

# **Trilingualism: Montrealers are unique in the extent to which they can speak three languages and such ability is common amongst second and third generation allophones**

Jack Jedwab

President Association for Canadian Studies

September 2023

# Introduction

There has been much discussion about the respective state of French and English in Quebec as regards the degrees of knowledge and use of the two languages. Very often language debates get cast in Quebec in zero sum terms with more English implying less French especially in Montreal.

More recently a Statistics Canada study pointed to the expansion of English language knowledge principally amongst Quebec francophones which was construed by some observers as a threat to the condition of the French language.

In effect it was as it had been described elsewhere as an increase in the degree of bilingualism. The subject of bilingualism has been controversial of late though it's widely seen as an asset for Quebecers. Indeed data from the 2021 census reveals that not only has bilingualism been on the rise in Quebec but so too has tri or multilingualism a phenomenon driven by Quebec's face growing allophone population. The majority of the country's trilingual population live in the Montreal region and the continued growth of such individuals is supported by Quebec's immigration policies which include a higher percentage of persons who know both French and English with another language as their mother tongue (see the last slide of the presentation).

That which follows offers a detailed look at Quebec's trilingual population and how their numbers have evolved over the past ten years.

The data that follows are compiled from special tabulations from the 2021 census of Canada

# Canada sees a 20% increase in the numbers of trilinguals between 2011 and 2021

Canada	Total	English/French and other language(s)	Canada rate of trilingualism
2021	36328475	1740865	4.8
2011	32852325	1402910	4.3

**Quebec's trilingual population grew by almost 30 percent over the period 2011 to 2021 constituting 70 percent of the increase in Canada's total trilinguals**

Quebec Prov	Total	English/French and other language(s)	Quebec rate of trilingualism
<b>2021</b>	8308480	1093340	13.2
<b>2011</b>	7732525	857455	11.0

Over the period 2011 to 2021 the ROC experienced some growth in trilingualism with a less than 20% increase in numbers

Canada outside of Quebec	Total	English/French and other language(s)	Canada outside of Quebec rate of trilingualism
2021	28019995	647525	2.3
2011	25119800	545455	2.2

# More than half of Canada's trilingual population resides in the Montreal Metropolitan Region as more than one in five Montrealers speak at least three languages

2021	Total	Know English/French and other language(s)	Rate of trilingualism
Canada	36328475	1740865	4.8
Montréal (CMA), Que.	4206455	904595	21.5
Quebec	8308480	1093340	13.1
Gatineau	347700	41215	11.8
Ottawa	1116795	107300	9.6
Sainte-Agathe-des-Monts	19415	1455	7.5
Sherbrooke	220105	14260	6.4
Québec	817105	50415	6.2
Toronto	6142885	218735	3.5
Moncton	154245	5070	3.2

# The majority of Quebec's allophones report speaking three languages or more with Gatineau and Montreal leading the way

2021	Total allophone population	Number of allophones that know English, French and other language (s)	%allophones that speak at least 3 languages
Canada	7799860	891120	11.4
Quebec	1169005	585915	50.1
Gatineau	36030	18885	52.4
Montréal	992095	516850	52
Rouyn-Noranda	650	330	50.7
Québec	39545	17405	44
Sherbrooke	13535	5640	41.6
Saguenay	1650	675	41
Trois-Rivières	5190	2065	39.8
Granby	3400	1340	39.4

# Montreal allophones demonstrate extraordinarily high rates of intergenerational language transmission as children and grandchildren of immigrants persist in knowledge of three languages

Allophones Montreal CMA	Total -	English, French and one or more non-official languages	
Total - Generation status	992095	516850	52.1
First generation	784205	366650	46.7
Second generation	192955	139635	72.3
Third generation or more	14935	10570	70.7



