# CANADA'S OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

## Cornerstone and Guarantee for Managing Canadian Diversity

# LES LANGUES OFFICIELLES DU CANADA

## La pierre angulaire et la garantie de la gestion de la diversité canadienne


**ABSTRACT**

Duality and diversity are the cornerstones of the Canadian Federation. It follows that the continued effective governance of Canadian diversity will depend upon our continued ability to assume the linguistic duality of the country. This means maintaining "our tolerance and openness to linguistic duality (which) is echoed in the attitudes of Canadians towards immigration and diversity." In addition to fostering harmony domestically, Canadian attitudes and policies are availed upon as exemplary in the international community. But above all, Canada's bilingualism has fostered open-mindedness toward diversity and difference.

**RÉSUMÉ**

La dualité linguistique du Canada a produit une diversité de sa société qui est à la base de la Confédération Canadienne. "La conclusion qu'il faut tirer de ce fait est que la gouvernance fructueuse de la diversité au Canada dépend de la perpétuation de notre aptitude à assumer la dualité linguistique de notre pays." L'immigration à bien sûr contribuer à la diversité Canadienne et aujourd'hui le Canada à l'opportunité de faire valoir de son expérience sur la scène internationale. Cette expérience donne d'ailleurs à notre société une longueur d'avance en termes d'adaptation à un environnement global qui change rapidement.



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If you had to pick terms to describe Canada's future, what would you say? *Diversity* is, no doubt, a very likely candidate. Looking at the latest census data, we cannot but be amazed at the Canadian rainbow of origins. Close to one in five Canadians is foreign born and one in seven belongs to a visible minority. *Visible Minority*? Some of our cities are in the process of rendering the very designation absurd because the minority is becoming the majority[1]. There are plenty of places around the world where a demographic shift of this magnitude would be seen as threatening. Canada's good fortunes are in my view not accidental. They are the result of a particular disposition towards accommodation and compromise – which brings me to the other term I believe is an integral part of our future. It is *duality*, or, more specifically, *linguistic duality*. Duality and diversity refer to a particular Canadian perspective on how to build a country. They are based on the conviction that unity does not mean uniformity. And they are deeply complementary forces in the Canadian Federation.

Si le Canada a pu créer une société pluraliste unique, c'est notamment parce que la dualité linguistique est l'un des fondements de la fédération canadienne. En d'autres termes, s'il n'y avait eu le bilinguisme, la société de tolérance et de diversité qui est la nôtre n'aurait pu advenir de la même façon. La conclusion qu'il convient de tirer de ce fait est que la gouvernance fructueuse de la diversité au Canada dépend de la perpétuation de notre aptitude à assumer la dualité linguistique de notre pays.

Let me explore this relationship a bit further.

### La notion de droits collectifs

Le politologue Will Kymlicka estime que l'un des atouts de la démocratie canadienne est le fait que nous reconnaissons des droits collectifs. Le Canada n'aurait probablement jamais vu le jour sans la négociation d'un compromis réussi entre l'anglais et le français. La notion de droits collectifs est au cœur même de notre fédération, et les Canadiens ont appris que, pour respecter les droits

des personnes, il faut également tenir compte des groupes auxquels ces personnes appartiennent. Un autre politologue, Charles Taylor fait valoir de façon très convaincante que le fait de conférer des droits à une personne peut ne pas donner grand'chose si la culture et la langue de cette personne sont rejetées. Dans son célèbre article intitulé *The Politics of Recognition*, M. Taylor explique clairement que la reconnaissance d'une personne dépend de la reconnaissance collective des groupes auxquels elle appartient. Le Canada a eu la grande chance de prendre conscience dès le début des liens étroits entre la reconnaissance individuelle et la reconnaissance collective.

In this context, it is important not to forget Canada's Aboriginal People. Canada's history of inclusion and compromise did not extend to them originally – and we feel the consequences of this omission to this day. Clearly, Canada's history of accommodation is not perfect but what our recognition of Canada's two official languages has given us is a process that guides in the search for solutions – including Canada's First Nations. Let me give you an example: The Northwest Territories have their own Official Languages Act which recognizes eight aboriginal languages as well as English and French. And in Nunavut, Inuktitut is an official language. In both territories, there is an awareness that respect for linguistic diversity is a cornerstone for building an inclusive society. These are important steps. As Commissioner I am following and supporting these developments because our official languages policy at the national level has served as a starting point for developing language policies which respond to specific territorial needs.

### Public Opinion and Second Language Learning

Je ne voudrais pas louanger la politique sur les langues officielles du Canada sans toutefois mentionner le fait que chaque réalisation est le fruit d'une importante somme de travail. Je crois fermement que l'une des meilleures preuves de la capacité d'une société ou d'une personne de communiquer avec les autres et de les respecter est son aptitude à apprendre une langue seconde et son ouverture d'esprit à cet égard. Posez-vous la question: Qu'est-ce que votre connaissance d'autres langues vous a-t-elle permis de découvrir? À quel point cela vous a-t-il permis de réellement avoir accès à une autre culture et de la comprendre? Vous conviendrez probablement que le bilinguisme (ou le multilinguisme) constitue une voie d'accès privilégiée à la diversité.

