LANGUAGE POLICY AND THE PRODUCTION OF E-MAILS

— a case study at Canadian Government Institutions —

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Purpose of the study

◇ To examine how e-mails are written in a language-policy governed workplace.

◇ Emphasis on some code-switching examples.

"Why e-mails?"

-Since the latter half of 1990's, e-mails have become a popular medium for communication in many domains of modern societies.

- In the workplace, the use of e-mails is essential for communication within the institution.

The Japanese Journal of Language and Society

Special Issue: Linguistic Science in e-Society

Hasida (2001)

-Pointed out the influence of the development

of information technology on the studies of language and communication.

→Emphasized the importance of "Linguistic

science in e-society".

Yazu (2005/2008)

- methodology: questionnaire survey
- place of research: 10 departments and agencies in the National Capital Region of Canada (Ottawa and Hull)
- targeted subjects: <u>bilingual</u> federal public servants

    ---results of the 2nd official language test

    →at least "BBB" (comprehension, writing, speaking)

    A=low, B=intermediate, C=advanced

- number of questionnaires distributed: 320 copies

    →265 copies collected (return rate: 83%)

    valid copies= 253 (113 anglophones, 140 francophones)

Linguistic composition of the institutions in which the research was conducted

a>f	a=f	a<f
Anglophones over-represented (a:75%+ ╱ f:-25%)	Balanced proportion of anglophones and francophones (a:59-75%╱ f:25-41%)	Francophones over-represented (a:-59% ╱ f:41%+)
-Fisheries and Ocean -Health Canada -Western Economic Development Agency -Atlantic Economic Development Agency	-Human Resources -Public Works and Government Services -Industry Canada	-Heritage Canada -Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages -Tax Court

Official Languages Act （1988）
Part Ⅴ　Language of Work

"English and French are the languages of work in all federal institutions, and officers and employees of all federal institutions have the right to use either official language in accordance with this Part." (Section 34)

"Every federal institution has the duty to ensure that….

work environments of the institution are conducive to the effective use of both official languages and accommodate the use of either official language by its officers and employees…" (Section 35)

Yazu (2005/2008)

Contents of the Questionnaire : language choice asked….

-When initiating a conversation
   addressee=don't know if anglophone or francophone (Q1)
                  =bilingual (Q2), =supervisor (Q3)
-When responding (Q4-7)
-Perception of language choice (Q8)
-When having difficulty expressing oneself in the 2nd official
   language (Q13)
-When topic is work-related (Q9)
 When topic is non-work-related (Q10)
-When speaking with colleague of the same language group
   (Q14)
-Frequency of code-switching (Q11, Q12)
-When sending e-mails (Q15)
-At meetings (Q16)
-Perception of Passive Bilingualism (Q17)

Colley & Todd (2002)

"(one-to-one) forms of electronic communication have a relatively informal style: they use more casual lexicon, they are less carefully edited than traditional written forms and they have developed their own stylistic features. Linguistically, e-mail bears resemblance both to writing and to speech: for example, the underlying social dynamics are those of writing, whereas the lexical and stylistic properties more closely resemble speech."

Yazu (2005/2008)
:questions regarding e-mails and language policy

Formal e-mails (& paper-based documents)

(1)documents for wide distribution

→must be in both official languages

(2)documents or working papers for limited distribution

→may be written in only one official language, provided that the principle of alteration is respected

Informal e-mails (one-to-one basis) →no language policy

(3)to a colleague whose OL1 is different

(4)to a colleague whose OL1 is the same

Treasury Board, Policy of Official Language, Glossary (2003) Definition:

- First official language (OL1) -The official language with which an employee has a primary personal identification.

- Second official language (OL2) -The official language which is not the OL1.

- Anglophone -Any person, of whatever ethnic origin or mother tongue, whose OL1 is English.

