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# Standing Committee on Official Languages

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Chair: Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg





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• (1840)

[*Translation*]

**The Chair (Mr. Emmanuel Dubourg (Bourassa, Lib.)):** I'd like to call the meeting to order.

[*English*]

Welcome to meeting number 20 of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Official Languages.

[*Translation*]

The committee is meeting today to discuss its study entitled "Government Measures to Protect and Promote French in Quebec and in Canada".

[*English*]

To ensure an orderly meeting, I would like to outline a few rules to follow.

[*Translation*]

For those attending the meeting remotely, I would like to take this opportunity to remind everyone that screen captures or photographs of your screen are not authorized, as pointed out by the Speaker of the House, Mr. Rota, on September 29, 2020.

[*English*]

Members and witnesses may speak in the official language of their choice. Interpretation services are available for this meeting. You have the choice, at the bottom of your screen, of either floor, English or French audio.

[*Translation*]

Before speaking, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic. When you are done, mute your mic to minimize any interference.

[*English*]

As a reminder, all comments by members and witnesses should be addressed through the chair.

[*Translation*]

When speaking, please speak slowly and clearly.

[*English*]

Unless there are exceptional circumstances, the use of a headset with a boom microphone is mandatory for everyone participating remotely.

[*Translation*]

We're making an exception this afternoon for our witness.

Should any technical challenges arise, please advise the chair. Please note that we may need to suspend for a few minutes, as we need to ensure that all members are able to participate fully.

There's no one in the room.

I would now like to welcome our witness.

I would like to say to Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil that he will have seven and a half minutes for his statement, to be followed by a round of questions from members of the committee.

As usual, I have a yellow card to signal to witnesses that they have a minute left. I use a red card to let them know that their time is up.

We the committee members now welcome Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil, Assistant Director, Diversity and Sociocultural Statistics, at Statistics Canada.

Mr. Corbeil, you have the floor for seven and a half minutes.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil (Assistant Director, Diversity and Sociocultural Statistics, Statistics Canada):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I would like to thank the committee members for inviting Statistics Canada to appear before them to provide input into their study on the measures the Government of Canada can take to protect and promote French in Canada.

My brief presentation will cover three key points. First, I will talk about different indicators and concepts that are used to track the evolution of French in Canada. Second, I will describe some of the issues and challenges specific to the state of French outside Quebec, as well as in Quebec. Lastly, I will conclude my presentation with a list of other topics requiring more in-depth analysis that needs to factor in the growing complexity of language dynamics and multilingualism in Canada, and particularly in Quebec.

First of all, what do we mean by the state of French in Canada? There are actually a number of indicators and concepts that are used to track its evolution. For example, there are traditional ones that look at the change in the size and proportion of the population with French as its mother tongue, the population with French as the main language used at home, and the population that knows French well enough to have a conversation.

And while statistics on the use of French in the private sphere are very useful and reveal multiple facets of linguistic diversity, language policies, charters and legislation focus on the public sphere. In this vein, it is very important and useful to collect and publish information on the language of work and on language practices in different areas of public life, such as language of instruction, day care centres, cultural activities, public signage, communications with and services offered to communities, to name a few.

Faced with this wide array of indicators, we want to know which one or ones will be considered most important or will best reflect what we call the state and evolution of French. The findings on the status of French could also differ based on whether only one indicator or several non mutually exclusive indicators were used.

Two indicators traditionally used to monitor the evolution of French outside Quebec—mother tongue and first official language spoken—reveal that the French-language population continues to grow in number, but decrease in proportion. The same observation was made for the population that reported being able to have a conversation in French.

Moreover, the population that speaks French predominantly at home is declining in number and proportion, while the population that uses it equally with English or as a secondary language is growing. Similarly, the population that predominantly uses French at work has dropped in number and proportion in favour of the population that uses French and English equally in the workplace.

• (1845)

[*English*]

Of course, it is perilous to speak only to a global analysis without taking into account the great diversity of situations and contexts, depending upon whether one resides in the Atlantic provinces, in Ontario or in the western provinces, in rural areas or in larger urban centres.

In addition, some less frequently used indicators testify to the fact that the picture is not all negative. For example, over the last 10 years for which data are available, the number of enrolments in a French-language minority school has grown by 17% to reach nearly 171,000 students. Likewise, the number of young people who registered in the French immersion program in Canada has increased by nearly 70% since the very first action plan for official languages began in 2003, reaching nearly 478,000 students during the year 2018-19.

However, several studies have documented the fact that the main issue in this area concerns the retention of second language skills and the opportunities to maintain them over time.

[*Translation*]

Two other considerable issues are hindering the growth of French in Canada outside Quebec. The large-scale study entitled “Language Projections for Canada, 2011 to 2036,” which Statistics Canada published in 2017, shows to what extent major changes in the number of French-language immigrants would be required to stabilize the demographic weight of the francophone population. What’s more, incomplete transmission of French from one generation to the next, combined with a low fertility rate and weak status

of French in many regions of the country are impeding the growth of the French-language population.

In Quebec, the presence and use of French, and how it has evolved, is complex and multifaceted. For example, census data on mother tongue or main language used at home are generally used to show how French in Quebec has changed. We know that immigration is the main driver of population growth and that the vast majority of these immigrants—more than 7 in 10, in fact—have neither English nor French as their mother tongue. In addition, of the roughly 180,000 new immigrants in the Montreal area at the last census, more than half spoke another language most often at home.

Finally, of the approximately 1.1 million immigrants who were living in Quebec in 2016, 55% reported speaking more than one language at home.

Are these statistics automatically indicative of the decline of French in favour of English in Quebec? Not necessarily, because the reality is much more complex.

For example, in the last census, of the roughly 230,000 workers in the greater Montreal area who spoke a language other than English or French most often at home, close to 46% used French most often at work and another 18% used it equally with English.

As well, between 2006 and 2016, the predominant use of English at work by workers whose mother tongue was English fell by 6 percentage points, and by 7 percentage points among workers in the “other” mother tongue category, in favour of the predominant use of French or equal use of French and English. In contrast, a decrease in the predominant use of French was observed among workers whose mother tongue was French, in favour of equal use of French and English.

According to the Office québécois de la langue française, there was an increase in bilingual greetings by clerks in Montreal stores between 2010 and 2017, but the option for service in French remained stable at 95%.

Finally, of the approximately 6,000 French-mother-tongue McGill University students who graduated between 2010 and 2015, more than 80% reported speaking French most often at home in the last census. These are just some examples of the complexity of language dynamics in Quebec.

Before I conclude, I’d like to say that in addition to the information on French as a mother tongue and as the main language used at home, it is important to delve deeper into a number of dynamics and dimensions on the evolution of the situation of French.

In Quebec, for example, which specific factors account for the increase in English–French bilingualism in the workplace? What is the role of industry sectors involved in commercial trade with the rest of the country or internationally?

A more in-depth analysis of these issues is absolutely necessary, especially considering the growing importance of exports of goods and services from Quebec's high-technology and knowledge industries. In addition, a better understanding is required of the obvious under-representation of populations with an immigrant background in provincial, regional and local public administrations, and in Crown corporations in the greater Montreal area, sectors where the use of French is rather widespread.

There also seems to be an urgent need to better understand the role of language and educational paths, on the one hand, and the language used in the public sphere in Quebec, on the other.

Furthermore, given the increasing complexity of language dynamics and a rise in multilingualism at home in the Montreal area, the traditional indicators of "mother tongue" and "language spoken most often at home," including a focus on language transfers, need to be revisited and better integrated with other language practice indicators to develop a more complete portrait of the evolution of French in Quebec.

In Canada outside Quebec, some of the topics requiring more comprehensive analysis include the transmission of French to children; the retention of language proficiency among young people whose second language is French; a better understanding of the issues and obstacles that impede the growth, integration and inclusion of highly ethnoculturally diverse francophone immigrants; and a better understanding of the barriers and opportunities of French educational paths from preschool to university.

To conclude, the data to be collected in the 2021 Census of Population this coming May and in the Survey on the Official Language Minority Population in 2022 will be combined with data from other administrative sources and from surveys to build a rich data ecosystem, which will help to enhance our understanding of the complex dynamics of the situation of French in the country.

Thank you for your attention. I would be happy to answer any questions you might have.

• (1850)

**The Chair:** Thank you very much, Mr. Corbeil.

We'll now move on to the first six-minute round of questions. We'll begin with Mr. Dalton.

Mr. Dalton, you have the floor for the next six minutes.

**Mr. Marc Dalton (Pitt Meadows—Maple Ridge, CPC):** Thank you very much for your presentation, Mr. Corbeil.

You mentioned that the French-language population was growing in number, but decreasing proportionately. You said that immigration was the main reason for this.

