THE FIFTIETH ANNIVERSARY OF THE LAURENDEAU-DUNTON COMMISSION: WHERE TO NOW?

JEAN-PIERRE CORBEIL[1] is assistant director and chief specialist of the Language Statistics Section in the Social and Aboriginal Statistics Division at Statistics Canada. After having completed a B.A. and M.A. at McGill University, he earned a Ph.D. in sociology from the Université de Montréal. He has been working in the field of Language Statistics and studying Canada's linguistic dynamics for the past 15 years. Throughout his career at Statistics Canada, he has published several monographs, articles and studies on Canada's language dynamics and has given many presentations on this topic in various places across the country. In addition to demolinguistics, his fields of interest are, among others, immigration, intergroup relations, Canada's linguistic duality, multilinguism and education.

ABSTRACT

The goal of this short article is to demonstrate, with the help of available official statistics, that the transformations and evolution that occurred within the Canadian legal framework in terms of official languages over the last fifty years coincided with a significant decrease of social and economic inequalities between Francophones and Anglophones and that, in turn, the demographic shifts in Canadian society are now giving rise to new issues and challenges, particularly as regards the French language as we are approach the Commission's 50th anniversary.

Since Lester B Pearson's government launched the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (Laurendeau-Dunton Commission) in 1963, Canada has been through profound changes, especially when it comes to its demography, society, culture, laws and politics.

When the Privy Council Committee reviewed the Commission's mandate in July 1963, it was the principle of *equality of the two peoples* that have founded the Canadian Confederation[2] which was set as the guiding principle of this initiative aimed at reporting on the state of bilingualism and biculturalism in Canada. It thus became the commissioners' responsibility to ascertain to what extent that equality existed.

The Commission's mandate was not only limited to the equality of "two peoples", but to the "equal partnership of all who speak either language and participate in either culture, whatever their ethnic origin."[3] Moreover, this equality principle did not mean absolute equality of the members of both groups, but rather "a real equality of opportunity – an equality ensuring that the fact of speaking English or French would be neither a help nor a handicap to a person seeking entry into the institutions affecting our individual and collective life"[4] and that this should hold for all aspects of life; social, cultural, economic and political.

At the time the Commission was created, a sense of discontent could be felt amongst the country's Francophones in relation to the vitality of their language and culture. And the Commission did indeed reveal that Francophones were markedly and consistently in a weaker position than their Anglophone counterparts when average income, educational level, professional occupation and business ownership were considered[5].

A portion of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission's mandate was to determine ways in which equality amongst Francophones and Anglophones could be achieved. In this respect, one of the main impacts the Commission has had was without a doubt the creation and the adoption of the Official Languages Act by the federal government in July 1969, the first policy having specifically to do with language to be passed by the federal Parliament. This act was created in order to "ensure respect for English and French as the official languages of Canada and ensure equality of status and equal rights and privileges as to their use in all federal institutions, in particular with respect to their use in parliamentary proceedings, in legislative and other instruments…" (section 2).

The goal of this short article is to demonstrate, with the help of available official statistics, that the transformations and evolution that occurred within the Canadian legal framework in terms of official languages over the last fifty years coincided with a significant decrease of social and economic inequalities between Francophones and Anglophones, and that in turn these demographic shifts in Canadian society are now giving rise to new issues and challenges, particularly as regards the French language, as we are approach the Commission's 50th anniversary.

SOME MILESTONES OF LANGUAGE LEGISLATION IN CANADA

Since the adoption of the Official Languages Act in 1969, the Canadian legislative framework in regards to official languages has greatly evolved. For the purpose of brevity, we will limit ourselves here to a summary of some of the main milestones of this evolution.

Following the enactment of the act in 1969, Canada has set in place an official policy on multiculturalism in 1971, a policy which follows-up on recommendations made in the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission's fourth volume on the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada.[6]

At the provincial level, while New-Brunswick has granted official status to both French and English in 1969, Québec, through the adoption of the Charter of the French Language in 1977, posited French as the province's only official language, a shift which has had significant consequences, especially in regards to the language of instruction and the language used at work. It is only in 1986 that Ontario adopted its French Languages Services Act, a policy which guaranteed an individual's right to receive services in French from Government of Ontario ministries and agencies in 25 designated areas.

In 1982, the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms enshrined linguistic rights in the Canadian Constitution. Sections 16 to 22 of the Charter are about official language in Canada, section 23 specifically concerns the right of citizens belonging to a French or English-speaking minority to be educated in their mother tongue.[7] In 1982, the notion of multiculturalism was also enshrined in the Charter, in as much as section 27 allows it: "This Charter shall be interpreted in a manner consistent with the preservation and enhancement of the multicultural heritage of Canadians."

It should also be noted that during the 1970s and in the 1980s in particular, French as a second language educational programs offered in provinces other than Quebec and educational programs promoting bilingualism grew significantly. For instance, while there were 260 schools offering a French immersion program during the 1976-77 school year, this number soared to 1 800 for the year 1991-92.