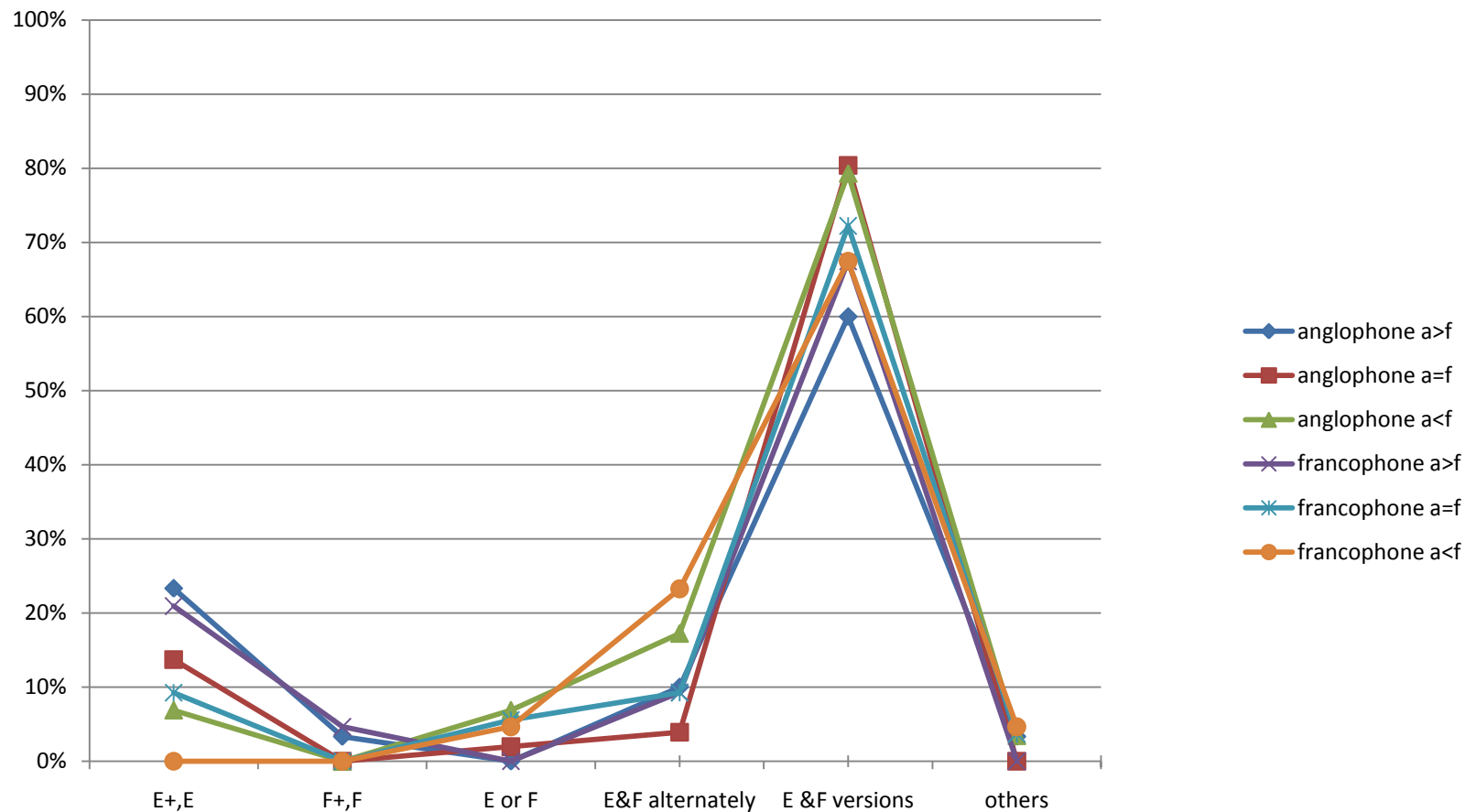- Francophone -Any person, of whatever ethnic origin or mother tongue, whose OL1 is French.

(1)Formal e-mails for wide distribution policy

(La version française suit.)

English version

French version

"How do you write formal e-mail messages intended for wide distribution?"

