

# REALITIES AND MYTHS OF LINGUISTIC BARRIERS IN HEALTH CARE

## Vitality challenges facing the English-speaking Communities of Quebec

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*“Montreal is not a bilingual city. Quebec is not a bilingual Quebec “. Employees who deal with the public must be able to address customers correctly in French, “not like what we have right now in downtown Montreal, and not only in Montreal, which is ‘Bonjour-Hi’”. It is great if individuals want to learn different languages like English, Spanish, Mandarin or Arabic in their private lives, but institutions and businesses must function strictly in French. “There is a difference with what is institutional and it must be without mercy”.*

**Diane De Courcy**, Minister of Immigration and Cultural communities, Speech presented at the Conseil du Patronat, Montreal. Reported by Marian Scott, The Gazette, February 24, 2014.

### **Introduction.**

Bonjour, Hi. The three themes developed in this presentation are: 1) the concept of ethnolinguistic vitality; 2) overview of the institutional vitality of the English-speaking communities of Quebec (ESCQ); 3) challenges and prospects for the institutional vitality of the ESCQ.

### **1. The group vitality of langue minorities and majorities**

The notion of group vitality provides a conceptual tool to analyze the socio-structural variables affecting the strength of language minorities and majorities within multilingual societies. The vitality of a language community is defined as ‘that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in multilingual settings’ (Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977). The more vitality a language community enjoys, the more likely it is that it will thrive as a collective entity. Conversely, language communities that have little vitality are more likely to eventually cease to exist as distinctive language groups within a region or state. As can be seen in **Figure 1**, the three pillars of group vitality are demographic, institutional control and status factors. Each factor combine to contribute to the strong, moderate or weak vitality of language minorities and majorities (Harwood, Giles & Bourhis, 1994).

*Demographic* variables are those related to the absolute number of speakers composing the language group and their distribution throughout the urban, regional, or national territory. Number factors refer to the language community's absolute group numbers, their birth rate, mortality rate, age pyramid, endogamy/exogamy, and their patterns of immigration and emigration in and out of the given territory. Distribution factors refer to the numeric concentration of speakers in various parts of the territory, their proportion relative to outgroup speakers, and whether or not the language community still occupies its ancestral territory. These demographic factors can be based on one or a combination of linguistic indicators often found in census data: mother tongue, knowledge of a first (L1) and second (L2) language, L1 and/or L2 language use in private and public settings. Taken together, these indicators can be used to monitor demolinguistic trends such

as language maintenance, language shift and language loss of minority language groups (Bourhis, El-Geledi & Sachdev, 2007).

Figure 1 here: Group vitality

Within democracies, demographics factors constitute a fundamental asset for language minorities as "strength in numbers" can be used as a legitimizing tool to grant language communities with the institutional support they need to foster their development within multilingual societies. A minority with strong demographic vitality can more easily develop and legitimize a strong institutional vitality than a minority with a declining demography. Institutional control is defined as the degree of control one group has over its own fate and that of outgroups and is the dimension of vitality 'par excellence' needed by language groups to maintain their strength relative to competing language groups. The extent to which a language group has gained formal and informal representation in the institutions of a region or country constitutes its institutional support. Informal support refers to the degree to which a language community has organized itself as a pressure group to represent and safeguard its own language interests in various public domains. As seen in Figure 1, formal support refers to the degree to which members of a language group have gained positions of control at decision-making levels in health and social services, education, in government ministries, the judiciary and police, the economy, the mass media and within cultural, sport and religious institutions (Bourhis, Sioufi & Sachdev, 2012).

The presence and quality of leaders who can head the formal and informal institutions representing language groups also contribute to the institutional support of language communities. Gains in institutional support often depend on the emergence of activists and charismatic leaders who succeed in mobilizing language minorities to defend or gain greater institutional support for their community. Taken together, language groups who have gained strong institutional control within public and private institutions are in a better position to safeguard and enhance their collective language and cultural capital than language communities who lack institutional control in these domains.