In order to reflect the country's new Constitution, the 1969 Act was revised in 1988 so as to "expand the legislative basis of the language policies and programs adopted by the federal government"[8]. Amongst the major changes that resulted from the revision of the Act of 1969, sections IV, V, VI and VII, which respectively concern communications with and services to the public, services provided on behalf of federal institutions, language of work in federal institutions, participation of English-speaking and French-speaking Canadians in federal institution (Commitment to equal opportunities and equitable participation), and finally, the advancement of English and French in Canadian society. Section VII of the 1988 act was modified in 2005, thus compelling the federal government's departments and agencies to take positive measures to foster the development of official language minority communities in Canada.

In 2003, the federal government adopted a five-year National Action Plan on official languages (2003-2005), which was followed by the Roadmap for Canada's Linguistic Duality 2008-2013 and the Roadmap for Canada's Official Languages 2013-2018.

SIGNIFICANT DECREASE IN SOCIO-ECONOMIC INEQUALITIES

The evolution of the legislative framework, programs and policies relating to official languages coincided with a marked and progressive decrease of socio-economic inequalities between Francophones and Anglophones in Canada.

As regards levels of education, census data from 1971 shows that 44% of Canadians aged 15 or older with French as a mother tongue had not completed the 9th grade comparatively to 23% of that same age group whose mother tongue was English. In 2011[9], this gap had significantly narrowed; 25.7% of the population having English as a mother tongue had a high school diploma as their highest certification compared to 20.3% of individuals having French as a mother tongue. Similarly, 22% of the former had a bachelor level or higher university diploma compared to 18.6% of the latter. The gap that still exists nowadays can partly be explained by the fact that older generations of French-speakers are less likely to have a diploma or a degree than their English-speaking counterparts.

In terms of revenue, the significant gaps that existed between Francophones and Anglophones have also greatly narrowed, or even completely disappeared in some cases. For instance, while the median income of French mother tongue Quebecers was 7 250 dollars lower (in constant dollars, 2005) than the one of English mother tongue Quebecers in 1970, it was inferior by 4 000 dollars 35 years later. The narrowing of this gap is much more significant when we consider median income; in 2005, French-speakers had a slightly higher median income than English-speakers. In Ontario and in many provinces excluding Quebec, census data for 2006 shows that the median income of Francophones between the ages of 25 and 44 was in many cases superior to their English-speaking counterparts.[10]

One of the main changes regarding Francophones on the labour market is without a doubt the fact that during the 1960s and 1970s, this group was underrepresented in many sectors and was often confined to sectors with lower incomes. Hence, Francophones were a lot less likely than Anglophones to hold jobs in management, business, finance and administration. They were also underrepresented in the natural and applied science sector. This gap has considerably subsided today, and this to the point where overall each group is relatively equally represented in every sector.

The Laurendeau-Dunton Commission and the 1988 Official Languages Act have had a great impact on the representation of Francophones in the public service sector, especially at the federal level. Thus, while 26.9% of Canada's population was made up of individuals with French as a mother tongue in 1971, this group only held 23.8% of jobs within the federal public sector. In 2011, while Francophones accounted for 21.7% of Canada's population at that time, they made up 27% of the labour force within the federal government. Outside of Quebec, while Francophones made up 6% of Canada's total population, they accounted for 9% of the total employees working for the federal service. Thirty five years later, while their demographic weight was of 4%, they held 11.5% of federal public service jobs.

CHANGING DEMOGRAPHIC CONTEXT (1961-2011)

The narrowing of the gap in inequalities between Francophones and Anglophones over the last decades

happened at the same time important changes in the country's demographic context were underway. While the principle of *equality between the two nations* guiding the work done by the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission has resulted in equality of rights within all Parliament and Government of Canada institutions, the demographic forces at work in the last fifty years brought forth new challenges.

Over the last half century, numerous studies have shown that the active use and parent-child transmission of languages are closely tied to the demographic weight and status of those languages on a given territory, consequently, the demography of linguistic groups is thus a defining factor for the future of the French language in the country.

Through it activities, the Commission has shed light on the proportions (or number) of Francophones in the provinces and amongst their communities.[11] In 1961, Quebec's population was made up of 81.2% of individuals having French as a mother tongue, 13.3% of individuals having English as a mother tongue and 5.6% of individuals that had a language other than French or English as a mother tongue. In comparison, in all the other Canadian provinces, French was the mother tongue of 6.6% of individuals, 76.8% had English as a mother tongue while the demographic weight of the other languages combined was 16.7%. It should also be noted that the importance given to Quebec's demands within the Commission's work cannot uniquely be attributed to the fact that Quebec is the sole province where Francophones form a majority, but also to the fact that Quebec has a significant demographic weight within the Canadian Confederation (about 28.8%).

At the time of the 2011 Census, Quebec's demographic weight in the Confederation was 23.6% and Ontario's weight increased from 34.2% to 38.4%, mainly due to the influx of international immigration to that province. Likewise, Alberta and British-Colombia's populations combined represented 16.2% of Canada in 1961; it grew to 24% in 2011.

