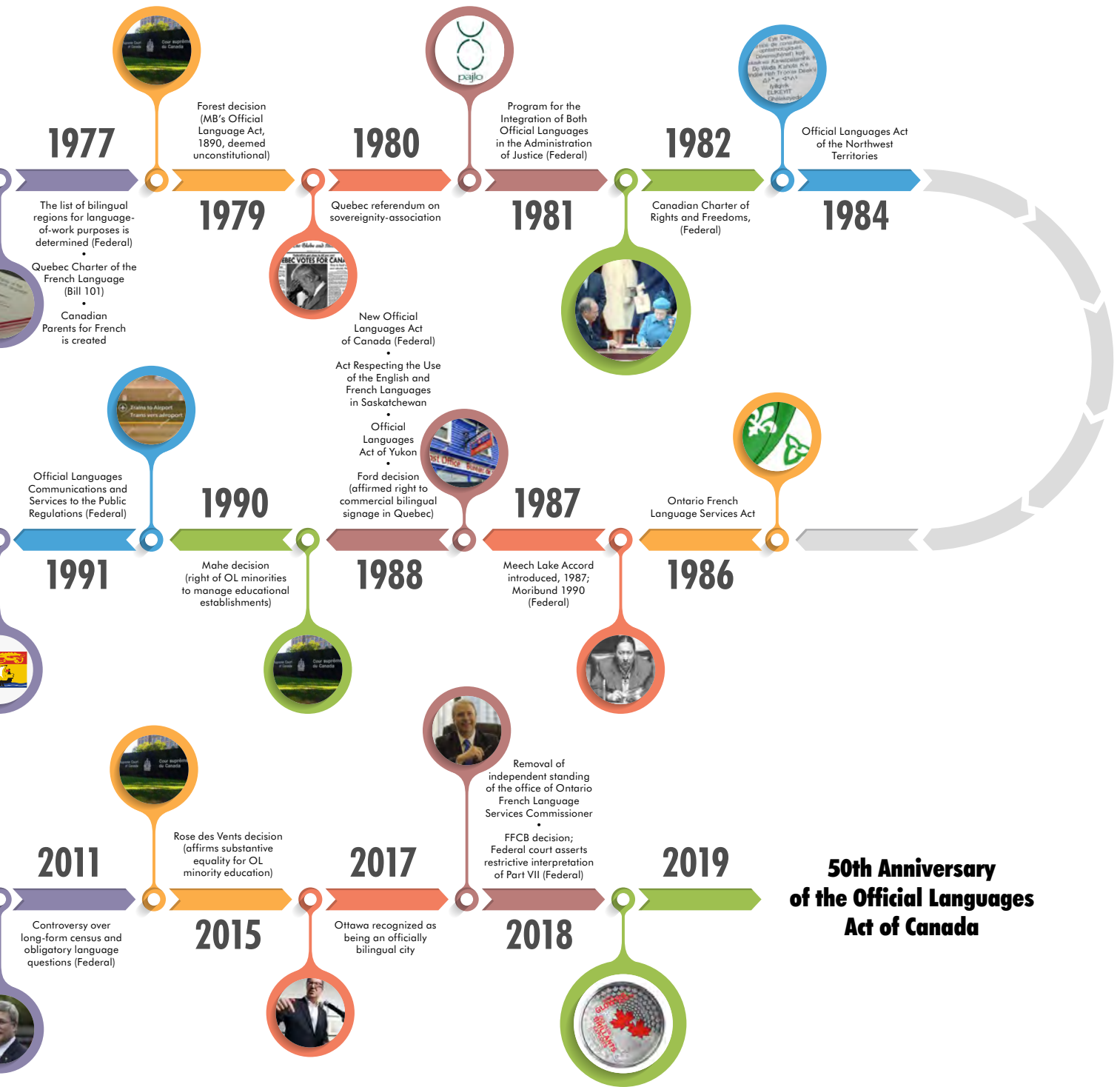
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# KEY DEVELOPMENTS IN OFFICIAL LANGUAGES SINCE 1969



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# TWO SOLITUDES

## and their Connected History

**By Robert J. Talbot**

Relations between English- and French-speakers in Canada have, at different points in our history, been variously characterized by conflict, coexistence, and collaboration. Fortunately, today, relations are and have been peaceful for some time. But this was not always the case.

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, North America was a continent at war. The two principal European powers jostling for control—France and Britain—went to war in North America no fewer than six times during that period. This often had devastating implications for the colonists themselves. For example, in 1696-1697 French forces expelled the majority of Newfoundland's English-speaking population, and in 1755-1764, British forces expelled the majority of Acadia's French-speaking population.

There were instances of coexistence, even collaboration, however, during this turbulent period. For example, some trade was maintained between British and French colonists and fishermen during peacetime. After the British took control over much of mainland Acadia, in 1713, French-speaking Acadians were initially tolerated and, to some extent, encouraged to remain as settlers in order to maintain a viable local economy.

Overall, the period was predominantly one of conflict, culminating in the Seven Years War (1754-1763) in which Britain ultimately gained control over what was, until then, New France.

British authorities quickly recognized, however, the need to maintain the loyalty (or, at least, the neutrality) of the approximately 60,000 French-Catholic settlers now in their



midst, especially at a time when the American colonists to the south were beginning to push for independence from Britain. In 1774, Governor Guy Carleton persuaded the British Parliament to adopt the Quebec Act that recognized the Catholic faith and the French civil code in the colony. In 1791, the Constitutional Act allowed for an elected assembly in Upper Canada (Ontario) and Lower Canada (Quebec), and French and English were recognized as the languages of the Lower Canadian parliament.

It was in part for these reasons that most French- and English-speaking settlers in Ontario and Quebec remained loyal or neutral during the American War of Independence and the War of 1812. If not for this compromise between French and English, it is possible that Canada would not exist as we know it today.

While Francophones and Anglophones fought against each other during the Lower Canadian and Upper Canadian rebellions of 1837-1838, there were also examples of French/English collaboration on the rebel side. Members from both cultural-linguistic groups had sought greater democratization of Canadian society.

Anglophones and Francophones also worked together to advance Canadian democracy through peaceful means, and to achieve greater rights and recognition for the French and English languages. In 1848-1851, the moderate reformers Robert Baldwin, an Anglophone Protestant; and Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine, a Francophone Catholic; formed a government as co-premiers of the recently united Province of Canada. Remarkably, they persuaded British authorities to grant responsible self-government for the colony. Baldwin and LaFontaine also adopted a measure to restore recognition of French and English as the languages of the legislature.

Francophones and Anglophones collaborated once more to achieve Confederation, in 1867. The leading figures of this partnership were John A. Macdonald and George-Étienne Cartier. The new federation included a French-majority province—Quebec. Its constitution recognized French and English as the languages of the federal legislature and courts; and as the languages of the provincial legislature and courts of Quebec; and, in 1870, of Manitoba as well. The constitution also recognized the rights of the Protestant minority in Quebec and of Catholic minorities in some other provinces to their own separate schools. In practice, this meant that the Anglophone minority in Quebec and Francophone minorities in other provinces could to some extent use education to ensure a continued transmission of their languages in their communities.

Relations between French- and English-speaking Canadians quickly deteriorated over the next half century after Confederation. There ensued a number of conflicts and controversies, and a fundamental disagreement over

whether Canada should be a bilingual and bicultural country from coast-to-coast, or an English country with a French minority confined to the province of Quebec. Most notably, these controversies included: the hanging of Louis Riel in 1885, the restriction of French-language education rights by several provinces (notably New Brunswick, Manitoba, and Ontario), and the Conscription Crisis of the First World War. By 1918, Anglophone/Francophone relations had reached their lowest point, and some Quebec politicians had openly begun to consider secession from the federation (in the famous Francoeur Motion of 1918).

**“... most French- and English-speaking settlers in Ontario and Quebec remained loyal or neutral during the American War of Independence and the War of 1812. If not for this compromise between French and English, it is possible that Canada would not exist as we know it today.”**

Following the First World War, moderate Anglophone and Francophone politicians and civil society leaders and intellectuals worked together in an effort to repair relations and to give greater recognition to the equality of French and English in Canada. They formed what was known as the ‘bonne entente’ movement, and both men and women played an important role, including Eugénie Lorans, who served as President of the Bonne Entente League. The *bonne ententistes* helped to bring about bilingual celebrations to mark the 60th anniversary of Confederation, bilingual postage, and the restoration of French-language education in Ontario—all in 1927. The introduction of a federal Translation Bureau, bilingual currency, and an English/French national radio service (CBC/Radio-Canada) followed in the 1930s. On the international stage, English- and French-speaking statesmen like Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King and Minister of Justice Ernest Lapointe worked together to bring about Canada’s independence from Britain. While instances of conflict and tension persisted, relations and recognition of French and English were far better in 1939 than they had been in 1919.



**DIGBY, NOVA SCOTIA, JUNE 4, 2014: Mural tells story of the Acadian people of Nova Scotia.**

Tensions mounted once more during and after the Second World War. Another (although far less serious) conscription crisis occurred, and after the war, French-Canadian intellectuals grew increasingly critical of the socio-economic disparity separating English- and French-speaking Canadians, and of the continuing predominance of the English language in the public sphere, including in Quebec where Francophones constituted the majority.

The situation came to a head during the 1960s 'Quiet Revolution' in Quebec. The country saw the rise of a secular Francophone nationalist movement that considered separation from Canada as a serious alternative to the status quo. In 1962, controversy and protest flared over the lack of Francophone representation within the federal public service. Not only was it often difficult for Francophones to be served by the national government in their own language, but they also had unequal access to jobs in Canada's national administration.

To respond to the mounting national unity crisis, and to identify potential solutions, Prime Minister Lester B.

Pearson created a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963-1969). Pearson also took other measures that were aimed at fostering a national Canadian identity that was more inclusive of French-speaking Canadians and Ethno-Cultural communities, notably with the adoption of a new Canadian flag, in 1965.

The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism was headed by a Francophone, André Laurendeau, and an Anglophone, Davidson Dunton. Its multi-volume report issued a series of sweeping recommendations, including:

- Official bilingualism at the federal level, not only in parliament and the federal courts, but also in government administration;
- Official bilingualism for Ontario and New Brunswick (in addition to Quebec, which was, at the time, already a bilingual province), and improvements to French-language service in other provinces;
- The creation of bilingual districts throughout the country where appropriate;
- Official bilingualism in the national capital region, across all levels of government;





- Constitutional recognition of the right of official language minorities throughout the country to send their children to publicly funded schools in their official language, where numbers warrant;
- An Official Languages Act and a Commissioner of Official Languages for the federal government and for each bilingual province.

In response to the recommendations of the Royal Commission, the federal government, under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau, adopted the Official Languages Act (OLA) that came into effect on 7 September 1969. Its purpose was to strengthen national unity through greater equality of access to and participation in Canada's national institutions, for all Canadians, regardless of what official language they spoke. The OLA affirmed the equality of French and English in the federal parliament and courts (strengthening Section 133 of the BNA), recognized French and English as the Official Languages of Canada, mandated that federal institutions serve and communicate with the public in both languages (specifically, central offices, offices in designated bilingual districts, and institutions serving the travelling public), and in time affirmed the right of federal public

servants to work in the official language of their choice. Collectively, these measures attempted to put an end to a century of debate and ambiguity over whether Canada was an English-speaking country with a territorially confined bilingual Quebec, or a bilingual country with room enough for the two official languages to thrive, from coast, to coast.