In 2019, according to the immigration statistics, none of the 10 countries from which the vast majority of immigrants come had French as a first or official language. Considering the fact that Canada's population growth is mainly through immigration and not the birth rate, what should we do? What can we do?

Do you have any comments on this?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Thank you for your question, which is very appropriate.

We nevertheless need to look at things very carefully. That's why I spoke about the criteria used to define French-language populations. For example, it's important to know that most French-language immigrants who settle outside Quebec come from francophone Africa, mainly sub-Saharan, or the Maghreb. The vast majority of these immigrants have neither French nor English as their mother tongue. Nevertheless, they use French because, as a result of education and their colonial heritage, many completed their entire schooling in French. When they get to Canada, they may speak Swahili, Arabic or another language, but their main language may well be French. They go to French-language schools.

Close attention to the criteria used is also required. However, you are absolutely right. If we compare the relative weight of French-language immigration to English-language immigration, it's clear that we are well below the levels required to maintain the population's demographic weight. At the moment, approximately 2% of immigration is French-language immigration.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** I am a member of Parliament from the Vancouver area. In light of the circumstances caused by COVID-19 last year, many immigrants from Africa whose second language is French had a great deal of trouble obtaining services in that language. It's truly a problem. It's indicative of how poorly we are doing in providing services to official language minority communities.

Do you think that our systems are requiring people who live outside Quebec to learn English rather than French? I am referring to francophones and francophiles.

• (1855)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** This too is a very good question. What is perfectly clear is that many of these immigrants have a knowledge of English that is probably inadequate when they arrive. Many of them have mentioned that they consider it very important to integrate into the French-language community, but that to enter the labour market, they also have to develop language skills in English.

It's a paradox then, because to maintain the vitality of the French-language community, proficiency in both languages is required to better integrate into that community.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Right. I wonder whether we can make more of an effort to attract French-speaking immigrants. It's a big question, and it may be out of your...

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I can't indulge in politics, of course.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** I understand.

I find it encouraging to see just how many students are in immersion programs. You said that there was a 70% increase since 2003. There are now half a million students in immersion. Here in British Columbia, there are 54,000. This demonstrates enthusiasm about learning French across the country. That's a good thing.

As you mentioned, the greatest challenge is retention of the language in an anglophone setting. To promote French as an official language, we think that it's very important to focus on this pool of immersion students. We mustn't lose that.

Do you have any comments or suggestions about this?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** What I can say is that from a statistical standpoint, the biggest problem is that once most of these students are out of the school system and in the labour market, they don't get much of an opportunity to use their second language. Their proficiency declines as time goes by.

Promoting opportunities to use the language, by instilling a greater appreciation of French and the importance of French to Canada, for example, could certainly contribute to the solution. It's important to see more than just a symbol. It's obvious that people need opportunities to speak French.

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** That's the challenge we need to meet, which is to grow the French language community. I'm sure that even the students want to continue to use their second language.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Dalton.

Mrs. Lalonde, you have the floor for six minutes.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde (Orléans, Lib.):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Corbeil, I'd like to thank you for being here with us this evening to put all of Statistics Canada's indicators for population trends into perspective.

Among the categories you mentioned were those populations whose mother tongue is French, those who speak French at home, those for whom French is the first official language spoken, those for whom French is the language spoken most often at home, those for whom French is the language of work, and those who have a knowledge of French.

I'd like you to tell us more about the trends since the most recent censuses, from 2001 to 2016, and more specifically to give us an overview of regional differences in the decline of French outside Quebec. I represent the riding of Orleans in Ontario, and as we know, pools of francophone populations are often found together.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Thank you. That's a good question.

It's clear that if we track the evolution since the 2021 census, and disregard the extent to which the censuses are comparable, what we see is aging populations, particularly in the Atlantic provinces. In New Brunswick, for example, the population as a whole declined between 2011 and 2016, and not only the French-language population.

There are specific challenges. For example, there has been considerable anglicization in the Atlantic provinces. The percentage of francophones who use English more often at home is very high. Of

course, there are enormous variations in terms of the demographic weight represented by these populations.

In Ontario, we need only look at Toronto, where there is no real concentration of francophones at all. There are many French speakers, but not compared to the Ottawa or northern Ontario regions.

This has progressed a great deal over time, but not only as a function of migration. The Atlantic provinces attract very few French-language immigrants. Most settle in Ottawa, Toronto, Calgary, Edmonton and Winnipeg, among others. Here again, it's all a matter of concentration.

• (1900)

When we talk about the evolution of French, it's important to consider the factors that contribute to population evolution generally. There are two key factors. Immigration was already mentioned, but there is also interprovincial migration. In New Brunswick, for example, the situation is rather unique, with a high level of out-of-province mobility among highly educated French-language people.

In northern New Brunswick, it's hard to retain immigrants. For economic or socioeconomic reasons, they prefer to move outside the province. Some regions receive very few people as a result of international immigration or interprovincial migration. Even in Ontario, this can be seen clearly. Schools are closing in the north of this province whereas the schools are full in the southwest

Migration therefore plays an extremely important role. In some communities, the concentration of francophones is higher. In such cases, the vitality of French is no doubt stronger and better than in regions that receive very few people who migrate there, and hence the population is aging generally and needs to cope with the exodus of younger generations.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** Thank you.

In your address, you spoke about the increase in the number of francophones outside Quebec. However, the proportion of francophones is apparently still decreasing in these same provinces and territories. It went from 4% in 2011 to 3.8% in 2016.

Can you give us more details about this and why it is happening?

• (1905)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I answered a question earlier about the number of French-language immigrants. The population is growing in number, but decreasing in percentage. That's not surprising. We conducted a study that included projections for this population, showing that in some provinces, the number of French-language immigrants would have to triple to maintain the demographic weight of this population. The immigration of English-language populations has the wind and its sails, whereas the number of French-language immigrants is struggling to contribute to growth.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Corbeil.

Mr. Beaulieu, You have the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu (La Pointe-de-l'Île, BQ):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, Mr. Corbeil. Thank you for your presentation.

We have often been under the impression that Statistics Canada was painting an optimistic picture of the situation. Now, the government and the minister responsible are admitting that French is declining in Canada and Quebec.

Do you agree with this?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** It's a broad question. If you're asking me whether French is slipping in Quebec, I would say that we have, since the last census, observed a decline in the use of French as the main language, both at work and at home, at the expense of two languages being used. By observing language transfers, some have claimed that, given the demographic weight of the English-mother-tongue population in Quebec, 90% of immigrants should be adopting French and only 10% adopting English.

It's nevertheless important to consider that for the past 15 years, the proportion of immigrants tending to adopt French as the main language at home has been growing. We're talking about 10 percentage points over 15 years. There is therefore a decrease of the same order in those opting for French.

So it's not a bed of roses, but we need to be very careful. For example, it's been said that the transfer in Quebec is falling back because the other-mother-tongue population is growing. Of course...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I don't think anyone says that. I've often heard people who wanted to paint an optimistic picture of the situation say it, but that's not the problem. The problem is that language transfers have been hugely and disproportionately towards English.

Let's talk about the language used at home.

The anglicization or assimilation process is insidious. People are steadily using more English than French at home, and the situation is changing gradually. According to the indicator for French as the main language spoken at home, French is in decline. The Statistics Canada projections on language used at home, as illustrated in scenario 8, show that the percentage of francophones could drop from 81.6% in 2011 to 73.6% in 2036.

Do you agree with these Statistics Canada projections?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I'd say that we're placing a huge emphasis on this problem. I wouldn't contradict you on that. That's why I mentioned that it's important to look at a variety of indicators

rather than only one. The fact is that the use of French as the main language at home will continue to decline. There is no doubt about that. That's what the projections show in all the scenarios.

However, some immigrants whose mother tongue is another language continue to speak their other language most often at home, but use French as their second language. Most analysts ignore this by saying that it's not important. However, we've seen that in Quebec, 80% of these people speak French as their second, though not as their main, language at home, and 80% of them use French as their main language at work.

It's important to pay attention to the indicators. There is no doubt, however, particularly in terms of mother tongue, that French is not the mother tongue of the majority of immigrants. I fully agree with you on that score.

• (1910)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In my view, that's not the most important indicator.

In any event, I've noticed that all the indicators show the same thing.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Overall, that's true.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** In the most recent Statistics Canada census, one point caught my attention.

It explained that according to the usual analysis methods, approximately 80.6% of francophones used French as the main language at home. However, a new way of analyzing the results showed that 87% of francophones spoke French at home. In the latter, multiple responses were used. In the previous method, if someone said they used both French and English at home, 50% was entered for French and 50% for English. That's the general principle that had been used.