The *status factors* are those related to a language community's social prestige, its socio-historical status within the state and the prestige of its language and culture locally, nationally and internationally. Language laws adopted by dominant language majorities can bolster or weaken the judicial status of its linguistic minorities while more or less respecting the rights and freedoms of individuals and vulnerable minorities. The more status a language community is ascribed to have, the more vitality it is likely to possess as a collectivity. Social psychological evidence shows that speakers of high status groups enjoy a more positive social identity and can more readily mobilize to maintain or improve their vitality position within the state.

These three dimensions combine to affect in one direction or the other the overall vitality of language minorities and majorities. A language community may be weak on demographic variables but strong on institutional support and status factors resulting in a medium vitality position relative to a language minority weak on all three vitality dimensions (Bourhis & Landry, 2012).

## **2. Group vitality challenges of the English-speaking communities of Quebec (ESCQ).**

We apply the vitality framework to our analysis of the English-speaking communities of Quebec (ESCQ) whose minority status in the Province is declining on the

demographic, institutional and status fronts relative to the dominant Québécois Francophone majority (Bourhis, 2001, 2012; Jedwab, 2004). This decline of the ESCQ is due to a combination of factors including the adoptions of language laws increasing the status of French relative to English, political uncertainty related to the separatist movement, a declining provincial economy and high taxation rate compared to the rest of Canada (ROC) (Johnson & Doucet, 2006; Stevenson, 1999). These factors resulted in the exodus of numerous Quebec Anglophones to the rest of Canada (ROC).

Figure 2 here: Mother tongue population in Quebec.

As can be seen in Figure 2, the percentage French mother tongue population shifted slightly from 80.7% of the Quebec population in 1971 (4,866,000) to 78.9% in 2011 (6,164,545). With rising immigration, the Allophone population of Quebec doubled from 6.3% of the population in 1971 (390,415) to 12.8% in 2011 (1,003,545). In contrast, the English mother tongue population dropped both in absolute and relative numbers declining from 13% of the population in 1971 (789,000) to 8.3% (647,655) in 2011 for a net loss of 141,175 Quebec Anglophones across these four decades. This demographic drop undermined the overall vitality of Anglophone minority especially given that the Quebec Government uses mother tongue (MT) rather than First Official Language (FOL) as the linguistic baseline for crafting its language laws and determining the institutional support it should grant to the Anglophone minority

On the status front, the Quebec Government adopted 11 Language Laws designed to improve the status and use of French relative to English between 1969 and 2013. These language laws were the following: Bill 63 (1969); Bill 22 (1972); Bill 101 (1977); Bill 53 (1983); Bill 142 (1986); Bill 178 (1988); Bill 86 (1993); Bill 40 (1997); Bill 170, 171 (2000); Bill 104 (2002); Bill 115 (2010), proposed Bill 14 (2013). The *Charter of the French Language* (Bill 101) adopted in 1977 was the most important of these laws and increased the overall vitality of the Québécois French majority while reducing the institutional vitality of the English speaking minority (Bourhis, 2001). Over the decades it was the mobilisation of Quebec Anglophones acting as individuals or collectively which attenuated features of Bill 101 which were more damaging for the vitality of the ESCQ (Stevenson, 1999). As seen in the following cases, Bill 101 and related laws have had a major impact on key aspects of the ESCQ institutional vitality over these last decades.

**Official Status & Language of Work.** Bill 101 stipulated that French was the ONLY official language of Quebec. This meant that only the French version of laws and regulations were Official. Following Quebec Anglophone challenge of Bill 101, the Canadian Supreme Court restored French and English as co-official versions of laws in 1979 though other judicial issues remain pending to this day (Foucher, 2012). Bill 101 established that that the public administration used only French as the language of work across all ministries while providing its services in French to all citizens. Organizations and private firms could only communicate and receive services in French from Quebec Government Ministries. However citizens as *individuals* could receive services in English from Provincial ministries upon request.

Bill 101 also stipulated that French was the language of work of all business firms with more than 50 employees and that such firms had to obtain Francization certificate to

operate in the Province. The law also stipulated that all employees had the right to work in French and could not be fired because they lacked knowledge of English, while all customers had the right to be served in French. While Francophone, Anglophone and Allophone employees must work in French in firms of more than 50 employees, smaller businesses of less than 50 employees could also work in languages other than French. In 2013 the Parti Québécois proposed Bill 14 which extended the obligation of French only use to all firms with more than 25 employees in the Province.

