

Education is often viewed as a cure for all problems, but the use of French as a language of instruction in public schools has failed to halt the anglicization of Ontario's young Francophones.

Retention of French among young Franco-Ontarians

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In 1968, the Ontario Legislature authorized the use of French as a language of instruction in public schools, thereby making it possible for students to receive their education in French up to the end of the secondary school level. This has raised hopes that the decline in the use of French in Ontario would slow down if not stop entirely. However, the 1981 census has revealed that anglicization is still on the increase.

Analysis of the census data on mother tongue and languages spoken in the home reveals that French is being abandoned at an accelerated rate in provinces with an English-speaking majority. Of the 475,605 people for whom French was the mother tongue in Ontario, the proportion of those who spoke mainly English in the home grew from 27 per cent in 1971 to 34 per cent in 1981.

It remains to be seen if French-language instruction has slowed down this phenomenon. At present, this is impossible to calculate because only since 1971 has the census taken into consideration the language spoken in the home. In order to have the necessary comparative data, we shall have to wait until 1991.

Many people are concerned that the new language regime has not put a brake on the declining use of French. Even though many schools were created following the new legislation, particularly between 1970 and 1975 (1), it should be recognized that education is not the only factor

to be considered if we are to remove the phenomenon of transculturation, especially among young people. Socio-economic and demographic factors also come into play.

In the following pages, we examine a number of survey results regarding the language behaviour of school-age students. In particular, we analyse their use of French and their French-language skills.

The use of French among Franco-Ontarian youths

After analysing the results of the 1971 census, Charles Castonguay (2) noted in 1976 that this group was becoming increasingly anglicized. Two years earlier, he and J. Marion (3) had noted that Franco-Ontarians were very little affected by assimilation in localities where they were in the majority. However, in locations where they represented less than 50 per cent of the population, the rates of anglicization were in some instances very high. The authors were thus doubtful that French could hold its own in situations where demography worked to its disadvantage.

Toward the end of 1979, we conducted socio-linguistic surveys of Francophone pupils in seven towns with a minority French population: Cornwall, Ottawa, Pembroke, North Bay, Toronto, Welland and Windsor. These surveys confirmed and complemented Castonguay's study findings, and enabled us to measure the relationship between the frequency with which French was used in the family and the aptitude of students to learn and master the language.

From one generation to the next

In these seven Franco-Ontarian communities, French was used less in conversations among children than in those between parents: 32 per cent of the children always or most frequently used French among themselves, as opposed to 56 per cent of the parents. These figures are

TABLE 1
The use of French among children
in Franco-Ontarian families

	Cornwall		Ottawa		North Bay		Welland		Pembroke		Windsor		Toronto	
<i>Proportion of Francophones</i>	38 %		20.6 %		17.3 %		17.1 %		10.2 %		7 %		1.9 %	
Level	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary	Elementary	Secondary
Use of French and English														
Always or most frequently in French	48.2	46.1	51.9	31.1	34.1	39.2	34.2	12.5	26.3	16.7	31.5	25.8	25.3	44.4
	157	143	67	170	86	169	67	35	20	12	28	33	19	71
Equal frequency in French and English	23.3	21.3	21.7	24.2	22.6	27.4	21.4	19.6	18.4	12.5	12.3	25.0	8.0	25.6
	76	66	28	132	57	118	42	55	14	9	11	32	6	41
Always or most frequently in English	28.5	32.6	26.4	44.7	43.3	33.4	44.4	67.9	55.3	70.8	56.2	49.2	66.7	30.0
	93	101	34	244	109	144	87	191	42	51	50	63	50	48
TOTAL	326	310	129	546	252	431	196	281	76	72	89	128	75	160

somewhat discouraging, for they apply to pupils who were receiving their education in French, and not to all young Franco-Ontarians, as was the case for the Castonguay study.

The law of numbers

Our surveys also revealed that the retention or loss of French among pupils receiving instruction in that language were closely linked to the demographic weight of their community, as may be seen from the statistical data contained in Table 1. This table shows that the use of French between brothers and sisters varies in frequency from town to town: generally speaking, the smaller the Francophone element, the less frequent the use of French. We found the same phenomenon when we used other points of reference: the language used by parents with children, by children with their parents, with their friends, etc. French-language education has clearly not eradicated assimilation among Franco-Ontarians, and its influence is directly related to the demographic weight of the Francophone community.

We have seen that French-language education did not resolve the

problem of linguistic alienation. In addition, the survey conducted with the help of collaborators (4), and other studies by our team, established that the frequency with which French is used in the home in the minority Franco-Ontarian community had clear repercussions on the aptitude of students receiving their instruction in French to learn and master this language. By way of illustration: if students correctly master the use of reflexive pronouns (*il se lève*) during their studies, those who express themselves always or most frequently in French in their families will, by Grade 5, have a sound mastery of this syntactic form. If the contrary is the case, students will not have mastered this usage by the end of secondary school.

