THE PRIME MINISTER OF A BILINGUAL COUNTRY MUST BE BILINGUAL

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Several linguistic principles can guide the choice of leaders of federal political parties: whether one thinks of dual leadership, the alternation between Francophone and Anglophone leaders or a "double majority" system.[1] But in the 20th century, the rule of bilingualism prevailed. The 1960s enshrined the view that a person who aspired to become Prime Minister of Canada had to speak both official languages adequately.

FRENCH AS AN ELECTORAL STRATEGY

Until the 1950s, it was self-evident that candidates for the office of Prime Minister of Canada had to speak English. The ability to speak French was only an asset. For a long time, few English-speaking leaders, with the exception of Sir Robert Borden[2] (1901-1920) and R. B. B. Bennett (1927-1938), concerned themselves with speaking French in public.

But in a context where half of Canadians of French origin did not speak English, everyone guessed that indifference to the French fact affected the chances of winning an electoral majority in Quebec. The progress of radio and then television only

1 As an example of dual leadership, let us think, for United Canada, of the tandem of LaFontaine-Baldwin or MacDonald-Cartier. The "double majority" system, i. e. a majority among Francophones and a majority among Anglophones, has been theorized for United Canada, but not applied. The alternation rule was followed for Montreal City Hall until the beginning of the 20th century. Since the 1950s, it has been applied, more or less methodically, in a series of federal areas, including the positions of Governor General, Speaker of the House of Commons and Senate, head of the Armed Forces and head of a few major Crown corporations. Frédéric Lévesque, "L'alternance au poste de gouverneur général et la dualité canadienne: règle de politesse ou convention constitutionnelle?", *Revue générale de droit*, vol. 37, No. 2, 2007, pp. 301-343.

2 Sir Robert Borden learned French when he was in his fifties, around 1905. In 1912, he was said to speak a very correct French.

reinforced this conviction.

Also, in the post-war period, the Conservative Party of Canada (PC) made efforts to reach the French-speaking electorate. George Drew (1948-1956) gave a few speeches in French during the 1949 election campaign.[3] This precedent did not go unnoticed. In 1951, Louis Saint-Laurent (1948-1958) predicted "that before long" the main members of each of the federal parties would speak French. "Six years ago," he added, "I outraged many people with a similar statement. This time, the same statement does not seem to have frightened many people."[4]

"LIP SERVICE"

As soon as he was elected leader of the Progressive Conservatives, John G. Diefenbaker (1956-1967) wanted to correct his heavy Anglo-German accent by taking language courses. However, he was never able to speak French well enough to give speeches in that language without notes. It is said that, having wanted to thank French-speaking Quebeckers for their support during the campaign that had propelled him to the position of Prime Minister, he concluded his New Year's Eve radio address with the following sentence: "In closing, my dear friends of French Canada, I hope that my wishes will be appreciated." The listeners heard instead: "En teuminant, my cheur zomies dou Canada Fwranssè, ch'espère que mes veaux seront après chier".[5]

Elected leader of the Liberal Party of Canada (LPC), Lester B. Pearson (1958-1968) swore that he would work quickly to speak Canada's second official language. Nevertheless, he remained very far from his objectives.[6] It is said that in 1965, he was giving a speech in English in Montreal when he was interrupted by screams: "In French! In French!" So he tried to continue in French, but the crowd, who understood nothing of his "gibberish", kept shouting: "In French! In French!"[7] Knowing that this ignorance of French was unacceptable, Pearson challenged his successors: "In the future, Liberal leaders will have to speak French as well as English... as I would like to be able to do".[8]

THE PROMISE TO BECOME BILINGUAL

From the mid-1960s, at a time when Quebec

3 It must be said that he had to make amends for inflammatory statements made at the time when he was leading the destiny of the Ontario Conservative Party. In a 1936 by-election, he said that Canada's French Canadians "are a defeated race, and that their rights are rights only because of the tolerance by the English element who, with all respect to the minority, must be regarded as the dominant race. "*The Toronto Star*, November 27, 1936, quoted by Peter Meehan, "The East Hastings By-Election of 1936 and the Ontario Separate School Tax Question,' CCHA Historical Studies, vol. 68, 2002, p. 117.

4 Louis Saint-Laurent, quoted in "The Great Advantages of Bilingualism in Canada", Canada, August 20, 1951, p. 4.

5 Jean-François Lisée, "35 citations: Ce qu'ils n'auraient pas dû dire!", *L'Actualité*, 14 avril 2011, version Web: https://lactualite.com/politique/35-citations-ce-quils-nauraient-pas-du-dire/

6 "My difficulties in using French, when I was in Quebec, meant that I never got rid of a certain sense of humiliation for not being able to speak fluently in their language, to French-speaking audiences or to my Quebec friends whom I met in social gatherings." Lester B. Pearson, *Words and Occasions: An Anthology of Speeches & Articles Selected from His Papers (1924–1968) by the Right Hon. L. B. Pearson*, Toronto, University of Toronto Press, 1970, p. 35.

7 Michael Bliss, *Right Honourable Men: The Descent of Canadian Politics from Macdonald to Mulroney*, Toronto, Harper Collins, 1994, p. 228.

