

FRENCH AS  
THE "COMMON PUBLIC LANGUAGE"  
IN QUÉBEC<sup>1</sup>

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It's official : French in Québec is no longer the sole property of the French Canadian ethnic

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1. This article is an abridged and modified version of Leigh OAKES, "French – a language for everyone in Québec ?", *Nations and Nationalism*, vol. 10, n° 4, p. 539-558 (Permission granted by the editors of *Nations and Nationalism*, Journal of the Association for the Study of Ethnicity and Nationalism, London School of Economics). I wish to thank Jane Warren, Gérard Bouchard, Claude Verreault, Céline Gagnon and Bill Marshall for their comments on the issues raised herein, as well as the Arts and Humanities Research Board (AHRB) for its financial support. All translations from the French are mine.

group<sup>2</sup>. According to the report of the *Commission des États généraux sur la situation et l'avenir de la*

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2. Following Gérard Bouchard, ethnic identity is defined here in a broad sense, which implies a significant degree of overlap with cultural identity (Gérard BOUCHARD, "Ouvrir le cercle de la nation. Activer la cohésion sociale. Réflexion sur le Québec et sa diversité", *L'Action nationale*, vol. 87, n° 4, 1997, p. 128). It is nonetheless clearly distinguished from the latter, especially because of the myth of common origin, the "sine qua non of ethnicity" (Anthony D. SMITH, *The Ethnic Origins of Nations*, Oxford, Blackwell, 1986, p. 24). For further discussions on the important differences between ethnicity and culture, see Thomas Hylland ERIKSEN, *Ethnicity and Nationalism*, London, Pluto Press, 1993, p. 33-35 and Ross POOLE, *Nation and Identity*, London, Routledge, 1999, p. 39. With the decline of the concept of "French Canada", some prefer to refer to the ethnic majority in Québec as "Quebecers of French Canadian heritage" (Jocelyn LÉTOURNEAU, "Penser le Québec (dans le paysage canadien)", Michel VENNE [ed.], *Penser la nation québécoise*, Montréal, Le Devoir et Québec/Amérique, coll. "Débats", 2000, p. 107), or "Franco-Quebecers" (Gérard BOUCHARD, "Construire la nation québécoise. Manifeste pour une coalition nationale", Michel VENNE [ed.], *Penser la nation québécoise*, Montréal, Le Devoir et Québec/Amérique, coll. "Débats", 2000, p. 54). Following Danielle Juteau, the expression adopted here is nonetheless "French Canadian", while it is recognized that the French Canadians of former times are not the same as

*langue française au Québec*, otherwise known as the Larose Commission, French now belongs to all ethnic groups in Québec; it has become “a language for everyone<sup>3</sup>”. These are fine words, but what is the real intention of such a declaration and what are its implications ?

To be sure, French has made considerable progress since the adoption of the Charter of the French Language in 1977<sup>4</sup>. According to a study commissioned by the *Conseil de la langue française*, 87 % of Québec’s population in 1997 had French as its main “*langue d’usage public*”

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their descendants : “Since ethnicity constantly transforms itself, the French Canadian ethnicity of yesterday and that of today are very different from each other” (Danielle JUTEAU, “Le défi de l’option pluraliste”, Michel VENNE [éd.], *Penser la nation québécoise*, Montréal, Le Devoir et Québec/Amérique, coll. “Débats”, 2000, p. 211).

3. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français, une langue pour tout le monde. (Rapport de la Commission des États généraux sur la situation de l’avenir de la langue française au Québec)*, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 2001.

4. Marc LEVINE, *La reconquête de Montréal*, Montréal, VLB éditeur, 1997.

(language of public use)<sup>5</sup>. However, the idea that French constitutes a language of public use for *all* Quebecers, or what has become known as a "*langue publique commune*" (common public language), is more than a simple means of describing a sociolinguistic phenomenon ; more importantly, it is a political device which forms part of a broader project of redefining the Québécois nation in more inclusive, non-ethnic terms.

Despite the optimistic discourse of the authorities and certain intellectuals, two issues in particular still need to be resolved : can a language really be completely "de-ethnicized" as some suggest ? And how can new Quebecers be motivated to adopt for their public communications a language that has traditionally been associated with French Canadian ethnicity ? Before examining these questions in more detail, it is appropriate to consider briefly the history of the concept of *langue publique commune* as it is used in Québec.

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5. Paul BÉLAND, *Le français, langue d'usage public au Québec en 1997. Rapport de recherche*, Québec, Conseil de la langue française, 1999.

## HISTORY OF FRENCH AS THE LANGUE PUBLIQUE COMMUNE

Ever since the 1960s-1970s, the idea has frequently been raised of making French the *langue commune* of Québec. For example, the *Commission d'enquête sur la situation du français et sur les droits linguistiques*, also called the Gendron Commission, declared that :

*[w]e recommend that the Government of Québec sets itself the general objective of making French the common language of Quebecers, that is, the language which, known by all, can serve as an instrument of communication in contact situations between French-speaking and non-French-speaking Quebecers<sup>6</sup>.*

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6. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *La situation de la langue française au Québec. Rapport de la commission d'enquête sur la situation de la langue française et sur les droits linguistiques au Québec. Livre I. La langue de travail : la situation du français dans les activités de travail et de consommation des Québécois*, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1972, p. 154.

