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## **Evolution of Language of Instruction Policy in Canada: Lessons for the United States?**

### **Introduction**

In November of 2000, the American state of Arizona joined California in voting to prohibit bilingual education. “English-only” proponents and lobbying groups have indicated their intentions to pursue similar ballot propositions and/or legislation in other states.<sup>1</sup> The country is currently engulfed in a public discourse and policy debate about the “problems” of immigration and language. Recent massive protests by both legal and undocumented, largely Spanish-speaking, immigrants have caused economic and social disruption, and have polarized the nation.<sup>2</sup>

However, just over the border in Canada, it is a completely different story. Canada, like the United States, is a nation comprised of immigrants and a marginalized indigenous population. But instead of a *de facto* official language, as English is in the United States, Canada has two *de jure* official languages, English and French. In spite of the legal status of both English and French, provisions have been made in various provinces to accommodate other, non-official, languages in the schools. I would argue that this stems from the accommodations that must be made for minority Francophones in central and western Canada, and Anglophones in Québec; as well as Canada’s perception of itself as a “mosaic,” where multiculturalism is valued; as opposed to the American ideal of a “melting pot,” where immigrant and minority groups are expected to assimilate into the dominant culture as quickly as possible.<sup>3</sup> Additionally, many Anglophone children have been through French immersion programs with good results. I believe that this too may contribute to a favorable disposition towards education in other languages—many parents seem to recognize an intrinsic value in multiculturalism and multilingualism. While there are of course some detractors, by and large bi- or

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1 J Crawford, ‘Bilingual Education: Strike Two, Arizona voters follow California’s lead and mandate English-only programs,’ Rethinking Schools Online, Winter 2000/2001, retrieved 13 May 2006, <[http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special\\_reports/bilingual/Az152.shtml](http://www.rethinkingschools.org/special_reports/bilingual/Az152.shtml)>.

2 “Thousands march for immigrant rights: Schools, businesses feel impact as students, workers walk out,” CNN.com, retrieved 13 May 2006, <<http://www.cnn.com/2006/US/05/01/immigrant.day/>>.

3 S Dicker, Languages in America: A Pluralist View, 2nd Edition, Multilingual Matters, Clevedon, 2003, pp. 275-278.

multilingual education possesses a level of support in Canada unfathomable in the United States. This support and these accommodating language policies are important, because as David Corson writes:

“Language policies in schools can play a real role in three ways. First, by creating innovative, ingenious and emancipatory structures in schools, language policies can help students from marginal backgrounds to escape the unreasonable pressures to conform that schools place on them. Second, language policies offer a vehicle for educators to use in challenging unfair practices and structures. Finally, language policies provide a planned way for schools to extend high-quality education to all their students without discrimination.”<sup>4</sup>

Below I will examine various changes in language of instruction policy in Canada by type (provisions for official languages in a minority area and French immersion programs for non-Francophones; provisions for languages of immigrants; provisions for indigenous languages). Because Canadian provinces and municipalities have a considerable degree of control over education, many policy initiatives were on a provincial or more local level, though others were instituted on a national level.

### **Provisions for Instruction in Official Languages**

French speakers are a majority in Québec, and a minority in all other provinces, though the size of Francophone groups in other provinces varies greatly: they are a sizeable minority of over 30% in both Ontario and New Brunswick (which is officially bilingual); and a much smaller minority—lower than the national average of 17% English-French bilingualism—in Newfoundland, Nova Scotia, Prince Edward Island, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta, British Columbia, the Yukon, the Northwest Territories, and Nunavut.<sup>5</sup> The Anglophone minority in Québec is sizable, and is situated primarily in and around Montréal. The rural areas of Québec have very few Anglophones; in fact, there are more native speakers of indigenous languages than Anglophones in rural Québec<sup>6</sup>.

In addition to the minority groups of Francophones outside of Québec who wish for French-language education for their children; and the Anglophones in Québec who wish for English education; there is a large contingency of parents in Anglophone Canada who wish for their children to be educated partially or entirely in French. Therefore, French immersion programs exist in all provinces outside of Québec, and also within Québec for the children of parents for whom French is not a first language. These programs will be explained at the end of the section.

4 D Corson, *Language Policy in Schools*, Lawrence Erlbaum Publishers, Mahwah, New Jersey, 1999, pp. 16-17.

5 Natural Resources Canada, *The Atlas of Canada: English-French Bilingualism*, 2004, retrieved 13 May 2006, <<http://atlas.nrcan.gc.ca/site/english/maps/peopleandsociety/lang/officiallanguages/englishfrenchbilingualism>>.

