WHERE THERE'S A WILL THERE'S A WAY? EXPLAINING THE DIVIDE BETWEEN CANADIANS' DESIRE FOR BILINGUALISM AND THEIR ACTUAL KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH

Jack Jedwab is the Executive Director of the Association for Canadian Studies.

ABSTRACT

Canada describes itself as a bilingual country as reflected by federal policy which extends government services to the population in both English and French. However, it would be difficult to describe the country as bilingual based on the degree to which its population is able to speak the two official languages notably outside of Quebec. While the availability of services in both official languages is an important criterion in deciding whether to confer bilingual status on a country, the author contends that the lack of individual bilingualism on the part of the majority language group will have an impact on the vitality of the language minority. There is a sizeable gap between the population's high level of interest in learning a second language and the relatively limited extent to which it possesses knowledge of two languages. The author contends that the gap between the interest in second language learning and the actual acquisition of French in the majority-anglophone population outside of Quebec arises from both a lack of incentive for learning the language and a lack of opportunity to use the language.

1. INTRODUCTION

According to the guide "A Newcomer's Introduction to Canada", we are an officially bilingual country as reflected in the *Official Languages Act.* This is defined by the right of Canadians to receive federal government services in English or French, no matter what part of Canada they are living in. New Brunswick is referred to as the only province that is officially bilingual. While Quebec is the only province where French is the official language, English is the official language in the other provinces.

If forty years of official languages policy has not meaningfully enhanced the population's actual knowledge of English and French, it is because the legislation does not directly target such an objective. Rather, the law proposes to ensure that persons identifying as English and French speakers can secure federal government services in their principal language almost anywhere in the country. The policy therefore is frequently characterized as one of

language duality which seeks to ensure the harmonious co-existence of the nation's language communities. A policy of language duality can only succeed if at least some speakers are bilingual. Still, bilingualism on the part of the linguistic majority enhances the vitality of a linguistic minority by expanding its opportunities to use its principal language when interacting with the broader community.

Legislatively, Canada can legitimately describe itself as a bilingual country. Indeed, it is probably more important that services are provided in the two official languages than that a significant share of the population be bilingual. There is no international barometer for evaluating the percentage of the population that speaks two languages to qualify "de facto" as a bilingual state. If, however, a state is committed to promoting second language knowledge, the degree of bilingualism becomes important. Other countries which value language knowledge may offer some benchmark. Canadian policy-makers risk disappointment based on the historic progress the country has made when it comes to bilingualism. It is clear that without Quebec, the number and share of persons able to speak both English and French in Canada would be significantly reduced. Paradoxically, in official discourse, Quebec leadership often deny that the province is "de jure" bilingual, although "de facto", it is more likely to qualify for such status given the relatively important percentage of its population that reports an ability to speak both English and French.

As noted, the Government is committed to promoting knowledge of English and French amongst the population. When the federal government introduced an Action Plan on Official Languages in 2002, it emphasized that bilingualism was increasingly important for young people. By consequence, the Government of Canada proposed to "double the proportion of secondary school graduates with a functional knowledge of their second official language." (In 2001, the proportion of bilingual Francophones and Anglophones in the 15 to 19 age group is around 24% and the objective was to raise this proportion to 50% by 2013). Describing the objective as "quite realistic", the federal government proposed to offer assistance to the provinces and territories to achieve it. It is contended here that, however well intentioned, the government of Canada's Action Plan on official languages aimed too high in the desired level of bilingualism it hoped to attain.

The relationship between official discourse in Canada about bilingualism, public attitudes towards knowledge of English and French and the degree of such knowledge in the country will be the focus of this study. By way of analysis of public opinion surveys and data from the census, an assessment will be provided of the prospects for significantly expanding the level of bilingualism in the country.

The authors of the Action Plan pointed to the fact that, while half of anglophone Quebecers between 15 and 24 had mastered French in 1971, more than eight out of 10 did so by 2001. The proportion of Francophone Quebecers the same age with a command of English rose from 30% to 38% between 1981 and 1991. In 15 years, between 1981 and 1996, the proportion of Anglophones outside Quebec able to express themselves effectively in French rose from 8% to 15%. Based on the knowledge acquired from these experiences, it was deemed feasible that in a decade one young Canadian out of two would master both official languages.

It is further argued that such goals may not have taken into sufficient consideration the degree of the unevenness in the state of bilingualism across the regions of the country. It is the asymmetrical nature of bilingualism in Canada that makes such objectives difficult to attain. Moreover, national targets on bilingualism risk masking the large regional gaps in dual language outside Quebec, where bilingual environments are much less common and thus opportunities to use the other official language much less frequent.

There are no internationally recognized benchmarks against which to measure whether a territory can officially qualify as bilingual by virtue of the number of citizens able to speak two languages or more. Targets are generally established by a given State based on subjective criteria. High targets may involve lower standards in the qualitative side of one's ability to operate in a second language. That matter is outside the scope of this essay but merits further attention. Yet it can be assumed that the only way in which the fifty percent objective can be attained is if minimalist criterion is employed to measure second language knowledge.