**“[The job of] Commissioner of Official Languages is... trying each day to reconcile two imperatives: proving to French-speakers that the reform is serious, and to English-speakers that it is humane, and rich in opportunities for their children.**



The 1969 OLA also established the position of Commissioner of Official Languages, an independent agent of parliament whose job would be “to take all actions and measures within his [or her] authority with a view to ensuring recognition of the status of each of the official languages and compliance with the spirit and intent of this Act.” (Section 25, OLA, 1969) This responsibility, explained Keith Spicer, the first Commissioner of Official Languages (1970-1977) in his inaugural annual report, “enables the Commissioner not simply to defend the institutional bilingualism prescribed by law, but actively, if indirectly, to help promote it.” Spicer, an Anglophone in his mid-thirties who had worked as a professor, media commentator, and researcher for the B&B (Bilingualism and Biculturalism) Commission, believed that the promotion of linguistic duality had to be fun, frank, and accessible. Above all, it had to be couched in terms that would resonate with both Francophones and Anglophones. Reflecting at the end of his mandate, Spicer explained: “Seven years ago, I wondered what role I should strive for... The answer lies in trying each day to reconcile two imperatives: proving to French-speakers

that the reform is serious, and to English-speakers that it is humane, and rich in opportunities for their children.” (OCOL Annual Report, 1976)

Other measures promoting the equality of French and English, and key moments influencing Anglophone/Francophone relations, would follow over the next fifty years, notably the constitutional recognition of French and English as Canada’s two official languages, and the entrenchment of French- and English-language rights in the Charter, in 1982, and the adoption of a revised OLA in 1988.

—  
**Robert J. Talbot is Manager of Research at the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada.**

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# EDUCATORS KEY TO KEEPING BILINGUALISM ALIVE

## **A Conversation with the Official Languages Commissioner**

**By Meagan Gillmore**

When educators show students the importance of both English and French, they're exposing them to principles that are foundational to Canadian society, says Raymond Th  berge, the current Commissioner of Official Languages.

"Learning or teaching a second language is providing another window on the world," he says. "Teaching a second language, or French as a first language for that matter, is supporting this fundamental value of Canadian society. Canada is two large communities in one. When you provide second language education, you provide a bridge between both communities."

Connecting these two distinct parts of the country isn't always easy, however. As the Commissioner of Official Languages, Th  berge is responsible for ensuring equality of English and French in the government of Canada, Parliament, federal institutions and institutions subject to the Official Languages Act; supporting the preservation and development of official language minority communities across the country; and promoting the equality of English and French in Canadian society.

His office also reviews complaints about alleged violations of the Official Languages Act, and, when necessary conducts investigations. Complaints include French audio not being available for customs and border primary inspection kiosks at airports; not having French videos available in national museums; and even the Prime Minister responding





Raymond Th  berge, the current Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019.

in English to French questions or responding in French to English questions at public meetings. The commissioner's office conducts audits into bilingualism in federal services. Along with saying how to prevent these complaints from occurring again, the office prepares reports and recommendations to the government about how to promote and protect minority language communities across Canada.

This includes studying issues pertinent to promoting Canada's official languages—including education.

Statistics show Canadians support children learning both official languages. In 2016, the Office of the Commission of Official Languages commissioned a study which found that 8 in 10 Canadians support both languages being taught to some extent in all elementary schools in the country and that more needs to be done to make young people bilingual—including increasing the number of spaces available in school French immersion programs.

Education is not in the federal government's jurisdiction, and thus not explicitly covered by the Official Languages Act. Proper education however, is crucial for helping Canadians understand the importance of both official languages.

"I think teachers are always fundamental to building the

country. Teachers are very powerful in the way they can message things, and how they provide ideas," says Th  berge.

It's a critical time for people to be reminded of how important the two languages are. Th  berge became the commissioner on January 29, 2018, the eighth person in the role. In a statement released one year after his tenure began—he stated that he was "dismayed" by decisions made by provincial governments across Canada that weaken the status of minority language communities.

There is a "questioning about official languages in terms of it being a fundamental value of Canadian society," says Th  berge, something he wasn't expecting five decades after the Official Languages Act passed in 1969.

"I think it's a moment in time, a passing moment," he says, noting the solidarity he sees for minority language communities. "I think we have to address it, but I think we have an opportunity to educate society, and an opportunity to move forward."

One way to help Canadians better appreciate both official languages is to increase the number of Canadians who speak English and French. In February 2019, the commissioner's office released "Accessing Opportunity: A study on challenges in French-as-a-second-language education teacher supply and demand in Canada." The study, which was conducted by Canadian Parents for French, a national volunteer organization that helps create opportunities for people to learn and use French, details

**“... teachers are always fundamental to building the country. Teachers are very powerful in the way they can message things, and how they provide ideas.**

the struggles to recruit and retain French as a Second Language (FSL) teachers in different regions across Canada.

According to the report, 430,000 students were enrolled in French immersion programs across Canada in 2015-2016. Yet, statistics suggest the number of English-speakers who are fluent in French will remain the same for the foreseeable future. If French immersion programs continue to grow in popularity while the rate of bilingualism remains static, there will likely be a shortage of qualified FSL teachers.

"Parents want to provide all of the opportunities to their children, and they see French immersion programs and FSL



programs as the right opportunity down the road for their children, be it from a cultural perspective, be it from an employment perspective,” Th  berge says, explaining the increase of enrolment in French-language programs. “(They) just see it being a positive element for their children.”

“We need to get government engaged to basically fund those places so we can create more capacity in the system. Otherwise, we’re denying quality second-language education to a lot of children.”

The report makes several recommendations. They include establishing a national roundtable with provincial and territorial partners and FSL stakeholder organizations to develop and lead long-term solutions.

“There’s no capacity in the system right now,” says Th  berge. “We have to [create solutions] on a long-term basis.”

This teacher shortage isn’t new, says Nicole Thibault, national executive director of Canadian Parents for French. The organization issued its first report on the subject in 2002. A perennial challenge has been “getting the right [teachers] in the right place to teach the program,” Thibault says. Research supports this. Teacher candidates surveyed for the “Assessing Opportunity” report listed proximity to friends and family, where they currently live, and where they want to live as some of the most important factors in deciding what jobs to take. There’s “no easy answer” to this problem, she says, noting money is not enough to solve it.

Survey results indicate a preference for teaching in urban locations. If the French teacher is the only French-speaker in the community, they may feel isolated and leave, shares Thibault. On the other hand, some rural areas have a larger population of French speakers. “It’s more of an appreciated skillset,” Thibault says of how Francophone communities view learning and speaking French. This also makes it possible to recruit former French teachers to fill needed positions, so that they’re not “starting from scratch” when it comes to filling the need for French teachers or French immersion programs, explains Thibault.

Immigration plays a key role in French immersion programs, she says, noting that Canada’s international reputation as a bilingual country makes it attractive to prospective immigrants.

“We’ve done a good job internationally of selling the idea that Canada is a bilingual country,” says Thibault. “We’ve got a lot of new immigrants coming in. When they arrive, they’re ready and prepared to learn another official language as well. For many of them, they already have another language, so it’s not an issue for them to pick up another one.”

Immigration, however, also contributes to the shortage of FSL teachers. Previously, provinces lacking teachers for French immersion programs could recruit teachers from Quebec to fill those positions. Right now, many teachers in

**“Linguistic duality lies at the heart of the Canadian value of diversity, [it is] the foundation, and there’s a number of foundation pieces. We go from language duality, and then we go to other rights in the Charter, and then we talk about reconciliation. These are all part of the country which continues to evolve, and that’s the great thing about Canada. As a country we continue to evolve, but we can’t forget, and we should never forget what our fundamental values are and what we built this country on. There’s no contradiction. This country has evolved in respecting its core values.**

Quebec are teaching French to immigrants which means they can’t relocate to other provinces, she explains. This has led some provinces to recruit teachers internationally, explains Thibault, noting British Columbia has recruited teachers from Belgium.

The challenge of having two languages co-exist as equals has existed since before Confederation. In summarizing the findings, February’s report concludes: “The challenges in FSL education are as perennial as the challenges inherent in federalism itself, and more needs to be done, including at the national level. The persistence of these challenges makes it all the more important that we continue to draw attention to them and work toward finding innovative solutions that will help to improve access to the opportunities inherent in linguistic duality for all Canadians.”

“When we passed the Official Languages Act, it was a recognition that a very important part of the Canadian fabric

was these two languages, these two linguistic communities,” says Théberge. “Over the years, it’s become engrained in Canada’s DNA in terms of that is part of who we are. Overseas, we are seen as being a bilingual country. It’s part of the trademark of Canada. It’s who we are. Immigrants understand that. It’s very fundamental to who we are.”

While bilingualism has remained central to Canada’s identity, the country has changed dramatically since the Official Languages Act passed. The population has grown, and so has the number of languages spoken in Canada. Digital technology has revolutionized the way people communicate and interact. Modernizing the Act needs to be a priority, explains Théberge, noting political parties across the spectrum agree the Act needs to be updated.

**“... Digital technology has revolutionized the way people communicate and interact. Modernizing the Act needs to be a priority, explains Théberge, noting political parties across the spectrum agree the Act needs to be updated.”**

It’s up to the government to decide if additional languages should gain official language status, explains Théberge. His focus is ensuring a modernized law that is relevant, dynamic and strong. This means it needs to take into account the current landscape of Canadian society, new communications technology, and be something that can be enforced. Many groups are looking at the Act and considering how to make it an effective tool today, and in the future, Théberge shares.

Théberge says that, in his view, having two official languages does not contradict Canada’s value of multiculturalism. Instead, he says the Official Languages Act, is what allows current multiculturalism and reconciliation efforts between Indigenous Peoples and Canada to exist. Théberge shares that, in his view, having two official languages creates an environment for multiculturalism.

“Linguistic duality lies at the heart of the Canadian value of diversity,” he says. “I look at it as the foundation, and

there’s a number of foundation pieces. We go from language duality, and then we go to other rights in the Charter, and then we talk about reconciliation. These are all part of the country which continues to evolve, and that’s the great thing about Canada. As a country we continue to evolve, but we can’t forget, and we should never forget what our fundamental values are and what we built this country on. There’s no contradiction. This country has evolved in respecting its core values.”

Ultimately, promoting linguistic duality requires a lot of cooperation.

Participants in the “Accessing Opportunity” study identified the need for greater collaboration both between provinces and territories and between ministries of education, faculties of education and school boards. Thibault says cooperation between provinces and territories is especially important, noting the Atlantic provinces often work together, as does British Columbia, Alberta, Northwest Territories, and the Yukon.

School administration and staff also need to support FSL teachers, she says. Teacher candidates surveyed for the study reported the most important factor for them deciding to teach French was having a supportive school administration.

Provincial governments need to commit resources to create positive work environments for teachers, says Thibault. “Changing attitudes” towards teaching remains the greatest barrier to increasing the number of FSL teachers. “We have to work on making teaching a positive and viable career in general, and then we’ll have more people who want to teach French,” she says.

That will benefit everyone, explains Théberge.

—  
Meagan Gillmore is a freelance journalist in Toronto, ON.

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# BONJOUR, MY FRIEND

## Understanding Minority Language Rights

By Martha Beach

Head to the grocery store and you'll see shelves of products with French and English labelling. Fill out a passport application in either language. Type in a federal government URL, and you'll be asked if you wish to proceed in French or English. It's second nature to expect that Canada is—at certain levels—bilingual, but it wasn't always that way. If you were a member of a minority living in British Columbia in the early 1960s, filling out tax forms or finding schools that taught in your native tongue was unheard of.

The purpose of the Official Language Act, enacted in September 1969, was to ensure federal services were offered in both French and English. (For that reason, government also sought to increase the number of Francophones working at the federal level.) This led to the establishment of parallel programs, such as French-only education in Anglo communities, French immersion for English majority groups, and funding for minority representatives who, in turn, were able to advocate for better policy and more funding.

"The Act is fundamentally important, especially for linguistic minorities, whether

Above:  
Grocery items with bilingual labels.  
Image source: culturalquirks.com

they be the English speakers of Quebec or French speakers elsewhere, in terms of access to government services,” says Matthew Hayday, professor of Canadian history at the University of Guelph in Ontario. Now, we can all sign up for a new passport or (reluctantly) talk to a Canada Revenue Agency representative in either language.

The Act has made a lasting impression in terms of services and education, though we still have a lot to figure out. “We have evolved in our perspective and sensibilities,” says Serge Dupuis, historical consultant for RRCDupuis.com and associated member of CEFAN at l’Université Laval in Quebec. Fifty years ago, there was a lot of tension between French and English groups. “I think there are lot of conversations that we couldn’t have had 50 years ago that we now can have in a more calm and respectful manner,” Dupuis says.

