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Term Paper

Speak Canadian:

Canada's wish for bilingualism and Quebec's fight against it

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From the roman aqueducts that erode, to the potholes on a Montreal road; Civilizations rise and fall, with only language to tell it all. But as the heavens struck Babel, we were all left unable; To talk, and to be told. With all these new ways to speak, some countries, rather unique; embraced multiple languages, a move quite bold. Turtle Island made English and French official; yet their distribution remained unequal. In a constant struggle to express thought; many, on both sides fought.
In trying to unite people two; we made the urgent need for separation true.

In this essay, I begin by reviewing the main literature on the topics of Canadian bilingualism, but also other readings that were relevant to general issues in language planning and language death. This will be followed by a four-part discussion on bilingualism in Canada. In a short first part, I will tackle the issue of Canada having two official languages, and how this official status isn't reflected geographically or demographically. In a second part, I discuss what it is to be Canadian, what is the Canadian identity, if there even is one. I also address the ongoing conflict between the anglophone Canadian identity and the Quebecois identity, and I argue that these are clearly distinguishable, and always have been. In a third part, I address the more concrete issues surrounding language planning in Quebec, its goals, both official and underlying; its successes, its failures, and its potentially negative impact, and where we could go from here. In a final part, I reflect on language death and what is lost with it; but also, more generally, whether governments and linguists should involve themselves in the preservation of a language at all, or if these phenomena should be left untouched. Finally, I argue that no matter what it is that we lose with the death of each individual language, a loss in overall diversity will always be a great loss for humanity. I argue that intersubjectivity and interconnectedness is the key to unlocking new concepts and ideas, and that a simplification of intellectual work using one or only a couple of languages might be a limitation to our advancement of science and human knowledge.

Joshua Fishman's book *Reversing Language Shift* describes "the theory and practice of assistance to speech communities whose native languages are threatened because their intergenerational continuity is proceeding negatively, with fewer and fewer users (speakers, readers, writers and even understanders) or uses every generation". The languages in the world that are currently in such a position are many, and their number is probably going to increase in coming years, as English (or potentially other, new Lingua Francas) spread and dominate throughout the world. The book explores why languages shift, why attempts to reverse this shift often fail, and whether such efforts are even worth pursuing. Quebec serves as a key example, with Bill 101 standing out as one of the most ambitious language planning policies in the world. Fishman discusses how Quebec's approach differs from more bilingual-friendly policies seen elsewhere in Canada, emphasizing the province's insistence on French monolingualism in public life as a means of cultural and economic empowerment for francophones. He also highlights the broader ideological and historical factors at play—namely, the struggle to ensure that French remains the dominant language in Quebec. This book will be useful in our discussion of whether controlling and reversing language shift is necessary, whether it is even achievable, and what our position towards languages disappearing should be as linguists, or governments, for that matter.

David Harrison's book *When Languages Die* looks at the alarming rate at which languages are disappearing all around the world, and the consequences that come with such loss. He argues that when a language dies, we not only lose words, literature, and poetry, but entire systems of knowledge—cultural, ecological, and historical—that have been developed over generations, aligning itself to the Whorfian view of linguistic determinism, which hypothesizes that the language one speaks influences the way one thinks and perceives the world. He highlights how indigenous languages often have highly specialized information about local ecosystems, medical practices, and oral traditions, which can't always be translated or preserved in the more dominant, global languages like English. The book also explores the different mechanisms of language shift, and looks at how economic pressures, social stigma, and

government policies can contribute to the erosion of linguistic diversity. Harrison's work will be particularly relevant to discussions of language planning in Quebec, where similar pressures threaten the vitality of French despite the province's continuous efforts on the protection of its language. In the context of Canadian bilingualism, the book provides a broader perspective on the stakes of language loss, offering strong points to our discussion for why linguistic diversity should be actively preserved.