2. BILINGUALISM IN PRINCIPLE AND PRACTICE

If measured by the number of Canadians that know both English and French, it is fair to contend that nearly four decades following the enactment of the Official Languages Act, the idea of a bilingual Canada remains somewhat elusive. Undoubtedly Canada has made some progress in the numbers and share of persons able to speak both official languages. In 1961, some 12.2% of the population reported an ability to carry on a conversation in English and French rising to 16.2% in 1986 and in 2006, some 17.4%. Federal civil servants, in particular those employed in the national capital region and in Montreal, possess higher than average rates of bilingualism, as are francophones in Quebec and the rest of Canada and anglophones in Quebec and on a lesser scale anglophones in New Brunswick. But hope for substantial increases in the degree of bilingualism throughout Canada haven't materialized. In Ontario for example, the total bilingual population declined from 11.7 in 1986 to 11.3%

TABLE 1: Rates of English-French bilingualism and distribution of the bilingual population in 1996, 2001 and 2006 (Canada, Provinces and Territories)

	ENGLISH-FRENCH BILINGUALISM, CANADA, PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES, 1996, 2001 AND 2006			DISTRIBUTION OF THE BILINGUAL (ENGLISH-FRENCH) POPULATION, CANADA, PROVINCES AND TERRITORIES, 1996, 2001 AND 2006		
CANADA	% OF THE POP. 1996	% OF THE POP. 2001	% OF THE POP. 2006	% OF THE POP. 1996	% OF THE POP. 2001	% OF THE POP. 2006
Canada	17.0	17.7	17.4	100.0	100.0	100.0
N.L.	3.9	4.1	4.7	0.4 (Nfld only)	0.4	0.4
P.E.I.	11.0	12.0	12.7	0.3	0.3	0.3
N.S.	9.3	10.1	10.5	1.7	1.7	1.7
N.B.	32.6	34.2	33.4	4.9	4.7	4.4
Que.	37.8	40.8	40.6	55.0	55.6	55.4
Ont.	11.6	11.7	11.3	25.5	25.2	25.3
Man.	9.4	9.3	9.1	2.1	2.0	1.9
Sask.	5.2	5.1	5.0	1.0	0.9	0.9
Alta.	6.7	6.9	6.8	3.7	3.9	4.1
B.C.	6.7	7.0	7.3	5.1	5.1	5.4

Sources: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 1996, 2001 and 2006.

twenty years later. In his 1992 book "Canada's Official Languages: The Progress of Bilingualism", a leading Canadian analyst Richard Joy observed a noticeable upward trend in the country in rates of bilingualism (between 1961 and 1986) but regarded the overall percentage as "still very low", except in Quebec and on a lesser scale in New Brunswick.

According to the 2001 Census, while more than 43 per cent of francophones said they were bilingual, some nine per cent of anglophones – and only 7.1 per cent of anglophones outside Quebec – could make similar claims. In Canada, the knowledge of the French language increased between 2001 and 2006 among the Anglophone population (from 9.0 percent to 9.4 percent) and the allophone population (from 11.8 percent to 12.1 percent). English-French bilingualism grew or remained unchanged among Anglophones in every province and territory since 2001. In Quebec, nearly seven out of 10 Anglophones (68.9 percent) reported knowing both English and French in 2006, compared to 66.1 percent in 2001. In 2006, 7.4 percent of Anglophones outside Quebec said they could carry on a conversation in both official languages, an increase from 7.1 percent reported in 2001. The table below presents bilingualism rates and how they were distributed across Canada in 1996, 2001 and 2006.

As reflected in the Action Plan, the Government of Canada is concerned about the possible impact of the stagnation in the share of young Canadians that know a second language. However, the authors of the plan take comfort in public opinion surveys that suggest strong interest amongst Canadians in the acquisition of the two official languages. Some 86% of all Canadians (and 82% of Anglophones) think it is important for their children to learn a second language. Moreover, 75% believe this second language should be French. By comparison, 90% of Francophones who want their children to be bilingual favour English as their second language. A 2006 CROP/Radio-Canada Poll supports the Decima findings, noting that roughly 80 percent of Canadians say they support bilingualism in Canada. A similar proportion of Canadians (81 percent) acknowledges and supports the idea of Canada remaining bilingual.

There is a considerable gap between public support for the principle of bilingualism and the extent to which the population knows both English and French. According to a 2006 Decima Research poll, conducted for Canadian Heritage, 72 percent of Canadians are in favour of bilingualism in Canada, an increase of 16 percent since 2003. This figure represents significant progress, especially among Anglophones, where the level of support for language equality sits at 65 percent.

TABLE 2: Regional summary of public opinion on bilingualism

	QC	MARITIMES	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
In favour of bilingualism across Canada	91%	77%	66%	66%	58%	68%
In favour of bilingualism in their province	85%	79%	66%	63%	53%	59%
Agree that it is important for children to learn a language other than English (French in Quebec)	98%	90%	84%	78%	–	88%

Source: Décima and CROP/Radio-Canada, 2006.

Support is even stronger among young people aged 18-34, with 80 percent in favour of bilingualism.