Five years later, the same assertion was made in the White Paper that was to lead to the Charter of the French Language. Its author, the Minister for Cultural Development, Camille Laurin, was careful to distinguish this policy from linguistic assimilation.

*The total assimilation of all new immigrants, to the extent that they have lost all ties to their country of origin within one or two generations, is not a desirable objective. A society that allows its minority groups to maintain their language and culture is a society that is richer and probably better balanced<sup>7</sup>.*

Even if it was not intended to be assimilationist, the policy of promoting French as the *langue commune* of Québec as it existed at the time did, however, form part of a broader policy of *culture de convergence* according to which non-French

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7. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *La politique québécoise de la langue française*, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1977, p. 26.

speakers were encouraged to “converge” towards the culture of the French-speaking ethnic majority. The main architect of this *culture de convergence* policy was Fernard Dumont. It is therefore of no surprise that, in his capacity as Deputy Minister for Cultural Development, Dumont was also one of the co-signatories of the 1977 White Paper<sup>8</sup>.

By the 1990s, the idea of convergence behind French as the *langue commune* of Québec had all but disappeared. The new concern of liberal democracies for cultural diversity now made it necessary to state explicitly that new Quebecers had the right to speak the language of their choice in the private sphere. To recognize that the requirement that they adopt French was indeed limited to the public sphere, reference was no longer made to French as the *langue commune*, but rather as the *langue publique commune*. This “publicization” of the concept of *langue commune* is clearly manifested in official documents of the time.

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8. Geneviève MATHIEU, *Qui est Québécois ? Synthèse du débat sur la redéfinition de la nation*, Montréal, VLB éditeur, 2001, p. 18-19.

*This valorisation of French as the common language and language of public life does not, however, mean that one should confuse the mastering of a common language with linguistic assimilation. Indeed, as a democratic society, Québec respects the right of individuals to adopt the language of their choice in communications of a private nature<sup>9</sup>.*

In 1996, the *Comité interministériel sur la situation de la langue française* sought to consolidate this “new definition of the linguistic integration process<sup>10</sup>” based on the common public language. While the traditional categories used in censuses of the time were *langue maternelle* (mother tongue) and *langue d’usage* (the language spoken at home), the *Comité* favored an approach which would put more emphasis on the language used in the public

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9. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Au Québec, pour bâtir ensemble. Énoncé de politique en matière d’immigration et d’intégration*, Québec, Ministère des Communautés culturelles et de l’Immigration, 1990.

10. Marc LEVINE, *op. cit.*, p. 361.

sphere, thus allowing for a better evaluation of the aims of the Charter of the French language.

*In order to determine whether French has progressed as the “normal and everyday language” of public activities in Québec, one can evidently not rely on data relating to the langue maternelle; at the same time, it is not obvious that one should limit oneself to data regarding the langue d’usage, since the language spoken at home is not necessarily the language used at work or in public communications. Consequently, it is clear that one should use data relating to the langue commune (or civic language), but these data are not yet available. This can therefore lead to an underestimation of the number of “Quebecers speaking French”, especially amongst allophones (if they use French in their public communications more than at home<sup>11</sup>).*

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11. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français langue commune. Enjeu de la société québécoise. (Rapport du comité interministériel sur la situation de la langue française)*, Québec, Gouvernement du Québec, 1996, p. 10.

For this reason, the *Comité* introduced the notion of *langue d'usage public* and called for the creation of a real instrument of measurement for this new concept. In 1997, a study was therefore carried out "to evaluate the public use of languages and devise a global index<sup>12</sup>". An *indicateur des langues d'usage public* (index of languages of public use) was constructed using statistical information concerning the use of languages in a dozen domains of activity : in shops, at the bank, in the workplace, when using public services, etc. As the *Comité* had hoped, the new index has resulted in more positive statistics : whereas only 83 % of Québec's population claim to speak French in the home, 87 % declare it as their main *langue d'usage public* (see table 1).

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12. Paul BÉLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

Table 1.  
 Percentage of the population according to mother tongue, the language spoken at home and the language of public use (index) in the whole of Québec in 1997. The population was 18 years or older and native or immigrated before 1995, and was required to declare one mother tongue only. N=13,295<sup>13</sup>.