Richard Bourhis' article *Assessing Forty Years of Language Planning on the Vitality of the Francophone and Anglophone Communities of Quebec* analyzes in detail the impact of Quebec's language laws like Bill 101 on the province's linguistic communities. Using the ethnolinguistic vitality framework, the article examines how these policies have strengthened the status of French while contributing to the demographic and institutional decline of the Anglophone minority. Bourhis shows that these pro-French policies have been somewhat successful, with 95% of Quebec's population now having knowledge of French and observing that the majority of immigrants integrate into the Francophone community. However, he also points out the significant decrease in the size of the English-speaking community, with a 60% reduction in the English school system and a rising exodus of anglophones. The article questions whether Francophones should continue viewing their language as endangered, given their dominance in Quebec, or if they should begin seeing other linguistic minorities as an asset rather than a threat. This work is especially useful in our discussion of how effective language planning is in the long-term, but also what are the trade-offs between linguistic protection and minority rights, and whether current policies are enough to protect the future of French in the province.

Progress in Language Planning, edited by Juan Cobarrubias and Joshua A. Fishman, gives an overview of language planning efforts worldwide, with insights into the theoretical models used to analyze and implement language policies. The book discusses the distinctions between status planning (the legal and societal recognition of a language) and corpus planning (the development and modernization of a language's structure). This framework is relevant to studying language planning in

Quebec, where French has undergone extensive planning efforts to secure its role as the dominant language. Parts of the book address Quebec's language policies, analyzing their impact on linguistic education and the influence on Quebecois society. The book also looks at the ethics of language planning, reflecting on whether it should prioritize unity or diversity, and whether a relative bilingualism or strict monolingualism should be the goal. These discussions are particularly important when trying to evaluate how effective Quebec's language laws are in maintaining the vitality of French while taking into account the rights of other linguistic minorities.

The textbook *An Introduction to Sociolinguistics, Sixth Edition* by Ronald Wardhaugh is a beautifully written introduction to the field of sociolinguistics. For this paper, we have focused our attention on the parts on Language Planning. It goes over the way language planning is defined; it explains how language planning varies in form and in results, and goes into detailed examinations of language planning attempts, successes, and failures, including a discussion on Canadian Bilingualism and language planning in Quebec—the focus of this paper.

I. Canadian Bilingualism

Canada is one of the most known examples of a country where more than one language is considered an official language: English and French. In 1969, the Pierre Trudeau government enacted the Official Languages Act, granting both languages equal status within the federal government. This legislation ensures that Canadians have the right to receive federal services in their preferred language and mandates that all government publications be available in both English and French.

For many, this was a great stride in successfully representing a larger proportion of the Canadian population, with the hope of making French speaking communities (mostly concentrated in Quebec) feel heard, recognized, and included. On paper, the now official bilingualism contributed to a more colorful personality and identity of Canada as a nation. The keywords here are "on paper".

Outside of Quebec, there are approximately 1 million French speakers, out of the total 30 million non-Quebecer Canadians. Inside of Quebec, there are approximately 1.6 million English speakers, that speak English at home, for a total of 9 million Quebecers. The unequal distribution is clear.

> […] If Canada is officially a 'bilingual' country, bilingualism in the two official languages is found mainly in the population of French origin and truly bilingual communities are few, e.g., Montreal, Sherbrooke, and the Ottawa-Hull area. (Wardhaugh, 2010)

II. Identity

Canada Identity. What does it mean to be Canadian? To explain what it is like to be of any nationality is always a source of debate. Is it linked to where we are born? Is it the land we live on? Our official status as citizens of a nation? No matter how much we raise our vowels, or how *pure-laine* we are, if we go far back enough we always find our furthest ancestors outside of Canada. If we look far enough into the past while remaining geographically fixed, the only true original inhabitants of Canada are the Indigenous peoples. Unfortunately, these peoples experienced the wrath and greed of 15th century European colonialism, and faced large-scale, systematic exterminations. In the span of only two centuries, indigenous populations in the Americas experienced a decline in population of around 90%:

> Indigenous people north and south were displaced, died of disease, and were killed by Europeans through slavery, rape and war. In 1491, about 145 million people lived in the western hemisphere. By 1691, the population of indigenous Americans had declined by 90–95 percent. (McKenna & Pratt, 2015)

While efforts have been made to highlight and preserve the diverse Indigenous cultures that still exist in Canada, these communities continue to struggle for recognition and face ongoing social discrimination. This is evident in their underrepresentation in governmental institutions, and their disproportionately high suicide rate. (Kumar & Tjepkema, 2019). Nonetheless, the Indigenous peoples of Canada are the only peoples that we can argue to be "true" Canadians. Our stay on this land is only a loan of their home.

