CAPITAL LANGUAGES: DIFFERENCES IN KNOWLEDGE AND USE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH IN OTTAWA AND GATINEAU

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ABSTRACT

The essay examines the differences in bilingualism between residents of Gatineau, Quebec and Ottawa, Ontario with a view to offering insights into the respective experience of learning a second official language in school and that of interaction in the other language. The data suggest that knowledge of English and French is better amongst francophones in Gatineau than it is amongst anglophones in Ottawa despite greater opportunities for the latter to learn the other language in early schooling. It reveals that while Gatineau francophones report acquisition of the second official language somewhat later than do Ottawa anglophones the rate of second language retention on the part of the former group is considerably higher. The essay underscores the significance of having opportunities to use a second language and the risk of "using it or losing it" when it comes to the acquisition confined to the school setting. It concludes that the relationship language learning at school and opportunity for interaction needs much more attention on the part of researchers.

It's no coincidence that Canada's first French immersion class emerged during the 1960's in the province of Quebec. During that period, Quebec was undergoing economic and social change where there was an increasing desire that all Quebecers regard French as the province's dominant language. The timing for French immersion couldn't be better, as by the mid-1960's it was becoming increasingly evident that there would be pressure to learn French on those students for whom it was not a first language. Hence the immersion program targeted a population that understood the need for it and that expected that their children would make use of the French language when they became part of the workforce.

Since the 1960's, French immersion has become available in all provinces and two territories. But it is not surprising that it's most popular in the English-speaking sector of the province of Quebec, where French is both the official and majority language. The use of French as a second language is more likely to occur where there is a critical mass of English and French speakers living in relatively close proximity. Presumably, it will be more attractive to English-speakers in New Brunswick and in parts of Ontario since that is where the language is most likely to be put to use. However, enrollment trends in French immersion on a provincial basis might suggest otherwise. Outside of Quebec, it is the provinces of Prince Edward Island and New Brunswick with the highest percentages reporting enrollment in French immersion, with some one in five students enrolled in the program. Nova Scotia, Manitoba and Newfoundland, The percentage in Ontario is relatively low compared with the aforementioned provinces. But the provincial figures can be misleading in terms of the extent to which proximity to French-speaking communities influences the interest and desire for second language

TABLE 1: Number and percentage of mother tongue English, French and Non-official Languages in Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec, 2001 and 2006

	OTTAWA - GATINEAU		OTTAWA		GATINEAU	
MOTHER TONGUE	2006	2001	2006	2001	2006	2001
Total	1,117,120	1,054,865	835,470	795,250	281,650	259,610
English	550,260	530,870	514,680	49,7250	35,580	33,615
	49.3%	50.3%	61.6%	62.5%	12.6%	13.0%
French	360,175	341,180	139,205	133,830	220,970	207,345
	32.2%	32.3%	16.7%	16.8%	78.5%	79.6%
Non-official languages	185,875	162,415	165,360	148,285	20,520	14,135
	16.6%	15.4%	19.8%	18.7%	7.3%	5.4%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2001 and 2006

acquisition. In fact, in Canada's capital which borders on the province of Quebec, some 60% of children are enrolled in immersion and the demand is high.

Geographic proximity between English and French-speakers is more likely to create an environment where there is more opportunity for use of the acquired second-language. Proximity may not dictate the interest and demand for second language instruction but it does potentially provide the opportunities for interaction in the second language that can be essential in support of school-based language learning. Indeed, beyond the school years the ability to put what was learned into practice can make a crucial difference in the retention of the second language.

The part of the country where such proximity is most prevalent has been described as the bilingual belt. Richard Joy has described that belt as an "area 1,000 miles long, bounded on the West by a line drawn from Sault Ste. Marie through Ottawa to Cornwall and on the East by a line from Edmonston to Moncton....[O]ver 90% of all Canadians who claimed to have a knowledge of the French language were found within the Soo-Moncton limits. Outside this area, not one person in twenty could speak French, and not one in forty would use it as the language of the home".

Within the belt, however, the relative concentration of English and French-speakers is uneven, and rare are those areas with an equal percentage of the two language groups. Hence it is expected that one language will be dominant in a given area. As rates of bilingualism are higher within the "belt" there is more opportunity for language contact; it is within the 'belt" that the respective impact of learning French or English as a second language within school and its use in economic and/or social contexts can be mutually beneficial. The old adage "use it or lose it" applies to many facets of learning, and language is by no means an exception. When it comes to second language acquisition, to retain what is acquired at school is dependent on the ability to put it into practice. That which follows will examine the rates of official language bilingualism in the country's national capital region which indeed falls within the "bilingual belt". It is also an area where there is a strong incentive to acquire the second official language as more than 40% of the country's federal civil service is concentrated there. Ottawa is unique. As one observer noted with respect to Ottawa, "It's a political town like no other, a city of affluent, highly-educated people, many of whom work, or aspire to work, in the civil service. To do that, you need to speak French and parents face huge pressure to enroll their children in French Immersion programmes."