LANGUAGE CATEGORY				
LANGUAGE	MOTHER TONGUE	LANGUAGE SPOKEN AT HOME	LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC USE	MAIN LANGUAGE OF PUBLIC USE
FRENCH	82	83	82	87
FRENCH AND ENGLISH	N/A	1	8	N/A
ENGLISH	8	10	8	11
OTHER	9	6	1	1

It must be noted that the *indicateur des langues d'usage public* has received much criticism, especially by statisticians and demographers, who

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13. Paul BÉLAND, *op. cit.*, p. 46.

claim that its “*faux-fuyant*” (“red herring”) or “chimerical” nature conceals the actual precarious position of the French language, especially on the island of Montréal<sup>14</sup>. The methodological procedures used in the 1997 study have also been subject to rigorous criticism<sup>15</sup>. Nonetheless, as a political device, the notion of *langue d’usage public* seems to be on the way to replacing *transfert linguistique* (language shift or instance thereof), which implies a certain degree of assimilation from which the authorities are keen to distance themselves.

More recently, the concept of *langue publique commune* has found its place as an essential

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14. Charles CASTONGUAY, “Et la langue de travail, monsieur Larose?”, Charles Castonguay, Pierre Dubuc and Jean-Claude Germain, *Larose n’est pas Larousse. Regards critiques – la Commission des États généraux sur la situation et l’avenir de la langue française au Québec*, Paroisse Notre-Dame-des-Neiges, Éditions Trois-Pistoles and Montréal, Éditions du Renouveau québécois, 2002, p. 13.

15. Christian ROY, “L’usage des langues dans la sphère publique au Québec”, *Bulletin d’histoire politique*, vol. 10, n° 1, 2001, p. 151-160.

element in the new, citizen-orientated conception of Québécois identity. For example, it featured prominently in the submissions presented to the *Commission des États généraux sur la situation et l'avenir de la langue française au Québec*; it was also one of the key concepts of the Commission's report itself.

*All persons living in the territory of Québec, whatever their origin, receive en partage the official and common language of Québec. French thus becomes the privileged means of access to the civic heritage (values, rights, obligations, institutions, etc.) common to all Quebecers and on which their citizenship is founded. The French language offers a site for the exploration and development of the values peculiar to the whole of Québécois society. It is also the site of a vouloir-vivre collectif, the common public space where everyone can meet*<sup>16</sup>.

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16. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français, une langue pour tout le monde*, p. 13. Even if the Commission makes reference predominantly to French as the *langue commune*, it is understood that this implies *langue publique commune*.

French as the *langue publique commune* is thus seen as the key to civic participation, to one's citizenship. It is a means of maintaining the social cohesion of the ethnically diverse society that is Québec in the twenty-first century. To take these new aspirations for French into account, the Commission favored a move away from the language policy of the past that was based on the *survivance* of the majority ethnic group. To this effect, it recommended :

*[t]hat language policy in Québec definitively depart from the historical, Canadian approach which divides Québécois identity along ethnic lines – French Canadian and English Canadian – and replace it with a civic approach which bases the identity of the people of Québec on reception and inclusion with the help of a langue commune*

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Indeed, the definition given for the former is : “In Québec, the normal and everyday language used by all citizens in their daily communications, excluding those of a private nature and those exceptions for which the Charter of the French Language provides”, *ibid.*, p. 225.

formed by the contribution of all constituent parts<sup>17</sup>.

The notion of *langue publique commune* has also figured prominently in the debate among academics about which model of nation will best express the ethnic diversity of Québec today. For example, Diane Lamoureux believes that it is essential to dissociate language and culture: she asserts that French in Québec should be considered as a mere means of communication, and not as the bearer of the French Canadian cultural memory<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, as part of his model of nation for Québec based on republican values and Habermas' theory of constitutional patriotism, Claude Bariteau insists that "[i]n a political project in a multicultural environment, it is important not to link language and cultural belonging<sup>19</sup>."

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17. *Ibid.*, p. 21.

18. Diane LAMOUREUX, "L'autodétermination comme condition du multiculturalisme québécois", *Politique et sociétés*, n° 28, automne 1995, p. 53-69.

19. Claude BARITEAU, *Québec 18 septembre 2001. Le monde pour horizon*, Montréal, Québec/Amérique, coll. "Débats", 1998, p. 163.

These comments lead us to make an important observation : even civic nationalisms make use of language as a symbol of national identity, but by emphasising a different function. While for ethnic nationalisms, language unites those with the same mythical ancestry, for civic nationalisms, the dissociation of language and ethnicity is seen as the best way to unify an ethnically diverse society, to bring the different components together into what Anderson would call an “imagined community”. Indeed, Anderson claims that :

*[1] language is not an instrument of exclusion : in principle, anyone can learn any language. On the contrary, it is fundamentally inclusive, limited only by the fatality of Babel : no one lives long enough to learn all languages<sup>20</sup>.*

Similarly, Manuel Castells hypothesises that :

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20. Benedict ANDERSON, *Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Growth of Nationalism*, London, Verso, 1983, p. 122.

*language, and particularly a fully developed language, is a fundamental attribute of self-recognition, and of the establishment of an invisible national boundary less arbitrary than territoriality, and less exclusive than ethnicity [emphasis added]*<sup>21</sup>.

Castells is partially referring to Catalonia, where increased immigration both from other regions of Spain and the Maghrebi countries in particular, coupled with a falling birth rate amongst indigenous Catalans, has provoked authorities to attempt to dissociate language and Catalan identity.