There have been measurable changes in the past half-century. In the 1960s, roughly 30 percent of Quebec Anglophones were bilingual; while outside of Quebec, five percent of Anglophones were bilingual. According to Dupuis, those numbers are now 70 percent and seven percent respectively. Statistics Canada reports an average of nearly 18 percent bilingualism across Canada, but this is mainly attributed to Quebec. (It is worth noting the rate of bilingualism in the ‘bilingual belt’—parts of New Brunswick, parts of Quebec, and parts of eastern and northeastern Ontario where contact between the communities is the highest—hasn’t changed, explains Dupuis. Those regions were the most bilingual in the 1960s and still are today.) Half a century ago, large parts of the country offered little or no French language access or instruction, and that affected the ability to gain higher education. For example, only three percent of Franco-Ontarians reached university in the 1960s, points out Dupuis. “And now you have some of the most vibrant chapters, some of the strongest interest and friendly terrain for French language and education,” says Hayday.

When the Act came into effect (and with it, funding for education), Quebec was ahead of the curve. “Quebec has long provided far better English education than any of the other provinces have provided French,” Hayday says. “It was up to English Canada to bring things up to the Quebec standard.” In some ways, that still stands. There are currently three English-language universities in Quebec. “It is far easier for the average English speaker in Quebec to do their entire schooling in English, from kindergarten to university, than it is for a Francophone elsewhere.”

In general, English minority groups living in Quebec have fared well. They can enroll their children in every level of English-only schooling. They can catch the newest film on a Saturday night in English and watch English-

language news broadcasts. They can join sports teams that are English-oriented. Of course, they can also do boring stuff like taxes and fill out passport applications in English. They can even converse with many store clerks or Metro staff *en anglais*. The greatest jump in bilingualism has been amongst Franco-Quebecers: 45 percent speak English now, compared to 20 percent, 50 years ago. These positive aspects are also present for Anglophones and Francophones in New Brunswick, the only officially bilingual province.

The same cannot be said, however, for minority Francophone groups *en dehors de la Belle Province*. Yes, of course, they can apply for passports or marriage licences or do their taxes in French. However, even in large urban areas, you can’t find a French-only soccer team. It’s not every Saturday night you can catch *un film français* at the local theatre, and transit staff are more likely to speak Punjabi or Mandarin than French. There is a lack of access to French-only education in some areas, especially at higher levels. “Outside of the province [of Quebec], you’re basically

“Half a century ago, large parts of the country offered little or no French language access or instruction, and that affected the ability to gain higher education.

looking at bilingual universities, not stand-alone French ones, or French colleges that are affiliated with an English-language university,” says Hayday.

“Not offering them [schooling] in their [native] language is also not providing them with the means for social ascension,” says Dupuis, who, as a Franco-Ontarian, can speak to this personally. His grandfather didn’t obtain his high school diploma because his parents couldn’t afford to continue sending him to a private French school in the 1950s. He failed his courses when he reached Grade 13. His father was not able to become an architect as he wanted because he failed his English classes at the University of Waterloo. “Those are two generations! I did obtain a doctorate because I was able to study and work in French,” Dupuis says. “And that was the big difference.”

Canada is associated strongly with bilingualism, both within our borders and outside them. “There is a very strong cultural dimension in terms of reinforcing that

French has this particular status in Canada,” Hayday says. When newcomers aren’t able to easily enroll their kids in French or immersion, they are often dismayed. New Canadians are very open to bilingualism, agrees Nicole Thibault, executive director, national, at Canadian Parents for French (CPF). “They always tell us if their kid is going to

**“[Bilingualism] is a more complicated way to depict Canada,” Dupuis says, “but we might be coming to a point where we are recognizing that it’s a more appropriate one than the ideal we have set out.”**

learn one official language, let’s just have them learn both.”

A recent cross-Canada project called *Bonjour My Friend*, organized by a third-party program and funded by the federal government, found the majority of Canadians are very happy with the fact that Canada has two official languages. Specifically, Anglophone majorities recognize and celebrate Canada’s two official languages, though they may not speak French themselves. Many expressed interest in learning French one day, or regret forgetting the little they learned in high school. Of course, there are concerns about access, says Shaunpal Jandu, who was a consultant on the project. “But at the end of the day, knowing a second language is a skill you can learn. It’s not something you’re born into, it’s not a skin colour, it’s literally something you can learn how to do the same way you might learn a trade or go to university.”

Despite the gung-ho attitude, the duality of bilingualism may be limiting. Jandu noted many people questioned the value of French per se versus Mandarin, Punjabi, or one of the other top five international languages. Maybe, our society is one that has many language groups, including Indigenous, French, English, and immigrants, and that creates a common political. “It’s a more complicated way to depict Canada,” Dupuis says, “but we might be coming to a point where we are recognizing that it’s a more appropriate one than the ideal we have set out.”

That ideal stems from Pierre Trudeau’s vision based on Lester B. Pearson’s Official Languages Commission of the mid-1960s: if government provided French-language

service and education across the country, everybody could become bilingual. Dupuis feels that view is somewhat utopic. “I have many family members who did kind of succumb to this subtractive bilingualism and therefore were bad in English and lost their French, which is not helpful,” he says. Most medium and large cities in Canada provide some access to French language education and immersion programs. “In a way it’s very impressive,” Dupuis says. There’s been a lot of progress on the French services and education fronts and it has helped a lot of communities. “The downside to that is there are proportionally more Francophones who will lose their language during their life than there were in 1971.” Dupuis attributes some of this to inter-language unions. “Most francophone minorities marry anglophones now,” he says. When French is a language of that household, cultural preservation tends to be between 70 and 80 percent. If the family only speaks English, that rate falls to 10 to 15 percent. “We say that Canada has two official languages and they are equal in status, which, officially, in principal is true,” says Dupuis, “but in practice a lot of things that compromise that power dynamic continue to exist.”

Outside of the family setting, and among majority English-speaking communities, support for immersion education specifically has been fairly strong. CPF found 84 percent of Canadians believe youth should have access to learn their second language if they want it. Canada saw a 52 percent increase in French immersion enrollment between 2003 and 2013. “Parents and groups want their kids to be fully participating in what we consider a bilingual country,” says Thibault. As it stands, there are 490,000 kids enrolled yearly in French immersion. “We could fill another 100,000 with the demand of parents.”

While a number of strides have been made, the scale still sits more heavily in favour of the Anglo minority in Quebec and the Anglo majority elsewhere. “Despite the fact that this act being in place for 50 years, community leadership has to continue to fight tooth and nail for the gains that they’ve made,” Hayday says of Francophone minorities. “Vast improvements form the past, but it’s this ongoing struggle.” Nevertheless, the Act has done a lot of good for bilingualism in the public service and in other areas such as education. “A little bit of humility is not a bad idea,” Dupuis says. Celebrate what can be celebrated, and recognize that aspects with which we are not comfortable need attention. The truth of the matter is, we are only now seeing the product of these changes that started 50 years ago.

—  
**Martha Beach is a graduate of Ryerson University’s journalism program. Currently, she is a freelance writer and fact-checker in Toronto.**





# TEACHING

## BOTH OFFICIAL LANGUAGES IN QUEBEC

By Julie Hamel

In the province of Quebec, the experience of learning a new language is shared by many as they acquire either French or English as a second language. As a Francophone, I can attest to the challenges common to all second language learners.

The difficulty of reproducing sound and deciphering oral or written content in a native tongue is difficult enough, let alone in a second language. For Anglophones, they have a tough time getting their mouths around the *R's* and the *U's*, *EU's* or *OU's* in French. For Francophones, they have just as difficult a time in English, insisting on pronouncing the silent L parked before the D in *would* and *could*. And there's also the *TH's* that are not only pronounced two ways, but leave a feeling of having a hair stuck to one's tongue. In French the *S's* are always silent, in English they are not. In English some *GH's* sound like an *F* (as in *laugh*) and in French the sound *Ê* is written many different ways (*ais*, *aient*, *è*, *ê*, *es*).

As you can imagine, the experience of learning a new language can begin to feel like learning a form of gibberish from Mars. It is not surprising then, to find so many cases of dyslexia in both the French and English languages, what with all the exceptions, or all those sounds that don't quite match their visual components. Consequently, a linguistic anxiety amongst learners develops.

## NO MAGIC RECIPE

There are as many methods to teach a language, as there are schools of thought. Some swear that the teacher must never utter a single word of the native language while others rely on it excessively in order to save time or because their own knowledge is lacking. (I've come across French and English teachers who could barely speak the language they were teaching.)

There is no such thing as a magic recipe to learning, regardless of the subject. If a component is missing from the equation for learning, such as attention, study skills, rigor, curiosity, memory and so on, learning will not be systematic, especially if motivation is lacking.

Variety is the key to motivating students. For example, giving dictation is an effective method to train the ear to sound and spelling, but may become wearisome if it is the only method used, especially if the student doesn't understand a single word.

Explaining a grammatical concept in the student's native tongue is an effective way of securing comprehension if, of course, the native tongue is well learned. If a student has never understood the concept of verbs in his or her own language, he or she will have just as much trouble, if not more, doing so in the second language.

It is essential for a teacher to be on the lookout for a student's involvement; some pretend to understand to avoid humiliation, others have stopped listening all together, or rely on a classmate. There are as many obstacles to learning as there are methods of teaching or types of learners.

Listening is a key component to language learning, just as with music. Learning a second language is like learning music; if you never practice playing your instrument, you will never play. And not everyone is talented enough to become a musician! The acquisition of a second language is a gradual process and requires an infinite amount of patience and indulgence. One should be allowed to make mistakes without fear of the firing squad.

## A SECOND LANGUAGE IS NOT A CONSTRAINT, BUT AN ENRICHMENT

Teaching a second language in Quebec can be a challenging task because of the political attitude of language learners in Quebec: perceiving the "other" language as the enemy. However, speaking another language, be it French or English, does not threaten one's cultural identity. On the contrary, it adds to it. It is a self-extension and not self-extinction, but it is important for a teacher of a second language not to display imperialistic behavior. Motivation is not propelled by dictatorship. To be inspired, one requires respect.

Language is not just a cumulative amount of vocabulary; it's a world on its own. The English *drink like fish*, the French *like holes*. In English it *rains cats and dogs* (poor things), in French it *rains nails* (ouch). The "other" language is filled with pieces of history. For example, in 1706, under the Norman Conquest, the official language in Great Britain was actually French, hence words like quality and quantity that come from the French "qualité" and "quantité." In French, the word "redingote" (a fitted coat) comes from the English riding coat. Many French expressions are used daily in English, such as "à la carte" or "après-ski". Both languages have shared the same roof, on and off, for better or for worse, for a long time.

## LANGUAGE BELONGS TO A CIVILIZED WORLD

The province of Quebec represents the perfect opportunity to learn and master both official languages. We are surrounded by French and English. Why, then, must the learning of one or the other resemble a chore? A businessman I once knew had complained to me that road signs were of late, only in French when they had been in both languages for so long. My question to him had been why, in all these years, hadn't he learned to decipher the French from these signs? On the other hand, why is it, that in Quebec, a French waitress cannot take a simple order in English? Why is it that so many people do not speak that second language after so many years in Quebec, if only out of good will, and in spite of the teaching and the laws?

Language is the very expression of our humanity, essential to life like water or air. Language should not be used as a weapon. Without language there is no civilization, hence the importance of at least tasting the "other" language, to better savor one's own, one bite at a time.

—  
Julie Hamel has been teaching ESL and FSL for over 20 years at all three levels: elementary, secondary, and collegial. She is also a freelance translator and poet.

*Editor's Note:* This article was first published on teachmag.com, December 2010.