One online article expresses this idea nicely: "What we now know as "Canada" is a nation of immigrants who have come to settle on Indigenous land. Regardless of when we or our parents or our grandparents—or however far back migration may go in our lineage—we are settlers on Turtle Island." (Living Hyphen, 2022).

In that case, shouldn't Indigenous languages also be recognized as official languages of Canada? Given the violent history of colonial domination, shouldn't Indigenous peoples at least have the right to receive communications in their native languages? This could help them better understand government policies and perhaps even elevate their status to the same level as Anglophones and Francophones.

Canada distinguishes itself as a pool of cultures. During its colonization, France and Britain fought on the same land for who can get to own it. But even then, Canada was a mix of peoples. it seems that Canada's government also defines Canada as the mix of peoples that live on its soil, rather than a single ethnic or cultural characteristic. We can see this reflected on Canada's official website, where they have made an attempt at defining the Canadian People:

> Canada's estimated population of over 41 million people reflects a cultural, ethnic and linguistic mix that is unique in the world. Canadian multiculturalism is based on the belief that all citizens are equal and that diversity makes us stronger as a country. (Government of Canada, 2025)

What about the other languages that are growing in prominence across Canada, such as Mandarin? Today, over half a million Canadians speak Mandarin, making it the most spoken non-official language in the country. In the Toronto area, it is now the second most spoken language after English (Statistics Canada, 2021). A similar trend is seen with Punjabi—over half a million people speak it, and more than 300,000 Punjabis live in the Greater Toronto Area. Given their significant presence, should these languages also be officially recognized? These linguistic communities and cultures have become deeply embedded in what we consider "Canadian culture" today. Canada is often described as an amalgamation—a mix of different identities. Shouldn't all parts of this mix be officially recognized?

> Increasingly, the French in Canada found themselves confined to Quebec, itself dominated by the English of Montreal, and saw the country develop as a country of two nations (or 'two solitudes') with one of them – theirs – in a very inferior position. (Wardhaugh, 2010)

Defining what it means to be Canadian is challenging when the country's two main language groups remain in a constant struggle over identity. Perhaps, rather facetiously, one could argue that part of the Canadian identity is this very conflict between English and French Canadians. Some suggest that Quebec has a distinct identity of its own—so different from that of other provinces, that it has become one of the main arguments for a *Quebec Libre*. So, what is this Quebec identity?

Quebec Identity. Since Canada's foundation, French Canadians have always seen themselves as distinct from English Canadians. This sentiment grew stronger during the 1960s Quiet Revolution, a period of major reform in Quebec that also saw a rise in nationalist Québécois identity. It was around this time that French Canadians increasingly began identifying as Québécois.

In 1977, the Charter of the French Language, or Bill 101, established French as the sole official language of Quebec and the primary language to be used within the province. Language is a key aspect of national identity, and nationalist movements are often accompanied by a heightened emphasis on a language that represents the nation (Deutsch, 1968). It is therefore unsurprising that language policies are frequently justified by appealing to the sense of unity within a linguistic community.