**Language of schooling.** As per Bill 101, French is the compulsory language of primary & secondary schooling for all French mother tongue pupils and international immigrants regardless of linguistic background (Mallae, 1984). Quebec Anglophones and siblings have right to English schooling if one parent received most of their schooling in English in Quebec. English Canadians from rest of Canada (ROC) did not have access to English schooling. However a Court challenge of Bill 101 by Quebec Anglophones was won in 1994. This Canadian Supreme court ruling based on Section 23 of the 1982 Constitution granted Anglophones from the ROC the right to English schooling only if one parent received most of their schooling in English. Bill 101 restrictions on access to English schooling contributed to a 53% drop in English school enrollment in Quebec: from 256,000 pupils in 1971 to only 119,000 pupils in 2007 (Bourhis & Foucher, 2012). This enrollment decline contributed to the closing of numerous English school and substantial employment loss for English speaking school teachers and support staff across English school boards of Quebec (Lamarre, 2012). In 2013 the Parti Québécois Bill 14 sought to ban Francophone and Allophone college students from attending the three English language CEGEPS of the Province undermining the future developments of these Colleges.

**Language status of Municipalities.** The Quebec Government has full jurisdiction over the creation, merging and closing of municipalities. All municipalities must provide services in French to all citizens. Most Municipalities in Quebec have French only status and are not allowed to serve their citizens in languages other than French. Some Municipalities were granted bilingual status as 51% of their population had English as a mother tongue as per results of the last Canadian census. Bilingual status Municipalities are allowed to provide services in English to individual citizens upon request, while French services must predominate. Municipal councils can decide to keep their existing bilingual status if its English mother tongue population drops to less than 50%. However, the Parti québécois Bill 14 proposes to automatically demote Municipalities from bilingual status to French only status as soon as its English mother tongue population drops to less than 50% and this regardless of Municipal council opinions.

**Health & Social Services.** All Hospitals and Social Services must provide services in French to the Quebec population. But some health and social service institutions are allowed to provide services in both French and English in officially *recognised* bilingual status institutions. The *recognised* status of a hospital or social service is based on the size of the local English mother tongue population and historical antecedents of such institutions. The Ministry of Health 'Cadre de references' regulation (Quebec 2006) defines a *recognised* bilingual health or social service institution in the following terms :  
« Un établissement reconnu (R) est un établissement qui fournit ses services à des

*personnes en majorité d'une langue autre que le français et qui a obtenu de l'Office québécois de la langue française une reconnaissance en vertu de l'article 29.1 de la Charte de la langue française » (Bill 101). A designated bilingual health or social service institution provides a stronger offer of English language services to Anglophone patients and is defined in the 'Cadre de référence' regulation as : « Un établissement désigné est un établissement que le gouvernement désigne parmi les établissements reconnus. Il s'agit d'un établissement tenu de rendre accessible en langue anglaise aux personnes d'expression anglaise les services de santé et les services sociaux qu'il offre ». The bilingual status of these recognized and designated health institutions are revised every 3 years based on recent Canadian census data and regional realities. In 2010, 42 Health & Social Service institutions enjoyed *Recognized or Designated* bilingual status in Quebec of which 28 were in Montreal. Of the sixteen Administrative regions of the Province nine had one or more designated bilingual institution and eight had none.*

The 'Cadre de référence' also stipulates who can be considered an English patient as follows: « Les personnes d'expressions anglaise sont celles qui, dans leurs relations avec un établissement qui dispense des services de santé ou des services sociaux, se sentent plus à l'aise d'exprimer leurs besoins en langue anglaise et de recevoir les services dans cette langue ». The document also defines what can be considered a health service as being available in English in the following terms: « Un service est accessible en langue anglaise lorsque l'utilisateur peut s'exprimer en langue anglaise et recevoir une réponse adéquate en cette même langue ». Though Quebec Anglophone stakeholders have traditionally had an input in defining these bilingual status regulations, it remains that it is the Québécois Francophone majority which controls the legal status and development of bilingual health and social services institutions across the Province, a vulnerability that can vary depending on the political party in power in the Quebec Government (Carter, 2012).