8 Lester B. Pearson, quoted by Jean-V. Dufresne, "L'unité vitale (Pearson)", *La Presse,* 18 novembre 1963, p. 2.

nationalism was on the rise, the ability to say a few words in French was no longer enough. We wanted leaders who were truly bilingual. In 1967, during the LPC leadership race, Davie Fulton stated that the unilingualism of Conservative leaders had greatly damaged the party's cause in the past. "After a century of history," he argued, "it is absolutely essential that the head of cabinet be bilingual."[9] In 1968, during the LPC leadership race, Jean Marchand made a similar statement: "We are tired of federal government leaders who do not know how to express themselves properly in both of the country's official languages."[10]

The LPC turned to Pierre-Elliott Trudeau (1968-1984), a perfectly bilingual politician. The New Democratic Party (NDP) chose David Lewis (1971-1975), a man who could converse in French. The PC chose Robert L. Stanfield (1967-1976), who promised to take language courses, but was never comfortable in French. Joe Clark (1976-1983) was happier in his efforts, although his accent was regularly mocked in Quebec.

THE "LITMUS TEST"

It was really at the turn of the 1980s that mastery of the French language became a kind of "litmus test" for aspiring party leaders, as it was already the case for mastering the English language.[11] Since all English-speaking MPs, regardless of party, were increasingly comfortable speaking Molière's language, it came to be believed that it was unacceptable to be led by someone who was not perfectly bilingual. In 1983, Michel Doyon, a member of the PC Policy Committee, stated: "We can never go back on this. A unilingual English-speaking Conservative leader is absolutely unacceptable in Quebec, just as a unilingual French-speaking leader would be rejected by English speakers."[12] Brian Mulroney's (1983-1993) victory over unilingual English-speaking John Crosbie was a turning point in this regard.[13]

In 1989, NDP leader Ed Broadbent (1975-1990) was adamant that the leader of a national party in Canada had to be bilingual. "I think it is very important to have a leader who speaks both of the country's official languages.[14]" Thus, once elected leader of the NDP, Alexa McDonough (1997-2003), for example, spent some of her holidays in Jonquière to perfect a French that she had hardly had the opportunity to practice since her high school years.

After his election as Prime Minister of Canada in 2006, Stephen Harper (2004-2015) surprised many Anglophones by beginning his speeches and press statements in French. Harper explained him-

9 Davie Fulton, quoted in "Il faut un premier ministre bilingue", *Le Soleil*, 26 juin 1967, p. 3.

10 Jean Marchand, quoted in "Nous demandons l'égalité pour tous à travers le Canada", *Le Nouvelliste*, 15 juin 1968, p. 3

11 No leader of a federal party could claim power without good English. Many Francophones who could have been candidates for the succession of their party refused to run in the leadership race for this reason.

12 Quoted by Richard Daignault, "À Ottawa", *Le Soleil*, 20 janvier 1983, p. D-12.

13 Crosbie claimed that it was no more useful for him to speak French to get along with French Canadians than to speak Chinese or German to do business with China or Germany. Graham Fraser, *Sorry, I Don't Speak French: Confronting the Canadian Crisis that won't go Away* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 2006), p. 258.

14 Ed Broadbent, quoted by Pierre-Paul Noreau, "Intérêt soutenu au leadership NPD", *Le Soleil*, 17 janvier 1989, p. A -7.

PRIME MINISTER	ENGLISH	FRENCH	GAELIC	GERMAN	LATIN	GREEK
John A. Macdonald	●	×	●		×	
Wilfrid Laurier	○	●				
Robert Borden	●	×		×	×	×
Mackenzie King	●			×		
Louis St.Laurent	●	●				
John Diefenbaker	●					
Lester B. Pearson	●	×				
Pierre Ellliot Trudeau	●	●				
Joe Clarck	●	○				
John Turner	●	×				
Brian Mulroney	●	●				
Kim Campbell	●	×				
Jean Chrétien	○	●				
Paul Martin	●	○				
Stephen Harper	●	○				
Justin Trudeau	●	●				

● Spoken natively ○ Fluency in writing or speaking × Conversational or partial mastery

SOURCE: https://ipfs.io/ipfs/QmXoypizjW3WknFiJnKLwHCnL72vedxjQkDDP1mXWo6uco/wiki/List_of_Prime_Ministers_of_Canada_by_languages_spoken.html#cite_note-7

self. First, he said, "French is Canada's first national language."[15] Then he confided that he expressed himself "in French, because it helped him to structure his thoughts. It is a good practice, especially for an English-speaking person."[16] Finally, Harper mentioned his love of Molière's language. "I like French. Speaking French is a desire that goes back to my youth. I am more and more comfortable when I speak French today. I would of course like to speak it better, that's why I practice it all the time."[17]

CONCLUSION

Historically, with a few exceptions,[18] Francophone leaders of federal parties have been known for their exemplary command of English. Many of them, from Louis Saint-Laurent to Justin Trudeau, shared the characteristic of having been raised in bilingual homes. The ability to express oneself fluently in French is much less evident among English-speaking leaders. However, since Pearson, the English-speaking Prime Ministers who won an election (Joe Clark, Paul Martin and Stephen Harper) have all been able to conduct a conversation in Canada's second official language. This reflects the now generally accepted view that the Prime Minister of a bilingual country must be bilingual.

15 Stephen Harper, cité par Jean-Denis Bellavance et Gilles Toupin, " 'C'est la langue fondatrice du Canada'. Le français aide Harper à structurer sa pensée", *La Presse,* 12 septembre 2007, p. A -7.

16 Idem.

17 Idem.

18 Certain Social Credit and Bloc leaders come to mind, as well as Stéphane Dion.