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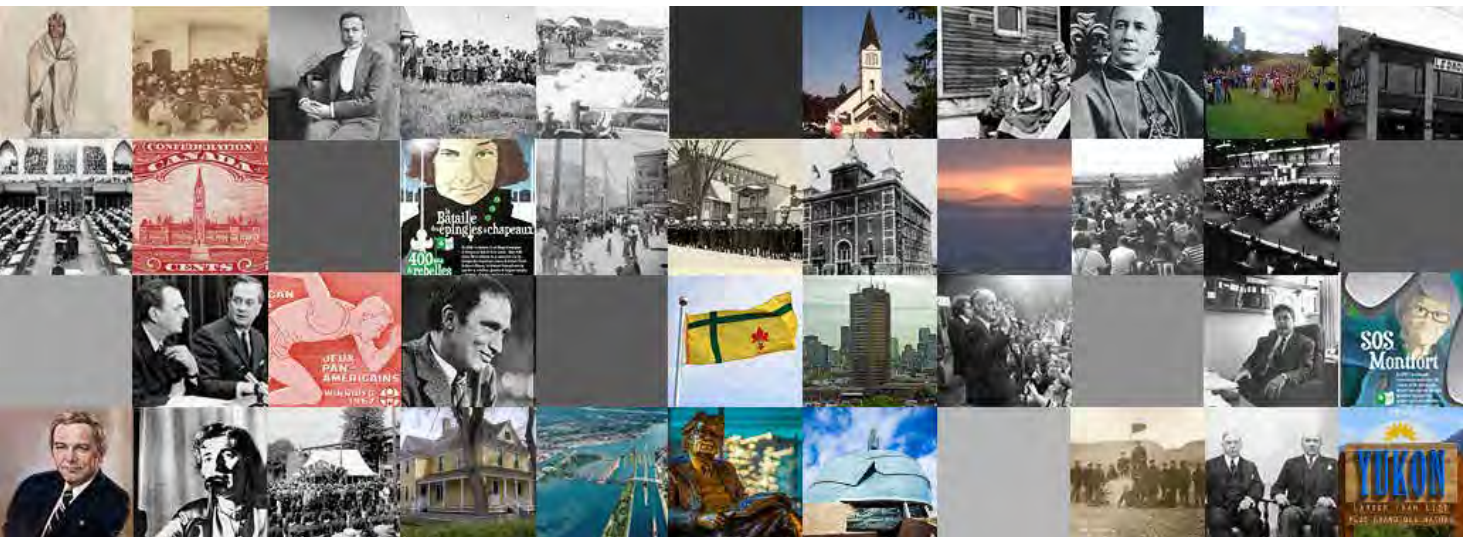
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# CURRICULA

## The 50th Anniversary of the Official Languages Act

This issue of TEACH focuses on the recent 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act (OLA) in Canada. Articles in this issue include a focus on the historical evolution of French-English relations up to the 1960s; understanding how the Official Languages Act can be viewed as a living document, hearing directly from the Official Languages Commissioner and his views, exploring the challenges of minority language communities; as well as understanding our language rights, among others.

Studying these historical events and the decisions that were made to try to both reflect and shape the identity of the Canada, while honoring the past, will help students gain an understanding of historical cause and consequence, and historical significance. They will see evidence that the actions of Canadians in specific communities brought about legal and societal change.

As students learn about Canada's languages and consider reasons for the Official Languages Act, they can make their own observations and arrive at their own conclusions about the value and importance of language equity to individual Canadians and our country.

Above image source: [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca)

### SUBJECTS

Canadian History since World War I (Grade 10)  
 Canada, History, Identity, and Culture (Grade 12)  
 Civics (and Citizenship) (Grade 10)  
 English Language Arts (Grade 6 and up)  
 Equity, Diversity, and Social Justice (Grade 11), and Equity and Social Justice (Grade 12)  
 Social Studies (Grade 6 and up)  
 Understanding Canadian Law (Grade 11)

### GRADE LEVEL

Grades 6 to 12

### DURATION

4 to 5 classes

## KEY CONCEPTS AND ISSUES

In this lesson plan, students will learn why there are two official languages in Canada and gain an overview of the social and legal history of the Official Languages Act by briefly reviewing key events and interactions between Indigenous peoples, French settlers, and English settlers, and, more recently, First Nation and Inuit, Anglophone, and Francophone communities in Canada. Students will learn about the importance of language to culture and identity; they will read one or more picture books that touch on residential schools.

Students will learn about the key events in Canada's history which led to the creation of the Official Languages Act in 1969, including the role of the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism. They will create a Venn diagram to show their assessment of whether it is important to keep official minority-language communities in Canada vital.

In a final task, students will reflect on whether bilingualism still makes sense in Canada today, and complete a ballot to show their conclusions.

Students will explore many elements of the Citizenship Education Framework (Ontario curriculum), such as inclusiveness, equity, respect, rights and responsibilities, justice, fairness, and citizenship.

## MATERIALS REQUIRED

- Computers with Internet access
- Variety of picture books which features residential schools and the loss of language (see list in resources below)
- Timeline: [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline)
- Ballot prepared ahead of time for each student (for step five)
- Writing paper and utensils
- Blank paper, colored markers

## BIG IDEAS

There are differences among individuals and groups, and it is important to value and respect these differences. Throughout Canadian history, people of different languages have faced challenges and struggled to

improve their lives. Our rights and responsibilities as Canadian citizens have changed over time. It is important to understand policies and laws that support human rights, including our language rights. It is important to be personally engaged and socially active as the federal government often reviews, asks for citizen input on, and revises existing statutes, such as the Official Language Act.

## FRAMING QUESTIONS

*Why is there more than one official language in Canada? Why are the official languages English and French? Who are the founding nations of Canada? Why might having two official languages be important to citizens? How have various ethnic communities contributed to Canadian identity? How can a country that embraces an ethos of multiculturalism have only two official languages? Is bilingualism still important today in Canada?*

## TERMINOLOGY

**Aboriginal:** Refers to all Indigenous peoples in Canada, including First Nations, Métis, and Inuit.

**Anglophone:** An English-speaking person.

**Bilingualism:** Fluency in, or use of, two languages.

**Diversity:** The presence of a wide range of human qualities and attributes within a group, organization, or society. The dimensions of diversity include, but are not limited to, ancestry, culture, ethnicity, gender identity, language, physical and intellectual ability, race, religion, sex, sexual orientation, and socio-economic status.

**Multiculturalism:** The presence of, or support for the presence of, several distinct cultural or ethnic groups within a society.

**Francophone:** A French-speaking person.

**Official language:** A language which is given special legal status in a jurisdiction, state or province, or country; usually refers to the language used in the government.

**Residential schools:** Federally funded, church-run educational institutions for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, these schools were particularly numerous in the

first half of the twentieth century, some residential schools still existed as late as the 1990s. As part of a government policy promoting assimilation, aboriginal children were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools. Students were deprived of their families, languages, and culture, and some were subjected to physical or sexual abuse.

existed as late as the 1990s. As part of a government policy promoting assimilation, aboriginal children were taken from their families and placed in boarding schools. Students were deprived of their families, languages, and culture, and some were subjected to physical or sexual abuse.

## OVERVIEW

The goal is for students to learn how and why language is important to a nation and its people and that the social and legal attitudes to language in Canada have changed over the past 50 years.

They will begin with a general discussion of language and how and why it is important to individuals, groups, and communities—and beyond. As a way of understanding the power of language to provide historical, cultural, and legal context to societies, they will read a picture book story which includes information about the government’s use of residential schools over a period of 150 years to try to assimilate Aboriginal children, including forbidding them to practice speaking their language or practice their culture. About 150,000 children attended these schools. The following information appears in a definition in the Ontario social studies curriculum:

Federally funded, church-run educational institutions for First Nations, Inuit, and Métis children, these schools were particularly numerous in the first half of the twentieth century, some residential schools still

They will discuss key events in Canada’s history which led to the creation of the Official Languages Act in 1969, and discuss why language is included in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which is part of the 1982 Constitution Act. They will reflect on the importance of official-minority language populations in Canadian communities and the role of bilingualism in an increasingly multicultural and multilingual society. They will debate the relative merits of bilingualism in a nation that celebrates multiculturalism. In a final task, students will reflect on whether bilingualism is still relevant in Canada today, and complete a ballot to show their conclusions.

Teachers can use the content provided below as a guideline, choosing the content and activities as they determine if it's appropriate for the grade level of their students.

## EXPECTATIONS/OUTCOMES

The overall expectations listed below serve as an entry point for teachers. Teachers are encouraged to make connections to specific expectations in their region and grade.

Students will:

- Identify and describe bilingualism as a key component of the Canadian identity and describe some of the ways in which communities that were in Canada around the early 1800s have had an impact on Canadian identity
- Describe some key political developments and/or government policies; and some key social, economic, and political trends, events, and developments in Canada between 1945 and 1982, and explain how they affected the lives of people in Canada
- Describe some key factors that affected the relationship between French and English Canada between 1945 and 1982
- Analyze how various Francophone communities in Canada, including those outside of Quebec, have acted to preserve their political and cultural identity



One of many residential school classrooms.  
Image Source: Anglican Church Archives, Old Sun



## THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 1969-2019

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- Explain the significance for human rights in Canada of historical and contemporary laws and judicial and other inquiries/commissions
- Gain insight into Canadian history and events
- Identify some of the rights and freedoms protected by the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms and the Ontario Human Rights Code and their corresponding responsibilities or obligation; and learn that our language rights as Canadian citizens have changed over time
- Communicate their ideas, arguments and conclusions using various formats and styles as appropriate.

### BACKGROUND

Canada is primarily an English-speaking country. Although, in 2018, 5% of people living in Toronto could not speak English or French, today, according to the latest Statistics Canada census, about 75% of Canadians speak English at home. However, prior to the 1950s, Canada was even more predominantly English-speaking; and because English was the dominant language of business, government, and culture, this had an effect on certain structures in the country. For example, it was mostly English-speakers who held key positions of influence, power, and wealth.

That changed over the decades. In the 1960s, Quebecers began demanding that Quebec and French be given equal status. The Official Languages Act emerged out of this time of tension between Anglophones and Francophones. It was passed by the federal government in 1969 to ensure French and English were official languages in Canada.

The Act was created to protect, promote, and ensure respect for both English and French, to ensure their equal status and use, and to ensure they would receive equal status, rights, and privilege in parliament, in federal institutions, and in all those institutions governed under the act. (This includes Crown corporations, such as VIA Rail and Canada Post, and federal departments. It also applies to certain organizations that once were public but are now private and yet still have language obligations. These include Air Canada, CN Rail, and NAV CANADA.)

It is also to promote the vitality and development of minority language communities in Canada (this includes Anglophone minorities within Quebec, and Francophone minorities outside Quebec), and to promote French and English within Canadian society.

The Canadian Charter of Rights, adopted in 1982, contains fundamental rights, including providing certain language rights to Canadian citizens and to New Brunswickers; New Brunswick is the only officially bilingual province in Canada. Its government is legally required to provide services in English and French. (Many provinces do provide services in other languages, but they don't have to.)

In recent years, most Canadians speak English; most French-speakers live in Quebec; and because of immigration, the numbers of Canadians without English or French as their first language has increased dramatically.

Raymond Th  berge, Commissioner of Official Languages, recently commented, "The ultimate goal is equality, but we have a long way to go before both languages are equal."

In 1988 and 2005, the OLA was updated; in 2019, the federal government announced it would begin a process to modernize the Act. Why? The population has grown from 20 million in 1969 to 36 million in 2019. There has been a dramatic increase in immigration, in new technological changes, and awareness of the importance of reconciliation with Aboriginal peoples.

Newcomers to Canada studying to become citizens now learn that there are three founding peoples of Canada: the Aboriginal People, the French, and the British. Aboriginal peoples lived and flourished on the land that now is called Canada long before any Europeans arrived.

People who speak English as a first language are called Anglophones. People who speak French as a first language are called Francophones. Most Francophones live in Quebec. One million Francophones live in Ontario, New Brunswick, and Manitoba.

According to the most recent census, about 75 percent of Canadians speak English at home. About 30 percent of Canadians are able to have a conversation in French.

In 2016, according to Statistics Canada, the country's bilingualism rate was at an all-time high of 17.9 percent. This was mainly because of an increase in the number of people who can speak French.

Statistic Canada noted: "English and French—the country's two official languages—continue to play an important role in the lives of Canadians: they are the languages of convergence and integration into Canadian society."

## STEP ONE TEACHER-DIRECTED DISCUSSION

**Ask students:** *Is the language you speak important? Why?*

Discuss. Then explain that you want to think back to a time before Canada existed as a country. Introduce a conversation about the founding nations of Canada. First, discuss the phrase “founding nation” and what it means.