While much attention is directed at the challenges associated with early/school based second language acquisition, considerably less research has been conducted around the retention of second languages beyond schooling. The prevailing theory holds that a language learned during early childhood is forgotten when contact to that language is severed. A key element is the degree to which contact is maintained – however minimal – with the early-acquired language. Studies that tend to report little or no evidence of preserved language knowledge usually involve participants that are completely isolated from a childhood language. Accordingly, they contend that some contact with the early language throughout life helps guard against language loss. By contrast, Jeffrey S. Bowers et al. (2009) found "traces of early language exposure in individuals in their adult years, despite a complete absence of explicit memory for the language." Researchers identified age as an important factor in the ability to relearn a language, with persons under age 40 demonstrating some ability while those over 40 failed to show any relearning." Their results indicated that, even when exposure to the childhood language is completely blocked, implicit knowledge can still be preserved.

There is ongoing discussion as to the factors that help determine the variability in the level of language retention among individual learners. Some stress the neuropsychological make-up or external circumstances/ environment of one speaker that ultimately enable them to attain/maintain language skills or cause erosion. Summarizing the principal contributing factors, Schmid and Dusseldorp point to language aptitude (Hyltenstam, 2007), emotional and attitudinal factors (Schumann, 1994; 1998; Schmid,2002), ethnic affiliation and identification (Giles et al., 1977; Ya g˘mur, 1997), and the amount of exposure to and use of the language in question (Paradis, 2004; 2007). Researchers increasingly view these factors as interdependent or intertwined (e.g. de Bot et al., 2007).

DEMOGRAPHIC PROFILE OF THE NATIONAL CAPITAL REGION

An area of the country where there is significant opportunity for interaction between English and French speakers is in the country's National Capital Region. Also referred to as Canada's Capital Region, it includes Gatineau, Quebec, the Canadian capital of Ottawa, Ontario and surrounding urban and rural communities. The National Capital Region (hereafter NCR) straddles the Ottawa River, which serves as the boundary between the provinces of Ontarioand Quebec.

Between 2001 and 2006, the share of anglophones in the NCR slipped below fifty percent owing to the rise in the number of persons whose first language was neither English nor French. For the entire region, English is the mother tongue of one in two persons, French nearly one in three and the others approximately one in six. Not surprisingly, English-speakers are more concentrated on the Ontario side of the NCR and francophones on the Quebec side. But there is divergence in the respective share of anglophones and francophones; in Gatineau, mother tongue francophones represented 78% of the population in 2006, while anglophones represented some 62% of the population of Ottawa.

KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH

In 2001 some 44.3% of the population of the National Capital Region reported an ability to speak both the English and French languages versus 44.4% in 2006 (in 1991 it was 42.8 and in 1996 44.0%). In effect, over that five-year period there was virtually no change in the level of bilingualism, despite a fairly strong push on the part of the federal government to increase rather sharply the share of youth (in particular non-francophones outside of Quebec) able to speak both English and French. In the National Capital Region some 29.1% of anglophones reported knowledge of both English and French in 2001 and 30.5% in 2006, versus 75.3% and 73.3% in the share of NCR Francophones in 2001 and 2006 respectively. One in four allophones in the NCR reported knowledge of both English and French.

TABLE 2: Percentage with Knowledge of English and French by Mother Tongue English, French and Other in percentage, Gatineau, Quebec, 2006

2006	GATINEAU POPULATION BY MOTHER TONGUE		
KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH	ENGLISH	FRENCH	OTHER
Total	60.6%	63.2%	52.2%
Under 5 years	32.2%	11.8%	20.1%
5 to 9 years	55.3%	14.9%	45.1%
10 to 14 years	63.0%	29.4%	51.1%
15 to 19 years	75.9%	60.3%	74.9%
20 to 24 years	77.7%	76.2%	76.3%
25 to 29 years	66.4%	76.9%	67.4%
30 to 34 years	68.0%	79.8%	57.1%
35 to 39 years	66.1%	77.1%	58.0%
40 to 44 years	68.0%	76.9%	58.3%
45 to 49 years	59.3%	74.8%	56.5%
50 to 54 years	57.4%	75.4%	50.8%
55 to 59 years	59.2%	73.1%	41.6%
60 to 64 years	52.1%	71.2%	39.7%
65 to 69 years	44.2%	69.6%	28.9%
70 to 74 years	47.6%	68.0%	19.8%
75 years and over	34.8%	60.1%	20.3%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006