### **3. Challenges and prospects for the English-speaking communities of Quebec**

The development of the ESCQ is dependent on collaboration across English-speaking institutions in health and social services, primary/secondary education, universities, municipalities, business, cultural, sport and leisure industries and local mass media. It is the combination of these English speaking institutions working together that contributes best to the enduring vitality of the ESCQ. But we find that these English speaking institutions tend to work independently of each other: they often work in silos. Yet, separately, each of these institutions is vulnerable to Quebec government laws which by design or indifference often favour French over English language institutions.

What collective action can be adopted by the ESCQ to resist the piece-meal erosion of English speaking institutions by government laws and decrees? Clearly Bill 101 and other language laws including the proposed Bill 14 are designed to reinforce the vitality of the dominant French language majority while, as collateral damage, further eroding the institutional vitality and status of English speaking minorities. When proposed laws such as Bill 14 undermine the institutional vitality of sectors such as bilingual status municipalities and English language CEGEPS, other English speaking institutions including health and social services need to also mobilise to defend the vulnerable institution singled out by current measures. If English speaking institutions keep working in SILOS, each institutional sector will be eroded one by one over the long term. Health

and social services may have been spared in the proposed Bill 14 but may be undermined in some future government law or decree.

As it turns out the Parti Québécois Government proposed the Charter of Quebec values in September 2013. The Charter proposes to modify the Quebec *Charter of human rights and freedoms* to in effect legislate Muslims, Jews and Sikhs employees to either remove their religious signs at work or be expelled from Quebec state jobs, including the public administration, hospitals, social services, the courts, the police, municipalities, daycares, schools, universities etc. Adoption of the Charter (Bill 60) by the Parti Québécois government is likely after the spring 2014 election. Given the religious, linguistic and cultural diversity of the ESCQ, adoption of the Charter is likely to undermine the capacity of bilingual hospitals, social services and universities to keep and recruit professionals who speak English and have religious convictions other than those of the Catholic Québécois francophone majority.

The English speaking communities of Quebec need horizontal inter-institutional solidarity to resist the erosion of its vitality that comes with being a minority within a majority Francophone environment. It is English speaking communities who can mobilise across inter-institutional lines that can best defend and develop their institutional vitality not only in Montreal but also in the regions. Organisations such as the Quebec Community Group Network (QCGN), the Community Health and Social Services Network (CHSSN) and the English Language Arts Network (ELAN) foster pan-institutional awareness while nurturing the emergence of the leadership needed to face ever changing challenges for the ESCQ (Jedwab & Maynard, 2012).

Quebec Anglophones cannot count on an influx of English-speaking migrants from the rest of Canada to settle in Quebec. French language requirements in public and private sector jobs, a declining economy as well as linguistic and political tensions succeeded in removing Quebec as a desirable province of settlement for many Anglophone and Allophone Canadians from the ROC. How much help from the Federal government is possible for vulnerable ESCQ institutional vitality? Analysts suggest that Bill 101 designed to improve the status and use of French relative to English undermined support for the separatist cause by making soft nationalist more secure about the vitality of their own language and cultural community. Ultimately, the erosion of the demographic and institutional vitality of the minority ESCQ following the adoption of pro-French language laws was a small price to pay to preserve Canadian Unity especially during 1980 and 1995 sovereignty referendum. The federal government cannot be seen to openly support the institutional vitality of the ESCQ as Quebec nationalist will use such '*intrusions*' in Quebec affairs as another political tool to mobilise for the separatist cause. Federalist intrusions to help English speaking minorities of Quebec may cost votes for federalist parties, especially amongst the Québécois francophone majority. It is also understood that federal action in support of the ESCQ minority in Quebec does not win votes in the ROC. Given the political cost of openly supporting the ESCQ at both the provincial and federal levels, English-speaking minorities of Quebec often feel isolated when it comes time to defend or develop their institutional vitality. Thus the need for the ESCQ to mobilise *collectively* across institutional sectors is crucial despite the temptation to exit the Quebec provincial challenge by migrating as *individuals* to the security of English majority provinces in the rest of Canada.