*Too much insistence on that bond is likely to alienate those whose first language is not Catalan, and it may encourage them to insist that their linguistic rights take precedence over Catalan self-ascription*<sup>22</sup>.

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21. Manuel CASTELLS, *The Power of Identity*, Oxford, Blackwell Publishers, 1997, p. 52.

22. Charlotte HOFFMANN, "Balancing language planning and language rights : Catalonia's uneasy juggling act", *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, vol. 21, n° 5, 2000, p. 435.

Encouraging immigrants to associate with and participate in the wider society is an obvious concern for the authorities in Québec as well, especially considering the low birth rates amongst native French speakers. But can language be dissociated from ethnic identity in this way? Can language be completely “de-ethnicized” as the Québec authorities and certain intellectuals seem to want?

#### CAN LANGUAGE BE “DE-ETHNICIZED” ?

Already in 1988, Raymond Breton predicted that the presence of immigrants in Québec would result in the “the progressive dissociation of language from ethnicity<sup>23</sup>”. Fifteen years on, we are now in a better position to evaluate these predictions. It is true that, even if he or she will never be able to become a *Canadien français* (an ethnic French Canadian), the child of immigrant to

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23. Raymond BRETON, “From ethnic to civic nationalism : English Canada and Québec”, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 11, n° 1, 1988, p. 97-98.

Québec can nonetheless participate in Québécois society by becoming a *francophone*<sup>24</sup>. But the use of language, as opposed to ethnicity, as a parameter of social categorisation by no means weakens the link between these two concepts. As Guy Bouthillier points out, “[t]he majority of ethnic groups have the right to their [own] *phone*: italo-phone, hellenophone, hispanophone, not forgetting creolophone<sup>25</sup>.”

Moreover, the term *francophone* demands closer attention. A survey of dictionaries of Québécois French shows that, when defining this word, a broad, “international” perspective is usually adopted. For example, the *Dictionnaire du français plus à l’usage des francophones d’Amérique* describes a francophone as “[f]or whom French is the mother or official language<sup>26</sup>”, the *Dictionnaire*

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24. Gérard BOUCHARD, “Construire la nation québécoise. Manifeste pour une coalition nationale”, p. 59.

25. Guy BOUTHILLIER, *L’obsession ethnique*, Montréal, Lanctôt éditeur, 1997, p. 84.

26. *Dictionnaire du français plus à l’usage des francophones d’Amérique*, edition established under the responsibility of

*québécois d'aujourd'hui* as “[w]ho speaks French, either as a mother, official or second language<sup>27</sup>” and the most recent *Dictionnaire québécois-français* simply as a “*pers[onne] de langue française*”<sup>28</sup> (“French speaker”). However, anyone spending time in Québec will notice that the word is often used to describe an ethnic, rather than purely linguistic reality. For example, the above definitions undeniably include immigrants from France, yet the latter are usually referred to as *Français* and not *francophones*, a term by and large reserved for those of French Canadian descent<sup>29</sup>. Even within

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A. E. SHIATY, with the collaboration of Pierre AUGER and Normand BEAUCHEMIN; principal editor: Claude Poirier, with the assistance of Louis Mercier and Claude Verreault, Montréal, Centre Éducatif et Culturel inc, 1988, p. 706.

27. *Dictionnaire québécois d'aujourd'hui*, edited by Jean-Claude BOULANGER; supervised by Alain Rey, Saint Laurent, Dicorobert inc, 1992, p. 513-514.

28. Lionel MENEY, *Dictionnaire québécois-français*, Montréal, Guérin, 1999, p. 864.

29. In a similar manner, the French have a propensity to exclude themselves from the term francophone, which they tend to reserve for French speakers from countries other than France (Bernhard PÖLL, *Francophonies périphériques : histoire*,

official and academic circles, where in theory everyone using French in the public sphere is francophone, reference needs on occasion to be made to the *francophones de souche*<sup>30</sup> (i.e. those with French as a mother tongue). If the new approach is to emphasise French as the *langue publique commune*, why are these distinctions still made ?

The answer to this question can be found in theories of intergroup relations within the field of social psychology. According social identity theory, for example, all individuals have a fundamental need to distinguish themselves from others, to attain psychological distinctiveness, in this case on an ethnic dimension<sup>31</sup>. In other words, ethnicity is

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*statut et profil des principales variétés du français hors de France*, Paris, L'Harmattan, 2001, p. 21-22).

30. See, for example, Gérard BOUCHARD, *La nation québécoise au futur et au passé*, Montréal, VLB éditeur, 1999, p. 69, 77.