Other persistent difficulties include use of the proper gender (*école français*), choice of preposition (*aller à son amie*), agreement between subject and verb (*elles ne veut pas*), phrases based on English syntax (*je suis quinze ans*), and anglicized terms (*un movie*).

Influence of the social milieu

The use of French outside the family is also an important factor. Table 2

contains data on the use of reflexive pronouns by students of elementary and secondary Francophone schools in four towns where the French language is of varying importance: Hawkesbury, Cornwall, North Bay and Pembroke. The Hawkesbury sample does not include students who express themselves mainly in English in the home since this is not a significant phenomenon in this predominantly Francophone town.

Based on the data in Table 2, if we use Brown's criterion (5) of 90 per cent correct usage as indicating mastery of a language, the Hawkesbury students have already achieved this standard for reflexive pronouns when they enter elementary school. Those from Cornwall and North Bay who always or most frequently use French in the home achieve these same skills by Grade 5. In Pembroke, this level is achieved only at the end of secondary school. For children for whom English is the dominant language according to this criterion, the reflexive pronoun is mastered only at the end of secondary school in Cornwall and, for all practical purposes, in North Bay as well; in Pembroke, they finish their studies

without achieving this standard perfectly.

These results are linked to the frequency with which French is used outside the family in the four towns in question. In our 1982 study, we drew attention to the dual effect of the clear numerical predominance of Francophones in Hawkesbury: the very great majority of students who express themselves always or most frequently in French in the home also do so outside the home. In the other three towns, the attachment to French declined in concert with the proportional representation of Francophones, as follows: Cornwall, North Bay and Pembroke. The same phenomenon exists to a lesser degree among students who rarely speak French in the family.

All these facts illustrate the impact of demography on the aptitude of young Franco-Ontarians to learn and master French.

Other findings

Our research also revealed a phenomenon we had not considered: the relationship between the frequency in the use of French in the

home and the use of the familiar language register. In daily conversation, those who used French very little in the home, never, or hardly ever, used the typical forms of popular Canadian French; by contrast, however, those who used French regularly adapted naturally to these forms. Since use of the mother tongue in one's own family is essential to the acquisition of various registers of day-to-day language, we found that those who used French very little had serious weaknesses in this respect. As for the demographic element relating to this aptitude, the results of our research tend to confirm what we have noted above.

French, then is becoming a sort of second language for young Franco-Ontarians who rarely speak it in the home; its structure and familiar registers are largely unknown to them. The opposite of course, holds true in cases where French is the predominant language of use.

Remedies

In our view, the solutions to this problem are chiefly socio-political and pedagogical in nature. In predominantly Anglophone milieux, the abandonment of French by Franco-

Ontarians is due in part to the low prestige they attach to this language given its relative lack of value as a means of socio-economic advancement. Consequently, any measure designed to enhance French in the mind of individuals would have repercussions on the resistance to assimilation and on students' attitudes toward their mother tongue. Such measures have already been the subject of studies by the Federation of Francophones outside Quebec and, in collaboration with Canale and Bélanger, we have ourselves published an article on this question. (6)

In terms of pedagogical solutions, we would first mention those currently implemented by some Ontario school boards. Educators have recourse to two remedies.

The first is orientation classes. Students suffering serious weaknesses in French derive benefit from such classes early in their programme, when they receive instruction especially adapted to their needs and dispersed in an intensive form if the teacher is assisted by a monitor. The second remedy consists of special "catch-up" classes.

In both instances the objective is the same: to bring students to a sufficient level of French so as not to compromise or interrupt the progress of other students in that language and in the various subjects taught. (7)

Solutions may also be sought to the manner in which French is taught. According to a survey conducted by Cazabon and Frenette (8) in a minority Franco-Ontarian environment, the teaching of French may be coloured by a normative approach that tends to discourage students from usages which do not conform to *correct French* and to substitute equivalents which correspond to this standard. Both authors have noted that very few teachers made a distinction, for pedagogical purposes, between "mistakes" in popular Canadian French (*le moineau a pogné une bibitte*) and those that may be considered "un-French" (*je lève à six heures*). Most teachers found such mistakes equally

TABLE 2
Mastery of the reflexive pronoun among young Franco-Ontarians in four towns with varying proportional Francophone populations

