IDENTITY AND DIVERSITY UNDER CANADA'S *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*

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INTRODUCTION

In the following pages, I will discuss the issue of identity and ethnic and racial diversity in the context of the Francophone minority living outside Quebec, particularly in Ontario. In Canada, these Francophones represent one of the two official language minorities recognized by the Canadian federal government in the *Official Languages Act*, a law that was introduced in 1969, following the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism in Canada (known as the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission).

It should be noted at the outset that Francophones belonging to the official language minority are confronted, on a daily basis, with the reality of a living environment where English predominates in the public sphere and, often, in the private sphere as well. The situation of the Francophone minority has gradually changed over the years. From a homogeneous group, it has become increasingly heterogeneous in terms first of language, but also in terms of ethnicity and race. My brief exposé will therefore focus on a changing Francophonie that is much more ethnically, racially and linguistically diverse than it was in the 1970s and 1980s. We are now in the presence of diverse Francophone communities with plural identities, where the French language is often the only common denominator.

The continued arrival of immigrants since the mid-1990s and an increased rate of exogamous families, where one parent is not a Francophone, have forever changed the composition of the Francophone minority. This new reality influences how members of this group perceive their relationship to identity and their sense of belonging (Gérin-Lajoie, 2013). In this context, I conceive the relationship to identity as a changing phenomenon, rather than some-

thing that was acquired at birth for life (Hall, 2006; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003). The relationship to identity is changing: it can go beyond a single identity and take various forms – bilingual, trilingual, even multilingual – thus moving us away from an essentialist perspective (Hall 2006).

But before talking more about the relationship to identity in a context of ethnic and racial diversity within the Francophone minority in Canada, taking Ontario as an example, let us briefly return to Part VII of the *Official Languages Act*, which deals specifically with official language minorities in Canada.

PART VII OF THE *OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT*

Part VII of this *Official Languages Act* recognizes the presence and importance of the French-speaking (outside Quebec) and English-speaking (in Quebec) minorities, as evidenced in the first paragraph of the following section:

> **41 (1)** The federal government is committed to enhancing the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and supporting their development, as well as to fostering the full recognition and use of both English and French in Canadian society. (Canadian Federal Government, 1985.)

In its implementation, there are two points (my italics) that specifically concern official language minorities (although several others also concern them, but indirectly):

> **43 (1)** The Minister of Canadian Heritage shall take such measures as he or she considers appropriate to advance the equality of status and use of English and French in Canadian society, including any measures:
>
> a. *that will enhance the vitality of the English and French linguistic minority communities in Canada and support their development;*
>
> b. to encourage and support the learning of English and French;
>
> c. to encourage the public to better accept and appreciate English and French;
>
> d. *to encourage and assist provincial governments to foster the development of English and French linguistic minority communities, including the provision of provincial and municipal services in both English and French and the provision of education in their own language;*
>
> e. to encourage and assist these governments to provide opportunities for all to learn English and French;
>
> f. to encourage and cooperate with businesses, employers' and labour organizations, voluntary and other organizations to provide their services in English and French and to foster the recognition and use of these two languages;
>
> g. to encourage and assist organizations, associations or other bodies to reflect and promote, in Canada and abroad, the bilingual character of Canada;
>
> h. subject to the approval of the Governor in Council, to enter into agreements or arrange-

> ments with foreign governments that recognize and strengthen Canada's bilingual identity.
>
> (Canadian Federal Government, 1985)

When we read the statements presented above, we may be surprised not to see any reference to the diversity found within the current Francophonie. Let us look briefly at the case of Ontario.

FRANCOPHONES IN ONTARIO, DIVERSITY AND THEIR RELATIONSHIP TO IDENTITY

For Francophone communities outside Quebec, immigration has become an important issue. To this end, Francophone communities outside Quebec have adopted a Strategic Framework developed in 2013 by Citizenship and Immigration Canada to promote the recruitment, welcoming and retention of immigrants. In the 2017–2018 Annual Report of the Office of the Commissioner of French Language Services of Ontario (2018), the following is noted:

> Ontario's Francophone community faces several demographic challenges. Immigration then appears to be a major issue for the vitality and dynamism of the Franco-Ontarian community, whose face is set to continue to diversify. Currently, there are 92,385 Francophone immigrants, representing 15% of Ontario's Francophone population (622,41,519 Francophones or 4.7% of the Ontario population). Of these, 16,045 (17.4%) are recent immigrants. For all Francophone immigrants, 63.5% are from a visible minority and this figure rises to 78.2% for immigration. (p. 24)

There is no denying the changing nature of Ontario's Francophone population. The same applies to the relationship to identity and the sense of belonging to the group. The presence of newcomers has led Ontario's Francophone community to redefine itself for the sake of inclusion. In schools, for example, policies and guidelines promoting student inclusion have been developed and implemented in the context of French-language schools.[1]

I believe it is very important to consider the new realities experienced by the official language minority Francophone community. The various levels of government must recognize this in their respective areas of intervention in order to better meet the needs of all.

TO CONCLUDE

In order to enhance the vitality of the French-speaking minority in Canada in the context of the demographic changes of recent years, it is necessary to give greater recognition to diversity within the Francophonie, which is not explicitly provided for in the current *Official Languages Act*. At the time of the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission's recommendations, it will be recalled that the federal government had chosen two distinct paths: following the *Official Languages Act*, in 1971, it created its Multiculturalism Policy (which became law in 1988), the purpose of which was to recognize the individual rights of newcomers in the host society. Leaving

1 Among others, *l'Équité et éducation inclusive dans les écoles de l'Ontario* (2014). *L'admission, l'accueil et l'accompagnement des élèves dans les écoles de langue française de l'Ontario* (2009) and *une approche culturelle de l'enseignement pour l'appropriation de la culture dans les écoles de langue française de l'Ontario* (2009).

the *Official Languages Act* to deal exclusively with "linguistic duality". While it is important to recognize this linguistic duality, the primary reason for the development and implementation of the *Official Languages Act*, it is still important to give greater consideration to the increasingly heterogeneous nature of the Francophone minority in Canada. In this context, we can only hope that this *Act* will be amended to take greater account of the changing nature of this linguistic group and the challenges it faces in this social context.

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