31. Henri TAJFEL, "Social identity and intergroup behaviour", *Social Science Information*, vol. 13, 1974, p. 65-93 ; Henri TAJFEL, *The Social Psychology of Minorities*. (*Minority Rights Group Report 38*), London, Minority Rights Group, 1978 ; Henri TAJFEL and John C. TURNER, "The social identity theory of intergroup behaviour", in Stephen WORCHEL and

indeed exclusive, in so far as social identities are invariably constructed in contradistinction to others. This is not to imply, however, that an individual cannot assimilate to the majority group if so desired, no more than it hinders different ethnic groups from living as equals in the same society or nation, depending on how the latter is defined. As Gérard Bouchard reminds us, ethnicity should not be confused with ethnocentrism or ethnicism<sup>32</sup>. It is these phenomena which should be condemned, and not ethnicity itself, because they invariably drive individuals to discriminate against members of other ethnic groups, irrespective of how much a common culture and language are promoted.

In France, for example, despite the much vaunted republican model, ethnic discrimination manifested through language still exists. About the French spoken by foreigners, Julia Kristeva observes that :

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William G. AUSTIN [eds.], *Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, 1986, revised edition of *The Social Psychology of Intergroup Relations*, Chicago, Nelson-Hall Publishers, 1979.

32. Gérard BOUCHARD, *La nation québécoise au futur et au passé*, p. 30.

[e]ven when he is legally and administratively accepted, the foreigner is not for all that accepted into [French] families. His untoward usage of the French language discredits him, consciously or not, in the eyes of the natives who identify themselves more than in other countries with their polished and cherished speech<sup>33</sup>.

Liliane Vassberg confirms this observation, this time about a variety of French indigenous to France, notably Alsatian French.

[A]n Alsatian accent when pronouncing French usually produces very negative judgments of the speaker: "an accent" is considered unrefined, ungraceful, crude, ridiculous, a mark of lower-class origins and a lack of education<sup>34</sup>.

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33. Julia KRISTEVA, *Étrangers à nous-mêmes*, Paris, Fayard, 1988, p. 58.

34. Liliane M. VASSBERG, *Alsatian Acts of Identity: Language Use and Language Attitudes in Alsace*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 1993, p. 170.

Using the “matched-guise” technique, John Paltridge and Howard Giles also found that a Parisian accent was rated more favorably than an Provençal one, which itself was considered more prestigious than a Breton accent, which itself was judged more positively than an Alsatian accent<sup>35</sup>. Empirical research has shown that “evaluations of language varieties [such as these] do not reflect intrinsic linguistic or aesthetic qualities so much as the levels of status and prestige that they are *conventionally* associated with in particular speech communities<sup>36</sup>”. In other

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35. John PALTRIDGE and Howard GILES, “Attitudes towards speakers of regional accents of French: Effects of regionality, age and sex of listeners”, *Linguistische Berichte*, vol. 90, 1984, p. 71-85. The “matched-guise” technique is used to elicit attitudes towards speakers of different languages of varieties of language. It consists of playing to a target group recordings of a passage read by a single person in different languages or accents. Members of the target group then have to evaluate what they believe to be different speakers using a scale corresponding to degrees of friendliness, sincerity, intelligence, trustworthiness, etc.

36. Howard GILES and Nikolas COUPLAND, *Language: Contexts and Consequences*, Milton Keynes, Open University Press, 1991, p. 37-38.

words, negative opinions about different varieties of French express negative views about the ethnic groups that speak them.

There is also the example of the English Only movement in the United States. Calls heard since the middle of the 1980s by associations such as US English to make English the official language of individual states, as well as at the federal level, are the product of ethnicism or what is termed in the US, the “new nativism<sup>37</sup>”. Similarly in Sweden, where nationalist rhetoric has been played down since the 1930s, language offers a means of discrimination against immigrants which is more “politically correct” than race or ethnicity<sup>38</sup>. Such

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37. Geoffrey NUNBERG, “Lingo Jingo : English Only and the New Nativism”, *The American Prospect*, vol. 8, n° 33, 1997, <http://www.prospect.org/print-friendly/print/V8/33/nunberg-g.html> (April 17<sup>th</sup> 2000) ; Carol L. SCHMID, *The Politics of Language : Conflict, Identity, and Cultural Pluralism in Comparative Perspective*, New York, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 41-43.

38. Leigh OAKES, *Language and National Identity : Comparing France and Sweden*, Amsterdam and Philadelphia, John Benjamins, 2001, p. 114-115.

behaviour serves as evidence against Anderson's claim mentioned above, that language is not an instrument of exclusion.

Even leaving aside this ethnicism played out through language, it must be noted that language is nonetheless associated with ethnicity in more banal situations. As Will Kymlicka shows using the example of the US, so-called civic nations are in fact not as ethnoculturally neutral as they think<sup>39</sup>. In France, too, the choice of French as a common public language is far from ethnoculturally neutral. Speakers of minority languages have long fought for official recognition of their languages, but this has been consistently rejected<sup>40</sup>. When supporters of the republican model of integration vehemently reject what they refer to as "the 'ethnization' of public life<sup>41</sup>", they neglect the fact that

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39. Will KYMLICKA, *Politics in the Vernacular: Nationalism, Multiculturalism and Citizenship*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001, p. 24-25.