GATINEAU

Gatineau is the province of Quebec's most bilingual region with some 64% of the population reporting knowledge of both English and French. On the basis of age cohort, one observes that Gatineau's anglophones acquire knowledge of French early and by the age of 15 some three-quarters report knowledge of English and French. In the case of francophones, it is in the late teens as they enter the workplace that their degree of bilingualism jumps considerably and remains at a similar level across the life-cycle. For their part, the level of reported bilingualism is lower amongst Gatineau anglophones in the upper age cohorts. That does not imply that it is in decline and may indeed reflect a generational shift in the degree to which anglophones are learning the French language. When it comes to allophones, they fall somewhere in between the two official language groups in terms of the level of bilingualism in the earlier age cohorts. The rate of reported bilingualism is similar for Gatineau's anglophones and allophones that

are between the ages of 15-19. Those allophones over the age of 30 have lower rates of reported bilingualism. That is possibly attributable to the same generational shift in their acquisition of the two official languages.

OTTAWA

Some 38.3% of the Ottawa population reported knowledge of English and French in 2006 compared to 37.8% in 2001 (it was 38.2% in 1996 and 37.2% in 1991). There was a slight increase in the percentage of anglophones in Ottawa that were bilingual over the period 2001-2006, rising from 27.1 to 28.4%. In Ottawa the pattern of bilingualism amongst anglophones and allophones is quite similar with just over one quarter obtaining knowledge of both languages by the age of 10 and nearly 40% attaining such status by the age of 15. By the age of 10 the vast majority of Ottawa's francophone population reports knowledge of English and French and by their late teens nearly all francophones achieve such status and sustain it over the course of their lives.

TABLE 3: Percentage with Knowledge of English and French by Mother Tongue English, French and Other in percentage, Ottawa, Ontario, 2006

OTTAWA 2006	MOTHER TONGUE		
KNOWLEDGE OF ENGLISH AND FRENCH	ENGLISH	FRENCH	OTHER
Total	28.5%	89.5%	23.4%
Under 5 years	6.3%	44.0%	8.2%
5 to 9 years	26.2%	70.8%	28.2%
10 to 14 years	38.2%	88.5%	38.3%
15 to 19 years	38.9%	92.1%	34.5%
20 to 24 years	38.1%	94.0%	29.3%
25 to 29 years	38.8%	94.4%	28.5%
30 to 34 years	36.5%	93.7%	25.9%
35 to 39 years	33.6%	94.6%	22.8%
40 to 44 years	27.3%	95.7%	22.5%
45 to 49 years	25.4%	94.0%	22.8%
50 to 54 years	26.8%	94.3%	24.3%
55 to 59 years	26.7%	93.5%	23.2%
60 to 64 years	21.7%	92.2%	19.5%
65 to 69 years	17.8%	90.6%	15.8%
70 to 74 years	15.3%	88.3%	11.4%
75 years and over	11.5%	82.6%	12.7%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006

ALLOPHONES, SECOND AND THIRD LANGUAGE ACQUISITION IN THE NCR

In the table below, we examine the three largest allophone groups in the region and focus on those in their late teens and early twenties. By the early teens, the mother tongue Portuguese and Arabic report considerably greater knowledge of English and French in Gatineau than in Ottawa. In the case of the Spanish mother tongue populations of Ottawa and Gatineau, they report similar degrees of knowledge of the two official languages in the late teens but a substantial gap in favor of the latter region emerges in the early twenties. That gap is explained in part by the effects of the workforce on language use.