> "The image of a threat to the dominance of the French language in Quebec, surrounded as it is by a sea of English from within and from without Canada, is the constant spectre that animates these solutions at the grass-roots level and that obtains massive popular support for them." (Fishman, 1991)

As René Lévesque's popularity grew, so did support for a sovereign Quebec. However, he maintained that even in the event of separation, Quebec should preserve close ties and a strong economic alliance with Canada. Referendums brought Quebec to the brink of independence, but many anglophone companies saw the language laws and the separatist movement as a threat. During the increase in

popularity of the Parti Quebecois and its campaign for the separation from Canada, 91 anglophone companies left the province. Others, like the Royal Bank of Canada, threatened to relocate their headquarters out of Montreal if Quebec were to become independent. (Lavoie, 1977)

A pattern begins to emerge: if not for Montreal's status as an international city, Quebec might have been able to unite its population more easily, and achieve separation. Montreal has long been, and continues to be, the outlier in Quebec—something the province must reckon with due to its sheer size and influence. This might indicate that efforts to emphasize French, might just be targeting Montreal.

III. Planning

Quebec Language Planning: A Targeted Policy? With the seemingly unstoppable rise of English as the world's lingua franca, local languages like Quebec French are argued to be under threat. Additionally, migratory movements to Canada and Quebec bring diverse cultures and peoples, each with their own language. This growing diversity is seen by some as a challenge to the preservation of Quebec French, contributing to a rise in nationalist sentiment. In response, recent bills and laws have been passed to reinforce—and ensure the enforcement of—existing language policies, further emphasizing French as the primary language in Quebec. In 2023, Quebec's Premier, François Legault, stated:

> For many years now, we see year after year, the percentage of francophones in Quebec decreasing. I think if we want to make sure long term that we still speak French in Quebec, it's important that we stop this decrease and start seeing an increase.

However, if we investigate the statistics behind these claims, it seems that they only make sense if our focus is exclusively on Montreal. This is problematic if we are arguing for French in *all* of Quebec.

In 2021, 93.72% of Quebec's population reported knowing French. The majority of anglophones in Quebec—80% as of 2011—are concentrated in Montreal. In the Greater Montreal Area, 63% of residents identified French as their mother tongue in 2011, while 11.62% reported English as their only mother tongue, and 24% cited a language other than French or English. In contrast, the city of Quebec,

the province's second-largest city, has a very small anglophone minority. In 2011, 94% of its residents declared French as their only mother tongue, while only 1.43% identified English as their only mother tongue, and 3.24% reported a mother tongue other than French or English. Province-wide, 7.6% of Quebecers declared English as their mother tongue. (Statistics Canada, 2011; 2021)

It therefore makes it hard to believe that these policies are done in a patriotic, nationalistic spirit. Rather, these policies seem to specifically target Montreal, and perhaps have a slightly different goal.

Language Laws: A Goal Beyond Language. Immigrating to any country is no easy task. Canada has a point system, where factors like a migrant's higher educational attainment is worth more points, increasing their chances of being accepted into the country. Proficiency in the country's languages is also a factor, where knowing one of the two official languages will give you some points, while knowing both will give you more. Quebec has its own point system and, unsurprisingly, it has a stricter evaluation when it comes to language proficiency. Recently, the system has been modified to require migrants to have an intermediate level of French. French language requirements have also increased for temporary workers and foreign students. (Rukavina, 2023)

In migration scholarship, various levels of job skill are often distinguished. There is a panoply of jobs that require difficult manual labour, that are often not high paid, like for example slaughterhouses. Often, we call them "bad jobs" because people don't want to do these jobs, and those who do don't enjoy them. They are contrasted with white collar jobs, in this case "good jobs". (Horowitz, 2016)

A well-documented trend shows that native-born workers tend to pursue white-collar careers, while immigrants are disproportionately employed in these difficult, low-wage jobs. This can be explained with the limited options available to newcomers, with fewer resources to negotiate better conditions, a lower likeliness to be unionized, and the risk they face of losing their jobs if they try pushing for higher wages. (Hoe, 2017)

What is often overlooked, however, is the broader societal benefit provided by these immigrant workers. Their willingness to take on these low-paid, labor-intensive roles helps keep costs down for consumers. This allows for porkchops to cost 20$/kg instead of 200$/kg if native white-collar workers had to be incentivized to work in slaughterhouses.