The new method was to enter 100% for people who said they spoke French only, among francophones, and enter 100% for those who also spoke English. This led to totals that sometimes exceeded 100%, like 121%.

Why was this method used? The chief statistician seemed to be saying that it was to help official language minorities.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Not at all.

On August 4, statistics Canada published a reference document describing the two major approaches for presenting and distributing information about languages. The reference document was approved by members of an advisory committee.

I believe you are alluding to the Statistics Canada report entitled, “English, French and official language minorities in Canada”. In fact, the difference between the two main trends can be explained as follows. There are francophones, anglophones and allophones. There is no option for dividing lines anywhere, because the multiple responses need to be assigned. If we're interested in placing an emphasis on French, it might be useful to know that some people speak only French at home and that others speak French and English equally. This provides a more nuanced portrait of the presence of French. However, the goal is not to distinguish francophones from anglophones.

**The Chair:** Thank you Mr. Corbeil and Mr. Beaulieu.

Mr. Boulerice now has the floor for six minutes.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice (Rosemont—La Petite-Patrie, NDP):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thank you very much, Mr. Corbeil, for being with us this evening.

You know how statistics can be weapons in the hands of politicians. The situation is such that it has become an extremely sensitive and complex issue. On the one hand, some people say that everything's going badly, that it's awful and a catastrophe. On the other, people say that everything's fine and that there's nothing to worry about.

My view is that the situation lies somewhere between the two. As you were saying, the subject is complex. From one region, one group or one age segment to another, the realities are varied and different. I'm particularly interested in what you said about the indicators, to the effect that those for the private sphere may not be the most important and that those for the public sphere may be more revealing in view of the demographic changes owing to immigration and other factors. I don't think that the issue of mother tongue should enter into it at all. It even runs counter to the spirit of Quebec's Bill 101, which wanted immigrant children to go to French schools. The second and third generations may not have had French as their mother tongue, but they were able to speak French.

You mention public space indicators. According to you, what are the most revealing indicators here? Is it language of work, the language spoken in stores and restaurants, or the language for cultural activities?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Thank you. Once again, that's a very good question.

Measuring language used in the public space is one of the great challenges. Needless to say, while work is a key sector, it's important to understand that one-third of the population is not in the workforce and therefore does not use French or English at work. However, there are other indicators.

The Office québécois de la langue française carried out investigations in 2010 and 2017, in which people were asked what language they used, generally speaking, outside of their home and their circle of friends. According to the results obtained, some people used English more often at home, though they used French at work. Others used more than one language at work, but spoke their other language at home. Of course the language used for service de-

livery is important. There is also the matter of languages used at performances or a variety of other activities. Indicators could be developed on the use of languages.

People who speak mostly French at home will usually speak French in public. The same goes for people who speak English most often at home.

Nevertheless, the major challenge is to be able to monitor trajectories if we are to acquire a better understanding of the presence of the French language, without falling into a reductionist approach in which those who do not speak French at home are not considered francophones. I think things can be analyzed in a much more subtle manner.

• (1915)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** There are indeed many nuances. I was listening earlier to Ms. Josée Boileau speak about this topic on Radio-Canada. She was saying that in Quebec, according to the Office de la langue française, 94% of people were capable of carrying on a basic conversation in French. I must admit that this figure surprised me. I had the impression that it was much lower than this.

Have you obtained results like this in your surveys?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, definitely. I must say that this 94% result it has been very stable over time. You're not wrong however, because when we were doing some surveys in which we altered the question slightly to ask whether people could speak about various subjects, the percentage dropped.

Nevertheless, I think that many would agree that being able to engage in a conversation is not a very sound indicator of the state of French in Quebec. What may well be important here, in my view, is the extent to which it's being used. Does it necessarily have to be the main language used?

I gave an example earlier of what is happening in the work environment. Between 2006 and 2016, over a period of 10 years, the people who said they spoke French and English equally at work increased from 4.7% to 7.4%. We don't know much about the factors that explain this increase. We do know that exports abroad of goods and services increased significantly, particularly in the service industries. Of course that's not the only factor to explain the change. We don't know whether it's the outcome of the internal work environment or whether it stems from the fact that Quebec, and Montreal in particular, is a hub for artificial intelligence, high tech, multimedia, aeronautics, and other sectors.

We definitely need to push this analysis further for a better understanding of the situation and perhaps to be able to take more appropriate action that could encourage people to use French at work.

**The Chair:** Mr. Boulerice, you have 10 seconds left.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** In that case, Mr. Chair, I'll wait for the next round of questions.

**The Chair:** Thank you for your understanding.

Mr. Corbeil, we're going to have a five-minute round of questions, and the first up will be the vice-chair of the committee, Mr. Blaney.



Mr. Blaney, you have the floor.

**Hon. Steven Blaney (Bellechasse—Les Etchemins—Lévis, CPC):** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Corbeil, we are pleased to welcome you this evening. Indeed, after a fashion, you're setting the table for us at a time when we are conducting one of the most important studies that the committee has undertaken since the coming into force of the Official Languages Act more than 50 years ago. What we're doing is preparing a report on the health of one of our two national languages, namely French.

You also gave us a status report on the situation outside Quebec. You mentioned six indicators, five of which showed a decline in French. You gave us various statistics on Quebec, but you never mentioned the data from the 2017 study, which drew attention to the worrisome state of affairs for French in that province.

Could you give us an overview of the 2017 study to supplement the data that you provided this evening? We would like to use it for our study.

• (1920)

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Do you mean Quebec, or all of Canada?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** I'd like you to talk about the demographic projections, including the reduction in the pool of francophones. Earlier, Quebec was considered to be 80% francophones, but suddenly, the percentage began to diminish. We've been told that in demographics, a percentage point over a short period is significant. I'd like to hear your comments on this.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Thank you for your question.

Of course the demographic projections are based on hypotheses and scenarios. We have developed a good many such scenarios by factoring in trends observed over the previous 15 years before the 2011 census or the National Household Survey. By using these and closely examining these trends, we can achieve an in-depth analysis through what we call microsimulation. We assign a probability to every Canadian, of experiencing an event in the course of their existence, which is to migrate, learn a language, give birth to a child, or something else. We know, for example, that people who have just had a child are less likely to move to another province for a number of years. All of this is taken into account. It's extremely complex.

However, given that the mother tongue of most of the immigrants who come to Quebec is neither English nor French, it's not surprising to see that French as a mother tongue should be decreasing significantly in that province. That was among the important results we observed. There was a major increase in the number of English-language immigrants in recent years in Quebec. Even taking the relative weight into her account, it would appear that generally speaking, more immigrants tend to adopt English than French. Ultimately, it means that these immigrants will increasingly tend to use English than French.

However, contrary to what many people might think, on Montreal Island, a steady 66% of the population reported their first spoken official language to be French. We are not necessarily expecting a

decrease, because there is a growing percentage of migration on Montreal Island tending towards the crown. On the other hand, there is a significant increase in the English-language population in Laval and on the South Shore. This naturally contributes to a decline in the relative weight of French as the language spoken at home.

Don't forget—and this is no doubt the most serious challenge that leads us to examine the various indicators—that the language transfers for the other mother-tongue population is not strong enough to offset the growth of this population over the long term.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** In connection with language transfers, it would seem that we now take into account the attraction of English for francophones, particularly for cultural matters.

In your next censuses, will the indicators enable you to measure the likelihood for a young francophone in Quebec to migrate towards the anglophone culture because of their consumption of cultural content? Are you going to do this kind of analysis?

It would seem that such factors are contributing to the decline, in addition to some of the other factors you summarized for us.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, definitely. If we focus again on the language transfers, an increase in language transfers among younger people has been observed.

We might ask whether these young people, more of whom are attending English-language CEGEPs and universities, tend to be living with English-speaking roommates whose language is that of the institution they are attending.

However, I think that with increasingly diverse data sources at our disposal, including a well-known longitudinal platform in education that enables us to track these students over time and integrate the census data, we will be able to analyze this more thoroughly.

• (1925)

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Corbeil.

Mr. Arseneault, over to you now for the next five minutes.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening once again, Mr. Corbeil. We have met several times in the past, on this very committee.

You are always well prepared and excellent at explaining the numbers. You're a true statistician. It becomes almost dizzying, not because you are not being clear, but because you have such a thorough mastery of your subject, which is not necessarily the case for us.

I don't know where to begin. I might ask some questions other than those dealing with the changing francophone landscape in Canada.