**Ask:** *For whom might the concept of ‘founding nations’ be troubling? Why? In your opinion, what were the founding nations of Canada? (How many were there?) What languages did all these nations speak? (English, French, and perhaps 57 to 60 languages of Indigenous peoples)*

(Mention to students that in 2011, over 60 Aboriginal languages were reported spoken in Canada. If you wish, share this map: [www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/mapping-indigenous-languages-canada](http://www.canadiangeographic.ca/article/mapping-indigenous-languages-canada))

Explain to students that most Indigenous cultures were oral cultures, and language was the foundation of the culture, and explain why and what that means. (For example, languages hold the history of the society, the stories, songs, dances, and the laws. It can create a sense of identity.) A loss of a language, especially a language of a largely oral culture, can mean a loss of all this.

Ask students to share their ideas about their own language as part of their identity, including how words might connect them to their families and societies.

With higher grade levels: Interested students may want to listen to a CBC podcast about the “founding peoples” of Canada: [www.cbc.ca/radio/thesundayedition/june-25-2017-the-sunday-edition-with-michael-enright-1.4171552/canada-had-three-founding-peoples-not-two-1.4171577](http://www.cbc.ca/radio/thesundayedition/june-25-2017-the-sunday-edition-with-michael-enright-1.4171552/canada-had-three-founding-peoples-not-two-1.4171577).

## STEP TWO

Introduce students to the topic of residential schools by asking them to talk with a partner about how they’d feel if:

- They were forced to leave home and live at school, whether they wanted to go or not
- They had to go even though their parents didn’t want them to
- They had their name taken away at school and it was replaced by a number

- They couldn’t speak the language they knew best, the one they spoke at home with their family and friends

Read aloud to the class a picture book which highlights the residential setting experience.

Define and discuss the word “assimilation.” Discuss, and explain further, the purpose of residential schools, in particular, why children were not permitted to keep their real names or speak in their mother languages.

**Ask:** *What is the power of language? How is language important to you personally? To your family? To our country?*

With lower grades, if possible, read and discuss “When I Was Eight” and discuss the possible results of having one’s name changed and one’s language taken away. Have them predict what might happen to the girl in the story when she returns home from residential school. Then read the sequel “Not My Girl” by Christy Jordan-Fenton. Have students write or draw a personal response to the readings after a class discussion.

With older grades, read and discuss with students the two picture books mentioned above, or encourage students to read the middle-grade novels from which the two picture books were adapted, “Fatty Legs,” and “A Stranger at Home: A True Story.”

After a class discussion, have students write or draw a personal response to the stories they read, especially the effect of losing one’s language.

## STEP THREE

**Ask:** *What is an “official language”? Why might a country have an official language? What do you know about the Official Languages Act, such as why it exists and what it says?*

Record the students’ comments. Then explain that you will trace very loosely the key events in Canada’s history which led to the creation of the Official Languages Act in 1969. Display this timeline: [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline). Remind the students of the struggle between different nations to claim ownership of the land that would one day be Canada. The British ultimately gained control but, eventually, permitted the French to maintain much of their culture and legal code, including their language to ensure peace and mutual respect.

## THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 1969-2019

Even before Canada became a country in 1867, there were negotiations about what language would be used in parliament. One suggestion was optional bilingualism, but the Franco-Canadian members opposed this.

In 1867, the British North American Act was passed. It included a resolution that granted “equal access for Anglophones and Francophones to the law in their language” and guaranteed “equal participation in the debates and proceedings of Parliament.” In other words, it established French and English as Canada’s official languages to be used by members of Parliament, by the federal courts, and by Quebec’s national assembly and courts, including that French and English would be used in the documentation of their proceedings.

Review with students that prior to the 1950s, Canada was predominantly English-speaking; and English was the dominant language of business, government and culture, which meant it was mostly English-speakers who held key positions of influence, power, and wealth.

Over the decades, this created growing friction between Anglophones and Francophones in Canada. In the 1960s, Quebecers began demanding that Quebec and French be given equal status.

Have students focus on the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism and learn that it was created in 1963 to examine and help resolve these difficulties.

Begin by having them define the words “explicit” and “implicit,” and then have them watch this 40-second video: Canada History Week: Two Languages: <https://youtu.be/U2fcJHOCXpU>. Discuss how writing laws can make beliefs explicit.



Have them watch and discuss this short video clip (Nova Scotia’s Isolated French): [www.cbc.ca/player/play/1719622883](http://www.cbc.ca/player/play/1719622883).

Discuss how the findings of the Commission led to the creation of French education across Canada and the Official Languages Act in 1969. Explain that the OLA was created to protect, promote, and ensure respect for both English and French, to ensure their equal status and use, and to ensure they would receive equal status, rights, and privilege in parliament, in federal institutions, and in all those institutions governed under the act, as mentioned above.

It is also to promote the vitality and development of minority language communities in Canada (this includes anglophone minorities within Quebec, and francophone minorities outside Quebec), and to promote French and English within Canadian society.

With higher grades (gr 9 and up): Have students in small groups survey the timeline ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline)) decade by decade from the 1860s through the 1960s and choose 15 to 20 events that they think are key to telling the important story of the creation of the OLA. Have them make a timeline, plot these points on it, and write a sentence or two to summarize the event. Have them present their summaries to the class, and compare and contrast their choices.

Remind students that their rights as Canadian citizens include language rights; explain that the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which came into force in 1982 and is part of the 1982 Constitution Act, enshrines these rights. Specifically, it provides that:

- English and French are the official languages of Canada
- English and French have equal status in all institutions of Parliament and the government of Canada
- either English or French can be used in any federal court.

Draw students’ attention to the creation of OLA in 1969 and the creation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms in 1982, 13 years later. Ask why including these rights in the Charter was necessary if they were already included in the Official Languages Act.

Image source: <https://youtu.be/U2fcJHOCXpU>



Ask pairs of students to create a short skit (if possible using both French and English) showing how the OLA could be important to a Canadian citizen. Have volunteers share their skit.

## STEP FOUR

**Ask:** *What about the provinces? Are they bilingual too?*

After discussing with students, confirm that New Brunswick is the only province or territory with two official languages, French and English. Nunavut, a territory, has three official languages, English, French, and the Inuit language (Inuktitut and Inuinnaqtun). It is the only territory with a language protection act—the Inuit Language Protection Act. It was passed in 2008 to protect the Inuit language and increase the number of speakers.

Tell students that two million Canadians belong to official-language minority communities across the country. The Official Languages Act is supposed to ensure the vitality and development of official-language minority communities.

Have students watch the 51-min video, or excerpts from it (note: it is in French only), about 23-year-old Jim Chabot crossing Canada with a goal: to only speak French along the way and to raise awareness about Francophone communities outside Quebec. (You can find it here: <https://youtu.be/pJULJs0EmnA>) or have them read one or more articles about his journey ([www.thestar.com/edmonton/2018/08/22/quebec-man-hitchhikes-across-canada-speaking-only-french.html](http://www.thestar.com/edmonton/2018/08/22/quebec-man-hitchhikes-across-canada-speaking-only-french.html); [www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/blogue-blog/jimchab-eng](http://www.noslangues-ourlanguages.gc.ca/en/blogue-blog/jimchab-eng)).



Alternatively, have students watch the 11-min video, “The Canadian Francophone Experience,” created by Citizenship and Immigration Canada: <https://youtu.be/KZwbCMYTFU> (English subtitles can be turned on). It introduces Francophone immigrants and their families explaining why they chose to live in Francophone communities outside Quebec.

Then discuss the video or article as a class. **Ask:** *In your opinion, did Jim succeed in reaching his goal? What have you learned about Francophone culture outside Quebec? How does this affect your understanding of the importance of the Official Languages Act?*

Have students, in partners, complete a Venn diagram to illustrate the importance of keeping official minority-language communities in Canada vital.

## STEP FIVE

Tell students there has been a tremendous growth of non-European languages, including Mandarin, Cantonese, Arabic, Punjabi, and Filipino in Canada. Now more than half a million people in Canada speak each of these languages.

**Ask:** *What are the top five languages in Canada? Provide the answer or have students research to find out. (In 2018, the top five, in order were: English, French, Mandarin, Cantonese, and Punjabi.)*

Remind students that Canada is a multicultural country. On the recommendation of the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Canada announced a policy of multiculturalism in 1971. A report in 1987 concluded that the policy was no longer relevant. It had focused on preserving the culture and languages of immigrants to Canada from Europe. However, immigrants were now arriving from many other parts of the world, including Africa, the Middle East, Asia, and their concerns were also more widespread. The Canadian Multiculturalism Act of 1988 was created to address these changes.

Have students give examples of ways that various ethnic communities have contributed to Canadian identity throughout the decades. (Provide them with time to research, if possible; for example, you could have students in pairs or small groups each choose a different ethnic group to research.) Discuss their answers as a class.

## THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 1969-2019

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Tell students that on March 2019, the Honourable Mélanie Joly, Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie, said:

“English and French are Canada’s two official languages. They are at the heart of who we are as Canadians ...

In 1969, Canada adopted an Official Languages Act to solidify the dream of a country based on the peaceful coexistence of two major linguistic communities, English and French, living together and building a country respectful of its diversity....

On the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act, we are reaffirming the importance of linguistic duality. Along with Indigenous languages, they are a powerful symbol of diversity and inclusion in our society, regardless of our mother tongue. Across the country, people can testify to the rich history of official languages and be proud of their linguistic heritage.”

Tell students you want them to consider their own opinions about bilingualism in Canada. First, show students this infographic, “What Canadians Think about Bilingualism and the Official Languages Act” ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/what-canadians-think-about-bilingualism-and-ola.pdf](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/what-canadians-think-about-bilingualism-and-ola.pdf)).

Ask them to list what they should consider when analyzing the information (date of census, what questions were asked, who asked the questions, who was asked to respond (age groups, geographical regions, languages spoken, and so on), and why.

Have them consider questions such as:

- *Why did the survey try to include people in different political regions/different genders/different ages across Canada?*
- *Why might responses to objective and subjective questions vary depending on whether people are responding on the phone or online?*
- *Why was only the adult (over 18) population/only two genders included?*
- *The 2012 Environics survey results are listed at the end of the article. Why might these differ from this more recent survey?*

With higher grades: Students may read the survey research presentation [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/publications/other/2016/official-languages-and-bilingualism-survey-research](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/publications/other/2016/official-languages-and-bilingualism-survey-research) to learn more details of the survey, for example, the objectives and more details about the findings.

With higher grades: Pairs of students can watch this video (6.32 minutes) in which secondary students discuss their thoughts on linguistic duality: [www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/resources/charter-video](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/resources/charter-video).

Have them:

1. Make notes to summarize the responses elicited in this video
2. Jot down the questions that think might elicit similar reflections.
3. Write their own responses to their own questions.

Give all students 15 minutes to jot down some of their thoughts, either individually or in pairs.

Then, as a class, discuss these questions: *How can a country that embraces an ethos of multiculturalism have only two official languages? Does bilingualism still make sense in Canada today? If so, how do you think the Official Languages Act can maintain relevance going forward in a multicultural society comprised of many cultures and languages?*

Finally, hand out a ballot on which is written “Bilingualism in Canada” and have each student check off: Yes or no. Provide a space below for students to write at least three points supporting their opinion.

## OPTIONAL EXTENSION ACTIVITIES

- Ask students to research the effects of not being able to speak either official language in Canada. (Have them find at least three possible effects. For example, 35% of people who cannot speak English or French are living in poverty.) Ask them to propose a solution to any detrimental effects. Have them create a one-page poster sharing their work.
- Students can make posters for the school hallways or create a special announcement to be read out over the school announcements explaining and pointing out the significance of the 50th anniversary of the bilingualism in Canada to fellow students, both younger and older.
- Students can write and illustrate their own children’s picture book story about two characters who meet but cannot speak the same language. When they are done ask them to describe the difficulties their characters had and how they overcame them.
- Small groups of students can discuss whether they think Canada should remain a bilingual country, posing arguments for and against.