For the reasons outlined previously, Montreal's diversity and large immigrant population is an economic strength. The USA succeeded in bringing their economy back on its feet so quickly after the pandemic compared to the rest of the world, partly due to them having such a large immigrant population working essential jobs at a minimum wage. (Joint Economic Commitee, 2021)

In Aristide Zolberg's chapter in *The Handbook of International Migration*, he cites a comparative study which states that "the gap between the goals of national immigration policy […] and the actual results of policies in this area […] is wide and growing wider in all major industrialized democracies. (Cornelius, Martin, and Hollifield 1994b, 3)" (Zolberg 1999, p.73). In the case of language laws in Quebec, the goal might be to protect the French language from the arguable threat of migration and the spread of English, but the underlying goal might be to reduce immigration overall. However, just as Zolberg points out, the goals of a policy, whether clear or hidden, can still have unexpected results. The language laws currently put in place and their enforcement, such as the increase in tuition for out-of-province and international students in anglophone universities of Quebec, will end up hurting Quebec's economy, and influence on the international scene, more than it will help preserve the French language.

> However, such moves to restrict the use of English in Quebec, e.g., in public education, have come under attack as a violation of rights provided in the new constitution, and in 1984 the Supreme Court of Canada voided those parts of Quebec's Bill 101 of 1977 that restricted certain rights of anglophones in that province. (Wardhaugh, 2010)

At the moment, most of the policies surrounding the preservation of the French language are more focused on limiting the entry of non-French speakers and limiting the use of English, rather than promoting the use of French. It seems, the goal isn't to lift French up, but rather to bring English down.

IV. Reflections

Why do languages die? Harrison (2007) emphasizes that language do not die on their own through natural causes, rather they die due to being pushed out by dominant languages through political, economic, and cultural pressures. When people perceive the dominant language as necessary for social mobility, they tend to abandon their native languages. English is very often seen as a global language of business, scientific research, and technological advancement, making it attractive for younger generations in an increasingly globalized world that Quebec is a part of, especially in cosmopolitan areas of Quebec like Montreal. For Quebec, the difficulty is arguably greater, because English remains dominant in North America and carries significant economic and social advantages. Failure to protect and promote French in daily life could lead to French slowly eroding, as has happened with many indigenous languages in Canada, and other minority languages around the world.

With the death of a language, Harrison argues that we lose much more than simply the oral traditions, literatures, poetry and arts. Similar to the Whorfian view, when a language dies, unique knowledge and unique perspectives on the world die with it. We lose a way of thinking that is unique to the former speakers of that language, we lose a way of understanding the world. Quebec French carries cultural and historical nuances that differ from the standard European French. If it were to disappear, a significant part of Quebec's identity and history would be lost, even if speakers of other Frenches remain.

Wardhaugh shows that there have been successful language planning efforts. He gives the example of Turkey, where an overhaul of the language was done using Corpus Planning (the development of a standardized language or variety of a language). When Turkey was established as the modern republic we know today, its leader had to modernize and standardize the language. New vocabulary was created for scientific and technological terms, and its orthography was changed to use Roman script, separating it from any Arabic and Persian influences. In contrast, Quebec's language

planning is a case of Status Planning, where laws like the Official Languages Act and Bill 101 have elevated the status of French; first as an official language, then as a primary language of use within the province. More recent marketing campaigns, often directly funded by the Quebec government (Gouvernement du Québec, n.d.) have appeared as efforts to bring English down. A year ago, the Montreal subway had the same advertisement format in every car: a French idiomatic expression translated into English, arguably showing how and why French was better. These advertisements are successful, because uniting against a common enemy is easier than fighting for a common good.

You cannot lift a language up by bringing another down. If your interest is to preserve one language, trying to forcefully remove another language is just as tragic as the first language dying. This probably isn't the case for Quebec, but the pushback against a global language like English could flip the table and start eroding English and its Quebec/Montreal variety, in favor of French. No matter how we look at it, language loss, but most importantly language diversity loss, is problematic.