In your address, you said right at the outset that immigration was the main driver of growth. Is the fact that immigration has been the main driver of growth in the country something new, or has it always been like that?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Well, we're talking mainly about the late 1990s. That's when immigration became more significant in terms of growth factors than natural growth, which is to say births minus deaths.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** For immigration today, based on what you replied to the excellent questions from my colleagues, simply accounting for those who speak French at home or at work does not of itself provide an accurate picture of the demographic weight of the francophone and anglophone populations, whether one lives in Quebec or elsewhere in Canada.

This, apparently, is a relatively recent phenomenon in the country's history. You mentioned the late 1990s. Is that what you said?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Yes, because prior to the late 1990s, natural growth was a more significant factor than immigration.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** You told us that according to Statistics Canada, it's outdated to simply do what we did before the 1990s and simply use the usual indicators and do what we did before the 1990s, if we are to develop an accurate picture of the language situation in Canada.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** I wouldn't say outdated, exactly.

I think that information about the language spoken at home is nevertheless extremely useful insofar as—

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Is it incomplete?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** It's definitely incomplete, particularly when we are welcoming immigrants whose mother tongue is not French and not the main language they use at home.

I believe that other indicators are important. One would be the language of education for children, which will help French penetrate into private space. We need to acknowledge that to obtain a more subtle and complete picture, we need more than language spoken most often at home. It could be the use of a secondary language, but to what extent is there a link between that and the language of work, and between that and the language of education?

And we shouldn't hide the fact that things are not doing so well outside Quebec. That's fairly clear, just because the issues pertaining to the transmission or non-transmission of the language are nevertheless important.

So I wouldn't say that we're outdated. I would simply say that we need something more substantial and more nuanced in terms of information.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Will the next census enable us to paint a more accurate picture?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** In 2022, we will have the great privilege of conducting a survey on official language minority populations. It will be a very detailed questionnaire on just about every dimension of the population's characteristics, and the information gathered can be integrated with the 2021 census data for the same people.

This will give us a much more complete picture of these practices, behaviours and characteristics everywhere in Canada, except for francophones in Quebec, because they, unfortunately, are not part of the target population. But it will definitely help for the

French-language population outside Quebec, and not only for mother tongue and language used at home.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Okay.

If it's all right with you, I'd like to return to that much-discussed rate of 66% on Montreal Island, owing to the anglophone shift to the outskirts.

You said there wasn't a decline. Perhaps I misunderstood what you said. Did you say there was no decline on Montreal Island because the demographics had been changing by language?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** For a long time, we tended to focus on what was happening only on the island. What we found this time was much more migration. Even French-language immigrants no longer automatically go through Montreal. They go directly to Laval or the South Shore, which partly explains why French has remained stable as the main language on Montreal Island.

● (1930)

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Arseneault.

Thank you, Mr. Corbeil.

Given when we started and the minor technical problems, we're going to do a final round of questions, for two and a half minutes each. After Mr. Beaulieu, it will be Mr. Boulerice's turn.

Mr. Beaulieu, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'll begin by responding briefly to Mr. Arseneault. On the one hand, if there is no decline as such in the main language spoken at home in Montreal, there certainly is one in the greater Montreal area. For example, Laval is becoming anglicized more quickly at the moment. There is also anglicization on the South Shore.

I'd also like to make a minor correction. Earlier, my colleague seemed to be saying that the mother tongue indicator should be excluded. I don't think we need to be limited to this at all. It's a medium or long-term indicator.

When a mother changes the mother tongue used at home, it becomes the mother tongue of the next generation. This need not be alarming, but if we were to transfer this principle to the environment, some people would say the same thing about a climate emergency and they would raise the alarm. With the environment as with language, the precautionary principle needs to be applied, and sticking your head in the sand is definitely not the answer.

Mr. Corbeil, you spoke about several factors that had an influence on the situation. The factor I consider central is the common public language. If French is the common public language, more newcomers would learn French and integrate.

Do you agree?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Absolutely. It's a huge challenge, because we know full well that for immigrants, it's not because you have another language as a mother tongue or that you speak that other language most often at home that you won't have a preference for English or won't turn towards English.

The language used in the public space is definitely a challenge. Perhaps the greatest challenge is to cope with this form of bilingualization that is becoming relatively widespread in the greater Montreal area. What needs to be done is to try and understand why it is happening.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Exactly.

I believe that the intent of Bill 101 was to make French the common language, while the Official Languages Act was more for institutional bilingualism.

So if a newcomer had a choice between the two, given that in Canada and the United States the majority speak English, there's a natural tendency to opt for English. As Bill 101 was gradually weakened and full bilingualism reappeared—

**The Chair:** Mr. Beaulieu, Your speaking time is up. Thank you very much.

We are now beginning the final round of questions.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for two and a half minutes.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much, Mr. Chair.

I fully share my colleagues' concerns about applying the precautionary principle. I too rely on science-based decisions, facts and meaningful data. That too is part of our discussions and our analysis.

To return to you, Mr. Corbeil, what do you believe are the most critical factors for the evolution of the state of French in Quebec and Canada? I imagine that you would tell me it depends on the regions. However, is it immigration, the language mainly spoken at home, the language of work, or rather the language transfers that we spoke about earlier this evening?

Where, in fact, do we need to take action to be as effective as possible?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Answering this question in so little time would be rather tricky. I would say that caution is needed.

Is there a political remedy or program that would enable us to take action with respect to language transfers? I personally don't know of any, and they are complex.

Not only that, but it's important to understand that the number of immigrants who do not know French when they arrive in Quebec seems to have increased in recent years. When immigrants come to Quebec and know only English, that definitely has an influence on the language they will be inclined to use in the public space.

I think that it's also fairly obvious that strengthening the educational trajectory from early childhood through to postsecondary would be very effective outside Quebec, on condition of course that it is attached to immigration.

• (1935)

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** For francophone communities outside Quebec that are in a highly minority situation, would a focus on francophone immigration not be the best approach at the moment?

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** For Canada outside Quebec, everyone agrees on the importance of immigration to at least make it possible to stabilize and revitalize francophone communities. The same is true of schools.

I think that immigration should play a very important role, provided that enough immigrants are available.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Boulerice.

Thank you very much, Mr. Corbeil.

**Mr. René Arseneault:** Mr. Chair, before Mr. Corbeil leaves us, I'd like to remind him that if he would like to add some information after time has run out, he could send it in writing to the committee.

**The Chair:** Understood. Thank you.

Before giving the floor to Mr. Beaulieu, I'd like, on behalf of the committee members and myself, to thank Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil for having accepted our invitation and for his contribution to the study we are conducting.

May I remind you that Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil is the assistant director, diversity and sociocultural statistics, at Statistics Canada.

We thank you once again for your intervention, Mr. Corbeil.

**Mr. Jean-Pierre Corbeil:** Thank you. Good evening.

**The Chair:** Thank you. It was a pleasure.

And now, please go ahead Mr. Beaulieu, before we welcome our next witnesses.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I'll be very brief.

I have two routine motions, to be introduced in different committees. Can I introduce one here?

**The Chair:** Yes. You can always bring a motion, but you know that—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** I can bring it if there is unanimity; otherwise I will do it later.

**The Chair:** What I want to say is that these motions were not tabled with 24 to 48 hours' notice.

You can just file these notices of motion. There will be no debate.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** They were tabled with notice; I'm sure of it.

**The Chair:** Oh, they are these motions that—

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, Mr. Chair.

**The Chair:** I'll check with the clerk to make sure that the notices for these motions were filed.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Perfect. While waiting, can I read the first one?

**The Chair:** Yes. Do it while I check.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Okay.

That the clerk inform each witness who is to appear before the Committee that the House Administration support team must conduct technical tests to check the connectivity and the equipment used to ensure the best possible sound quality; and that the Chair advises the Committee, at the start of each meeting, of any witness who did not perform the required technical tests.

**The Chair:** Okay.

Would you like us to debate your motion right away?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Yes, if everyone is in agreement. Otherwise, I wouldn't want to steal any time from the guests.

**The Chair:** Okay. I'm going to go with the hands that have been raised.

We'll begin with Ms. Lalonde.

**Mrs. Marie-France Lalonde:** I'd like to thank my colleague for introducing this motion. However, I believe we have witnesses to hear and I wouldn't be very happy about making them wait.

We recognize the importance of your motion, Mr. Beaulieu.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Okay. I agree with you on that score, Ms. Lalonde.

I'll try to have the motions adopted later or at the end of the meeting.

**The Chair:** Okay. Thank you.

We're now going to suspend the meeting for a few seconds so that we can run a few tests and welcome our witnesses.

• (1935) \_\_\_\_\_ (Pause) \_\_\_\_\_

• (1940)

**The Chair:** I now call the meeting back to order.

The committee is meeting today to discuss its study entitled "Government Measures to Protect and Promote French in Quebec and in Canada".