This same survey found that 70 percent of Canadians felt that bilingualism was a defining feature of the country. Still as Parkin and Turcotte (2004) point out, the number of those who say it is important to learn French is much higher than the actual rate of bilingualism among young Anglophones. They conclude that the support for bilingualism as a policy is not being translated into commitment to the practice of bilingualism at the level of individual citizens.

There is much less cost attached to expressing a desire to learn a second language than to actually acquire one. (Although when an important majority of individuals indicate such interest, the state can justify significant investment on behalf of the taxpayer to support bilingualism). As suggested earlier, the best measure of whether a nation is bilingual is less a function of the degree of interest in learning a second language, as opposed to the extent to which its population is able to communicate in two languages. Very often it is assumed that where there is a will to learn another language, a way can be found to make it happen. It shall be observed that finding the way is no simple task.

The challenge for any pluralistic society that values dual or multiple language knowledge is to translate the motivation to learn into the acquisition of the second language. Undoubtedly, the two are related but the strength of one's motivation to acquire the second language is influenced by a variety of circumstances and factors. Put another way, the commitment to second language acquisition may be deemed soft when an individual identifies a series of obstacles that get in the way of the desire to learn a second language. Perhaps the main question arising from all this is, if the interest is indeed as high as the opinion polls suggests, why has the degree of bilingualism slipped amongst the population? It is a question that is not sufficiently addressed in the Action Plan. Historically, the meaningful increases in bilingualism in Canada have generally occurred where individuals have felt pressured to acquire the other official language. Felling that knowledge of English and French will improve one's mobility differs from feeling there is a penalty associated with the failure to acquire the other language. In some way, this reflects the difference between inciting people to learn a second language and coercing them into do so. There have been several debates over what can be described as a coercive measure when it comes to supporting second language learning.

3. IS CANADA REALLY A BILINGUAL COUNTRY?

Canadians would likely describe their country as bilingual were such a question put to them. As noted from a legislative standpoint, such a response could be justified. However, on the basis of the degree of knowledge of English and French, such an affirmation is much more problematic. As observed below, the majority of Canada's bilingual population resides in the province of Quebec and the Montreal region is home to more than one in three bilingual Canadians.

When it comes to support for the principle of bilingualism, Canadians are not all that distinct from much of the rest of the world which also tends to see value in the acquisition of a second language. For example, many Americans, and especially many young Americans, express an interest in learning Spanish. In Canada, 62% of non-Francophones, living outside Quebec, aged 18-34, say it is important for their children to learn French; but the number of non-Hispanics Americans, aged 18-34, who say it is important for their children to learn Spanish is not far behind (55%), and in some regions is much higher (i.e. in the Western states it is 70%). A survey of the 27 countries of the European Union found that 60% would either like to learn a new language or improve their command of an existing one.

For its part, the European Union describes itself as a truly multilingual institution which fosters the ideal of a single Community with a diversity of cultures and languages. It targets as a long term objective that all EU citizens be capable of speaking two languages in addition to their mother tongue. In November 2005, the European Commission identified the three core aims of its policy of multilingualism as the encouragement of language learning, the promotion of a healthy multilingual economy, and providing all EU citizens access to legislation, procedures and information of the Union in their own language

A survey conducted for Eurobarometer in November-December 2005 revealed that the majority (56%) of Europeans were able to hold a conversation in a language other than their mother tongue. In 9 out of 29 European countries covered in this survey, over half of the respondents are able to hold a conversation at least in two foreign languages. Some 28% stated that they master two languages along with their native language.

Compared to results yielded from a 2001 survey for Eurobarometer, the share of those knowing at least one foreign language increased by 9 points (from 47% in 2001 to 56% in 2005). While nearly all citizens of Luxembourg, Slovakia and Latvia indicate that they master at least one foreign language, the percentage able to do so was lower in Ireland (34%), the United Kingdom (38%), Italy (41%), Portugal (42%) and Hungarians (42%).

The authors of the 2002 federal government Action Plan on Official Languages in 2002 acknowledged that Canada was not faring especially well in terms of the share of its bilingual population. They observed that "…Canada has

TABLE 3: Knowledge of English and French in selected provinces and cities in Canada, 2001 and 2006

	2006	2001	% INCREASE IN NUMBERS OF BILINGUAL POPULATION	% INCREASE IN BILINGUAL POPULATION 2001-2006	% INCREASE IN OVERALL POPULATION 2001-2006
Canada	5 448 850	5 231 575	217 275	4.1	5.4
Quebec	3 017 860	2 907 700	110 160	3.8	4.3
Rest of Canada	2 430 990	2 323 875	107 115	4.6	4.4
New Brunswick	240 085	245 865	-5 780	-2.3	0.1
Ontario	1 377 325	1 319 715	57 610	4.4	6.6
Manitoba	103 520	102 840	680	0.7	2.6
Alberta	222 885	202 905	19 980	10.0	10.6
British Columbia	295 645	269 365	26 280	9.7	5.3
Montréal	1 861 925	1 801 005	60 920	3.3	5.3
Québec City	232 535	221 260	11 275	5.0	4.2
Ottawa – Gatineau	496 025	467 030	28 995	6.3	5.9
Ottawa	320 175	299 735	20 440	6.8	4.9
Gatineau	175 855	167 295	8 560	5.0	6.8
Toronto	418 505	393415	25 090	6.4	9.2
Vancouver	162 790	147 775	15 015	10,0	6.5

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

fewer bilingual people than does Britain, which ranks lowest among the European countries for second-language skills."