40. Leigh OAKES, *op. cit.*, p. 121-124.

41. Dominique SCHNAPPER, *La communauté des citoyens. Sur l'idée de nation*, Paris, Gallimard, 1994, p. 98.

the public sphere in France is already founded on the ethnic identity of the dominant core. In the words of Michel Seymour, “Jacobin Republicans who relentlessly denounce minority claims are most often unconscious nationalists<sup>42</sup>.” In Canada as well, despite the much vaunted model of multiculturalism, it is often forgotten that “there is no mosaic without cement, [and] in this case, it is English Canada which is the cement<sup>43</sup>”. In what is termed the “liberal paradox<sup>44</sup>”, the civic nation often denies the communitarian base on which it is built. This has the effect of further discrediting the concept of ethnicity, by reinforcing the fallacy that only minorities have ethnic identities.

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42. Michel SEYMOUR, “Le libéralisme, la politique de la reconnaissance, et le cas du Québec”, in Will KYMLICKA [ed.], *Comprendre*, vol. 1, n° 1, [http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/lepagef/dept/cahiers/Seymour\\_liberalisme.pdf](http://mapageweb.umontreal.ca/lepagef/dept/cahiers/Seymour_liberalisme.pdf), p. 5 (November 7<sup>th</sup> 2002).

43. Guy BOUTHILLIER, *op. cit.*, p. 188.

44. *Ibid.*, p. 2.

Eriksen also notes the impossibility of dissociating language and ethnicity in Mauritius<sup>45</sup>. While Kreol is spoken by 54 % of the population there according to official statistics, many Indo-Mauritians in particular are unwilling to admit that Kreol is in fact their mother tongue because the language is also that of the Creole or Métis ethnic group. It was partly because of this ethnic association that the attempt to make Kreol the (supra-ethnic) national language of Mauritius in 1982 had to be eventually abandoned.

Considering that all modern states have language policies, be they *de jure* or *de facto* in nature, some ethnic (or national) groups are necessarily favored over others, a fact which has provoked much debate in discussions of liberalism, nationalism and democracy<sup>46</sup>. Just as choices

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45. Thomas Hylland ERIKSEN, "Linguistic diversity and the quest for national identity : The case of Mauritius", *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, vol. 13, n° 1, 1990, p. 1-24.

46. See, for example, Brian WALKER, B. 1999. "Modernity and cultural vulnerability : should ethnicity be privileged ?", in Ronald BEINER [ed.], *Theorizing Nationalism*, Albany, State

concerning the official language in other contexts cannot be ethnoculturally neutral, the decision to make French the official language of Québec is no more civic than had another language been chosen. To echo the words of Fernand Dumont about the republican aspirations of the Patriot movement in 1837-38, French “is no more democratic in its essence than other languages<sup>47</sup>”. Nonetheless, the idea of a completely ethnically neutral French seems to dominate contemporary Québec language policy. Indeed, the Larose report says absolutely nothing about the place of the majority group in the proposed new language policy, the Commission preferring to avoid all mention of ethnicity, no doubt because of the negative connotations of this term<sup>48</sup>. But the position defended is thereby made problematic: not only can it be

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University of New York Press, 1999, p. 154 and Charles TAYLOR, “Nationalism and Modernity”, in Robert MCKIM and Jeff MCMAHAN [eds.], *The Morality of Nationalism*, New York, Oxford University Press, 1997, p. 34.

47. Fernand DUMONT, *Genèse de la société québécoise*, Montréal, Boréal, 1993, p. 175.

48. See Guy BOUTHILLIER, *op. cit.*, p. 161.

considered disingenuous, it is also unwise, because it risks alienating Quebecers of French Canadian origin, who could then withdraw into themselves and adopt a defensive position with regard to French. One could not wish for a less desirable outcome, considering the efforts to promote French as a “language for everyone”.

Paradoxically, the choice of the civic terms *langue publique commune* and *langue officielle* to refer to French in Québec also shows that language cannot be completely “de-ethnicized”. If the new approach to Québécois identity defines the nation and all that is national as predominantly civic, why not refer to French as the “*langue nationale*”, in the same way that Québec City is considered as the “*capitale nationale*”, the library as the “*bibliothèque nationale*”, and June 24<sup>th</sup> as the “*fête nationale*” of all Quebecers ? The answer lies almost certainly in that, more so than other symbols of identity, language is inextricably linked to ethnicity. Referring to French as the “*langue nationale*” would risk being considered as favoring the language of the ethnic majority.

In later versions of his model of the Québécois nation as a North American francophonie, Bouchard reduces the “ethnicity coefficient” to language alone, which he considers as an “indispensable vector to collective life<sup>49</sup>”. In this way, he recognizes that language cannot be completely “de-ethnicized” as a matter of principal, making his approach one of the most viable among the many civic models currently proposed. In the particular case of Québec, the link between language and ethnicity is all the more inextricable because, since the secularization of society following the Quiet Revolution, it was language, together with the Québécois state, which came to replace the Church as the main bearer of French Canadian identity. Moreover, the relationship between language and ethnicity is mutually reinforcing: not only does the French language carry the French Canadian culture, French Canadian ethnicity is one of the major driving forces for the

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49. Gérard BOUCHARD, *La nation québécoise au futur et au passé*, p. 64, 71.

maintenance of French language in North America. Yet this fact is completely ignored by many of the models proposed for Québec that are strictly civic.