[English]

I would like to make a few comments for the benefit of the witnesses.

[Translation]

Before speaking, wait until I mention your name. When you are ready to speak, click on the microphone icon to activate your mic.

[English]

I will remind you that all comments should be addressed through the chair.

[Translation]

The interpretation services available for this meeting are approximately the same as those provided during regular committee meetings. At the bottom of your screen, you can choose either Floor, English or French.

[English]

Please speak slowly and clearly. When you are not speaking, your mike should be on mute.

[Translation]

I would now like to warmly welcome our witnesses this evening.

You will each have seven and a half minutes to give your statement. I will advise you when you have a minute left, and the red card will indicate that your time is up. The committee members are well aware of this procedure.

This evening we have, as individuals, Mr. Charles Castonguay, retired professor, and Mr. Patrick Sabourin, doctor in demography.

I will give the floor first to Mr. Castonguay for seven and a half minutes.

Mr. Castonguay, you have the floor.

• (1945)

**Prof. Charles Castonguay (Retired Professor, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening, ladies and gentlemen.

[English]

Our language policies are failing to preserve both Canada's English-French linguistic duality and the French character of Quebec itself. My conclusion is based on close to a half-century of census data.

First, I'll say a word on why our language policies are failing us. The more a minority language group is concentrated within a given territory, the better it resists assimilation to the majority language. A language policy aimed at preserving the French-speaking component of Canada's population should therefore have aimed first and foremost at maintaining and promoting the French character of the province of Quebec.

Canada's Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism rejected such an approach. It opted instead for individual freedom of choice between two official languages and for the free circulation of individuals from coast to coast, unhindered by any linguistic measures that might possibly restrict such mobility. This kind of linguistic free trade principle has guided Canada's language policy ever since.

It is a striking fact that at the same time, Quebec's Gendron commission was grappling with how to ensure the free circulation of unilingual French-speaking Quebecers within Quebec, which was gravely impeded by the domination of English in Montreal's work world. Quebec, therefore, opted for a policy with French as sole official language and with a Charter of the French Language geared to make French the default language of public communication between all Quebecers, including at work.

Conflict was inevitable between Canada's free trade "official language of your choice" policy and Quebec's protectionist "one official and common language" approach. The outcome was equally inevitable. The courts have left precious little of Quebec's charter intact. This has had dire consequences for French in Quebec, and automatically for French in Canada as a whole.

Now I will turn to some statistics. The French mother-tongue component of Canada's population plummeted from 29% in 1951 to 21%, according to the last census, that of 2016. Since Canada's Official Languages Act, the percentage of Canadians speaking French as their main home language has declined just as rapidly. In contrast, Canada's English-speaking component has just about held its own.

The crushingly superior power of assimilation of English is the principal explanation for this. The assimilation of Canada's French mother-tongue population to English as their main home language increased steadily from less than 300,000 in 1971 to over 400,000 in 2016. At the same time, the assimilation of non-official mother-tongue Canadians to English rose from 1.2 million in 1971 to 2.7 million at the last census, whereas their assimilation to French has reached a mere quarter million, a large number of whom derive from Quebec's selection of immigrants who had adopted French as their main home language abroad before coming to Quebec.

On the whole, the overall gain that English draws from assimilation of all kinds in Canada increased from less than 1.5 million persons in 1971 to over three million in 2016. French, by contrast, still remains mired in an overall loss, due to assimilation, in the order of 180,000 at the last census.

- (1950)

At the level of Canada as a whole, therefore, Canada's language policy and Quebec's sorely weakened charter have, taken together, in no way stopped the erosion of Canada's French-speaking component.

Lately, things are not any rosier for French in Quebec. Indeed, between 2001 and 2016, the last 15 years, Quebec's French-speaking majority has plunged at record speed to a record low. In contrast, in Quebec, for the first time in census history, English has roughly maintained its weight in Quebec as a mother tongue, and increased its weight somewhat in terms of the main home language.

The most stunning development is on Montreal Island, where French mother tongue youth have become more bilingual than their English counterparts and are now adopting English as the main home language at the rate of 6%.

As for the rest of Canada, the anglicization rate of the French mother tongue population outside Quebec has steadily increased, from 27% in 1971 to 40% in 2016.

The most eloquent evidence of the failure of Canada's language policy is, however, the anglicization rate of Francophones in Canada's very capital. It has exactly doubled since Canada's initial Official Languages Act, rising from 17% to 34%. It even topped 40% in 2016 among the capital's younger French mother tongue adults, a proven forerunner of greater anglicization yet to come.

It is high time, therefore, to aim Canada's language policy more squarely at preventing further erosion of Canada's fading linguistic duality.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Castonguay, for your testimony.

[Translation]

We will now hear from Mr. Sabourin, doctor in demography.

Mr. Sabourin, you have the floor for seven and a half minutes.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin (Doctor in Demography, As an Individual):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Good evening to everyone. I'd like to thank the committee for having invited me.

I'd like to begin by pointing out that I'm appearing here as an individual, a scientist, a demographer and a citizen who is concerned about the future of the French language.

My comments will address the first part of the study's mandate, which is to paint an objective and detailed picture of the state of French and English in Quebec. I will therefore briefly present the outcome of my research work on the demographic future of the French language in Canada.

However, before beginning, I would like to inform the committee that the correspondence I received calling the witnesses contains some French mistakes and several examples of what Gaston Miron called "traduidu," or "translated from," which is to say sentences that look like French, but that can only be understood properly by reading the English version.

I'm not pointing this out because I'm a language purist. You'll never see me out marching on behalf of proper French or abolishing the Radio Radio group. However, the federal government, owing to its institutional status and its claims with respect to bilingualism, needs to set a proper example, particularly when dealing with the Standing Committee on Official Languages.

A living language is one that looks at reality without any filters that might be imposed by another language. If French is nothing more than a translation language, and if it can only truly remain alive within the federal government, how can the government have the moral authority to defend the cause of the French language across Canada?

As Professor Charles Castonguay has already demonstrated, French is declining in Quebec and Canada, and has been for quite a while.

The decline has been accelerating in Quebec since the early 2000s. In my brief address, I would like to place an emphasis on the causes of this decline and on future prospects.

First of all, when we speak of decline, we're talking about a reduction in the demographic weight of francophones compared to other language groups. As the comparative weight of French diminishes, the less competitive it becomes, demographically speaking, by which I mean that there will be fewer people speaking French, lower demand for services in French, fewer opportunities to work in French, fewer immigrants who have the opportunity or the desire to live alongside francophones, and other similar considerations.

In Canada, the main consideration is the relative weight of French compared to English, because these two languages are in competition with one another. The two languages are official throughout Canada, and the language choice is left up to each individual. This is called the personality principle.

There are other forms of linguistic organization that limit such competition. In Switzerland, for example, the place of residence determines what languages are used. This is called a territoriality principle. Competition between languages is limited to certain zones that are designated bilingual.

Let's move on to the decline of French and the demographic system. Demography, basically, is a rather simple discipline. In order to determine how a population is evolving, we need to know what comes in and what goes out. An inflow might be an immigrant or a birth, and an outflow might be a death or an emigrant, which means someone moving out of their region.

When we speak about a language group in demolinguistics, it can also mean entering or leaving a population by changing the language used. It's a bit like moving, but it means moving from one language to another. We call this language substitution.

To anticipate the future, we must begin by understanding the demographic system that has historically determined the language dynamics in Canada. With only seven minutes, all I can do is give a rough approximation, for which I apologize in advance.

Let's go back a bit.

Early in the 20th century, before the Second World War, the baby boom among francophones was called, rightly or not, "the revenge of the cradle". This advantage was offset by an exodus of francophones to the United States and by cyclical, and heavily anglophone, European and British immigration, particularly outside Quebec.

The baby boom was followed by a baby bust, meaning that fertility dropped rapidly, and this definitively counterbalanced the francophone birth rate. However, the significant exodus of anglophones from Quebec that began in the 1970s contributed to maintaining the demographic weight of French. This was the period of the referendums, which continued until the mid-1990s.

As of the 1990s, immigration rates began to increase dramatically and have remained among the highest levels in the world, at approximately twice the level for the United States. Immigration is becoming less European and increasingly diversified. During this period, the fertility rate among Canadians and Quebecers has remained well below the replacement level. Anglophones continued to move, but not to the same extent as during the referendum years. Fewer of them were leaving Quebec. As a consequence, the decline of French has been accelerating, as demonstrated by Mr. Castonguay.

