BONJOUR, HI AND OLA

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Given the very uneven geographic distribution of first language English and French speakers in Canada, the dream of some mass, country wide English-French bilingualism inevitably confronts the reality of achieving that goal in parts of the country without a critical mass of French speakers (or a critical mass of English-speakers in certain parts of Quebec). Largely owing to such demographic concentration, over 80% of the country's population is unable to speak both official languages. By consequence, most policy-makers show a marked preference for focusing on the near 20% of the population that is able to speak both English and French. And, they often assign credit to the *Official Languages Act* for the progress in numbers and share of bilingual Canadians that has been attained over the past half century.

If in 2019 Canada proudly describes itself as a bilingual country it is a function of the concentration of English and French-speakers in Quebec, Ontario and New Brunswick and more specifically across what has been referred to as the bilingual belt a line between Sault Ste. Marie and Moncton that has not stretched much over the years.

Rates of bilingualism among the English-mother tongue population in the Quebec part of the bilingual belt are considerably higher than they were in 1961. Based on the 2011 census data, some 85.7% of Canadians with knowledge of both official languages live in the three provinces and in 2016 that percentage climbed to 85.9% (expect it to increase further in the years ahead). In reality Canada is best described as a country that is de jure bilingual-that is to say in law-but not one that is de facto bilingual-that is to say bilingual in fact. Paradoxically it is Quebec that is much closer to being a de facto

bilingual place while not being one in law.

Despite the relatively low rates of bilingualism outside of Quebec, survey of Canadians consistently reveal that a majority of Canadians value bilingualism and they believe it is important to know both official languages. While most also agree it's an important part of our identity/or being Canadian, as observed below, there are some important regional variations in such views.

TABLE 1: "THE FACT THAT THERE ARE TWO OFFICIAL LANGUAGES (ENGLISH/FRENCH) IN CANADA IS, FOR YOU, AN IMPORTANT PART OF WHAT IT MEANS TO BE A CANADIAN."

The following summarizes those who strongly agree with the above statement (rate 7-10 on a 10-pt scale):
Among Anglophones (by province/region)
Nova Scotia: 70%
Central Ontario: 58%
British Columbia: 48%
Manitoba: 47%
Alberta: 36%
New Brunswick: 34%
Among Anglophones (by city)
Montreal: 85%
Toronto: 71%
Among Francophones (Across Canada)
61%

SOURCE: CANADIAN HERITAGE, 2018

Survey findings reveal that sustaining/retaining a second language is closely tied to the opportunities to use it. This is also a key determinant in reducing insecurity and anxiety individuals may encounter when using a second language. Hence it is in those institutional settings where such opportunity most frequently arises that levels of comfort are higher (social networks and the workplace). Correspondingly, where such interaction is less frequent (e.g. school), comfort levels are lowest.

Clearly, the capacity to use one's official language in the workplace is at the heart of supporting both bilingualism and official language minorities. Success stories around students that go through French immersion programs or receive basic French second language instruction do not sufficiently research the degree to which the acquired language is retained in areas where there are few opportunities to make use of the second language. It is critical to examine the transition between school and the workplace as regards the acquisition and retention of a second language. Census data reveals that significant numbers will lose the second language acquired in less than ten years, as they enter unilingual work environments. There remains a key challenge for the federal government in encouraging and/or requiring those companies and organizations with which it does business to ensure that they can meet a high standard for operating in both official languages.

TECHNOLOGIES: CANADA'S ROBOTS MUST BE BILINGUAL

There have been unimaginable advances in technologies since the OLA was introduced. The idea of a universal translation device that was once the

dream of many a fan of Star Trek now seems like its introduction is around the proverbial corner. On-line services are increasingly available in both official languages and voice/assistance using artificial intelligence (AI) can operate in the languages of Shakespeare and Molière (and replicate their voices) and replace humans in the communication of selected information. Use of the Internet and new tools to communicate and interact with the public along with unparalleled opportunities for machine translation create potentially enormous opportunities to expand service for citizens in the two official languages across all geographies and many sectors.