6 Statistique Canada website, retrieved 3 January 2001, <<http://www.statcan.ca/francais>>.

The situation has changed dramatically since 1912, when Regulation 17 in Ontario decreed English to be the only language of instruction in Ontario's schools from Grade 3 and above<sup>7</sup>. In the 1960s, the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism published a report recommending multiculturalism in federal policy. The federal government decreed both English and French to be official languages for all federal government business in the "Official Languages Act" of 1969<sup>8</sup>. But since the provinces exert more authority in education than the federal government, changes, even in regard to the official languages of English and French, were not quick to happen. However, in the "Declaration of St. Andrews" of 1977, the premiers of Anglophone provinces agreed to guarantee French language of instruction in primary and secondary schools in areas where there was a sizable enough population of Francophone students to warrant this. The mid-1970s also saw the first complete French school networks in provinces other than Québec.<sup>9</sup>

In 1982 the cause was strengthened with Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which granted the right to an education in their native language to official-language minorities. Although some provinces were slow to make changes accordingly, language minority individuals and groups were then able to make challenges in the courts for minority language education on the basis of this law. An example of this is the Mahe decision in 1990, in which the supreme court ruled that not only are official language minorities entitled to an education in their native language, but that management of these schools by the minority language group is necessary, since "the majority cannot be trusted to act in the best interests of the minority and that the best guarantee against assimilation is direct minority control of institutions."<sup>10</sup>

### **English in Québec**

Perhaps because of Francophone Canada's perception of its language and culture as being threatened, and its status as a minority in spite of its official status, the situation for Anglophones within Québec has been more problematic than the situation for Francophones in many of the other provinces. With the separatist Parti Québécois in power, Bill 101, which stipulated that only the children of parents who had attended English-medium schools within Québec could receive instruction in English, was enacted in 1977. This meant that all children whose parents had attended French-medium schools, as well as all

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7 D Corson & S Lemay, *Social Justice and Language Policy in Education: The Canadian Research*, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1996, p. 60.

8 Dicker, p. 265.

9 Corson & Lemay, p. 62.

10 Corson & Lemay, p. 62.

immigrants, and all Canadians from other provinces, had to attend French-language schools. Only temporary residents and indigenous groups were exempt.<sup>11</sup>

Because there is still a strong separatist element in Québec, the tension between the two official language groups has not been resolved. Most likely, policies will continue to be challenged and introduced regarding the situations of official language minorities.

### **Immersion Programs**

Immersion programs in Canada generally refer to a school in Anglophone Canada that primarily uses French as a language of instruction with students whose home language is not French. In spite of the paucity of Francophones outside of Québec, Northern Ontario and New Brunswick, these French immersion programs are very popular throughout the country, and have been growing, both in number of schools offering the programs as well as students enrolled, since their inception.<sup>12</sup>

One of the first French immersion projects was the Toronto French School, which was begun in 1962 by W. H. Giles, an Anglophone. He started the school with other Anglophone parents who desired that their children grow up bilingual. The Toronto French School has been regarded as a pioneer in bilingual education in Ontario.<sup>13</sup>

A study conducted from 1972 to 1975 by The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education examined primary school French immersion programs in the Ottawa area, and the cognitive development of children in these programs compared to children in English programs. It was determined that the students in the French immersion program were doing just as well as those in the English program in all subjects tested in English, even though they had not learned the subjects in English.<sup>14</sup> And, as expected, those in the French immersion program scored much higher on tests of French, compared to those students in the general curriculum, who were receiving 20 to 40 minutes a day of instruction in French as a second language. The only difference was a lower average on tests of English-language word discrimination and knowledge. However, this difference was only evident in kindergarteners and

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11 D Kelly, *Bilingual/Multicultural Education in Canada: Interpretation and Bibliography*, State University of New York Press, Buffalo, 1986, pp. 6-7.

12 Statistique Canada, Division de l' éducation, de la culture et du tourisme, Section de l' enseignement élémentaire et secondaire, *Langue de la minorité et langue seconde dans l' enseignement, niveaux élémentaire et secondaire*, Ottawa, 1991, p. 10.

13 W Giles, *The Toronto French School*, paper presented at the "Bilingual Education Conference," Toronto, March 1971, p. 30.