The table below further illustrates the change in the numbers of English-French bilinguals that occurred over the 2001 to 2006 period. There was a 4% increase in the number of English-French bilinguals over that period; while the increase in the country's total population was 5.4%. In short, the overall population of the country is growing quicker than its bilingual population. This however was not the case for British Columbia and its capital or for the national capital region (Ottawa's bilingual population grew faster than its overall population).

TABLE 4: Knowledge of English and French amongst francophones in Quebec and anglophones outside of Quebec, 2006

CANADA 2006 KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH	FRANCOPHONES IN QUEBEC	ANGLOPHONES OUTSIDE OF QUEBEC
Total – Age groups	35.8	7.4
Under 5 years	4.5	1.2
5 to 9 years	7.7	7.2
10 to 14 years	17.8	11.9
15 to 19 years	40.7	13.0
20 to 24 years	50.9	12.1

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

4. PRINCIPLE GAPS IN BILINGUALISM

Underlying regional differences in knowledge of English and French is the concentration of francophones in a given part of the country. Despite limited English language instruction in the province's French language schools, Quebec francophone youth between the ages of 10 and 19 possess considerably higher rates of knowledge of English and French than is the case for anglophones outside of Quebec. This is in large part because exposure to the second language outside the classroom is far greater amongst francophones in Quebec than it is for anglophones in the rest of Canada.

As observed below, amongst anglophones and allophones (notably those outside of Quebec), the rate of bilingualism decreases as of the age of 25. For francophones such declines are more evident at the age of 65.

It is worth noting that age and level of education are amongst the principal gaps in levels of interest in language learning in Europe as the younger population (83%) is almost two-and-a-half times more likely than the oldest (34%) to express interest in studying a foreign language. A similar gap emerges when contrasting the most educated in Europe (77%) with persons that have the least formal education (32%). In sum, "multilingual Europeans" are younger well-educated, either a student or employed in a position that presumably requires the use of a foreign language and, when surveyed, tend to say they are motivated to learn another language.

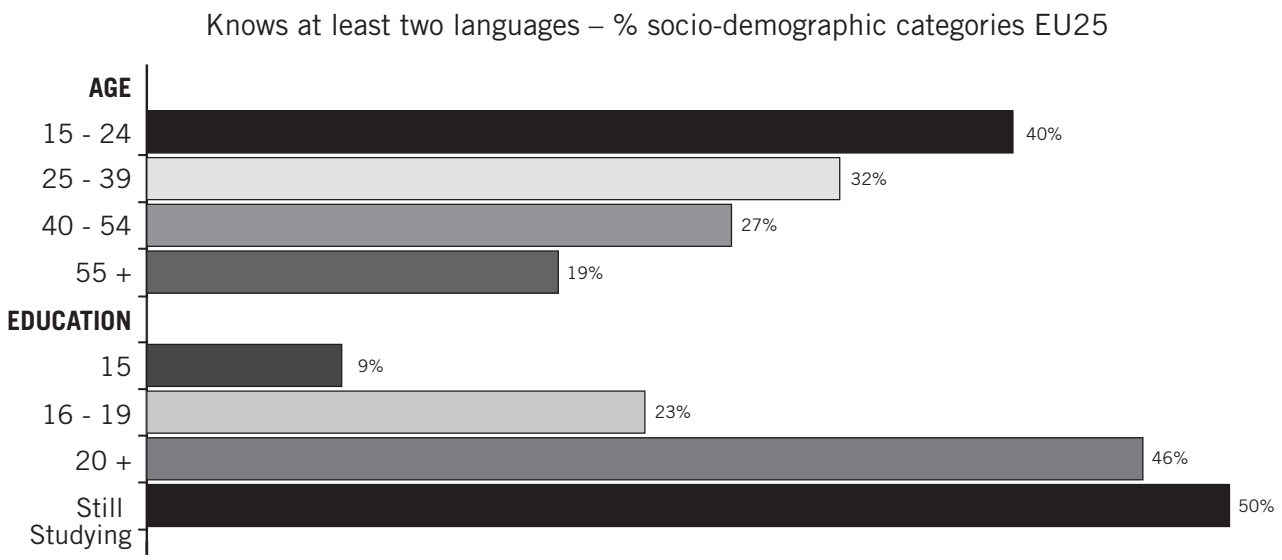
The level of education is also a factor in the rate of bilingualism as reported by language groups in Canada. As observed below, when looking at the age group 15-24, the gap is more pronounced amongst francophones, as those without a high school degree report considerably less knowledge of French and English than those with high school degree who in turn are less bilingual than those with the equivalent of a college degree or more. While the level of education also plays a role in reported knowledge of English and French amongst Anglophones, the difference is most pronounced between those individuals with a university degree and those without. Amongst allophones, the level of education plays little role in reported knowledge of English and French.