Automated language translation services are on the rise globally and with Canada's experience and commitment to service delivery in both languages, it can demonstrate considerable leadership in providing a model for best and inclusive practices in language delivery. Organizations and companies are increasingly using AI to do translation. Such platforms as Google Translate, Microsoft Translator, and Amazon Translate have made great strides in improving accuracy and along with other AI enabled automated translators are used daily by individuals and businesses. The CEO of one of the world's largest translation companies, Ofer Shoshan, predicts that in the near future machine translation will carry out more than 50 percent of the work handled by the global translation market. There is currently insufficient research around the impact of AI on translation and on if and how people's interaction with a second language will evolve.

DEMOGRAPHIC CHANGE: MIGRATION, IMMIGRATION, DUALITY AND DIVERSITY

Since the adoption of the OLA, Canada has undergone a demographic revolution owing in large measure to the diverse composition of newcomers. The composition of the population is very different from what it was when in 1969 Canada introduced the *Official Languages Act* (hereafter OLA). The sixties impulse of promoting bilingualism and biculturalism gave way to policy and discourse that promoted multiculturalism within what was described in 1971 as a bilingual framework. The discourse changed yet again in the 1980s as diversity was described as operating in conjunction with the country's linguistic duality and/or two official languages. For some analysts, duality and diversity were inevitably in competition while others saw areas of convergence and/or intersectionality.

In reality, the dichotomy of duality and diversity played out quite differently across Canada. Concerns around the degree to which newcomers would diminish the French character of Canada were partially allayed with the 1991 federal transfer to Quebec of much of the authority for immigrant selection. Outside of Quebec, until the year 2000, there was little attention directed at how immigration might diminish the weight of minority francophones. Since that time, the federal government has substantially increased funding to help minority official language francophones attract French-speaking migrants to their communities in support of their vitality, so that newcomers could be seen as a potential source of growth for demographically vulnerable communities.

Overall, however, in the rest of Canada the percentage of established and recent immigrants over the age of 15 that report knowledge of both English and French is less than the overall share of persons that know both official languages. As observed in

TABLE 2: PERCENTAGE OVER THE AGE OF 15 WITH KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH IN CANADA, QUEBEC AND THE REST OF CANADA FOR NON-IMMIGRANT, IMMIGRANT AND BY TIME OF ARRIVAL

Percentage English and French Bilingual (census 2016)	Canada	Quebec	Rest of Canada
Total	18.9	49.5	9.7
Non-immigrants	21.4	49.1	11.5
Immigrants	11.9	51.6	5.3
Before 1981	11.5	52.7	5.8
1981 to 1990	11.7	52.5	5.1
1991 to 2000	11.0	53.0	5.0
2001 to 2010	13.4	53.1	5.9
2001 to 2005	13.4	55.1	6.1
2006 to 2010	13.3	51.4	5.6
2011 to 2014	12.1	46.9	4.6

SOURCE : CENSUS OF CANADA, 2016

table 2, that is not the case in Quebec where with the exception of the most recent cohort (arriving between 2011 and 2014), the percentage reporting knowledge of English and French is greater than that of the overall population of the province.

CONCLUSION: THE BRAVE NEW WORLD OF OFFICIAL LANGUAGES

Public messaging around advancing bilingualism and supporting Canada's official language minorities has been too timid. Our laws and public discourse tend to encourage second language acquisition and remind citizens of the need to support official language minorities. But many Canadians seem unaware that linguistic duality is foundational and fundamental to a variety of other programs and policies (i.e. Canadian multiculturalism). Support for official language minorities is more than just a need – it is a responsibility on the part of Canadians. It is necessary to expand knowledge amongst Canadians about the *Official Languages Act* and remind the population that the country has a constitutional responsibility to support its/our official language minorities. Without a constant reminder we risk allowing politicians and others to

undercut the importance of French in Canada.

I am proud and privileged to belong to the community of bilinguals along with my wife and four children, a community that continues to add new members to its ranks. Despite the challenges to expanding the numbers of Canada's community of bilinguals (we form a sort of community), doing so must remain a key goal of the government of Canada and positive/impactful measures need to be pursued in this regard.