*Civic approaches like Bariteau's are void of underlying motivation if they cannot be understood as being motivated by the desire to ensure the survival of a common public culture of French expression. Now, despite the warnings of Dumont and Bouchard, new conceptions of the "Québécois nation" seem to want to keep this motivation which drives them in the dark. They believe that, simply by underlining in passing that French will be the language of citizenship of the new sovereign state, they can solve the problem of the survival of the French language in the few acres of snow lost in America, as well as the linguistic quarrels which arise on its territory. These positions are either naive or dishonest<sup>50</sup>.*

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50. Frédéric-Guillaume DUFOUR, *Patriotisme constitutionnel et nationalisme. Sur Jürgen Habermas*, Montréal, Liber, 2001, p. 198.

In other words, quite apart from the fact that language cannot be completely “de-ethnicized” as a matter of principle, one should not attempt to do so either. Ethnicity provides a necessary motivation for the survival of French, which reference to civic principles alone cannot inspire.

### MOTIVATING NEW QUEBECERS

The issue of motivation is also important if new Quebecers are ever to be successfully encouraged to adopt French as a language of public communications. Much has been made of the claim that the only difference between the civic nation being proposed in Québec, and that which supposedly already exists in the United States, is that the “common public culture” into which immigrants are expected to integrate is not English but French-speaking<sup>51</sup>. Yet as far as the motiva-

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51. Dominique AREL, “Political stability in multinational democracies : comparing language dynamics in Brussels, Montreal and Barcelona”, in Alain-G. GAGNON and James TULLY [eds.], *Multinational Democracies*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2001, p. 75.

tions for second language acquisition are concerned, it is unwise to compare French and English in these two contexts when the languages do not enjoy the same power of attraction. Linguists generally identify two types of motivation underlying second language acquisition : instrumental and integrative or sentimental.

*The first assumes that individuals are interested solely in acquiring sufficient communicative ability to satisfy their own specific goals, usually economic targets, while the second is based on the desire of individuals to associate themselves ever more closely with a target community to the point, eventually, of assimilating to it<sup>52</sup>.*

In the North American context, studies have shown that instrumentalism is generally the primary motive behind the desire to immigrate to

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52. Dennis AGER, *Motivation in Language Planning and Language Policy*, Clevedon, Multilingual Matters, 2001, p. 109.

the USA<sup>53</sup>. Moreover, regarding language, instrumental motivations extend beyond the borders of the US. Learning English will improve one's employment prospects anywhere on the North American continent or indeed in the world. By contrast, French in Québec cannot benefit from this degree of instrumental motivation : it is not the dominant language of the Canadian state, it is only spoken by 2 % of North America's population and has far fewer speakers than English world-wide. Despite important successes regarding French status language planning in Québec, it is generally accepted today that language legislation alone is not enough to guarantee the survival of French in North America. One of the areas recognized as also being important is immigration policy. Marc Levine identifies in particular the need for efficient mechanisms for welcoming and including immigrants, such as the promotion of a common French-speaking public culture to which immigrants feel they can both relate and

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53. *Ibid.*, p. 114.

contribute<sup>54</sup>. In other words, there is a recognized need for integrative or sentimental motivations specific to Québec to supplement or reinforce the instrumental ones created by language legislation.

Aware of this need, the Québécois authorities there have made the promotion of integrative motivations amongst those of non-French Canadian descent one of their main strategies<sup>55</sup>. Indeed, the *Comité interministériel sur la situation de la langue française* explained in 1996 that “this expression ‘langue commune’ evokes the dual idea of ‘communication’ and of ‘community’<sup>56</sup>”. This stresses two important functions of French, even for new Quebecers. For even if French is a second language instead of a mother tongue for the latter, at least for the first generation, it does not follow that the attachment to this language must be

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54. Marc LEVINE, *La reconquête de Montréal*, p. 385.

55. Ines MOLINARO, “Contexte et intégration. Les communautés allophones au Québec”, *Globe. Revue internationale d'études québécoises*, vol. 2, n° 2, 1999, p. 124.

56. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français langue commune. Enjeu de la société québécoise*, p. 239.

purely instrumental : “second languages can play a significant role in one’s linguistic identity<sup>57</sup>.” To facilitate this type of identity function among new Quebecers, what is needed is not a new civic model of the Québec nation, but rather a so-called “integrationist<sup>58</sup>” model which, within an overall civic framework, nevertheless recognizes different ethnic identities and their various ways of relating to French.

As a first step in this direction, and to explain to immigrants that “in strictly linguistic terms, arriving in Québec is not equivalent to arriving in Canada<sup>59</sup>”, the Larose Commission took up an idea introduced by the *Forum national sur la citoyenneté et l’intégration*<sup>60</sup> in 2000, by proposing

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57. John JOSEPH, *Language and Identity : National, Ethnic, Religious*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 185.