## **RESOURCES**

### **Historical Timelines**

- Government of Canada Timeline
- ([www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/canadians-official-languages-act/history-official-languages-act.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/canadians-official-languages-act/history-official-languages-act.html))
- Visual Timeline from Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/timeline))

### **History of Bilingualism in Canada**

- Roots of Bilingualism in Canada Video of Prof Marcel Martel (<https://youtu.be/nUbMS3TU9kM>)

### **Fun Bilingual Activities For Grades 6 to 9**

- From the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages – Origami Option 1 ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/origami\\_e.pdf](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/origami_e.pdf))
- From the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages Origami – Option 2 ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/origami\\_f.pdf](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/origami_f.pdf))

### **General Sources about the Official Languages Act**

- Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages website ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en))
- Official Languages Act, 1969 – Canadian Encyclopedia Entry ([www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/official-languages-act-1969](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/official-languages-act-1969))
- Official Languages Act, 1998 - Canadian Encyclopedia Entry ([www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/article/official-languages-act-1988](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/article/official-languages-act-1988))
- Government of Canada description of the Official Languages Act ([www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/canadians-official-languages-act/act-serves-canadians.html](http://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/campaigns/canadians-official-languages-act/act-serves-canadians.html))
- Video of High school French-English radio show in which student hosts interview the Commissioner of Official Languages ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/LaurenHill\\_academy\\_sub\\_eng.mp4](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/sites/default/files/LaurenHill_academy_sub_eng.mp4))
- Podcast by 2020 Network, “Explain Like I’m Five, Importance of Official Languages Act with Raymond Th  berge” ([www.soundcloud.com/canada2020/explain-like-im-five-23-the-official-languages-act-with-raymond-thaberge](http://www.soundcloud.com/canada2020/explain-like-im-five-23-the-official-languages-act-with-raymond-thaberge))

### **Bilingualism**

- Q&A about Jimmy Chabot who walked across Canada only speaking French ([www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/newsletter/2018/jimchab](http://www.clo-ocol.gc.ca/en/newsletter/2018/jimchab))
- Canadian Encyclopedia Entry on the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism ([www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/royal-commission-on-bilingualism-and-biculturalism](http://www.thecanadianencyclopedia.ca/en/article/royal-commission-on-bilingualism-and-biculturalism))
- Video about the Portrait of Official-Language Minorities in Canada by Statistics Canada Part 1 (<https://youtube.com/watch?v=YCwuJzwVLik>) Part 2 (<https://youtube.com/watch?v=mR0SsBQ8zbY>)
- Rates of bilingualism in Canada over the decades from Statistics Canada ([www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016001-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-630-x/11-630-x2016001-eng.htm))

### **Indigenous Languages in Canada**

- Information about Aboriginal languages in Canada from OISE ([www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/Teacher\\_Resources/Curriculum\\_Resources\\_\(by\\_subjects\)/Indigenous\\_Native\\_Languages.html](http://www.oise.utoronto.ca/deepeningknowledge/Teacher_Resources/Curriculum_Resources_(by_subjects)/Indigenous_Native_Languages.html))

### **Beyond English and French in Canada**

- Infographic displaying the 2016 Census of Immigrant languages in Canada ([www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/pub/11-627-m/11-627-m2017025-eng.htm))
- Montreal Youtuber Discusses Beyond Bilingual in (<https://youtube.com/watch?v=h8KEe6NYY8Q>)

### **Children’s Books about Residential Schools**

- “As Long as the River Flows” by Larry Loyie
- “When We Were Alone” by David Robertson
- “Shi-shi-etko” by Nicola I. Campbell
- “I Am Not a Number” by Jenny Kay Dupuis
- “When I Was Eight” and the sequel “Not My Girl” by Christy Jordan-Fenton
- “Fatty Legs” and “A Stranger at Home: A True Story” by Christy Jordan-Fenton (Recommended for middle school students)



## **STUDENT EVALUATION QUESTIONS SPECIFIC TO THE LESSON PLAN**

### **Before (Pre-Implementation)**

- Do students have a general understanding of the meaning of bilingualism and multiculturalism?
- Do students have a clear understanding of the key events and changes which occurred between the time of the arrival of Europeans in what is now Canada and the present which led bilingualism as a federal policy?
- Have students considered the importance of language to one's identity and what the effects of its loss could be on a people and/or individual?
- Do students have any prior understanding of the existence of official minority-language communities in Canada and whether or not they have remained vital?
- Have students considered how bilingualism might remain vital to Canadians in today's increasingly multicultural and multilingual society?

### **After (Post-Implementation)**

- Students will describe the meaning of bilingualism and multiculturalism.
- Students will reflect an understanding of the key events and changes which occurred between the time of the arrival of Europeans in what is now Canada and the present which led bilingualism as a federal policy.
- Students will reflect on, and explain their ideas about, the importance of language to one's identity and what the effects of its loss could be on a people and/or individual.
- Students will learn about official minority-language communities in Canada and consider whether they have remained vital.
- Students will consider and reflect on how bilingualism might remain vital to Canadians in today's increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.

## **TEACHER EVALUATION QUESTIONS**

### **Before (Pre-Implementation)**

- Do you have a general understanding of the meaning of bilingualism and multiculturalism?
- Do you have a clear understanding of the key events and changes which occurred between the time of the arrival of Europeans in what is now Canada and the present which led bilingualism as a federal policy?
- Do you have any prior understanding of the importance of language to one's identity and what the effects of its loss could be on a people and/or individual?
- Have you reflected on the existence of official minority-language communities in Canada and considered whether they have remained vital?
- Have you considered how bilingualism might remain vital to Canadians in today's increasingly multicultural and multilingual society?

### **After (Post-Implementation)**

- Explain and give examples of bilingualism and multiculturalism.
- Share an understanding of key events and changes which occurred between the time of the arrival of Europeans in what is now Canada and the present which led bilingualism as a federal policy.
- Reflect on, and explain your opinion about, the importance of language to one's identity and what the effects of its loss could be on a people and/or individual.
- Share what you experienced and learned about the existence of official minority-language communities in Canada and whether they have remained vital in Canada.
- Reflect on, and explain your ideas about, whether/how bilingualism might remain vital to Canadians in today's increasingly multicultural and multilingual society.

**RUBRICS**

**GENERAL**

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
DISCUSSION	Student participated limitedly in the teacher-directed discussions	Student participated adequately in teacher-directed discussions	Student participated actively in the teacher-directed discussions	Student participated exemplarily in the teacher-directed discussions
CONTENT	Student demonstrated limited understanding of concepts, facts, and terms	Student demonstrated some understanding of concepts, facts, and terms	Student demonstrated considerable understanding of concepts, facts, and terms	Student demonstrated thorough understanding of concepts, facts, and terms
WRITTEN WORK	Student's written report was confusing, poorly structured, and had many grammatical errors	Student's written report was generally clear and had some structure, but numerous grammatical errors	Student's written report was clear and well-structured, but had a few errors	Student's written report was very clear, well-organized, and had virtually no errors
PRESENTATION	Student's presentation was confusing, lacked emphasis and energy, and resulted in no discussion	Student's presentation was generally clear, but lacked energy and emphasis, and resulted in little discussion	Student's presentation was clear, vibrantly presented, and resulted in a good discussion	Student's presentation was very clear, enthusiastically presented, and resulted in engaging discussion
GROUP WORK	Students made a minimal contribution to the group; very little cooperation	Students made some contribution to the group, but cooperation was superficial	Students made a considerable contribution to the group, with a good level of cooperation	Students made a significant contribution to the group, with an excellent level of cooperation

SPECIFIC

	LEVEL 1	LEVEL 2	LEVEL 3	LEVEL 4
STEP 1	Student demonstrated a limited understanding of the importance of language as a part of their own identity and how words connect them to their families and societies	Student demonstrated a basic understanding of the importance of language as a part of their own identity and how words connect them to their families and societies	Student demonstrated a good understanding of the importance of language as a part of their own identity and how words connect them to their families and societies	Student demonstrated a thorough understanding of the importance of language as a part of their own identity and how words connect them to their families and societies
STEP 2	Student demonstrated little insight in their personal response to the stories they read, especially the effect of losing one's language	Student demonstrated some insight in their personal response to the stories they read, especially the effect of losing one's language	Student demonstrated good insight in their personal response to the stories they read, especially the effect of losing one's language	Student demonstrated deep insight in their personal response to the stories they read, especially the effect of losing one's language
STEP 3	Student made minimal contribution to the skit showing how the OLA could be important to a Canadian citizen	Student made some contribution to the skit showing how the OLA could be important to a Canadian citizen	Student made a considerable contribution to the skit showing how the OLA could be important to a Canadian citizen	Student made a significant contribution to the skit showing how the OLA could be important to a Canadian citizen
STEP 4	Student's Venn diagram was limited and poorly illustrated the importance of keeping official minority-language communities in Canada vital	Student's Venn diagram was basic and somewhat illustrated the importance of keeping official minority-language communities in Canada vital	Student's Venn diagram was detailed and effectively illustrated the importance of keeping official minority-language communities in Canada vital	Student's Venn diagram was thorough and strongly illustrated the importance of keeping official minority-language communities in Canada vital
STEP 5	Student provided few or weak points to support their opinion on the importance of bilingualism in Canada	Student provided points to support their opinion on the importance of bilingualism in Canada	Student provided many points to support their opinion on the importance of bilingualism in Canada	Student provided many strong points to support their opinion on the importance of bilingualism in Canada





# WHAT LANGUAGE IS CODE?

By Carolyn Gruske

As the demand for programming and coding instruction increases, teachers are faced with decisions about the best languages to teach: is it better to focus on languages that are becoming more popular like Python or Ruby, or are students better served by learning some traditional fundamentals like SQL or C++? There are, however other languages that Comtech teachers should consider including in their lessons: Canada's two official languages, especially given this year marks the 50th Anniversary of the Official Languages Act.

That's not to say students should be learning grammar rules during computer classes. What they should be exposed to is the idea that it's important to program with multiple languages in mind.

In Canada, of course those languages are typically English and French, but in a world that is striving to create better user experiences and universal accessibility, that could mean producing software that works in dozens of different languages. In fact, creating multilingual software is just one small, but very important aspect of UX (or user experience) design.

"UX is the human side of creating the web," says Carolyn Van, director of program design at Toronto-based Canada Learning Code, a charity devoted to teaching both educators and students, "particularly women, girls, people with disabilities, Indigenous youth, and newcomers," how to program and to better understand

technology. It offers teachers free lesson plans and brings lessons and computing labs to schools across Canada through its 14 Code Mobiles (vans carrying laptops that travel from school to school).

“Without UX, it’s just a bunch of lines of code, with the lack of consideration for the diverse needs that humans have. Your typical UX designer is very invested in understanding cultural nuances, different accessibility needs, different physical and cognitive abilities. Without UX our digital experiences are unusable, terrible experiences. A lack of good UX design will cause frustration, and will cause people to opt out of an experience,” she says.

Looking at purely physical accommodation, good UX practices mean creating apps and programs and software that work for everybody, including (but not limited to) those who have fine motor skills disorders or visual impairments or hearing impairments. Often, solutions to help users with these sorts of challenges involve language: voice commands to control computer functions or speech-to-text descriptions of photos or videos, or machine-generated transcriptions of audio files. It goes without saying that in order for these types of applications to be truly useful, they must be made available in the user’s language.

Along with being a good programming practice, and an approach that increases accessibility, there are times that developing a bilingual application or program is an absolute necessity.

“It’s not only important, in fact in the province of Quebec, it is the law,” says Diana Cheptene, IBM Studios leader for Montreal at IBM Canada Ltd. “It’s not even an option. It is required by law that we provide the users here in the province of Quebec English and French at the same time.”

To that end, Cheptene says that when IBM gives its introductory training sessions to newly hired employees, the company teaches them about best practices that support design principals from both a user interface and a software design perspective, and part of that involves emphasizing how important it is to develop applications accessible in multiple languages.

“We talk about the economy of being able to personalize an application to the individual. If we think about that trend, and the market, then giving the user an experience that feels personalized to them is a main driver on why this is important. And so is providing a positive user experience, and that means language, that means culturalization, that means regionalization as well,” says Cheptene.