The table has been set for the future. Over the coming decades, there will be a low birth rate and upward pressure on immigration thresholds. In Canada outside Quebec, the linguistic assimilation of francophones will likely continue.

Because the fertility rate for francophones is very close to the rate for anglophones, potential for growth in both groups will basically come from immigration.

To maintain the language balance, French will have to be able to recruit immigrants whose language matches its demographic weight in terms of Canada's official languages, which is approximately 90% in Quebec.

Language substitutions are distributed approximately equally. In Canada outside Quebec, all substitutions are to English, but in Quebec, they are approximately equal.

• (1955)

If this proportion has increased over the past few decades, it's largely due to an increase in francophone immigration. The status and appeal of French in Quebec have made little headway, and language substitutions towards French have been levelling out. The lower appeal of French in Quebec has thus been concealed by two phenomena, the strong propensity of anglophones to leave Quebec, which increased the weight of francophones, and the selection of French-speaking immigrants from abroad, which gave the impression that these immigrants were learning French locally. The impact of both of these phenomena will tend to diminish.

With due regard to all these factors, we can project that French will decline just about everywhere in Canada and Quebec in the short and medium term. There is no point to burying yourself under a mountain of numbers. I'll mention just two important facts derived from my doctoral work. First of all, outside Quebec, French is declining both relatively and absolutely. The demographic weight of francophones will diminish and there will be fewer and fewer francophones. The decline is essentially the outcome of demographic aging and linguistic assimilation.

In Quebec, the decline of French is relative, which is to say that the demographic weight of French is diminishing compared to English. Overall, there is anglicization and linguistic polarization in Canada. Anglicization is occurring because French has lost ground just about everywhere, and polarization because francophones will become increasingly concentrated in Quebec, outside the Montreal census metropolitan area.

It's also important to give consideration to the fact that the changes expected at the federal and provincial levels are hiding local changes that are even more significant. For example, the Montreal suburbs have been mutating for 10 or 15 years now, and this mutation—

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada (Hochelaga, Lib.):** Mr. Chair, I have a point of order.

• (2000)

**The Chair:** Excuse me, Mr. Sabourin.

Go ahead, Madam.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Pardon me, would it be possible to ask the witness to speak a bit more slowly? It's hard for the interpreters to do their job.

**The Chair:** Noted. Thank you.

Continue, Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** I'm sorry. I'll slow down. I want to get to the end of my remarks.

The changes anticipated at the federal and provincial levels obscure even more significant local changes. Suburban Montreal, for example, has been rapidly changing for the past 10 or 15 years, and that change will continue for the next few decades. We're witnessing a geographic spread of the anglicization phenomenon.

I should point out that the geographic concentration of speakers is a key factor in the survival of linguistic communities. The more geographically concentrated the speakers of a language, the greater their potential linguistic vitality.

When the percentage of francophones in a region falls below a certain threshold, the percentage of those who don't speak French and adopt English as their language of integration rises quickly.

I would like to emphasize one final point. The percentage of bilingual francophones is rising sharply in Quebec, as Mr. Castonguay mentioned. That growth will continue over the next few decades. The long-term consequences of that increase are not yet well understood. That may mean an increase in the consumption of cultural goods in English, a decline in incentives for anglophones to learn French, an increase in the use of English in the public space, a decline in support for linguistic planning measures and so on. This is an issue that we will have to explore.

May I make a final remark, in conclusion, Mr. Chair?

**The Chair:** Yes, a very short one.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** I promise.

In conclusion, given current language planning conditions, French will inevitably decline virtually everywhere in Canada in the coming decades.

Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sabourin.

Please send us your notes or a brief. It would be very interesting for the committee to receive them through the clerk. Thank you.

I'd also like to thank you for the comment you made at the outset concerning the correspondence you've received. I take this very seriously and I'll pay special attention to it. We'll contact you if necessary. Rest assured we feel compelled to rectify the situation.

With that, we will now go to the period of questions.

Mr. Godin, you have the floor for five minutes.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Sabourin and Mr. Castonguay, thank you for being with us at this late hour.

I find this interesting and somewhat disappointing. Your testimony is interesting, but your observation on the future of the French language is disappointing.

Here's a question I'm dying to ask. We aren't experts. We haven't conducted exhaustive research on the decline of the French language, particularly in the Montreal region. We're aware of that, and

that's why we've taken action. It's why we're conducting this study today.

As a legislator, I'd like to take tangible action to slow the decline and reverse the curve so that French is restored to its rightful place. It must be understood that our ancestors have fought many battles throughout history, as a result of which we are now able to speak French in the Standing Committee on Official Languages of Canada, a country that has two official languages.

My question will be for both of you, Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Sabourin.

If you were given decision-making power in the drafting of the new act tomorrow morning, what would be your five priorities for reversing the curve?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** That's a good question.

**The Chair:** Mr. Castonguay, go ahead if you wish.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** I wanted to contribute to your work by presenting more of an observation based on the data most important for the future. I'm not the one who's saying this; it's sociolinguistics, the history of languages. In his work, Nicholas Ostler has concluded that the most important factor in preserving a language group is the number of its mother-tongue speakers. In my view, you absolutely must not underestimate the importance of this critical linguistic indicator.

I used the second indicator in my brief, which I'll send you once I've translated it. Mr. Chair, the translation service did an absolutely terrible job translating my brief. They had about 10 days to do it. It almost made me ill; I tried to translate it on time for your meeting, but that was impossible if I wanted a good result. You can add that to Mr. Sabourin's observation. My father was a translator in the federal public service in Ottawa, and my wife translated Hansard for the House of Commons. It's pretty bad when you get the title of the brief wrong.

● (2005)

**Mr. Joël Godin:** You're entirely right, Mr. Castonguay. We see it every day.

Briefly, if it weren't for that...

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** The only thing I can think of off the top of my head...

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Give us some tools.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** ...is the proposal to require newcomers who choose to make Quebec their home and who are candidates for Canadian citizenship to demonstrate satisfactory knowledge of French.

I think that's the first step toward recognition of a significant difference between living in Quebec and living elsewhere in Canada. I'm convinced that, if a survey were conducted on the issue, 90% of Quebecers would respond that newcomers should be able to understand the debates taking place in the host population, their host society, and those debates are largely conducted in French.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you very much, Mr. Castonguay.

Mr. Chair, I don't know whether I have a little more time for another witness?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds left, Mr. Sabourin; that's very short...

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Mr. Sabourin, 15 seconds for a quick answer. It's unfortunate, but time is limited, even in this committee.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** That's all right because I speak quickly.

**The Chair:** Yes, you have 10 seconds left now. Go ahead Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Canadian language planning has to change. That's the first and last thing I would say, since I have no time. There should be a shift from a principle of personality to the principle of territoriality.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** That's what Switzerland does.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Exactly. That would already be a step forward.

**Mr. Joël Godin:** Thank you, Mr. Sabourin.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much.

Ms. Martinez Ferrada, you have the next five minutes.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to the witnesses for being with us this evening.

I'll ask my questions right off the bat since we don't have a lot of time. I wanted to go back to immigration. Mr. Sabourin, perhaps you could answer first.

Mr. Castonguay, I understand the immigration question. Sometimes people don't see it, but I myself am an immigrant, and I learned French. As I always say, I'm a Bill 101 girl. Apart from Quebec, I also lived in Vancouver, where I attended a French immersion school. I'm certain that the future of French will be secured by francophone immigration, but also by better francization.

We heard from Senator Serge Joyal as part of this study last week. He told us that the demographic issue was important to the future of our francophone demography, as well as the birth rate relative to the immigration rate.

Do you agree with this principle of more targeted francophone immigration, particularly outside Quebec? Do we perhaps need more targeted immigration in Quebec's regions, and should we ensure that more extensive francization is done, particularly in economic immigration, which we also need in Quebec?

What do you say, Mr. Sabourin?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** That's a good question, one that can be divided into a number of components. You're asking whether we

can rely on francophone immigration, immigrant francization and regionalized integration. Can we have immigrants who speak French? Will they go and live where we tell them to go?

It's no simple matter. It looks good on paper, but it's hard to manage. Regionalized immigration has been a puzzle for decades. We try to encourage immigrants to go and live anywhere across Canada since we need population everywhere, but immigrants are concentrated in major cities such as Montreal, Toronto and Vancouver and face an initial challenge...

● (2010)

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Mr. Sabourin, on that subject, I'd suggest you take a look at pilot projects conducted in other countries, on regional immigration in particular, but from a family standpoint. The reason immigrants don't stay in the regions is that they don't have a family network. You absolutely have to consider...

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** You're absolutely right. I'm not saying it's completely impossible, but it's really difficult and calls for some serious thinking.