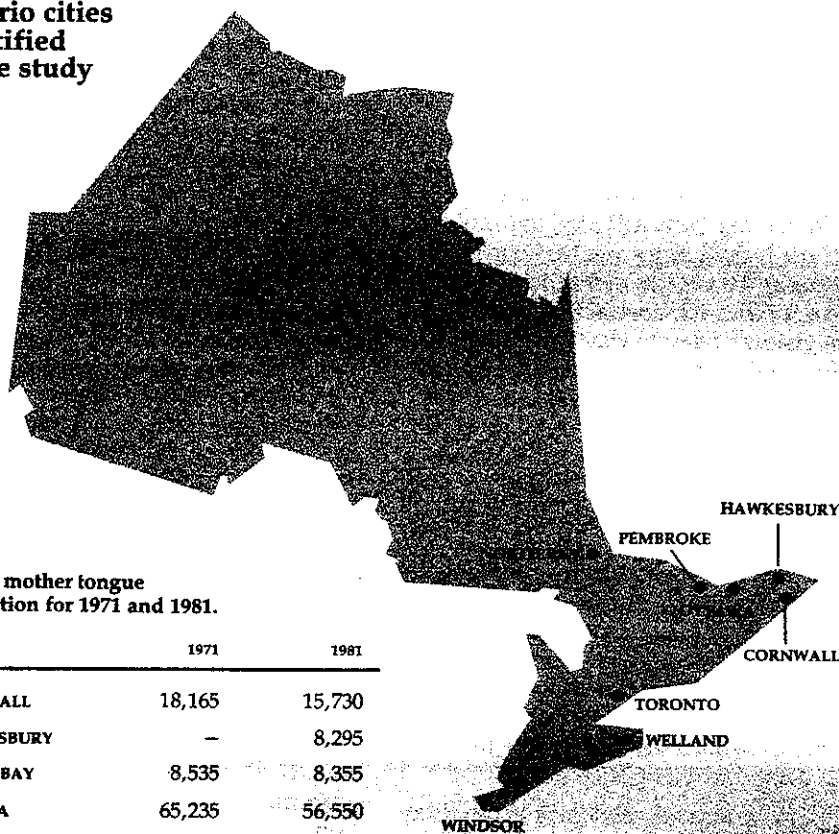
	Hawkesbury	Cornwall	North Bay	Pembroke			
Percentage of Francophones	(85%)	(38%)	(17%)	(10%)			
Frequency of use of French in the home	Always or most frequently	Always or most frequently	Never or occasionally	Always or most frequently	Never or occasionally	Always or most frequently	Never or occasionally
Grade							
2	77 96%	57 90%	22 78%	24 63%	45 36%	25 64%	37 35%
5	72 96%	77 99%	29 80%	23 96%	44 72%	27 86%	40 33%
9	117 100%	51 97%	42 88%	36 95%	38 83%	30 74%	43 70%
12	82 100%	62 100%	30 94%	77 100%	26 89%	45 89%	20 75%
TOTAL	348 99%	370 92%		313 80%		267 64%	

Ontario cities identified in the study

French mother tongue population for 1971 and 1981.

	1971	1981
CORNWALL	18,165	15,730
HAWKESBURY	—	8,295
NORTH BAY	8,535	8,355
OTTAWA	65,235	56,550
PEMBROKE	1,680	1,130
TORONTO	15,755	10,040
WELLAND	7,590	6,945
WINDSOR	14,305	10,535

Source: Statistics Canada, 1971 and 1981 census.



view, a more tolerant attitude should be adopted.

The sociolinguistic approach to teaching French, which is the basis of the new programmes designed for Quebec's Francophone students, might be adopted to great advantage by Franco-Ontarian educators. One of the goals of this approach is to encourage students to master "correct local French" by comparing the characteristics of this variety of French with those of familiar Canadian French, and by providing an understanding of the social and stylistic features appropriate to each of the registers. This goal presupposes that we recognize the "system" concept and the major role played by familiar Canadian French.

This new approach will thus tend not to eliminate this variety of French, but to use it as a point of departure for mastery of correct Canadian French. We would add that familiar Canadian French might even be used as an objective in a minority Francophone environment because students who scarcely speak French outside of school have a poor mastery of this type of French.

(Adapted from the French)

unacceptable and thus worthy of elimination.

Cazabon and Frenette also noted that the teaching of French provided few opportunities for communication and focused on a relatively mechanical learning approach far removed from the context of resources proper to correct language. Attention should be drawn to the weaknesses and inconvenience of this method.

In a majority Francophone community, acquisition of French as a language of communication is largely guaranteed outside the school; this does not hold true for a minority situation. Since language is primarily an instrument of communication, it is particularly important that the school recognize it as such. In our view, the great danger posed by the normative approach is

that it tends to discourage the characteristic features of familiar Canadian French, particularly when those features are common coin among students who still express themselves in French in the home.

As well, we believe that familiar Franco-Ontarian speech is an authentic language system even though it may differ from correct Canadian French. In addition to the fact that it is used for a major portion of all communications, this variety of familiar French is part and parcel of the cultural identity of the Franco-Ontarian community. If the particularities of this language are viewed as errors, this could well increase the trend toward the rejection of French that has been observed to varying degrees among young Franco-Ontarians who are members of a minority community. In our

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