TABLE 5: Mother tongue and knowledge of English and French by age cohort for Canada, 2006

CANADA 2006	TOTAL POPULATION	ENGLISH	FRENCH	ALLOPHONE
Total - Age groups	18.8	9.5	47.3	12.3
15 to 24 years	22.8	14.8	50.5	17.7
25 to 54 years	19.6	9.5	50.3	13.4
25 to 34 years	23.0	11.2	55.7	15.7
35 to 44 years	19.1	9.0	51.5	13.7
45 to 54 years	17.4	7.3	45.3	11.7
55 to 64 years	17.3	7.2	44.0	10.1
65 to 74 years	14.5	5.4	40.0	7.3
75 years and over	12.1	4.2	37.0	6.2

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

TABLE 6: Which languages do you speak well enough in order to be able to have a conversation, excluding your mother tongue



Source: Europeans and their Languages, Eurobarometer 243 November – December 2005 Publication: February 2006.

TABLE 7: Percent reporting knowledge of English and French amongst persons aged 15 to 24 years by mother tongue (English, French or Other), Canada, 2006

	TOTAL	ENGLISH	FRENCH	OTHER
Total – Highest certificate, diploma or degree	23.0	15.0	50.5	17.6
No certificate, diploma or degree	18.5	13.0	37.3	16.6
High school certificate or equivalent	22.5	15.0	57.7	16.0
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	25.0	10.7	40.0	21.0
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	33.0	16.0	64.0	26.8
University certificate or diploma below the bachelor level	27.5	19.0	69.5	16.0
University certificate, diploma or degree	34.0	27.4	75.1	19.8

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

TABLE 8: Percent reporting knowledge of English and French amongst persons aged 25 to 54 years by mother tongue (English, French or Other), Canada, 2006

	TOTAL	ENGLISH	FRENCH	OTHER
Total - Highest certificate, diploma or degree	19.6	9.5	50.0	13.4
No certificate, diploma or degree	10.3	3.7	27.2	5.8
High school certificate or equivalent	15.2	6.6	48.3	9.7
Apprenticeship or trades certificate or diploma	19.0	5.9	38.1	15.8
College, CEGEP or other non-university certificate or diploma	19.4	7.5	57.0	14.5
University certificate or diploma below the bachelor level	23.0	11.2	61.7	13.7
University certificate, diploma or degree	29.3	20.0	72.5	18.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

Amongst Canadians age 25-54, the respective pattern of knowledge of English and French across language groups on the basis of their level of education is somewhat similar to the younger group illustrated above. Francophones with a university degree are considerably more bilingual than those with the equivalent of a high school degree. As anglophones and francophones respectively secure more education, the gap widens in their reported knowledge of English and French.

5. THE QUESTION ON BILINGUALISM: ATTITUDES TOWARDS NATIONAL BILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE LEARNING

When determining the level of interest in bilingualism, it is important to look at the manner in which questions about language learning are put to the population. In an analysis of various opinion polls on the issue, Parkin and Turcotte (2004) observe that support for bilingualism varies tremendously according to the precise wording of the question that is asked. As a general rule, the more the meaning of bilingualism is defined in the question, the more support it will attract. For example, a large percentage of Canadians support the right of Francophones outside of Quebec to have their children educated in French, and the right of citizens to receive federal government services in the official language of their choice. More vaguely worded notions, such as the idea of "bilingualism for all of Canada," attract much lower levels of support.

As described earlier, when it comes to some aspects of bilingualism in Canada, there is a noticeable "softness" in public support. Depending on one's perspective, the bilingual glass can be seen as either half empty or half full. As observed below, Canadians are split in four when estimating the importance of speaking both English and French with nearly half the population collectively somewhat in agreement or disagreement. There is also a fair degree of "softness' on the issue of whether Canadians are required to learn a second language (16% strongly agree) and whether they should be required to do so (22% strongly agree). And the majority of Canadians disagree that bilingualism keeps the country united (a proposition to which less than one in five Canadians strongly adhere). While many Canadians would like to improve their language skills, most seem content with their actual command of the language they need.

A. MOTHER TONGUE

Overall, some 47% of Canadians agree (both strongly and somewhat) that it is important to speak both English and French. But when it comes to the extent to which

TABLE 9: Level of agreement on various questions pertaining to knowledge of English and French, February 2008

	STRONGLY AGREE	SOMEWHAT AGREE	SOMEWHAT DISAGREE	STRONGLY DISAGREE
It is important to speak both English and French	24	24	24	25
I would like to either learn a new language or improve my command of an existing one	38	37	10	10
I already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) I need	37	35	18	6
I cannot take the time to learn or improve my command of another language	11	30	34	19
In Canada we are required to learn a second official language	16	22	22	35
We should be required to learn a second official language	22	23	23	30
Bilingualism keeps the country united	17	24	28	25

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 6-10, 2008.

