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## カナダにおける語学教育の概観

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# A Brief Look at Language Education in Canada

Michael JOHNSON

## カナダにおける語学教育の概観

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**要旨** : Canada is widely regarded for its advances in language education theory and practice, as well as its legislative and social support for bilingualism and bilingual education. Presently, three main focus areas of language education in Canada are: official-language education, indigenous language education, and new immigrant language education. While official-language education and new immigrant education receive significant public (governmental) and social support, indigenous language education remains on the periphery, relying mainly on grassroots and community efforts for survival. This paper aims to provide a brief introduction to each of these areas, as well as a brief sketch of the social and historical contexts through which they have evolved. Based upon past and current trends, it will also comment on likely future directions of language education in Canada.

**キーワード** : Canadian language education, official-language education, indigenous language education, immigrant language education

### 1. Introduction

The current state of language education in Canada is the result of a variety of cultural, social and political forces that have contributed to its development over the past century. Canada is now widely known as a multilingual nation, with extensive legislative and social support for multilingualism. In responding to the needs of a multilingual society, Canadian educators and scholars have made significant contributions to the fields of second language acquisition and bilingual education. Despite how far Canada has advanced in terms of language education policy, provision and theory, the ever-changing nature of Canada's demographic composition requires continued attention and flexibility in meeting the needs of an increasingly diverse population, particularly in urban areas. Urgent attention is also required in the maintenance of aboriginal languages, which like other minority indigenous languages around the world, face the threat of extinction. In introducing the aforementioned issues, this paper will provide a brief overview of the historical factors which have contributed to the development of language education in

Canada, examine its current state, and conclude by briefly commenting on its future course.

## **2. Historical and Political Context**

Prior to European settlement in the new world, Canada was inhabited by various indigenous groups occupying all geographic regions of the country. At this time Canada was a multilingual nation, with dozens of indigenous languages spoken. With the arrival of European explorers and settlers, the social and linguistic landscape of Canada changed dramatically. French and English trading companies, colonies, and settlements slowly grew in size and power and began to displace indigenous groups. Eventually, the colonies confederated to form the Dominion of Canada in 1867. Within the new nation, Canada's indigenous peoples were pushed geographically and socially to the periphery, a marginalized state they have been struggling to overcome ever since.

Following the establishment of European colonies, colonizers initiated efforts at educating indigenous children. This was carried out largely through residential schools which forced Indian, Inuit and Métis children to enroll. These schools were initially carried out in a missionary capacity under direction of Roman Catholic, Anglican and Methodist churches. However, following the enactment of the *Indian Act* of 1874, the schools became operated jointly with the federal government (see Carney 1995, IRSRC 2007). Indigenous children who attended were forced to live away from their families for months, or years, at a time, and were subjected to an assimilative educational regime which sought to supplant local cultural and linguistic heritage with the so-called advanced, or enlightened, knowledge of the colonizers (Carney, 1995). The number of residential schools declined over the twentieth century, with the last school closing in 1996. In addition to contributing to the accelerated decline of indigenous languages and culture, the sad legacy of residential schools remains in public consciousness with scores of cases of former students coming forward with claims of physical, mental, and sexual abuse endured while attending the schools. The national government established a special commission to investigate these claims, and a compensation scheme has been established to compensate the victims.

As Canada's indigenous languages grew increasingly marginalized due to assimilationist educational practices, English and French concurrently became firmly established as Canada's national languages. This transpired through the establishment of English- and French-speaking public institutions in early British and French colonies, and later through confederation under the *British North America Act* (1867) in which French and English became established as official languages for all legal proceedings within the new nation. A little over a century later, the *Official Languages Act* (1969) was ratified, which set out three main objectives for language use in Canada:

- *the equality of English and French in Parliament, within the Government of Canada, the federal administration and institutions subject to the act;*
- *the preservation and development of official language communities in Canada;*
- *the equality of English and French in Canadian society.* (Government of Canada: 2007)

These objectives were expanded upon in further acts, particularly within the *Constitution Act* (1982), and the “new” *Official Languages Act* (1988), which set out more specific objectives in the protection of the rights of minority official-language groups within majority official-language settings (i.e. the rights of minority French speaking communities living within predominately English-speaking settings). These acts guaranteed the provision of schooling in the mother-tongue for minority official-language students living within majority official-language settings (where justifiable-sized communities exist), and the rights of minority official-language communities to have input in educational content at the local level.

### 3. Language Education in Canada Today

Language education in Canada today involves three main forms: official-language education (French and English), indigenous language education, and new immigrant language education. There is also a significant language education sector dedicated to providing international students with English and French language instruction, but this will not be subject to discussion below.