We see the willingness and openness of Canadians towards bilingualism reflected in opinion polls: a stable 82% of Canadians are in favour of the policy of bilingualism. 75% of English speakers choose French for their children and 90% of French speakers choose English[2]. Two out of three Canadians agree that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools. Such support is even higher among young, urban and immigrant Canadians[3].

This tolerance and openness to linguistic duality is echoed in the attitudes of Canadians towards immigra-


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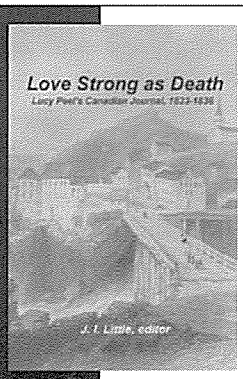


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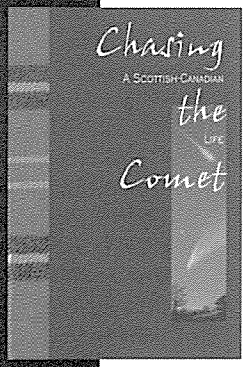


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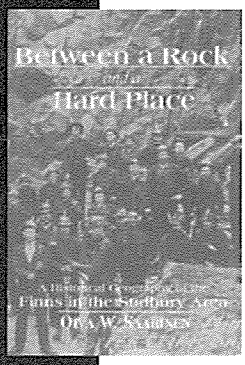


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tion and diversity. The American Pew Research Center published a report[4] in December 2002 based on a survey of 38,000 people in 44 nations. The report states "Immigrants and minority groups are generally seen as having a bad influence on the way things are going by people in most countries." But the report continues: "Only in Canada does a strong majority of the population (77%) have a positive view of immigrants." In the US, only 49% of the population believe that immigrants are a positive influence and the numbers are much lower in Europe: 46% in France, 37% in Great Britain, 35% in Germany and only 25% in Italy. How can we explain that an astounding three quarters of Canadians feel positively about immigration? I am convinced that our spirit of accommodation has produced the kind of inclusive social fabric that recognizes and embraces difference, whether this difference is linguistic or ethnocultural.

### The Impact of Immigration on Duality and Diversity

Une grande partie de la diversité du Canada est le résultat de l'immigration. C'est pourquoi il est important de rappeler que, en juin 2002, une nouvelle loi sur l'immigration est entrée en vigueur. Elle signalait la plus importante transformation de nos politiques d'immigration depuis 25 ans. Je suis heureuse de constater que la nouvelle loi concrétise beaucoup des recommandations que j'avais proposées au Parlement et au ministre de l'Immigration. Pour la toute première fois, le gouvernement du Canada s'engage explicitement à soutenir l'épanouissement et le développement des communautés minoritaires de langue officielle du Canada par l'entremise de l'immigration. Le Canada a besoin d'immigrants, mais il doit également s'assurer que les Canadiens de langue française et de langue anglaise profitent équitablement de leur arrivée. Malheureusement, la balance penche actuellement beaucoup plus d'un côté. Il y a un grand nombre d'immigrants au sein de la population anglophone : un anglophone sur cinq est né à l'étranger. En revanche, il n'y a pas beaucoup d'immigrants au sein de la population francophone : seul un francophone sur vingt est né à l'étranger. Cela s'applique aussi bien aux francophones du Québec qu'à ceux des autres provinces. Il faut cependant aussi noter que certaines communautés minoritaires anglophones du Québec rural ne reçoivent pas non plus leur juste proportion d'immigrants. La proportion d'immigrants anglophones qui s'établissent à l'extérieur de la région de Montréal a chuté de moitié au cours des quarante dernières années, passant de 36 p. cent à 18 p. cent.[5]

The commitments made in the new Immigration and Refugee Protection Act now need to be implemented and I call on both the provinces and the federal government to make sure that the demographic discrepancy between anglophones and francophones is eliminated as soon as possible. My Office has contributed to enhancing general awareness on this important topic by publishing two reports on immigration and Canada's official language minority communities in the past year.[6]

### An International Perspective

La politique canadienne des langues officielles n'est pas réservée à l'usage interne. Il est parfois plus facile de reconnaître nos réalisations en adoptant une perspective plus large.

The Canadian Government through the Canadian International Development Agency is currently helping Sri Lanka heal the scars of its civil war. As part of this assistance, the University of Ottawa is undertaking a project to help implement a successful official languages policy in Sri Lanka. Canadian experts on linguistic rights are helping Sri Lanka address issues that sound highly familiar to Canadian ears: equitable representation of both language groups in the government, the ability of civil servants to work in their preferred language, the promotion of the other official language in schools, the availability of higher education in both official languages and access to courts in both official languages. The promotion of both Sinhala and Tamil as official languages is an active contribution towards peace and stability in this country whose civil war has cost the lives of 60,000 people. Of course, I am not suggesting that an official languages policy is a magic cure. That would be presumptuous. But it is an important part of the solution.