# Three language knowledge is common amongst second and third generation allophones age 15-24

Montréal (CMA), Que. : Allophones	Total - Number of languages known	English, French and one or more non-official languages	
Total -0 to 14 years	113515	50475	44.5
First generation	38895	18575	48
Second generation	69160	28935	42
Third generation or more	5460	2965	54
Total 15 to 24 years	100345	70535	70
First generation	65450	40605	62
Second generation	30180	26010	86
Third generation or more	4720	3920	83

# Montreal allophones trilingualism jumps considerably as of the age of 15

Montréal (CMA), Que. Allophones		Total -	English and French only	%	English, French and one or more non- official languages	%
Total - Age	Total - Gender	992095	7750	7.8	516850	52.1
	Men+	481885	4025	8.5	262500	54.5
	Women+	510215	3730	7.3	254350	50
0 to 14 years	Total - Gender	113515	1600	1.5	50475	44.5
	Men+	58610	800	1.4	25285	43
	Women+	54905	800	1.4	25195	46
15 to 24 years	Total - Gender	100345	1785	1.8	70535	70
	Men+	51165	1000	1.9	34760	68
	Women+	49180	780	1.5	35775	73
25 to 34 years	Total - Gender	134310	1190	1	81100	60
	Men+	63605	595	1	38905	61
	Women+	70705	595	1	42200	60
35 to 44 years	Total - Gender	182025	940	0.5	102865	56
	Men+	83340	470	0.5	49650	60
	Women+	98685	475	0.5	53220	54

# Trilingualism like bilingualism amongst Montreal francophones makes massive strides after 15 years of age and modest rate of trilingualism emerges from ethnic mix

Montréal (CMA), Que. Mother Tongue French 2021		Total	English and French only	Percentage	English, French and one or more non- official languages	Percentage
Total - Age	Total - Gender	2515095	1159195	46	209330	8
	Men+	1236965	610450	49	99070	8
	Women+	1278125	548740	43	110260	8
0 to 14 years	Total - Gender	451580	78515	17	20105	4
	Men+	230465	38330	16.5	9520	4
	Women+	221110	40185	18	10580	5
15 to 24 years	Total - Gender	280870	169730	60	38620	13
	Men+	143020	87410	61	16995	11
	Women+	137845	82325	59	21625	16

# Montreal anglophone bilingualism begins prior to age 15 and rate of trilingualism likely emerges from ethnic mixing

Montréal (CMA), Que. 2021 English Mother Tongue		Total -	English and French only	Percentage E and F only	English, French and one or more non-official languages	Percentage E and F and O
Total - Age	Total - Gender	467685	247580	53	75870	16
	Men+	236530	125485	53	37405	16
	Women+	231155	122100	53	38465	16.5
0 to 14 years	Total - Gender	92095	43620	47	11395	12
	Men+	47820	21955	46	5630	11.5
	Women+	44280	21670	49	5770	13
15 to 24 years	Total - Gender	66150	40255	60	13095	20
	Men+	34185	20730	60.5	6180	18
	Women+	31965	19520	61	6915	21.5

**In 2021 a majority of Quebec's economic immigrants (which accounts for 60% of all newcomers) declared knowledge of French and English upon arrival and thus reductions in the numbers of English only were offset by upon arrival bilinguals**

Economic Immigration, Knowledge of Languages upon arrival, Quebec 2017-2021						
	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2017-2021
French only	20,8	21,1	24,3	30,5	26,8	23.9
French and English	36,6	34,0	32,1	41,9	57,6	40,3
Total French	57,4	55,1	56,4	72,4	84,4	64.2
English Only	26,2	27,8	27,5	15,9	10,9	22,4
Neither English nor French	16,3	17,0	16,0	11,7	4,7	13,4

Source: Ministry of Immigration, Francisation and Integration "Tables 2017-2021 of permanent immigration to Quebec" Government of Quebec, January 2023.