TABLE 10: Level of agreement by mother tongue (English, French or Other) on various questions pertaining to knowledge of English and French, February 2008

	TOTAL	FRENCH	ENGLISH	OTHER
It is important to speak both English and French	47%	81%	38%	37%
I would like to either learn a new language or improve my command of an existing one	75%	84%	70%	77%
I already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) I need	41%	87%	65%	74%
I cannot take the time to learn or improve my command of another language	72%	29%	45%	43%
In Canada we are required to learn a second official language	38	51	30	48
We should be required to learn a second official language	45	76	34	42
Bilingualism keeps the country united	40	63	31	43

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 6-10, 2008.

Canadians believe bilingualism is important, there is a considerable difference on the basis on one's language background. In effect, francophones (81%) are far more inclined to say that it is important to speak both English and French than do non-francophones (38%). Some three-quarters of Canadians would like to either learn a new language or improve their command of an existing one. Francophones were most likely to agree they would like to either learn a new language or improve their command of an existing one (84%), followed by Allophones (77%) and then Anglophones (70%).

Some 87% of francophones agree that they already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) they need compared to 65% of Anglophone respondents. This is the case of 74% of Allophone respondents.

Some 41% of Canadians believe that they cannot take the time to learn or improve their command of another language. Anglophone respondents were the most likely to agree that they cannot take the time to learn or improve their command of another language (45%), followed by Allophone respondents (43%). Francophone respondents were most likely to demonstrate openness to learning or improving their command of another language (29%).

B. GENDER

While young anglophone girls are more likely than their male counterparts to be able to speak French, differences in attitudes appear less pronounced as they get older. As revealed below, the principle difference is in the extent to which male respondents (46%) say that they cannot take the time to learn or improve their command of another language compared with female respondents (36%).

C. AGE

On the basis of age, it is clear that the younger cohort of Canadians is more open to learning English and French. Moreover, the relative age gap narrows when it comes to the level of satisfaction with the existing degree of language knowledge. But language background trumps the age difference to some degree when it comes to attitudes towards second language knowledge. For example, 76% of francophones versus 45 of anglos between the ages of 18 and 24 agree that it is important to speak both English and French. As the groups get older the gap widens further with some 84% of francophones between the ages of 35 and 39 in agreement with the importance of speaking both English and French versus 35% of anglophones in the same age group.

TABLE 11: Level of agreement by gender on various questions pertaining to knowledge of English and French, February 2008

	MALE	FEMALE
It is important to speak both English and French	45%	49%
I would like to either learn a new language or improve my command of an existing one	74%	75%
I already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) I need	46%	36%
I cannot take the time to learn or improve my command of another language	75%	68%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 6-10, 2008.

D. REGIONAL DIFFERENCES

Respondents from Quebec were the most likely to agree that it is important to speak both English and French (82%), compared to British Colombians who were the least likely to agree with the statement (19%). Quebecers were the most likely to agree that they would like to either learn a new language or improve their command of an existing one (84%), while respondents from the Prairies were the least likely to agree with the statement (61%). British Colombians were the most likely to say that they cannot take the time to learn or improve their command of another language (56%) while Quebecers were the least likely to agree with the statement (28%).

TABLE 12: Level of agreement by age cohort on various questions pertaining to knowledge of English and French, February 2008

STRONGLY AND SOMEWHAT AGREE	18-24	25-34	35-44	45-54	55-64	65+
It is important to speak both English and French	60%	49%	48%	45%	47%	40%
I would like to either learn a new language or improve my command of an existing one	94%	78%	73%	67%	75%	69%
I already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) I need	73%	64%	66%	73%	71%	82%
I cannot take the time to learn or improve my command of another language	47%	37%	45%	49%	30%	35%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

TABLE 13: Level of agreement by province/region on various questions pertaining to knowledge of English and French, February 2008

	MARITIMES	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
It is important to speak both English and French	54%	82%	41%	32%	32%	19%
I would like to either learn a new language or improve my command of an existing one	65%	84%	71%	61%	79%	77%
I already know or have sufficient command of the language(s) I need	76%	86%	67%	66%	69%	61%
I cannot take the time to learn or improve my command of another language	46%	28%	42%	43%	40%	56%

Source: Leger Marketing for the Association for Canadian Studies, February 6-10, 2008.

Of those Canadians that feel it is important to speak both English and French, some 78% believe they can take the time to improve their command of another language. Not surprisingly, amongst those who do not feel knowledge of the two languages is important, some 40% say they can take the time to improve their command of another language.

Those who strongly agree they would like to either learn a new language or improve their command of an existing one are more likely to agree that they can afford the time to improve their command of another language.

6. YOUTH AND BILINGUALISM IN CANADA

It is not surprising that efforts to raise the level of bilingualism in the country would focus on youth. First, the schools offer an institutional setting where at least some degree of second language instruction can become mandatory. Also youth are presumably less apathetic and more open to acquiring new skills including language acquisition. Public opinion surveys support the idea that young people are more open to second language acquisition. Some two-thirds of the 18-24 age group agree that in Canada we are required to learn a second official language, in contrast to one-third of respondents over the age of 25. Some 54% of the youngest cohort agrees that we should be required to learn a second official language compared with approximately 42% over the age of 25. Moreover, some 53% of respondents age 18-24 agree that bilingualism keeps the country united compared to just below 40% of those over the age of 25.