Policies such as those instated very recently which increased the tuition for non-Quebec students in anglophone universities are detrimental to individuals. To what extent this is helpful to the preservation and promotion of French is dubious. This policy was extremely controversial, and the petition against it became the second most signed petition in the history of Quebec's National Assembly.

The constant rise and spread of English is a global issue, a system issue. It is not an individual human issue. If we are to fight against this rise, we must fight by bringing the French language up, rather than worsening the lives of those who speak English, like in the case of out of province student, generalized as non-Francophone. In short, *rage against the (English) machine—not against its cogs*.

The concern that English will continue to replace other languages is very real for many people. The loss of linguistic diversity is generally seen as problematic. Some argue that rather than trying to save endangered languages, linguists should focus on documenting them as thoroughly as possible before they disappear. Language loss is often viewed negatively, particularly in relation to the Whorfian

hypothesis, which suggests that each lost language takes with it unique meanings, cultural perspectives, and ways of thinking. As Harrison (2007) puts it, "Language disappearance is an erosion or extinction of ideas, of ways of knowing, and ways of talking about the world and human experience." With every lost language, we lose another potential way of understanding and explaining what remains unknown.

In a 2023 essay I wrote in an introductory physics class, in which I discussed what a universal language would be and how the universe itself could be a language, I emphasized the importance of unifying concepts not only within a single theory, but also across different scientific disciplines. One example I examined was dark matter—a concept still surrounded by debate regarding its true nature. I argued that to understand what dark matter really is, we might need to approach the problem from a completely different field of research rather than relying solely on traditional physics analyses.

> We know [dark matter] exists, but we don't know what it is. Perhaps all we need is to reshape our way of thinking, or our way of speaking of the universe. We used to think of the electron as a particle, but when faced with its strange behaviour, we had to rethink its definition, we had to find a new way of thinking about it. Perhaps uncovering the mystery that is dark matter requires a similar kind of redefining, a similar reshaping of our way of thinking about matter, and perhaps about the universe as a whole. (Kanev, 2023)

I further argued that to arrive at the idealistic concept of a Theory of Everything, we must not only unite physics, but all domains of research:

> The end goal of physics is discovering a Theory of Everything. A single theory to unite all of physics, and to explain the entire universe. And perhaps, to reach this one, ultimately parsimonious theory, we must not only unite physics, but unite all domains of research – including language. (Kanev, 2023)

The majority of academic work today is written in English. Views on this differ, but a lot of non-English-speaking scientific communities are becoming increasingly annoyed about the monopoly that English has on research. From a Whorfian perspective, having a panoply of languages in which we

conduct research might give us nuanced perspectives and different findings on the same topics. By contrast, if scientific research is only done in English, we are limiting ourselves in what we are able to achieve, what we are able to think about. A diversity of languages, and the argued different ways of thinking that might come with each language, could give us different perspectives on the same topics, and could help us explain the unexplained, and complete incomplete theories.

In this paper, we have looked at the various issues that come with calling Canada a bilingual country. We looked at the geographic and demographic distribution of French and English within the country and realized that Canada might only call itself bilingual on paper through official governmental recognition, but that true bilingualism is only observed in some specific, cosmopolitan, and international regions. We discussed what it is to be Canadian, what it is to be Quebecois, and how this clash of identities contributes to policies to be put in place to further distinguish both populations, hopefully making an eventual geopolitical separation more successful. We then more specifically analyzed language planning efforts in Quebec, through the bills passed in the 70s, but also new laws and regulations that we see today, and the various marketing efforts that promote the French language. We observed that these efforts seem to be more focused on limiting the use of English rather than improving the presence of French, and how these policies might specifically be targeting Montreal and its immigrant populations. We hypothesized how this is potentially an effort at limiting the entry of new immigrants, while disguising controversial anti-immigration policies under generally popular ideas of language preservation. Finally, we discussed the global issues of language shift and the efforts to preserve languages, and whether any of these efforts matter. In the end, we argue that a linguistic diversity is necessary to a more complete understanding of the world, and that the monopoly that English has on scientific publications is potentially a limiting factor to the advancement of human knowledge.

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