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Figure 1: Group vitality

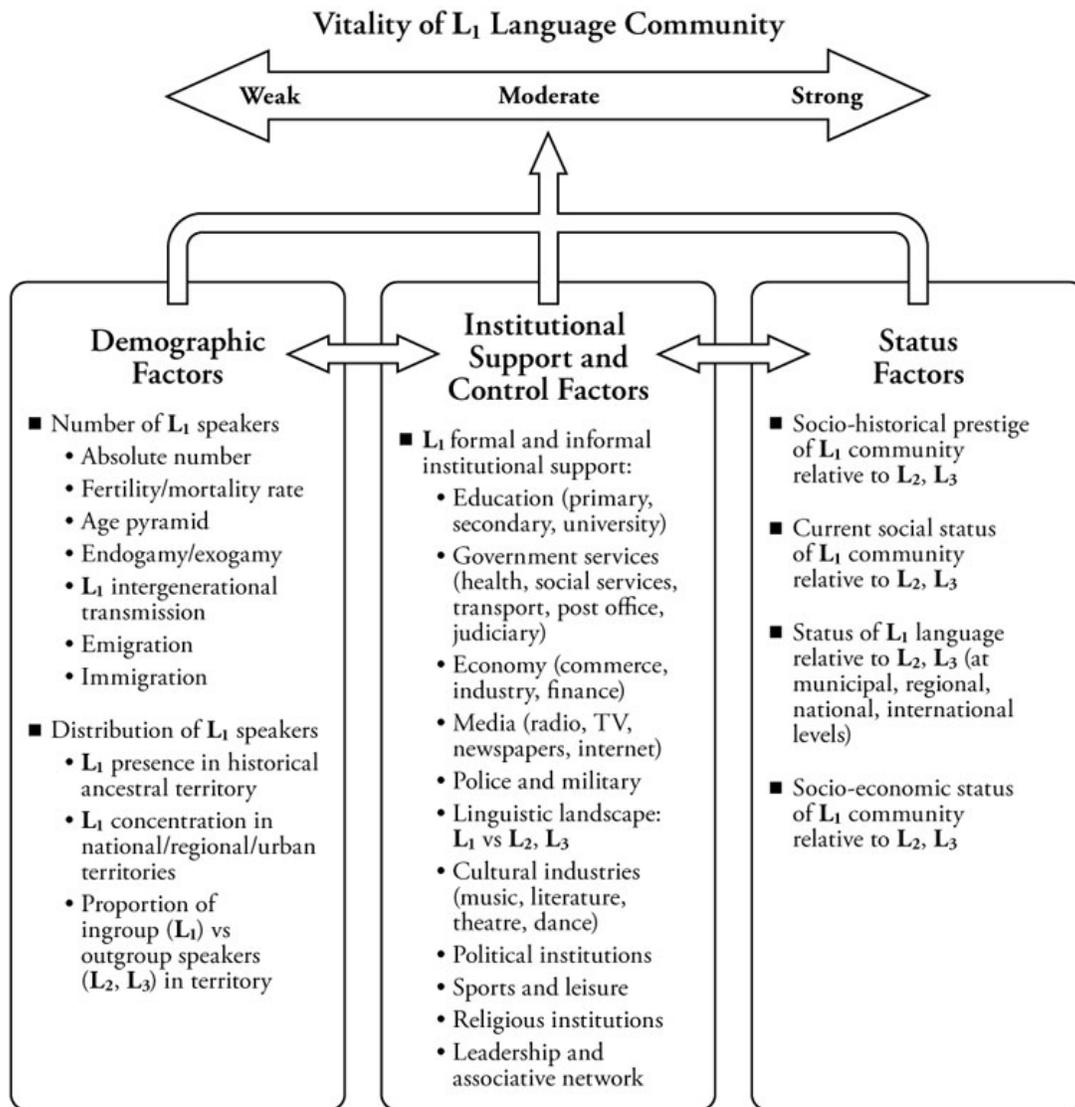


Figure 1: Demographic, Institutional support and status factors constituting the vitality of the in-group language community (L1) in contact with out-group language communities (L2,L3). Adapted from Bourhis, 2001; Giles, Bourhis & Taylor, 1977.

Figure 2: Mother tongue population in Quebec.