14 M Swain & H Barik, *Five Years of Primary French Immersion: Annual Reports of the Bilingual Education Project to the Carleton Board of Education and the Ottawa Board of Education up to 1975*, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1976, p. 27.

first graders, and disappeared from the second grade.<sup>15</sup>

Results such as these, in addition to federal policies that favor bilinguals for federal employment, have resulted in increased enrollment in French immersion programs outside of Québec. Catherine Martini, then a trustee on the Calgary Board of Education, described the demand for this type of instruction thus:

“The causes may have been rooted initially in federal employment policies, maybe in a few instances a kind of intellectual snobbery, but very quickly these requests have become more profound and therefore they have moved from a fad to a need.”<sup>16</sup>

Between the 1983-84 and 1988-89 school years, enrollment in these programs grew annually from 10 to 20%. Over this six-year period, enrollment doubled or more in these programs in grades three through 12.<sup>17</sup>

In addition to the immersion programs, the official languages are often taught as a second language in both primary and secondary schools. In 1989-90, over half of the students in English-language schools were enrolled in French as a second language programs. This represents an increase of over 30% from 1970-71.<sup>18</sup> In Québec, English is a required subject for students in French-language schools from fourth grade through graduation. Some schools offer English prior to grade four.<sup>19</sup>

### **Instruction in Heritage Languages**

Heritage languages refer to both native languages of indigenous groups, as well as languages spoken by immigrant groups. As mentioned earlier, the Royal Commission of Bilingualism and Biculturalism made recommendations favoring multiculturalism back in the 1960s. Their recommendations were heeded in 1971 with the adoption of a federal policy of “multiculturalism within a bilingual framework”<sup>20</sup>. This policy restates the official language status of English and French, “...but all ethnic groups are encouraged to enrich Canadian society by continuing to develop their unique cultures.”<sup>21</sup> At the time, this policy represented “...a major shift in federal policy regarding ethnic diversity. In contrast to ‘Anglo-Conformity,’ no one culture is ‘official’ or dominant; instead, *all* cultural groups are

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15 Swain & Barik, pp. 45-46.

16 J Cummins, *Heritage Language Education: Issues and Directions* (Proceedings of a Conference Organized by the Multiculturalism Directorate of the Department of the Secretary of State, Saskatoon June 1981), Minister of Supply and Services Canada, Ottawa, 1983, p. 20.

17 Statistique Canada, *Langue*, p. 10.

18 Statistique Canada, *Langue*, p. 5.

19 Statistique Canada, *Langue*, p. 11.

20 J Cummins, *Bilingualism and Minority-Language Children*, The Ontario Institute for Studies in Education, Toronto, 1981, p. 9.

21 J Cummins, *Bilingualism*, p. 9.

seen as contributing to building the Canadian identity.”<sup>22</sup>

Cummins goes on to explain how the benefits of linguistic diversity were emphasized in the Report. It recommended the “...teaching of languages other than English and French, and cultural subjects related to them, be incorporated as options in the public elementary school programme, where there is sufficient demand for such classes.”<sup>23</sup> Therefore, the goal of these bilingual programs is not to be a bridge to linguistic and cultural assimilation as generally intended in the United States, but instead are a means for cultural enrichment.<sup>24</sup>

These suggestions were implemented as policy first in Alberta in 1971. Ukrainian, German, and Hebrew were introduced as mediums of instruction in bilingual programs in Edmonton. The heritage language was used for 50% of the school day, and English was used for the other half. Later in the 1970s, programs involving Yiddish, Polish, Chinese, and Arabic were also introduced. Saskatchewan also passed similar legislation and introduced Ukrainian/English programs. Ontario, Canada’s most populous province, began its “Heritage Language Program” in 1977. This program differed from those offered in Alberta and Saskatchewan—although public funds were designated for the teaching of heritage languages, this teaching occurred *outside* the regular five-hour school day.<sup>25</sup>

In 1979, Manitoba enacted legislation “...permitting the use of non-official languages as languages of instruction for up to 50 percent of the school day.”<sup>26</sup> Ukrainian/English programs were introduced.

The Ukrainian/English programs in Alberta and Manitoba were assessed as successes. It was found that participating children acquired “considerable proficiency” in the heritage language “at no cost to their development of English or other academic skills.”<sup>27</sup> Cummins and Dansei argue that the success of these programs is analogous to the success of French immersion programs, with one key difference: the socioeconomic status of students in French immersion programs is generally quite high, while those served by the Ukrainian/English programs were generally from a group much lower on the socioeconomic scale. Therefore, “...the Ukrainian program evaluations suggest that bilingual education is not just for an elite group of students but is appropriate for a large proportion of the school population.”<sup>28</sup>

The various provinces had similar goals in instituting these heritage language policies. In

22 J Cummins, *Bilingualism*, p. 9.

23 J Cummins, *Bilingualism*, p. 9.

24 S Dicker, p. 275.

25 J Cummins & M Dansei, *Heritage Languages: The development and denial of Canada’s linguistic resources*, Our Schools/Our Selves Foundation, Toronto, 1990, p. 44.