#### 3.1 Official Language Education

Despite Canada’s adoption of two national languages, and its societal and institutional support for bilingualism, most Canadians are monolingual. According to Census Canada, in 2005 23,961,170 out of 29,639,030 Canadians (80.8%) considered themselves monolingual, with 20,014,645 citing English, and 3,946,525 citing French, as their only proficient language (refer to Figure 1). Official-language education in Canada is therefore mainly taught in English as a Second Language (ESL), or French as a Second Language (FSL), settings. Although years of study and contact hours vary in individual provinces, and across individual schools districts, French is generally taught as a second language subject in English-speaking junior and senior secondary schools. It is also widely taught in elementary schools. In French-speaking Canada (particularly Quebec), English is similarly taught as a second language subject in public schools.

Figure 1: Population by knowledge of official language, by province and territory

|                  | <b>Total</b> | <b>English only</b> | <b>French only</b> |
|------------------|--------------|---------------------|--------------------|
| Canada           | 29,639,030   | 20,014,645          | 3,946,525          |
| Newfoundland     | 508,080      | 486,390             | 145                |
| PEI              | 133,385      | 117,95              | 95                 |
| Nova Scotia      | 897,570      | 805,545             | 790                |
| New Brunswick    | 715,715      | 406,995             | 66,415             |
| Quebec           | 7,125,575    | 327,045             | 3,831,350          |
| Ontario          | 11,285,545   | 9,690,745           | 42,305             |
| Manitoba         | 1,103,700    | 990,280             | 1,250              |
| Saskatchewan     | 963,150      | 910,645             | 360                |
| Alberta          | 2,941,150    | 2,704,895           | 1,895              |
| British Columbia | 3,868,870    | 3,493,680           | 1,815              |
| Yukon T.         | 28,520       | 25,505              | 45                 |
| Northwest T.     | 37,105       | 33,550              | 40                 |
| Nunavut          | 26,670       | 22,125              | 25                 |

Source: Statistics Canada (2005 figures)

Although French maintains official-language status, the minority position of the language (on a national scale), and its limited use outside of Quebec, has resulted in a greater importance being placed on French speakers becoming bilingual. This is largely due to the increased professional opportunities and economic incentives that bilingualism provides. In the 1960s, parents in Montreal who recognized the importance of bilingualism for their children's futures lobbied for better language education in their local schools, and through grassroots efforts, established the first 'language immersion' programs. These programs evolved and became widely used for French and English language education programs across the country. The immersion language teaching methodology, and the content teaching approach at its center, has gone on to be among the most thoroughly researched language education initiatives in the world. Its effectiveness in producing high levels of additive bilingualism has resulted in it being widely emulated in other nations. Across Canada it is used most frequently for official second language education. As research has shown immersion students tend to achieve better results across all academic subjects than non-immersion students, it has also been popular in areas such as British Columbia, where bilingualism may not be necessary on a daily basis, but where parents and students recognize the cognitive benefits that can be achieved through participation in language immersion programs.

### 3.2 Indigenous Language Education

Discussion of language education in Canada most often involves the nation's official languages. This is somewhat regrettable as indigenous language education consistently finds itself relegated to a minor, or inferior, status. Considering the endangered status of many indigenous languages, this lack of attention is even more unfortunate. For any minority indigenous language community, the maintenance of the mother tongue is vital to the preservation of local culture and identity. Scholars have further tied language extinction to wider societal and environmental loss, as it represents the loss of valuable local knowledge (of significant potential value to all mankind) and biolinguistic diversity (see Skutnabb-Kangas, 2000, Nettle & Romaine 2000, Dalby 2003). Considering the importance of indigenous languages to Canada's cultural heritage and society, the state of indigenous language education should seemingly be given a greater priority than it is currently afforded.

Presently, aboriginal language education in Canada is carried out at the local level with the aim of language preservation and maintenance. Approximately three percent of Canada's population is of aboriginal ancestry. There are three officially recognized aboriginal groups in Canada, namely the First Nations (Indians), Inuit (Arctic peoples), and Métis (of mixed aboriginal and European descent) (MPWGS 2001). Within these groups there are approximately fifty indigenous languages spoken. According to Natural Resources Canada (NRCAN 2004), the vast majority of aboriginal language speakers (93%) speak languages from the Algonquian, Inuktitut, or Athapaskan language families (see Figure 2 for major aboriginal language groups).