If the majority of anglophone youth are not bilingual, some will argue that it due to the absence of resources to assist them in this regard, others will argue that there lacks opportunities to interact in the other official language and some will insist that the political will to provide bilingual education is simply absent in a number of provinces. It would be wrong to dismiss attitudinal challenges in the promotion of bilingualism. Of course attitudes are shaped by the surrounding environment, the resources in place and the political climate. A youth survey of respondents age 18-30 commissioned by the Department of Canadian Heritage reveals that some three in four persons observe a certain degree of apathy about learning the other language.

When respondents aged 18 to 30 were asked how important it is for their children or the children in their community to learn a language other than their first official language, a very large majority of both French and English respondents stated that it was either very or somewhat important. There were more French respondents (70%) than English respondents (49%) who believed learning a second language was very important, but overall sizeable majorities of both groups expressed a belief that learning a second language for their children or the children in their community was either very or somewhat important.

When asked whether the education they received in elementary and high school was a great opportunity for them to learn their second official language, a small majority, 54 percent, either strongly or somewhat agree with the statement. One of three (33%) Canadian youth either strongly or somewhat disagree that elementary and high school years were a great opportunity for them to learn their second official language.

When asked about the biggest obstacle to learning a second official language, Canadian youth said it was having no personal interest in learning the other language (21%). The next most common obstacles noted were having limited learning opportunities in their region (12%) and poor "teaching" of the other official language (12%). One in ten (10%) stated there were no opportunities for practice.

As to other means outside the classroom deemed as facilitating second language acquisition, 19 percent of French respondents and ten percent of English respondents replied that linguistic visits or exchanges would be an effective learning opportunity. Television was seen to make it easier to learn their second official language by 14 percent of French respondents and four percent of English respondents saw television as affording such an opportunity (a difference likely attributable to the larger amount of English television available in the North American marketplace, as compared to available French television). Some one in ten respondents-English and French alike- believe sports activities provided a good learning opportunity.

Conversation and socializing were noted by eight percent of French respondents and seven percent of English respondents as activities that could make it easier to learn their second language.

As to what prevented engagement in a preferred activity in the other official language, the most common specific answer from both French and English respondents was that they had no opportunities to practice: six percent of French respondents and 18 percent of English respondents responded this way. A total of five percent of French respondents and 17 percent of English respondents stated they simply had no interest in pursuing such activity in another language.

7. BILINGUALISM IN THE PUBLIC DOMAIN: OFFICIAL LANGUAGES AT WORK

Beyond the level of knowledge of English and French as a basis for assessing societal bilingualism, the actual use of the language in the public domain may also serve as such a benchmark. It is to be expected that there will be an important gap between knowledge of a second language and its use which is often a function of the opportunity for contact in the language. Such contact can take the form of either personal interaction or exposure to the language via its cultural expression (i.e. arts and media). The workplace provides an opportunity to evaluate the extent to which two languages are employed in the public domain.

As observed below, in 2006 some 3.6 of anglophones used the French language most often at work (0.9%) along with regular use (2.7%). By contrast in that same year, 34.9% of francophones used the English language most often at work with 11.9% using it most often and another 23% using it regularly.

TABLE 14: Number and percentage of persons of English mother tongue using the French language at work most often and regularly and persons of French mother tongue using English at work most often and regularly, Canada, 2006

CANADA 2006	ENGLISH MOTHER TONGUE	FRENCH MOTHER TONGUE
Total	10 717 070	3 992 820
French/ English at work	392 520	1 397 785
%	3.6	34.9

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

But there are important variations in the extent to which the second language is employed in the workplace depending upon where in Canada the group resides. As illustrated below, outside of Quebec-including in the "bilingual province" of New Brunswick, the share of anglophones that speak the French language most often at work or use it regularly stands at less than 2%. Only in the province of Quebec does the anglophone population use French in the work place most often (23.4%) along with 36.1% that use it regularly. Outside of Montreal, some 44% of anglophones use the French language most often compared with 16% of Montreal anglophones that do so.

The pattern of language use at work on the part of francophones contrasts significantly with that of the anglophone population. Outside of Quebec, some 80% of francophones report working in English with just over 60% doing so most of the time and nearly 20% doing so regularly. In Moncton, nearly 50% work in English most of the time with another 30% doing so regularly. In Quebec, some 5% of francophones speak English most of the time at work with another 23% doing so regularly. In the city of Gatineau, francophones are more likely to report working in English (22.5 most often and 37.2% regularly than do anglophones in the French language with 13.1% doing so most often and 35% regularly).