26 J Cummins, *Bilingualism*, p. 9.

27 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 44.

28 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 44.

Saskatchewan, the stated goals included:

“...deeper appreciation of human intelligence and the human capacity for speech; enhanced intellectual development; better communication within family, community, nation and the world; greater understanding and appreciation of one’s first language; and greater understanding and appreciation of one’s cultural roots.”<sup>29</sup>

The Ontario Ministry of Education cited similar objectives, with the addition of the improvement of “...communication with parents and grandparents, allow[ing] students to use skills they already possess; and provid[ing] experiences in learning that they may prove a valuable basis for credit courses at the high school level.” Similarly, a survey conducted by the Toronto Board of Education in 1986 showed that 88 percent of respondents (principals, teachers, and parents) favored heritage language instruction “...for the following major reasons: to improve communication with relatives; to enhance pride in heritage; to maintain and revitalize culture and religion; and because languages are best learned when young.”<sup>30</sup>

However, in spite of these government policies recognizing the advantages of heritage language education, and general public support, these programs sometimes face hostility from certain segments of the population. According to Cummins and Dansei, some Canadians “vehemently oppose” heritage language programs. These programs face opposition both because of their cost to the public in the form of tax dollars, and also because some people worry that “these ethnic children” may not assimilate and integrate into the “Canadian culture stream.”<sup>31</sup>

### **The case of Québec**

Policies and attitudes towards heritage language instruction have been problematic in Québec. Due to its extremely low birthrate and high rate of migration to other parts of Canada (due largely to economic depression resulting from corporate flight because of political instability and hostility towards English, the language of business), Québec has increased its share of new immigrants to Canada. In 1987, more than 36% of these immigrants spoke neither French nor English, and 27% spoke English only.<sup>32</sup> But as mentioned in the section on official languages above, English-medium schools were limited to the children of those parents who had attended English-medium schools in Québec. Therefore, the children of new immigrants are technically not eligible to attend these schools, regardless of their native language. Protests from ethnic groups have been numerous and many students continue to attend

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29 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 54.

30 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 55.

31 J Cummins & M Dansei, pp. 2-3.

32 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 28.

English-language schools in defiance of the law. Québec justified this legislation in a 1981 government plan of action for ethnocultural groups entitled “Autant de Façons d’être Québécois” (Quebecers Each and Every One). In this document, the stated aims of the provincial government were:

“...to ensure the maintenance and development of the cultural communities as well as their uniqueness; to sensitize Québec Francophones to the contributions of the cultural communities to the common heritage of Québec; and to assist the cultural communities to integrate into Québec society and particularly in those sectors where they have previously been underrepresented.”<sup>33</sup>

So while Québec did not seek to ignore the language of the immigrant groups entirely, there was a stated goal of integration, which in Québec involves becoming proficient in French. Programs such as those in the prairie provinces in which half of the students’ study time is spent in the heritage language were rejected in Québec in favor of programs in which all classroom instruction was given in French, and heritage languages were only seen as something to be maintained, not a medium of instruction. Two programs of heritage language instruction were developed for the province: the “Programme des Langues Ethniques” (PLE) and the “Projet d’Enseignement des Langues d’Origine” (PELO). The PLE was established in 1970 and involves the teaching of heritage languages outside of the regular school day (usually after school or on Saturdays) by members of the ethnic communities themselves. While some funding for this program comes from the government, the bulk of it comes from the ethnic communities themselves in the form of fees paid by parents, and some even comes from governments of the countries of origin. Students in these programs can apply to have their work counted towards high school credit. As of 1986, there were 11 different languages being taught in these programs.<sup>34</sup>

The PELCO program was established in 1977. It differs from the PLE in that the languages are taught during the regular school day in some instances (though often outside the school day), and that the Ministry of Education pays for the instructors’ salaries and the materials. The Ministry has also developed curricula for the courses, and offers professional development courses for the teachers involved.<sup>35</sup>

### **Native languages**

Speakers of indigenous languages faced perhaps the most intense repression of any linguistic minority in Canada’s past. Up until the 1980s, boarding schools were operated for Native students, in which they were separated from their families, punished for speaking Native languages, and taught that their

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33 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 29.

34 J Cummins & M Dansei, pp. 32-33.

35 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 31.

cultures and religions were “beneath contempt.”<sup>36</sup> But with the continued emphasis on multiculturalism, Native languages and cultures have started to be recognized as an important part of the “mosaic.” Programs and policies addressing indigenous languages are more recent and less numerous than those concerning official language minorities and immigrants, but they are being created and implemented.