They're not just looking for an available job in the right place; it's more than that. There are the immigrant networks, all kinds of things, the whole culture. A variety of cultures coexist in Montreal, for example. Immigrants look for that because it makes them feel somewhat at home.

You have to consider all that. There's also the idea that francophone immigration will save francophones outside Quebec. You have to beware of that notion. Francophones arriving in Canada will be subjected to the same pressures francophones outside Quebec now feel. They'll also be under pressure to switch to English and will undergo the same linguistic assimilation that francophones outside Quebec experience.

It's a short-term solution, a kind of antibody injection, as it were, but it won't solve the problem in the medium or long term.

Mr. Castonguay has something to add.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Castonguay.

**Ms. Soraya Martinez Ferrada:** Mr. Castonguay, perhaps you should clarify in your answer how important Quebec's francophone demographic weight is in the rest of Canada.

Would you like to comment on that?

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** I'd rather comment further on immigration outside Quebec. Francophone immigration to Quebec definitely has the potential to expand and persist, to contribute permanently to French in Quebec and thus in Canada.

As I confirm in my brief, native Quebecers who migrate outside Quebec, in the same way international immigrants migrate to other provinces, become anglicized, starting in the first generation, at virtually the same rate as their host francophone society.



The example I cite is more than an example; it's a general rule. In British Columbia, the anglicization rate of Quebec immigrants—and half the francophone population in British Columbia are originally from Quebec—is 71% among those who have reached adulthood. The rate for international francophone immigrants is 65%. The majority in fact contributes to the demographics of the English-language population.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Castonguay. I'm sorry, but time is up.

Mr. Beaulieu, it's your turn. You have the floor for the next five minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** My first question is quite general. If French were the common language in Quebec, just as English is in Ontario and elsewhere in Canada, do you think that language transfers might be more toward French and thus maintain the demographic weight of francophones in Quebec?

**The Chair:** You may answer, Mr. Castonguay.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** We wouldn't be able to ensure the demographic weight of francophones that way because immigration isn't strong enough. Their weight will decline, but the weight of English would fall proportionately. What we've been experiencing for 15 years, since the 2001 census, is that the weight of French is in decline both as a mother tongue and as the language spoken at home, and the weight of English has remained steady as a mother tongue and slightly increased as the language spoken at home. Consequently, there is a linguistic imbalance that we could remedy by taking action, as you proposed, and reverting to the first version of the Charter of the French Language, which was really a coherent whole. I'm convinced that would do the job. That's the big push we have to make today. Canada should encourage Quebec to head in that direction because it would help maintain the English-French linguistic duality of Canada as well.

• (2015)

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Under Bill 101, government services were to be provided for everyone in French, with special exceptions for Quebec anglophones. However, we've gradually returned to full bilingualism. Consequently, if, as you said, we returned to the spirit of the original Bill 101, I think we could make French the common language and the language of inclusion for newcomers.

Earlier Mr. Sabourin asserted something along those lines, saying that the territorial model might be able to guarantee the future of French. That's in fact somewhat the way it is in the rest of Canada, where the percentages of language transfers to English are so high that, even if anglophones' demographic weight declined slightly, they would ultimately still catch up because it's 99% [*Inaudible—Editor*].

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Mr. Beaulieu, you asked what would happen if Quebec were as francophone as Ontario is anglophone. We're actually very far from that situation. Quebec is Canada's most Canadian province because English and French are very strong there. I'd even say English is stronger. Anglophone institutions in Quebec are very strong. There are colleges and universities. In downtown Montreal, for example, you have McGill University,

Concordia University, Vanier College and Dawson College in a relatively small block. There's no equivalent in Ontario.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Under the Official Languages Act, the purpose of the entire official languages program for Quebec is to reinforce English in anglophone institutions. By doing that, does the federal government harm French and prevent French from being the common language?

**The Chair:** Who's your question for, Mr. Beaulieu?

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** For both witnesses.

However, Mr. Sabourin had started to respond. I'm, in a way, talking about the principle of institutional completeness, according to which the stronger a linguistic community's institutions are, the greater its language's power of attraction is.

Doesn't the overfunding of anglophone institutions—I mean by the federal government because we're at the federal level—undermine French as the language of integration?

**The Chair:** You have 15 seconds left.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** The federal government intervenes in language policy in Quebec in two ways: directly through the Official Languages Act and indirectly via its spending power. That's something the federal government may consider less frequently, for example, when investing tens and hundreds of millions of dollars in research at McGill University and Concordia University. That funding is allocated to English-language research and develops the anglophone community and work done in English in Montreal.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Sabourin.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for the next five minutes.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Thanks to our witnesses, Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Sabourin.

Mr. Sabourin, with regard to your last remark, I can't help but think that the federal government has used its spending power extensively, especially during this past year. However, I also plead guilty because we also brought pressure to bear in the case of several social programs during the pandemic, although I don't think that was exactly what you meant.

Mr. Castonguay, I listened closely to your presentation and was surprised by one sentence. I'd like to make sure I clearly understood, and I'd like to know how you think that would apply. I thought you suggested at one point that people should be prevented or discouraged from moving from province to province for linguistic reasons. Am I wrong? Please correct me if I was wrong.

• (2020)

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** No, I didn't mention interprovincial immigration at all.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** All right.

That's fine. Perhaps I misunderstood your remarks. That obviously reassures me because I think it's very important for many people.

Mr. Castonguay, many people say it would seem that the administration of French-language instruction programs for immigrants, in particular, could be improved. The Fédération des travailleurs et des travailleuses du Québec, or FTQ, has even demanded that businesses with 50 or more employees establish priority francization committees so that workers can act as watchdogs for French in the workplace.

Do you agree with the FTQ that French-language education and professional French-language training should and must be a central tool in promoting French in Quebec?

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** I agree, but I'm also thinking of the proposal I submitted to you some time ago that we consider the idea of requiring newcomers to demonstrate adequate knowledge of French as a condition for obtaining citizenship. That's along the same lines, and it's the very first step toward a territorial approach that would distinguish Quebec from every other part of North America.

It's something you can do to help achieve that end in the very short term and that would have a significant impact on the newcomers' minds. They would be informed of that condition before they arrived. I'm sure they would act accordingly.

Between 2001 and 2004, Statistics Canada conducted a longitudinal study in which it monitored a large cohort of immigrants who had arrived in Canada in 2001. It may be concluded from the findings of that longitudinal survey—something that's rarely conducted and is very costly—that, among allophone immigrants, that is, those whose mother tongue is not an official language, who arrived in Quebec during that period, the majority of those who neither spoke nor understood French on arrival still did not speak or understand it four years later.

If they still don't four years later, I bet they can get by in English and their mother tongue, or in both, but they don't need to learn French, and the battle is lost. In reality, every immigrant to Quebec who is granted Canadian citizenship but only has knowledge of English is a slap in the face to Quebec francophones.

This makes it that much harder to live in French.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you for repeating your proposal. I listened closely. I'm very pleased that Quebec has absolute control over economic immigration and the majority of immigrants.

As for your proposal, I have some serious doubts about its application in family reunification cases and in the refugee program, quite simply because those are the objectives of those programs, under which we have international obligations.

Mr. Sabourin, you said that the impact of immigrants who have learned French outside Canada and who are granted entry to Quebec or Canada will also decline over time. Could you tell me why the impact of francophone immigrants, French, Belgians, Algerians and Senegalese, will necessarily lessen over time?

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Perhaps I misspoke. In fact, since Bill 101 was passed, wherever we have taken greater control over immigration and immigrant selection, the percentage of language substitutions in favour of French has gradually risen thanks to francization outside Canada.

On the other hand, there has been little improvement in francization here at home. The more we move forward, the smaller the percentage of French-language immigrants outside Canada will be relative to immigrants who are already here. The improvement we have seen in language transfers in favour of French has levelled off. We can see it in the figures: it's about 54% and won't rise much higher than 55% or 56%.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** So we should increase francization.

**The Chair:** Thank you.

I realize time is passing very quickly, but I have to monitor it.

For the last four minutes, I turn the floor over to Mr. Mazier, unless he decides otherwise.

Mr. Mazier, you have the floor for four minutes.

● (2025)

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Mr. Chair, with your permission, I'll take my colleague's place.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Blaney.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** All right.

I'd like to thank our two witnesses for their moving testimony this evening. I'm fortunate to have been on the Standing Committee of Official Languages for many years, and I must say you both gave compelling testimony. I'd go so far as to say it's a revelation for the committee, a truly clear look at the situation of French both in Quebec and across the country.

Mr. Castonguay, I congratulate you on the way you spoke from your heart.

My two questions are as follows.

