Official Languages Policy in Canada

Language Choice of Bilingual Public Servants

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The main objective of this thesis is to analyze the language choice made by bilingual public servants in Canada, and to clarify the factors which govern their choice. The data was collected by a questionnaire survey which I conducted in 10 federal government institutions in the National Capital Region. The focus of my study is on the language use in a work environment which is "planned" by language policy. I take particular interest in how bilingual Anglophones and Francophones actually use English and French, the two official languages of Canada with equal legal status, but with unequal strength in virtually all aspects of social life.

This thesis is basically divided into two parts. Part I, which gives an overview of the official language policy of Canada, serves as a basic introduction to the empirical study demonstrated in Part II.

Chapter 1, which precedes Part I, clarifies the viewpoint of my study and provides an overview of the previous studies undertaken in some related fields.

Chapter 2, the first chapter of Part I, demonstrates the predominance of English over French from three aspects—internationality, language maintenance among Canadian citizens, and language contact between English and French. In Chapter 3, the language situation of Canada is analyzed in great detail with the data from the Canadian census. Chapter 4 describes, historically and legally, how the Canadian official languages policy came into effect and how it has developed into the present system. Chapter 5 describes the regulations concerning the language use of federal public servants in their workplace and examines whether or not these regulations are actually observed by them. The last chapter in Part I, Chapter 6, describes how the official language policy affects the Canadian society in general.

My questionnaire survey, described in Part II, aims at analyzing the language choice made by bilingual Anglophones and Francophones in various settings in the workplace, which I call "subdomains". The linguistic composition of the 10 institutions which I surveyed is also taken into
account to see, for example, if the tendency of language choice in institutions where Anglophones are over-represented differs from those where Francophones are over-represented. The method of my survey is described in Chapter 7, the first chapter of Part II.

In my analysis, I often refer to the following 4 categories of mutual language choices which may occur in a conversation between a bilingual Anglophone and a bilingual Francophone. They are defined as “accommodation to English” (=both speak in English), “accommodation to French” (=both speak in French), “passive bilingualism” (=the Anglophone speaks in English and the Francophone speaks in French) and “hyperaccommodation” (=the Anglophone speaks in French and the Francophone speaks in English). In Chapter 8, I describe the general tendency of the language choices made by the respondents of the questionnaire by processing the data in the form of “overall index” by each individual and by each subdomain.

Then, in Chapter 9, detailed analysis of the data from each question in the questionnaire is presented. The qualitative analysis based on the interviews with some public servants and my observation during the research, presented in Chapter 10, supports some of the findings from Chapter 9. Chapter 11 wraps up all the analyses and offers some discussion regarding language policy and language use.

The major findings from my questionnaire survey and my observation may be summarized as follows:

- In general, the predominance of English is stronger in institutions where Anglophones are over-represented. In institutions where Francophones are over-represented, both English and French tend to be used.
- Bilingual Francophones overwhelmingly use English in a one-to-one communication with bilingual Anglophones. This tendency is the strongest in institutions where Anglophones are over-represented. Bilingual Anglophones working in institutions where Francophones are over-represented tend to use French more than English in a one-to-one communication with bilingual Francophones.
- The subdomain in which both Anglophones and Francophones tend to use English the most is “Meetings in which Anglophones are the majority”.
- The subdomain in which balanced use of English and French is observed the most is “Formal e-mails (for wide distribution)”. Approximately 70% of the respondents report to write formal e-mails for wide distribution in both official languages.
- Bilingual Francophones have a strong tendency to use English in communications with bilingual Anglophones in the following subdomains in which efficiency is crucial: “Talking about work-related issues (with technical terms)” and “Informal e-mails to bilingual Anglophones”. Bilingual Anglophones, on the other hand, tend to use French in the following subdomains, in which efficiency is not an important matter: “Beginning of a conversation (when one knows that the listener is a bilingual Francophone)” and “Talking about non-work related (private) issues”.
- Anglophones working in institutions where Francophones are over-represented tend to have a good command of the French language. They tend to use French often in the following subdomains in which good command of the other official language is essential: “Talking about work-related issues (with technical terms)”, “Informal e-mails to bilingual Francophones”,

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and "Formal e-mails (for limited distribution)".

- Code-switching is quite often conducted in conversations between bilingual Anglophones and bilingual Francophones. The frequency of the switches from the first official language (OL1) to the second official language (OL2) is conspicuous among Francophones. 60% of them report to switch to English from French "often", "usually" or "always".

- "Passive Bilingualism does not occur frequently but is most often observed in institutions where Francophones are over-represented.

- "Hyperaccommodation" rarely occurs, but if it occurs, it is likely to be observed in some subdomains in institutions where Francophones are over-represented.

- 1 out of 10 Francophones reports to speak in English with Francophones "often", "usually" or "always".

- Some Francophones are observed to willingly use English more than French as the language of work.

- Many anglophones who are in managerial positions or intend to seek promotion, are observed to make efforts to speak French in their workplace.

- In institutions where Francophones are over-represented, informal e-mails and formal e-mails (for limited distribution) are observed to be written with inter-sentential code-switches and intra-sentential code-switches.

In concluding, I argue that even though equal status is given to the two languages, whose strength is socially unequal, a situation in which both languages are used equally is difficult to create, as the attractive force is constantly working towards efficiency of communication. However, in an environment where language use is "planned" by language policy, a counter force also works, which endeavors to create a balanced use of the two languages. In a "planned" language environment, the members who belong to the predominant language group are observed to speak the other language, which is not a common linguistic phenomenon in a "natural" language environment.