Un autre exemple est celui de la République d'Irlande. Le gouvernement irlandais travaille fort à promouvoir et à protéger la langue irlandaise. Cette langue historique et nationale est intimement liée à l'identité irlandaise mais n'est parlée que par 5 p. 100 de la population. Le parlement irlandais débat d'un projet de loi sur l'égalité des langues officielles. Ce dernier fait la promotion de la langue irlandaise et accorde des droits linguistiques aux citoyens et citoyennes. L'Irlande va même un peu plus loin en proposant la création d'un poste de commissaire aux langues officielles. En fait, la loi proposée s'inspire grandement de la Loi sur les langues officielles du Canada et, bien que l'on en soit juste au début, il existe beaucoup de parallèles avec l'expérience canadienne. Lors d'un récent voyage, j'étais heureuse de pouvoir offrir quelques suggestions pratiques sur la mise en œuvre d'une loi linguistique qui s'appuient sur plus de trente années de bilinguisme officiel au Canada.

Le Canada a de la chance à bien des égards, car il a pris de l'avance. Notre expérience du bilinguisme nous permet d'affronter avec aisance un monde complexe et de plus en plus hybride. Lorsque nous considérons le Canada moderne, nous constatons que l'idée de deux solitudes linguistiques et d'une multitude de collectivités ethniques fermées ne correspond plus à la réalité. La façon dont les gens jonglent avec les langues et les identités en est la meilleure preuve. L'intersection entre les langues officielles et la diversité devient un carrefour très animé, et nous devrions tous nous en réjouir. Mais, à ce stade précis, il nous faut veiller à ne pas oublier les piliers de ce que sont le français et l'anglais dans l'édification de la demeure canadienne.

As a society we must nurture both duality and diversity. If we do, Canada has the potential to be a leader in setting and advancing a successful bilingual and pluralist agenda. But what is even more important: if we succeed Canadians will continue to enjoy a privilege – the privilege of living in a country where two official languages open the doors through which we accept our nation's increasing diversity.

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[2] Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). Portraits of Canada 2001. Montreal. http://www.cric.ca/en_html.

[3] Association for Canadian Studies. Canadian Opinion Toward Second Language Knowledge and Education. Montreal.

[4] See http://people-press.org/reports/display.php3?ReportID=165 . The Pew Research Center is an independent opinion research group in Washington, D.C. that studies attitudes toward the press, politics and public policy issues.

[5] Statistique Canada, 1996 (dans : Commissaire aux langues officielle. 2002. L'immigration et l'épanouissement des communautés de langue officielles au Canada. p. 63.)

[6] Copies can be ordered or downloaded. Please visit www.ocol-clo.gc.ca.

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[1] The opinions and interpretation expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of Citizenship and Immigration Canada.

[2] The IMDB is a longitudinal database of linked immigrant records and subsequent taxfilings. The database is maintained by Statistics Canada on behalf of Citizenship and Immigration Canada and a federal provincial funding consortium. For more information see: http://www.cic.gc.ca/english/srr/pdf/res4bi.pdf

[3] To benchmark the entry earning of skilled workers against the Canadian average is not an adequate reflection of the objectives of the program. A more appropriate benchmark, such as similarly skilled Canadian-born individuals entering the labour market at a comparable time, could be taken from the Survey of Consumer Finances/Survey of Labour and Income Dynamics data.

[4] Li, Peter S. "Destination Canada - Immigration Debates and Issues" Oxford University Press 2003

[5] The Immigration and Refugee Protection Act and its accompanying regulations (which came into effect on June 28, 2002) introduced changes to the selection criteria for skilled workers, based on earlier research. However, it is too soon to determine whether these have had any impact on the economic performance of skilled workers.

[6] See for example: Reitz, Jeffrey G. 1998 *Warmth of the Welcome: The Social Causes of Economic Success for Immigrants in Different Nations and Cities* Boulder, CO: Westview Press; and Pendakur, Krishna and Ravi Pendakur, 1998 "The Colour of Money: Earnings Differentials among Ethnic Groups in Canada" *Canadian Journal of Economics* 31(3): 519-48.

[7] Waslander, Bert (2002) 'The Falling Earnings of New Immigrant Men in Canada's Large Cities' (forthcoming) presented at the John Deutsch Institute Conference on "Canadian Immigration Policy for the 21st Century October 18-19, 2002; and Green, David and Christopher Worswick (2002) "Earnings of Immigrant Men in Canada: The Roles of Labour Market Entry Effects and Returns to Foreign Experience" (forthcoming)

[8] International Adult Literacy and Life Skills Survey – the next round of this survey will include a sample of recently arrived immigrants.

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[1] Of course, like all social science research, there are questions about Card's analysis. In particular, the sample size is small and the comparison cities may not be ideal. However, if one's prior assumption is that a very large impact should have occurred, then this would be observable.

[2] Though work on the topic has been attempted by, for example, Card (2001), DiNardo and Card (2000), and Borjas, Freeman and Katz (1997).

[3] Some attempts at looking at corners of this issue have been conducted in the Canadian context, but they have been very limited in scope and have not tended to look at provincial programs involving health and education, nor included generations beyond the initial one that is born outside of Canada.

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