TABLE 4: Selected Non-Official Mother Tongue and Knowledge of English and French by percentage for 15-19 and 25-29 in Gatineau, Quebec and Ottawa, Ontario, 2006

2006	15-19		25-29	
	GATINEAU	OTTAWA	GATINEAU	OTTAWA
Portuguese	78%	82%	80%	55%
Spanish	39%	37%	66%	29%
Arabic	90%	35%	84.%	35%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006

LANGUAGE USED AT WORK IN THE NCR

The public service of Canada is a major employer in the National Capital region. In the NCR the public service aims at having a bilingual labour force and in pursuit of that objective invests considerably in language training. As individuals from across Canada and elsewhere in the world are employed by the public service in Ottawa, it cannot be expected that all would have received some French language instruction. But even amongst many Ottawa civil servants that did learn some French in the school system, many are in need of French second language training. A report issued by the Canadian Centre for Management Development (currently the Canada School of the Public Service) claims that: "the effective use in organizations of the official languages may or may not be closely linked to capability, which is more a yardstick of potential use rather than actual practice. Use is affected by conditions in the organizational environment and individual attitudes, perceptions and behaviour (e.g. the nature of the work performed by the organization, organizational culture)…". The authors of the report add that: "Interaction between capability and use is complex. Ideally, we should strive for a virtuous cycle of mutual reinforcement. Efforts to bolster and maintain linguistic capability should normally engender enhanced use of the official languages in the workplace. However, failure to support capability will undermine it (Bosivert and Leblanc, 2003)".

TABLE 5: Language Used Most Often at Work in percentage by age cohort for mother tongue allophones in Gatineau, Quebec and Ottawa, Ontario, 2006

2006	LANGUAGE USED MOST OFTEN AT WORK							
ALLOPHONES	ENGLISH		FRENCH		ENGLISH AND FRENCH EQUALLY		OTHER	
REGION	GATINEAU	OTTAWA	GATINEAU	OTTAWA	GATINEAU	OTTAWA	GATINEAU	OTTAWA
Total	45.2%	90.0%	39.0%	2.8%	10.9%	2.6%	2.4%	3.0%
15 to 24 years	27.6%	92.0%	54.0%	2.0%	14.7%	3.7%	0.9%	0.9%
25 to 54 years	49.0%	90.4%	35.8%	3.0%	10.5%	2.6%	2.4%	2.6%
25 to 34 years	52.9%	90.8%	30.7%	3.0%	11.9%	3.1%	2.2%	2.0%
35 to 44 years	49.5%	90.8%	35.3%	2.7%	10.8%	2.0%	2.5%	2.7%
45 to 54 years	44.3%	89.6%	41.3%	3.2%	8.7%	2.8%	2.6%	2.9%
55 to 64 years	40.2%	88.9%	44.6%	2.6%	9.2%	2.1%	3.6%	4.5%

Source: Statistics Canada, Census of Canada, 2006

Attitudes toward both official languages in the Public Service of Canada reflect an imbalance as a larger proportion of French-speakers claim to know English (85%) than English-speakers claim to know French (32%). It goes on to point out that bilingual English-speakers who work in bilingual regions spend 14% of their time speaking French; bilingual French-speakers working in bilingual regions spend 43% of their time speaking English.

Beyond the public service, the linguistic imbalance is much wider when looking at the use of English and French in the workplace in its entirety in Ottawa and Gatineau respectively. In Ottawa, in 2006, some 98% of anglophones report using English most often at work. For their part, nearly two-thirds of francophones report using English a majority of time in their workplace, another one in five report using both English and French, and approximately one in six use French most often at work. As to allophones, nine in ten report using English most often at work on the Ontario side of the region's border. On the Quebec side of the NCR in Gatineau, the pattern of language use in the workplace is quite different. Seven in ten francophones use French most often in the workplace in Gatineau, some one in four use English and the rest report use of both languages. For their part, some eight in ten anglophones use English most often at the workplace in Gatineau, 13% use French and 5% report use of both languages. In Gatineau, the allophones used English more often than they did French at work. The data cited here does not imply that the other official language is not used at all and so it may be used to varying degrees as the criteria here is only whether it is used most often. Yet when it comes to use of both languages equally, anglophones in Ottawa are least likely to do so.

CONCLUSION

Looking at knowledge and use of Canada's two official languages in Ottawa, Ontario and Gatineau, Quebec offers potentially important insights into the challenges associated with teaching second languages in varying contexts. It provides opportunity to make observations over the relationship between learning a second language in school and/or acquiring it through economic and social interaction. Ideally, the experience of acquiring a language at school would be accompanied by the opportunity to use it in later years. Such opportunity may vary considerably and even within areas with relatively important concentrations of persons identifying with the first and second languages, the much needed contact that affords putting the other language to use may be inadequate to support its retention. Paradoxically, knowledge of French and English is higher in Gatineau than in Ottawa even though the former is situated within a province that declares itself officially unilingual and offers more limited second language instruction in school to its majority language population. More research is needed in the NCR to better understand the transition between school and workplace when it comes to second language acquisition, otherwise it is likely that too many individuals will continue to lose a language that don't use sufficiently.

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