Most indigenous language education efforts are carried out at the primary and secondary school levels, although post-secondary and community-based programs are also in place in many areas. In the past, bilingual programs were often employed in order to provide indigenous children with a balanced education in both official and local languages. However, over the past decade there has been a noticeable shift towards immersion language education models. Johnston and Johnson suggest that this shift is taking place due to the fact that

“...bilingual education has in many cases not fulfilled its promise for Indigenous communities, and that the erosion of the indigenous languages has continued and in many cases been exacerbated by the continual presence of English in the schools” (Johnson and Johnston 2002 pg. 117)

Immersion programs in primary and secondary schools have been shown to have great utility in both minority language maintenance and revitalization in settings such as New Zealand and Hawaii (Nettle & Romaine 2000). This success has inspired Canadian indigenous language

immersion programs, which are currently expanding across country.

Figure 2: Population reporting an aboriginal identity: by mother tongue  
(out of a total population of 976,305)

| <b>Mother tongue</b>    | <b>Total</b> |
|-------------------------|--------------|
| English                 | 704,770      |
| French                  | 64,130       |
| Non-official languages  | 187,340      |
| Aboriginal languages    | 186,835      |
| Cree                    | 72,680       |
| Inuktitut               | 29,005       |
| Ojibway                 | 20,890       |
| Montagnais-Naskapi      | 9,655        |
| Micmac                  | 7,230        |
| Dakota/Sioux            | 3,880        |
| Blackfoot               | 2,740        |
| Salish languages        | 2,590        |
| South Slave             | 1,380        |
| Dogrib                  | 1,860        |
| Carrier                 | 1,225        |
| Wakashan languages      | 1,275        |
| Chipewyan               | 575          |
| Other aboriginal langs. | 31,840       |
| Non-aboriginal langs.   | 505          |

Source: Statistics Canada (2005 figures)

### 3.3 New Immigrant Language Education

Canada has long been a country that has attracted significant numbers of immigrants. Over fourteen million people have immigrated to Canada throughout its history, while sixteen percent of the current population consists of first-generation immigrants (MPWGS 2001). Canada currently accepts approximately 200,000 immigrants and refugees a year (MPWGS 2001). Immigrant children receive ‘special needs’ support such as ESL/FSL training in most school districts across the country. Adult immigrants are entitled to official-language training through the *Language Instruction for Newcomers to Canada* (LINC) Program. Through this program, provincial government-subsidized language training is provided free of charge for new

immigrants at local schools boards, community colleges, community centres, and immigrant organization offices (CIC 2007). LINC language education providers are accredited, and maintain high standards in language education to ensure that immigrants can smoothly transition into the workplace.

At the core of Canada's immigrant language education initiatives is the *Canadian Language Benchmarks* (CLB) scheme (see Pawlikowska-Smith 2000). This scheme, similar to the *Common European Framework for Languages*, and the *ACTFL Standards for Language Learning*, sets out proficiency standards for immigrant language education. The CLB framework is organized around three broad stages of proficiency (Stage 1: Basic Proficiency, Stage 2: Intermediate Proficiency, and Stage 3: Advanced Proficiency). Within each stage there are four additional proficiency sublevels (Initial, Developing, Adequate, and Fluent). In moving through the twelve-stage program, learners are required to show task-based competencies in the four macro skills (reading, writing, listening and speaking) at each level. As the benchmarks are competency-based, they clearly show both learners, and potential employers, what language tasks an individual is capable of performing in the workplace.

#### **4. Looking Towards the Future**

In the future, language education in Canada will likely be influenced by many of the same factors which have impacted its development in the past. With hope, past successes and failures will inform future approaches, and this will in turn result in more evolved and enlightened language education policies and practices in the country. French and English, as the nation's official languages, will continue to be the main focus of language education in Canada. While the position of English and French remain solid in Canadian society, the strong desire for French-speaking Canada to protect and perpetuate its culture requires continued attention and educational support. With the spread of immersion programs promoting additive bilingualism, Canada is well-positioned to expand French and English bilingual competency through such programs. Immersion education programs also stand to positively impact the maintenance of indigenous languages. However, indigenous language maintenance efforts need to be approached with greater urgency and support in order to prevent the loss of an invaluable cultural and societal resource. Language education efforts for Canada's new immigrants will only grow in importance in the coming decades. As the largest per capita immigrant destination in the OECD, and with national population growth tied mainly to immigration, language education is of vital importance in transitioning immigrants into the workplace. The social and economic value of language education in this regard cannot be understated. As Canadian language education moves forward, these three areas will hopefully continue to advance in meeting their specific needs, and in doing so, progress in a manner that is mutually beneficial to all.

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