In 1972, indigenous peoples started to demand their rights in regards to education with the publication of a paper entitled, “Indian Control of Indian Education,” by the National Indian Brotherhood. In 1977, the Ordinance Respecting Education in the Northwest Territories gave each Local Education Authority in the Territories the right to decide upon and direct the type of bilingual program it wants. The problem in implementation has been a shortage of qualified teachers. The resulting Northwest Territories Teacher Education Program is a project aiming to train bilingual Native teachers who can teach in Inuktitut as the language of instruction. Innovative teacher training schemes that involve field-based work as a classroom assistant in conjunction with coursework have succeeded in attracting more young Natives to the teaching profession. However, even with the teachers from this program, there is still a severe shortage. There is also a shortage of teaching materials in the Native languages.<sup>37</sup> Therefore, of the schools in Native communities where indigenous languages are used, Native languages are usually offered as a subject, but not as a medium of instruction. In less than 4% of these schools was a Native language used as a medium of instruction, mainly in primary schools in the Northwest Territories.<sup>38</sup>

Because many Native languages are threatened with extinction, their inclusion in the schools is being regarded with a sense of urgency. A program on Walpole Island in western Ontario is attempting to save the Native language of the community by including it in the schools, as well as by establishing a community program to teach and promote it. The program has been regarded as a success.<sup>39</sup>

## Conclusion

It is evident that the perception of Canada as a “mosaic” as opposed to a “melting pot” has been influential in spawning language of instruction policies that are more tolerant of minority language

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36 J Cummins & M Dansei, p. 11.

37 D Wilman, Towards Bilingual Education in the Northwest Territories, paper presented at “Heritage Language Education: Direction for the 1980s,” Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 1981, pp. 56-57.

38 D Corson & S Lemay, p. 31.

39 L White, Native Language Revival Program on Walpole Island, paper presented at “Heritage Language Education: Direction for the 1980s,” Saskatoon, Saskatchewan, June 1981, pp. 73-74.

groups, be they official languages or not, than those that are being pursued and instituted in the United States. In spite of some tensions between the Francophone minority and the Anglophone majority, the bulk of the population has the opportunity to study a second language, either in an immersion program, a bilingual program, or as a second language.

In *Language Policy in Schools*, Corson discusses the impact of the federal policy of bilingualism in Canada, and the effects a monolingual policy could have in the United States:

“Canada’s policy of bilingualism deliberately raised the status of speakers of French, and it did so in ways that are more consistent with modern ideas about social justice. In contrast, an English-only policy in the United States would reduce the status of Spanish speakers in that country by privileging speakers of English.”<sup>40</sup>

Canada could serve as an example for the United States. Instead of expecting rapid assimilation, perhaps American policy-makers and voters should study the Canadian case for ways in which to take advantage of the wealth of cultures and languages represented in their country.

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40 D Corson, p. 12.

## Appendix

### Chronology of events related to language of instruction policy in Canada

- 1912: Ontario legislation prevents instruction in any language other than English
- 1962: creation of the Toronto French School
- 1963: first meeting of the *Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*
- 1969: *Official Language Act*
- 1970: PLE established in Québec
- 1971: *Federal Multiculturalism Policy* decreed
- 1971: Alberta becomes first province to pass legislation enabling languages other than English and French to be the medium of instruction
- 1972: teaching of Native languages is begun in Saskatchewan
- 1972: “Indian Control of Indian Schools” is published
- Mid-1970s: first complete French school networks for minority French speakers in provinces other than Québec
- 1974: *Multicultural Act of Saskatchewan*
- 1976: *Bill 101* made law in Québec: only the children of parents educated in English-medium schools within Québec can receive instruction in English
- 1977: *Declaration of St. Andrews*: premiers of Anglophone provinces agree to guarantee French-language teaching in primary and secondary schools for Francophone students anywhere in Canada that the number of Francophone students warrants this instruction
- 1977: Ontario provincial government starts the “Heritage Languages Program,” which provides funds for the teaching of heritage languages outside of the regular five-hour school day
- 1977: the Québec government institutes the *Programme d’Enseignement des Langues d’Origine*, which allowed for 30 minutes per day of instruction in children’s mother tongue (Portuguese, Italian, Greek)
- 1979: Manitoba passes legislation permitting the use of non-official languages for instruction
- 1981: Québec’s “Plan of Action”
- 1982: *The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* assures right of official-language minorities to an education in their mother tongue
- 1990: Mahe supreme court decision reasserts rights for official-language minority education as well as the right of minorities to control their own schools

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