Quebec isn’t the only province with rules in place about how content needs to be delivered. The Government of Canada, for example, publishes standards for how to build Application Programming Interfaces (APIs) if their

developers wish to interface with government data. Those standards state the APIs should “support official languages” and give explicit instructions about what that means (such as using language codes and interpreting HTTP headers regarding language in a certain way). So graduated students who find themselves doing coding or application development work for government bodies will likely encounter programming that needs to accommodate both French and English speakers.

**“Along with being a good programming practice, and an approach that increases accessibility, there are times that developing a bilingual application or program is an absolute necessity.”**

Even students who find themselves working for private businesses or public institutions will often discover their organizations use government data, so learning to deal with bilingual software is a useful skill. This is especially true if their organizations have the goal of reaching out to the largest number of users or customers.

This is also true for students who just want to make their own projects available to the widest possible audience.

“English content on the Internet is predominant, but that doesn’t mean we should all just be reading English. I mean there are lots of users who can’t, and they will not go to your site if they can’t speak the language,” says Christine McWebb, director of the Stratford School of Interaction Design and Business, that is part of the University of Waterloo. The school focuses on teaching students about digital arts and design within a global business framework.

While the need to present content in more than one language may not be readily apparent to everybody, McWebb explains that once the idea is presented to students and they are informed as to how this makes programs and applications and websites more inclusive, they tend to embrace the practice relatively easily.

Says McWebb: “I would say that the generation of students that we have in high schools and even in universities now is very, very attuned to this [need to be

## TIPS for creating bilingual or multilingual programs

- Remember that words and sentences aren't the same length in different languages so ensure layouts (especially in menus or columns) make allowances for different word or letter counts.
- Avoid using pictures of flags to indicate the languages available. Instead write out the name of the language, in the language so users can identify their own languages. This means use "English and français" not "English and French" or "anglais and français."
- Pick font sets that accommodate accents or characters that need to be rendered in all languages used.
- Include information about the language presented on websites in the URL, so French pages would look something like [www.example.com/fr](http://www.example.com/fr) while the English version would be [www.example.com/en](http://www.example.com/en).
- Adding what are known as hreflang tags to indicate the language of the page (or website) is also helpful to ensure that search engines see the language content of the websites correctly.
- Make use of online machine translation services (like Google Translate) but always have a native speaker or fluent translator of the language review the output to ensure not just that it is accurate but that words, phrases, and idioms make sense in the target culture.
- Don't embed text in images. This way the same image can be used for every language version of the site. Also remember that text descriptions of the images should be translated into all the languages used on the website so that people using assistive technology can understand the description in their preferred languages.
- Consider using icons instead of (or in addition to words) to help guide users through programs and applications, but ensure the icons convey the same meaning across all the languages of the site or application.
- Refer to existing standards and guidelines such as [i18n](#) (for internationalization) and [L10n](#) (for localization) for best practices about how to render content (including things like time and money and numbers) in a way that respects various language and customs and cultures. [www.w3.org/International/questions/qa-i18n](http://www.w3.org/International/questions/qa-i18n). Also, look for internationalization and language guidelines for specific interfaces if you are creating programs to run on specific devices (for example, Android, iOS, etc.)

**“We talk about the economy of being able to personalize an application to the individual. If we think about that trend, and the market, then giving the user an experience that feels personalized to them is a main driver on why this is important. And so is providing a positive user experience, and that means language, that means culturalization, that means regionalization as well.**

inclusive]. They are very aware of their own rights and obligations and responsibilities, and they are aware of the conversation around inclusivity, so this would not come as a surprise to them. And I think above and beyond just making them aware of the existence of other languages on the Internet, that perhaps they should think about this a little bit more if it will get them to think about the larger picture, which is accessibility and inclusivity not just limited to the use of language.”

Of course thinking about a concept is one thing, but applying lessons in a practical manner is a completely different learning experience. While students, especially those who aren't in immersion programs may not have the language skills themselves to create both French and English content, Lennart Nacke, associate professor and director of the HCI (Human Computer Interaction) Games Group and Games Institute at the Stratford School says teachers can encourage collaboration between students who speak other languages so they get the experience of working not just with partners but co-operating on a bilingual or multilingual project.

He also suggests that teachers direct students who are interested in improving their skills on their own time to volunteer their services to assist with open source projects, especially smaller ones that are looking for people to work







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# THE PROMISE OF BILINGUALISM

**By Christine L. Cho, PhD**

From a young age, I wanted to be bilingual in English and French. I am not, however. It is a big regret that I am working to rectify. I started off in an environment that should have been conducive to bilingualism: I started French language instruction in the Alberta school I attended when I was 5 years old. I remember playing lots of verbal games and having fun. I also had maternal grandparents living in Montreal who had a working knowledge of French and would teach me a few phrases over the telephone. My neighbour and best friend was francophone and I used to enjoy hearing her speak with her family. My father studied both French and German at school and would relish starting small French conversations at the dinner table (to which my mother strongly objected as she had received no French language instruction in school). When we moved to



Ontario, French instruction started in grade 6 and it was very different. We had livres and cahiers. We asked and answered the same questions every class: *Comment t'appelles-tu? Quelle est la date, aujourd'hui? Quel temps fait-il?* We conjugated verbs and wrote sentences in our cahiers.

Despite this sharp contrast in instruction, I stuck with French, all through high school, even being placed in Enriched French in Grade 11. The bulk of my education, however, had heavily favoured grammar and mechanics. We spoke in class, but it was to answer questions for which a person could rehearse the response. We were not engaging in conversation, certainly not the kind that could help you outside of the classroom. Hence, during my first trip to Montreal, I felt like I didn't understand anything. I could read and write but my oral skills were dreadful. I was not becoming the bilingual person I thought I should have been by this time. My confidence was lost and I gave up trying to learn any more. What I did not give up on was the idea of bilingualism nor the belief that Canadians *should* speak more than one language and hopefully, both official languages.

In the early 2000's French Immersion programming was growing at a rapid pace in Ontario. Even before my daughter was born, people started asking if we were going to enroll her in French Immersion. I kept saying we had to meet her first, to see if an immersion program would be a good fit for her. I recognize the benefits of speaking more than one language and I wanted that experience for my child, but not at any cost. Learning a language, as I had experienced it, was hard and not always fruitful. I thought all parents were similarly reflective on the merits of enrolling their children in a French Immersion program. I came to discover that many parents see French Immersion as a form of streaming, a public form of private school. It has morphed into a type of elitism. The programs can be overly populated by girls, lacking enrollment of students who are ethnically and racially diverse. I have seen children whose home language is not English and those with learning disabilities moved out of immersion to the English stream. I know of parents who felt they had to choose between gifted programming for their child or staying in French Immersion despite the fact that, in the Ontario public school system, students who require support, modifications, and accommodations are entitled to obtain those services whether they are in an English or French stream. There is also another factor at play: social class. Statistics suggest that students in French Immersion programs tend to come from higher socio-economic backgrounds. In truth, many French Immersion schools are located in higher SES neighbourhoods.

When my daughter was born, we quickly discovered that she had an affinity for language. She was speaking, quite

clearly well before she was a year old and reading before she started school. We thought adding French would be a challenge she could handle. Thus, I realized we had bought into the notion that a French Immersion program would be more demanding, possibly a "better" education. I was also holding on to the promise of bilingualism for my child and all the doors that could open for her.

In our local school board, the immersion program started in Senior Kindergarten so that's where we enrolled her. We were lucky, I realize in hindsight. We didn't have to enter a lottery to get her in to the program, line up for a first-come, first-served spot or move to another neighbourhood. We just registered her at our local school and hoped for the best. As we had expected, she easily incorporated an additional language into her repertoire. She also had excellent teachers, many of whom were francophone. They used gestures and songs to teach, similar to the Accelerated Integrated Method (AIM). Again, she was lucky. As French Immersion continues to grow in Ontario, finding French teachers is becoming more and more of a challenge: there is a dearth of French teachers in the public school system but greater demand for French Immersion programming. I hear too many teacher candidates tell me they went

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through French Immersion but their program utilized rote-type learning similar to the way I learned French. As a result, they don't feel comfortable in the language so they don't even consider becoming French teachers.

When it was time for high school, even given the plethora of specialized schools in the city, my daughter decided that French was important to her so, she wanted to stay in French Immersion. The high school that offers French Immersion programming is not her home school and it's one of the few that has closed enrollment. If she

decided to leave the program, she'd have to switch schools. She was adamant, however, that she wanted her French to grow. When she came home in Grade 9 full of enthusiasm and excitement about an exchange program in France, we knew she had to go. Her exchange partner lived with us for 2 months and we watched her English blossom. When we sent our daughter to France, we knew she'd be coming home with a deeper sense of both English and French language and culture. Our daughter considers herself bilingual and has a deeper appreciation for linguistic roots and the subtle ways in which culture is expressed and understood through language. As she plans to head to university in another year, she is considering studying in Ottawa or Quebec. She wants to study in English, but live in a community where she can use her French daily. I am thrilled that this is her approach because one of the failings of French Immersion is the limited opportunities to use French on a daily basis outside of school. My daughter was again fortunate to have a positive exchange experience and a partner she chats with online regularly to keep her conversation skills up. We also have francophone neighbours who regularly converse with her.

My daughter has inspired me and her experience learning language has convinced me that I need to reinvigorate my desire to speak both official languages. I, too, have begun French conversations with my neighbour. To—in some way—address the dearth of French teachers, I have organized a community learning experience in Angers, France for teacher candidates through my university which has given me the impetus to work on my oral communication. I have had to email the teachers in France so I have begun to hone my reading and writing skills. I am apprehensive, but I realize the only way to learn is to try.

I often think back to a camping trip we took to the east coast when my daughter was 9 years old. We made a stop at a private campground near Trois Rivières. The only English-speaking person that worked there, the owner, was away when we checked in. We stood in amazement as our little girl walked up to the counter and booked a site for us. Later that evening, the owner came to our campsite. He wanted to meet the little "French" girl with the English parents. He sat and chatted with her for over half an hour. It was this kind of experience that I had hoped being bilingual would bring to my daughter's life. To me, this epitomizes Pierre Trudeau's dream in creating the Official Languages Act. The challenge is, how do we ensure all Canadians benefit from this richness?

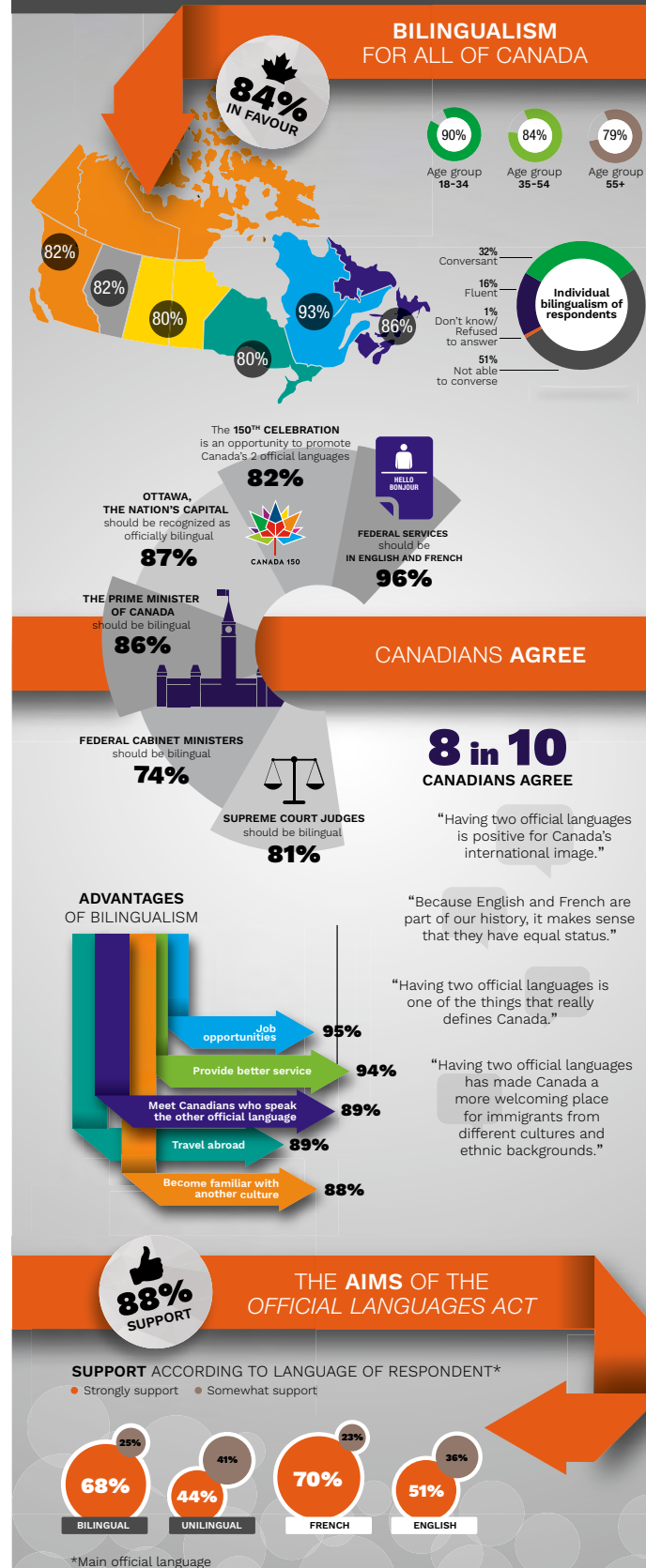
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## THE OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT 1969-2019

## WHAT CANADIANS THINK

# THINK

about bilingualism and the Official Languages Act



Survey conducted by Nielsen for the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages in February and March, 2016. The telephone survey results have a margin of error at the national level of +/-3.1%, 19 times out of 20.