58. Michel PAGÉ, “Propositions pour une approche dynamique de la situation du français dans l’espace linguistique québécois”, forthcoming.

59. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français, une langue pour tout le monde*, p. 19.

60. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *La citoyenneté québécoise. Document de consultation pour le forum national sur la*

the formalization of a Québécois citizenship to supplement, rather than replace, Canadian citizenship<sup>61</sup>. This idea was hotly debated, then rejected by the Minister concerned, Joseph Facal, on supposedly legal grounds. This article is not the place for an in-depth treatment of the notion of citizenship in general, or of what form it might take in the particular case of Québec. Suffice it to say here that the Commission was not referring to “nationality”, which is often confused with “citizenship”, especially in English<sup>62</sup>. Nor did it intend

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*citoyenneté et l'intégration*, Québec, Ministère des Relations avec les citoyens et de l'Immigration, 2000.

61. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français, une langue pour tout le monde*, p. 21. On this proposal, see also Alain-G. GAGNON, “Plaidoyer pour une commission nationale sur la citoyenneté québécoise”, *Le Devoir*, 15 June 2001, <http://www.vigile.net/dossier-nation/1-6/15-gagnon.html> (January 23<sup>rd</sup> 2003). On the more general references that the Québec authorities have made to citizenship since the 1990s, see Danielle JUTEAU, “The citizen makes an entrée : Redefining the national community in Quebec”, *Citizenship Studies*, vol. 6, n° 4, 2002.

62. Historically and conceptually, there is an important distinction between nationality and citizenship. While the

“a citizenship in the sole legal capacity to participate in the exercise of power, but in the broader sense of belonging to a living heritage, founded on the sharing of common political and cultural references and on a shared identity<sup>63</sup>.” As far as language policy is concerned, it is precisely this sort of measure which is required to create the integrative attachment to Québec needed if the notion of French as the *langue publique commune* for all Quebecers is to ever prove viable.

Denis Monière claims that “[t]he motivation for adopting French is necessarily weak and transitory among immigrants in a country which is officially bilingual and where English is the

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former pertains to the international sphere, denoting “the link between a person and a state which guarantees him or her diplomatic protection”, the latter refers to “a person’s legal capacity to participate in the exercise of power by way of the right to vote and eligibility for public office” (GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *La citoyenneté québécoise. Document de consultation pour le forum national sur la citoyenneté et l’intégration*, p. 13-14).

63. GOUVERNEMENT DU QUÉBEC, *Le français, une langue pour tout le monde*, p. 12.

language of economic and social success<sup>64</sup>.” In a similar manner, Bouchard goes as far as to say that sovereignty is a necessary condition for the successful implementation of his model of the Québécois nation built around French as the common denominator<sup>65</sup>. This may eventually prove so in the long term, but in the short term, an alternative could be found in a multidimensional citizenship, such as that which exists in the European Union. If a form could be found which was acceptable especially to Québec’s English-speaking community, whose primary allegiance is to Canada, a Québécois citizenship could offer a means of including in the national project the segment of Québec population on which its renewal depends, namely Quebecers of immigrant descent<sup>66</sup>.

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64. Denis MONIÈRE, “La lutte des langues au Canada”, *L’Action nationale*, vol. 93, n° 2, 2003, p. 23-24.

65. Gérard BOUCHARD, “Construire la nation québécoise. Manifeste pour une coalition nationale”, p. 67-68.

66. The question of First Nations is even more complex, since many of these have little allegiance to Canada, not to mention Québec.

## CONCLUSION

As this article has shown, language is not merely a means of communication; as a matter of principle, it cannot be completely "de-ethnicized". Moreover, in the particular case of Québec, it is not desirable to do so either. The new demographic reality brought about by immigration has understandably made it necessary to redefine the nation in more inclusive terms. But the introduction of a civic dimension should not entail the rejection of the identity of the ethnic core, which serves as an essential motivation for the maintenance of French. Any language policy which aims to promote French in Québec but which does not acknowledge that the language is also an important symbol of French Canadian identity thus seems doomed to failure.

That said, the survival of French in Québec also rests on its adoption by new Quebecers as their *lingua franca* for public communications. If the notion of French as a *langue publique commune* is to prove viable, additional sources of

motivation need to be encouraged among new Quebecers in order to reinforce those resulting from language legislation, motivations that are of an integrative or sentimental nature and which are specific to Québec. Time may show that independence is the only sure way of creating the necessary conditions. However, in the meantime, it would be worthwhile seriously considering other possibilities, such as a new "integrationist" model of nation which, within an overall civic framework, recognizes the various ethnic identities of all Quebecers, including that of the majority group, as well as their different ways of relating to French. Conceived in a way which is acceptable to all Quebecers, a Québécois citizenship could constitute the basis of this new model, thereby providing an original strategy for guaranteeing the survival of French in North America.