Can you leave the committee this evening with a message about Canada's role [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] in order to force open the French Canadian home.

My question for Mr. Sabourin is as follows: the impact of the Official Languages Act [*Technical difficulty—Editor*] of restorative and proactive measures. You suggested several. If it's possible in the time we have left, I'd perhaps like to hear what you have to say on that subject. I'd also like to thank you once again for your study, which I consider very important.

I want to repeat to you this evening that this is pivotal for the Standing Committee on Official Languages. It's a powerful observation of the state of French in Quebec and across Canada.

**The Chair:** Let's begin with Mr. Castonguay.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** Thank you for your interest in my little pamphlet, Mr. Blaney. The brief I'll be submitting to your committee in a few days, in both English and French, will expand on that analysis. The pamphlet focused solely on Quebec. I've expanded my analysis for you to include all of Canada.

Apart from that, would you be kind enough to rephrase your question, please?

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** You said it. We'll await your findings, and thank you, Mr. Castonguay. You said it all this evening.

You discussed how to prevent linguistic duality from eroding in Canada by actually strengthening one of the two languages.

Mr. Sabourin, I'd like you to tell us how the Official Languages Act can reinforce the situation.

Since you talked about potential solutions and identities, I'll let you have the last word on my speaking time.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** This is a broad issue. I think we still have time to do a U-turn. You mentioned restorative and proactive measures. First of all, there has to be a self-critique of the Official Languages Act and of the attitude of the federal government and federal courts, the Supreme Court in particular, toward language legislation in Quebec. As you know, judgments have been rendered overturning unanimous decisions made in the National Assembly of Quebec. It's somewhat shocking in some cases; these are judgments that have been drafted entirely in English invalidating portions or measures of Bill 101. That's just one example.

I actually propose that we consider the role of the federal government and federal courts in the weakening of Quebec's language policy. I think that would be a major step forward. Based on that examination, we could perhaps work on corrective measures, introduce a new policy or open a dialogue. Having said so, I don't think that can be done until we ascertain what has happened in the past 40 or 50 years.

**Hon. Steven Blaney:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Blaney.

We will now turn the floor over to Mr. Beaulieu for two minutes.

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

The Official Languages Act pushes for institutional bilingualism in Quebec, but that runs counter to Bill 101, which provides that French is the official language and the sole common language. All the judgments we discussed by the federal courts in Quebec have invalidated portions of Bill 101, which was designed to make French the common and official language.

If the federal government were to include in the Official Languages Act the principle that it not run counter to Bill 101 and that the Charter of the French Language takes precedence in Quebec, do you think that would solve part of the problem?

• (2030)

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** I don't think that's possible. It would definitely solve part of the problem, but, from what I understand, the Official Languages Act is a quasi-constitutional statute. It would be hard to change. What you're proposing is radical...

**Mr. Mario Beaulieu:** We've previously seen bills of that kind, for example, applying Bill 101 to federally regulated businesses. All the opposition parties agree on that. That would already be a step in the right direction. If it's not possible, I think that means Quebec independence is the only solution that will guarantee the future of French.

We have to try to do it. Institutional bilingualism in federal institutions is one thing, but using resources to push for institutional

bilingualism at the municipal and provincial levels and for more services in English...

**The Chair:** We have to leave some time for answers. Unfortunately, you have 10 seconds left to answer that question.

Go ahead, Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Yes, that would definitely help, but it will be hard to do.

I've stayed within the allotted 10 seconds.

**The Chair:** Excellent.

Thank you very much, Mr. Sabourin.

Since time is flying by, I request that the members ask brief questions.

I apologize because I skipped a round of questions immediately after Mr. Blaney. We will therefore continue with Ms. Lattanzio for the next four minutes, then finish with Mr. Boulerice.

Ms. Lattanzio, you have the floor for four minutes.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio (Saint-Léonard—Saint-Michel, Lib.):** Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I too want to thank our two witnesses.

Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Sabourin, thank you for being with us this evening.

Mr. Sabourin, you're the lucky one; my question is for you.

Earlier we heard the testimony of our statistician, Mr. Corbeil, who told us about language projections for Canada and provided us with a document on the study period from 2011 to 2036.

According to that document, French is declining across the country, including in Quebec. It also includes projections for Quebec's anglophone minority. The report states that the decline is due in particular to increased immigration and that mother tongues and official languages, including English and French, are declining in favour of other mother tongues. I'd like to have your opinion on that subject.

First, what do you think of those projections?

Second, what can you say about the decline of English in Quebec?

And, third, more precisely, to what do you attribute that decline?

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Sabourin.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Statistics Canada's projections generally agree quite well with mine. I don't see any decline in English in Quebec. It's really stable. Are you sure of what you're saying?

It's true there will be a decline in the percentage of anglophones in Canada as a whole, but the percentage of anglophones in Quebec should remain stable or increase slightly.

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** My source is the Statistics Canada website.

It was noted in a study that was conducted that the projections of researchers René Houle and Jean-Pierre Corbeil also reveal that English will decline significantly across Canada. That means the language, not anglophones.

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** Yes, there will definitely be a decline across Canada as a whole.

What Mr. Castonguay and I said is that it's mainly the mother tongue that will be in decline. The language spoken will not change that much.

Furthermore, it will decline much less quickly than French. So it's the balance between English and French that will change, which will shift more toward English because English will decline less quickly than French.

● (2035)

**Ms. Patricia Lattanzio:** Why do you think the language will decline less significantly for anglophones than francophones?

**Mr. Patrick Sabourin:** The linguistic assimilation of allophone immigrants will favour English more than French.

**The Chair:** Go ahead, Mr. Castonguay.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** I would add that francophones are also assimilating francophones who anglicize join the anglophone population and leave the francophone population.

This kind of linguistic assimilation is occurring at twice the rate and has twice as many consequences as the anglicization or francization of a person whose mother tongue is a non-official language.

I would also point out that Statistics Canada's 2017 projection work does not reflect the accelerating anglicization of francophone young adults on Montreal Island, whom I mentioned in my brief and discussed this evening.

With respect to linguistic assimilation, these projections are based solely on 2001 and 2006 census data. They're already out of date and invalid. The exercise has to be redone based on new data from the 2011 and 2016 censuses.

**The Chair:** Thank you, Mr. Castonguay and Mr. Sabourin.

Mr. Boulerice, you have the floor for the last period of questions. You have two minutes.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Thank you very much.

My first question is for Mr. Castonguay.

I belong to Quebec's union movement. As unionists, we New Democrats have always striven to ensure that Quebec workers can work in French and receive communications with their employers, their employment contracts in particular, in French.

With regard to the idea of subjecting private businesses under federal jurisdiction to a language regime, Mr. Labelle Eastaugh recently told the committee that the Official Languages Act could be used as a tool to guarantee francophone workers' right to work in the language of their choice.

Is that a recommendation that you support?

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** Mr. Boulerice, a francophone who works in the language of his choice may work in English.

That occurs too often in the Canadian public service in Ottawa, and I dislike the words "the official language of your choice". We'd like to know if francophones actually work in French, not in the language of their choice.

The Commissioner of Official Languages of Canada recently conducted a study...

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Mr. Castonguay, I said in my introduction that we work for francophone Quebec workers...

I have very little time. I nevertheless said that francophone Quebec workers had to have the opportunity to work in French and to communicate with their employers and French.

Do you think that the Official Languages Act can be used as a tool to achieve that objective?

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** Absolutely not.

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** Absolutely not? I see.

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** A few weeks ago, someone said that 44% of people whose mother tongue was French felt that they were inhibited and that their linguistic expression was limited to speaking English on the job in Canada's public service and, I believe, associated businesses...

**Mr. Alexandre Boulerice:** We were talking about federal authority, not the public service.

**The Chair:** Thank you...

**Prof. Charles Castonguay:** ...under federal authority.

If that's not the case after half a century of the Official Languages Act, I don't see how the Official Languages Act, in its current state, can improve matters in the least.

**The Chair:** Thank you very much. That is all the time we have. In fact, we have exceeded our allotted time.

On behalf of the members of the committee, the staff and myself, I want to thank Charles Castonguay, retired professor, for coming to see us and contributing to our study. Thanks as well to Patrick Sabourin, doctor in demography, for his contribution. Lastly, I want to assure you that I will take the remarks that both of you have made into consideration regarding the operation of this committee. We'll make sure that happens.

Thank you very much.

● (2040)

**Mr. Marc Dalton:** Thank you very much.

**The Chair:** I would like to thank all those who made it possible to hold this meeting this evening: the technicians, the clerk and the analysts.

With that, I immediately bring the meeting to a close. Thank you and good evening. The meeting is adjourned.

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