**“The 50th anniversary of the Act is here. And with all the changes in our society—in terms of new technologies, in terms of demography, with all of the immigration and the changes that are happening in our communities across Canada—the point is after 50 years, it’s time to reinforce the Act.**

**— Senator René Cormier**

Additionally, the federal department of Canadian Heritage, under Minister of Tourism, Official Languages and La Francophonie of Canada Mélanie Joly, is also undertaking efforts to study the modernization of the act, and has been accepting submissions from Canadians about how to best improve it.

The Senate hopes to have a report, including recommendations for future updates, ready by mid-2019. Senator Cormier wanted to have the report in the hands of Canadians before the next federal election, which took place October 21, 2019.

“There’s always a sensibility, politicians really are always a bit afraid of speaking about languages, because it means we speak about identity, it means we speak about our national unity,” says Cormier.

“The Official Languages Act was first created to make sure that Canada would stay Canada. In the 1960s, there was that tension between Quebec and the rest of Canada, and [the Act] was a way to bring Canada together and say, ‘this is our social contract.’ So that’s why this act is a quasi-constitutional act. It’s a very important act for Canadians. So, my personal hope is that I wish that [the Act] is going to be there in public conversation, going forward towards the next federal election.”

Stéphanie Chouinard, an assistant professor in political science at both Queen’s University and the Royal Military

College of Canada, was one of the people to testify before the Senate committee. She says all the major federal political parties have expressed their support for updating the Act.

“When it comes to the modernization of the Official Languages Act, it’s a multi-partisan push. You have not only Mélanie Joly, you have Conservatives like Alupa Clarke, for example, speaking of the need to modernize the Official Languages Act. I think the promises may be different, depending on who you will be talking to during the electoral campaign, but I feel like all three major parties will probably have some form of promise on that front,” she says.

No matter what happens to the Act—whether it gets updated before the election, altered after the election, or left unchanged as other legislative initiatives take priority—the Act, as it exists in 2019 isn’t the same document that was created in 1969. In fact, the Official Languages Act has a history of revisions and updates.

“It’s a living document in many ways, because it needs to adapt to the evolving circumstances in Canadian society,” explains Linda Cardinal, a professor of political studies and the holder of the research chair in Canadian Francophonie and public policies at the University of Ottawa.

A new version of the Act was adopted in 1988, and then



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**— Robert J. Talbot**

in 2005, parliament passed Bill S-3 which clarified the scope of Part VII of the Official Languages Act, so if an update were to be passed, it would be far from unprecedented.

Teaching about the act and its revisions is a difficult challenge for teachers at any level because the creation of the act had its foundations in practically the whole of Canadian history. As Chouinard explains, it’s helpful to understand that with the arrival of the Loyalists, “the linguistic make-up of what was to become Canada really started to shift because prior to that ... Francophones were the majority at the time.”

Their arrival, and their desire to have a governing body that would use the common law tradition (that originated in England and is based on precedent, not written rules) and work in English (as opposed to public bodies operating in French and following the civil law tradition (which originated in France and is based on a comprehensive series of rules), which had been the typical practice since the Quebec Act of 1774) and events that followed, including the creation of the province of Upper Canada, the 1837-38 Rebellions, and the Lord Durham Report, all played a role in the creation of the 1867 British North America Act—the

country’s first constitution. Even after that, issues of language continued to drive the politics of the country.

When Matthew Hayday, a history professor at the University of Guelph teaches about the Act, he says that even though there is a deep history of language issues throughout the country’s history, he usually begins talking about the 1960s, discussing the Quiet Revolution and the 1963 Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B & B Commission), established under Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson, because “there isn’t a sense of crisis that would actually prompt the federal government to take the action it does until the 1960s.”

He says that crisis, at least in part, comes down to Francophones feeling the federal government was failing them and not providing services to them in French, and the creation of the Official Languages Act was an effort to deal with that fallout.

“The purpose of the Act is to promote two official languages in the country, and the idea of providing a full array of federal services to English speakers and to French speakers in their own language. It’s not about making Canada a bilingual country where everybody speaks both English and French. Indeed, one of the key things that underpins the Official Languages Act is that it should be possible for French speakers who make up over one-quarter of the population of the country to live and get government services in their own language, without having to switch to English or learn English to do so,” says Hayday.

When viewing the history that led to creation of the Act, Robert J. Talbot, manager of research for Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, says it’s important to emphasize how important co-operation was to the process.

“One of the reasons why we have an Act is there has been a history of conflict. But we also need to talk about the examples of successful collaboration. Why does Canada still



**Prime Minister Lester B. Pearson convened the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in 1963.**

exist? Because we have found ways, with some difficulty, for English and French speakers to live together. The Official Languages Act is essential for that. It is central to making Canada as a political project possible,” he says.

Talbot adds that examples of co-operation exist throughout the country’s history, starting with Louis-Hippolyte LaFontaine and Robert Baldwin working together to bring in responsible government, and Sir John A. Macdonald and Sir George-Étienne Cartier forming an alliance that would lead to the creation of the British North America Act.

While the Act did result in changes in how government services were offered, it wasn’t perfect. By the late 1980s, the Constitution had been repatriated and the Charter of Rights and Freedoms had been adopted (and included recognition of language rights), and there was a realization that the Act needed strengthening.

“The fact that [the 1969 version] was merely a declaratory act is something that came up rather quickly as one of the biggest caveats to the Act. This is why, in 1988 when the Mulroney government decided for a pretty solid amendment of the Official Languages Act—the biggest revamping of the Act that we’ve seen since—that a number of the sections of this act were made to be justiciable, so if the official languages commission saw that there were repeat offenders within the federal state apparatus, then he or she could decide to go to the federal court,” says Chouinard.

Another major change in the 1988 version imposed a duty upon the federal government to work to promote the health and vitality of minority-language communities.

“There was a new section added which is called Section 7 which... said that the Canadian government had the obligation to see to the development and enhancement of its official language communities in both Quebec and in the rest of Canada, so that was a new legislation, and a very important piece of legislation, because it gave the government the status of fiduciaries of those minorities,” says Cardinal.

“Then, in 2000, the changes were meant to beef up that section because the government had good intentions, but we couldn’t see how they were being applied. The modification in 2000 was to reflect the need to add a bit more meat to that section... and make sure that the government was doing something in that particular area.

As for today, teaching about any potential changes that may be made to the Act in the future, both Cardinal and Chouinard explain that one of the fundamental questions an updated Act should probably address is about the government’s use of social media, and whether that use is congruent with the obligations laid out under the Official Languages Act. Is delivering policy by tweet an acceptable

way to transmit information? And what happens when the tweets are released in only one official language?

Then, when social media is combined with artificial intelligence and machine learning and online translation tools, this becomes an especially thorny issue. Are machine-generated translations good enough and clear enough and understandable enough to count as French or English under the Act? What is the obligation of the government to ensure that the translations are accurate?

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Chouinard and Cardinal feel that these are the types of questions that can be raised in classroom discussions in a variety of subject areas and at an assortment of grade levels, and make great entry-points to introducing lessons about the Act.

For more senior students, Chouinard says that another area of discussion might be to look at ways to update the role of the official languages commissioner to make enforcement of the Act easier and to ensure there are more serious consequences for violating the Act. That topic was part of her testimony before the Senate.

“We give the official languages commissioner greater power or we change their role entirely and create an administrative tribunal where private Canadians don’t need to go through the official languages commissioner. They can go to this tribunal and ask for reparations directly,” she explains.

Cardinal offers another exercise for more senior students: compare and contrast how different jurisdictions in the

country manage their obligations to official language communities.

“They could try to identify what is the language regime from one province to another—what kind of policy framework there is in the different provinces. Where is it in Canada that you can have French and English language services provided by government? That’s just one exercise,” says Cardinal.

“It would be interesting for students to know that New Brunswick is the only province that has an official languages act, just like the federal one. Ontario has legislation on French language services. Manitoba has a policy. So what’s the difference between an official languages act versus legislation versus a policy?”

While thinking about how the federal government interacts with the Canadian population may be a bit of an abstract reach for some students, Talbot offers some suggestions for how to frame the effects of the Act in more relatable ways.

“How do I explain [the Act] to a kid in kindergarten? Let’s say, if you’re a five-year old visiting the Children’s Museum in Gatineau you can do that in French or English. If you’re a 10-year old who is visiting a national park across Canada or a National Historic Site, you can do that in English or in French. If you’re an 18-year old, who’s applying for a federal bursaries or federal scholarship or a federal internship program, you can do that in English or in French. So I think [the Act] might relate to the lives and the aspirations of youth in more ways than then we might think.”

Speaking as professors, Cardinal, Chouinard, and Hayday share that the students they encounter have very little familiarity with the Official Languages Act and its

history, but in a lot of ways, that’s understandable due to the present political climate of the country, and that is something to keep in mind when speaking to young students today about the topic—that it’s not part of the cultural landscape the way it was in the 1960s, the 1970s, the 1980s and even the early 1990s when issues like Quebec sovereignty, the Quebec referendum, and the Meech Lake Accord were part of the daily news.

“They don’t tend to think about Francophone Ontario or Acadia. They tend to think about Quebec if they’re English speakers. And Quebec hasn’t been a major issue on the national radar now for a couple of decades. There has been a certain amount of disconnect between Quebec and English Canada for a while. There hasn’t been a major separation crisis. We haven’t been dealing with referendums. There hasn’t even been an elected government—even a [Parti Québécois] one—that actually had a new referendum as top of mind. So this just hasn’t been resonating on their consciousness as something to really be paying attention to,” says Hayday.

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Carolyn Gruske is an award-winning reporter and former magazine editor. She often writes about the intersection of business, technology and the law, but she also has a deep interest in educational topics.

## Multimedia Links

**In order to give students a better sense of what it was like in the 1960s and the atmosphere that led to the creation of the Official Languages Act, Stéphanie Chouinard, recommends two films from the National Film Board site: “Acadia, Acadia” ([www.nfb.ca/film/acadia\\_acadia](http://www.nfb.ca/film/acadia_acadia)) and “Action: The October Crisis of 1970” ([www.nfb.ca/film/action\\_the\\_october\\_crisis\\_of\\_1970](http://www.nfb.ca/film/action_the_october_crisis_of_1970)) which, she says “touches on the rise of nationalism in Quebec, and the impact of the economic strife that French**

**Canadians in Quebec were feeling,” even though it is mainly about the FLQ crisis.**

**The NFB site describes Acadia, Acadia as “an on-the-spot record of the student protests that shook the Université de Moncton in 1968-69. Led by students desiring greater recognition of the French fact in New Brunswick, the protests spawned street marches, petitions and a sit-in, but also many discussions among students seeking to re-establish an Acadian identity.”**





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