# **Immigrant Children make Montreal remarkably trilingual: Explaining the evolution of multilingualism in Montreal**



# Quebec Immigrants and their children fuel trilingualism in Montreal

Montreal 2021 Percentage French, English and other language (s)	Total	1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation plus
Total – Age	21.5	42	40	5
0 to 14 years	14	33	22	3
15 years and over	23	41.5	51	5
15 to 24 years	29	50	49	8
25 to 54 years	27	45	55	6.5
25 to 34 years	27.5	44	53	8
35 to 44 years	28.5	46	54	6.5
45 to 54 years	26	43	60	5
55 to 64 years	17	38	54	3.5
65 years and over	12	30	21	3
65 to 74 years	13	35	25	3.5
75 years and over	10	24	16	2.5

# Montreal Allophones display a remarkable rate of cross generational multilingual retention

Allophones Montreal 2021 Percentage French, English and other language (s)	Total	1 <sup>st</sup> Generation	2 <sup>nd</sup> Generation	3 <sup>rd</sup> Generation plus
Total - Age	52	46.7	72	70
0 to 14 years	44	48	42	54
15 years and over	53	46	90	80
15 to 24 years	70	62	86	83
25 to 54 years	56.5	50	91	82
25 to 34 years	60	53	88	85.5
35 to 44 years	56.5	52	91	78.5
45 to 54 years	53.5	47	93.5	60
55 to 64 years	50	42	91.5	58
65 years and over	34	33	76	56.5
65 to 74 years	40	38	81.5	63
75 years and over	27	25	64	45



# In the Montreal region the combined number of first and second generation population under 55 exceed the number of 3 gen plus

Geography: Montréal (CMA), Que.	Total - Generation status	First generation	Second generation	Generation 1 and 2 combined	Third generation or more
<b>Total - Age</b>	4206455	1221425	721355	1942780	2263670
<b>0 to 14 years</b>	720875	84555	284315	368,870	352 015
<b>15 years and over</b>	3485575	1136870	437045	1573915	1911660
<b>15 to 24 years</b>	483520	124370	120340	244710	238820
<b>25 to 54 years</b>	1735255	649755	233560	883315	851945
<b>25 to 34 years</b>	581905	191085	95740	286825	295080
<b>35 to 44 years</b>	601825	245375	73930	319305	282520
<b>45 to 54 years</b>	551530	213290	63885	277175	274350
<b>55 to 64 years</b>	562670	151560	48585	200145	362520
<b>65 years and over</b>	704120	211190	34560	245750	458370
<b>65 to 74 years</b>	415685	116665	18830	135495	280180
<b>75 years and over</b>	288440	94520	15730	110250	178190

# Mother Tongue Romanian and Italian top trilingual list in Montreal Region

Montréal Allophones (persons whose mother tongue is neither English nor French) 2021	Total	English only	French only	English and French	Neither English nor French	% with knowledge of English and French
Arabic	107605	10075	35795	57300	4440	53.2
Italian	63555	3195	9480	47080	3805	74
Spanish	85400	6225	27400	45805	5960	53.6
Mandarin	37980	15730	2545	14850	4855	39.1
Creole languages	37690	225	24455	11985	1030	32
Portuguese	19465	1630	5150	11760	920	60
Romanian	15020	500	2970	11155	385	74.2
Vietnamese	19905	3035	3785	10385	2700	52.2
Russian	17695	3775	2700	10035	1180	56.7
Greek	17080	5560	160	9700	1660	56.8

# Trilingualism near automatic for several non-official language groups in CMA age 15-24

Montreal selected groups by knowledge of French, English and other language (s) 2021 age 15-24	Total Number	Knowledge of French, English and other language	Percentage
Non-official languages	30180	26010	86
Armenian	920	905	98
Greek	530	510	96
Polish	330	315	95
Tamil	1520	1435	94
Punjabi (Panjabi)	825	775	94
Romanian	730	685	93
Gujarati	475	445	93
Bengali	1180	1100	93
Urdu	830	765	92
Russian	805	740	92
Mandarin	1255	1130	90
Turkish	540	480	88
Arabic	5195	4525	87
Spanish	5300	4510	85