In Quebec, while the demographic weight of French as a mother tongue and French as the language mainly used at home varied between 81% and 83% for 1971 and 2001, it slightly declined during the next decade, which can mainly be attributed to the influx of international immigrants having a mother tongue other than French or English. Due to the fact that Quebec's immigration policies tend to give an advantage to immigrants who have some knowledge of French, the proportion of immigrants able to speak French upon their arrival in Quebec has gone from less than 30% in 1980 to about 63% in 2011. In 2011, 94.4% of Quebec's population claimed being able to carry on a conversation in French. In 1961, this proportion was 87.4%.

Outside of Quebec, the demographic weight of French as a mother tongue went from 6.6% in 1961 to about 4% in 2011. As to the use of French as the main language spoken at home, it went from 4.3% in 1971[12] to 2.4% in 2011. When it comes to knowledge of French, the 1961 Census showed that 8.7% of individuals living in provinces outside of Quebec were able to carry a conversation in that language, compared to 10.2% fifty years later.

While the higher birth rate amongst Francophones during the 1950s and 1960s relatively maintained their demographic weight in the country during that time, many factors changed the situation in the following decades. Outside of Quebec and New-Brunswick, a decline in fertility coupled to a fragmentary parent-child language transmission resulted in a substantial increase of the Francophone population's average age. An increase in exogamous marriages and a rise of the use of English at home has also negatively affected the transmission of French to younger generation.

But the factor that always had and continues to have the greatest impact on the demographic structure of Canada's population is international immigration. On average, over the last 20 years, some 235 000 immigrants came to Canada every year, with more than 80% having neither French nor English as a mother tongue. Today, of the 250 000 immigrants that Canada welcomes annually, about 200 000 settle outside of Quebec and very few know French. Between 2001 and 2011, an average of 4.4% of newcomers settling in a province other than Quebec could speak French and barely 2% had that language as their first spoken official language.

While the demographic weight of Quebec in Canada was 23.6% in 2011, only 19.2% of immigrants that came to Canada between 2006 and 2011 were living in Quebec in 2006.[13] Furthermore, 15.2% of immigrants that came to Canada during that period had French as their first official language (FOL), which is significantly lower than the demographic weight of Canadian having French as

their first official language (23.2%). Finally, it should also be noted that between 2001 and 2011, two-thirds of the population growth in Canada was due to international immigration. According to demographic projections based on the 2006 Census data, this proportion will reach 90% in thirty years.

CONCLUSION

It is undeniable that the inequalities amongst Francophones and Anglophones that were observed by members of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission have considerably diminished over the last fifty years, and even disappeared in certain cases. Over the years, thanks to Canada's official languages legislative framework and many fierce struggles and demands, official language minorities have obtained many rights. But despite acquiring many linguistic rights, significant demographic trends that have been modifying the country's landscape in the last fifty years, such as international immigration as the main source of population growth and the strong inclination of immigrants to adopt English as their main language in the public and even the private domain, there remain important new challenges on the horizon. The greatest challenge that will most likely continue to arise is still the recognition and coexistence of the two official languages in a context of ever growing linguistic and cultural diversity. While the equality principle between two languages and the two main cultural groups was driving the work undertaken by the Commission, in 2013 the demographic imbalance between French-speakers and English-speakers which seems to gradually deepen across the country will continue to feed debates and concerns about the future of the French language in the country.

NOTE

1 The analysis made in this article is the author's own and not Statistics Canada's.

2 Considering the contribution made by the other ethnic groups to the cultural enrichment of Canada.

3 Report of The Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Volume 1, Ottawa, 1967, p. xxix.

4 Ibid, p. xxxii.

5 See « Les groupes linguistiques au Canada : 30 ans de scolarisation », Jean-Pierre Corbeil, *Tendances sociales canadiennes*, nº 11-008 in the catalogue, Winter 2003.

6 For more on this subject, see the article «Le multiculturalisme canadien», March 2006, Michael Dewing and Marc Leman, Parliamentary Information and Research Center, Library of Parliament.

7 In certain provinces, it is only towards the end of the 1980s and the beginning of the 1990s that Francophones were granted the right to manage their own schools.

8 Marie-Ève Hudon, Justice Canada, « *La Loi sur les langues officielles* : Comprendre ses principes et son régime d'application », Document interne, 2009. It should be noted that the Canadian Multiculturalism Act also came into force on the 21st of July of 1988; it was adopted by Parliament a week prior to the adoption of the Official Languages Act, 28th of July, 1988.

9 Starting with the Census of 2006, Statistics Canada surveys people on the highest certificate, diploma or degree obtained instead of the number of years of schooling.

10 At the time this article was written, the 2011 National Household Survey's data on revenue was not yet released.

11 At the time of the Commission, 48.3% of Canadians were of British descent, 30.4% were of French descent and 25.8% were of other ethnic origin. It should be noted that a large part of the studies done by the Commission were based on official statistic data on ethnic origin provided by the 1961 Census.

12 The question of the language most often spoken at home first appeared in the Census at that time, mainly because of a recommendation made by the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission.

13 Since historically the number of immigrants integrating Quebec society has been proportionally small compared to the province's demographic weight in the Canadian confederation, amongst the 6 775 770 immigrants living in Canada in 2011, 974 895 (14.4%) were residing in Quebec.