8. CONCLUSION

Canada is accustomed to describing itself as officially bilingual. From a legislative standpoint, it can legitimately make such a claim. However, as defined by the share of Canadians able to speak both official languages, at the current level, it seems insufficient against the benchmark it has set for the younger segment of the population. While there is no international benchmark against which a country might consider itself bilingual, on a comparative basis

TABLE 15: Number and percentage of persons of English mother tongue using French at work most often and regularly by country, selected provinces and cities, Canada, 2006

ENGLISH		FRENCH USED MOST OFTEN AT WORK		FRENCH USED REGULARLY AT WORK	
Canada	10 717 070	98 080	0.9	294 420	2.7
Quebec	321 950	75 185	23.4	115 895	36.1
Rest of Canada	10 495 120	23 895	0.2	178 625	1.7
Montréal	238 775	38 760	16.2	93 380	39.2
Rest of Quebec	83 175	36 425	43.8	22 515	27.1
New Brunswick	267 285	4 360	1.6	18115	6.7
Moncton	46 200	735	1.6	5800	12.6
Ottawa – Gatineau	339 140	5 555	1.6	58400	17.2
Gatineau	21 950	2 880	13.1	7660	35.0
Ottawa	317 190	2 675	0.8	50740	16.0

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

TABLE 16: Number and percentage of persons of French mother tongue using English at work most often and regularly by country, selected provinces and cities, Canada, 2006

FRENCH	TOTAL	ENGLISH USED MOST OFTEN AT WORK	% USING ENGLISH	ENGLISH USED REGULARLY AT WORK	% USING ENGLISH
Canada	3 992 820	487 015	12.1	910 770	22.8
Quebec	3 415 895	140 785	4.9	799 965	23.5
Rest of Canada	576 925	346 230	60.7	110 805	19.2
Montréal	1 385 975	81 445	5.9	462 275	33.4
Rest of Quebec	2 029 920	59 340	2.9	337 690	16.6
New Brunswick	137 580	34 455	25.0	46 045	33.6
Moncton	28 200	13 510	47.8	8190	29.0
Ottawa – Gatineau	220 030	80 035	22.4	69605	31.6
Gatineau	133 220	29 870	22.5	49695	37.2
Ottawa	86 805	50 165	58.3	19910	23.1

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006.

Canada seems well behind most European countries and on a relative par with the United States. The latter country does not describe itself as a bilingual nation.

It is clear that the government of Canada wants to narrow the gap between being its offer of services in both official languages and the extent to which the population is able to speak English and French. Indeed, the gap gives rise to the striking paradox of Canada offering services in the two official languages on a national scale for nearly four decades without generating a substantial increase in the population's knowledge of English and French over much of that period. Hence the symbolic or pedagogical dimension of national legislation on official languages may have contributed to strengthening support for official bilingualism-insofar as this entails extending services in both languages – but it has only had a very modest effect on increasing the rate of bilingualism on the part of the population. Along with political discourse in Canada which is generally favorable to bilingualism, the legislation may also have played some role in encouraging an important majority of Canadians to express a desire to learn both English and French. Yet this has given rise to yet another paradox wherein the degree of interest in learning the two official languages is considerably greater than the actual level of knowledge of English and French. The gap between interest in learning and knowing a second official language is narrower amongst younger Canadians, francophones in Canada, and anglophones in Quebec (though given their relatively high rates of bilingualism the gap barely exists amongst the minority language communities).

In Quebec where in the late 1970's the province decreed that its official language was French and that in law therefore it was widely deemed as unilingual, the level of bilingualism progressed considerably amongst the minority official language group but also on a lesser scale rose amongst the majority francophone population. In the case of the former, observers will no doubt argue that the pressure brought about by the enactment of legislation contributed to the substantial increase in the share of anglophones able to speak both English and French. In the case of young anglophones in Quebec, the expansion of French language instruction in the English language school system was largely responsible for the increase in the percentage of bilinguals. Indeed, it is the French immersion program

in many Quebec's English schools which the 2002 federal Government Action Plan holds up as an example of how it is possible to significantly increase the degree of French second language knowledge elsewhere in the country amongst school age children (from 24% in 2001 to 50% by 2013).

But such assumptions are based on the idea that the school on its own can have a decisive impact on knowledge of English and French. Indeed the Action Plan suggests that there is a need to provide some lived experiences for French language learners and, amongst other things, have proposed school exchanges to provide for direct contact between English and French speaking youth. That too however may be insufficient. The importance attributed to second language knowledge in the broader society is crucial to the success in raising the level of bilingualism. That is more likely the lesson from the experience of language learning amongst Quebec anglophone youth and on a lesser scale for the province's francophones. It is likely that the sense outside the school context that in the broader society French is essential to function in the province results in important and sustained levels of bilingualism amongst Quebec anglophones. For Quebec francophones, it is the fact of living in North America that seemingly compels many to learn English. It is such a strong incentive (some might call it "pressure"), that it is an important contributing factor in raising levels of bilingualism.

In the absence of sufficient incentive on individuals to do so, the likelihood of their acquiring a second language will diminish. Unless there is a sense that, in the school system, acquiring a second official language is as important in Canada as is for example learning mathematics, it is doubtful that there will be a substantial increase in levels of bilingualism in much of the country outside those areas with a high concentration of French-speakers. Public opinion surveys suggesting the existence of a will to learn, even combined with the availability of additional resources, will not suffice to achieve targets close to those established in the Action Plan. To project the desired image of Canada as "de facto" bilingual, it will likely be necessary to continue to sustain this view, even though the gap between the legal and sociological reality will remain with us into the foreseeable future.

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