(2) Formal e-mails for limited distribution
recommended ways of writing

- English version & French version   (same as (1))

- English & French paragraphs alternately

SUBJECT: A NEWCOMER IN HUMAN RESOURCES / *DU NOUVEAU AUX RESSOURCES HUMAINES*

I would like to announce that Ms.**** joined the Human Resources on Tuesday, October 15, as our Junior Human Resources Advisor.
À ce titre, elle viendra nous prêter main forte au regard de la classification et de certains dossiers liés aux ressources humaines. Elle nous arrive de Service correctionel du Canada.
Please note that she will be located in Room *** and you can reach her at ***-****. Effective November 4, she will be located in Room ***.
Je suis sur que vous vous joignez à moi pour souhaiter la bienvenue à notre nouvelle conseillère en ressources humaines.
I would like to take this opportunity to congratulate our new colleague on her term deployment and to wish her much success in her new responsibilities.
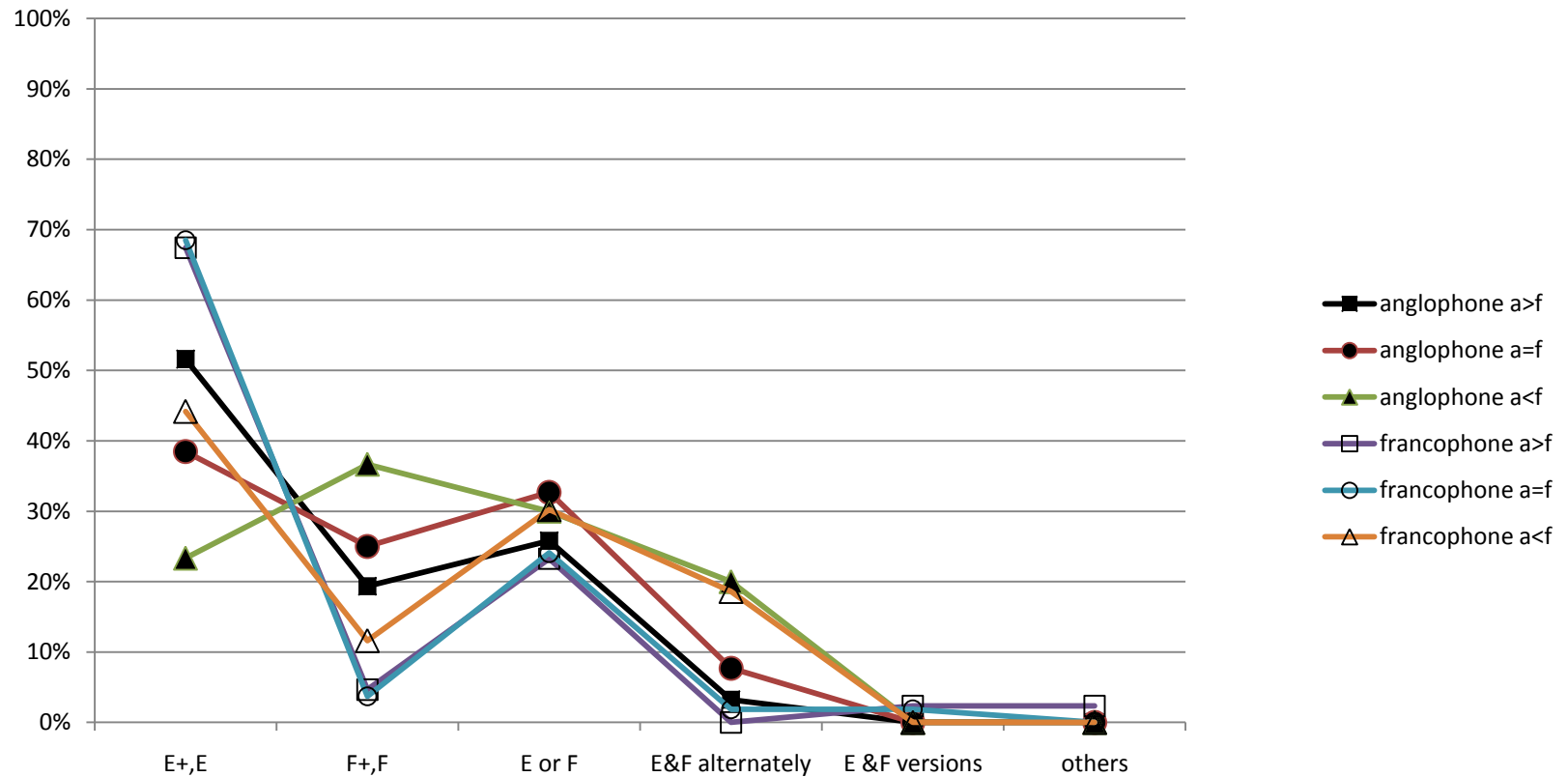Welcome aboard *****! / Bienvenue *****!

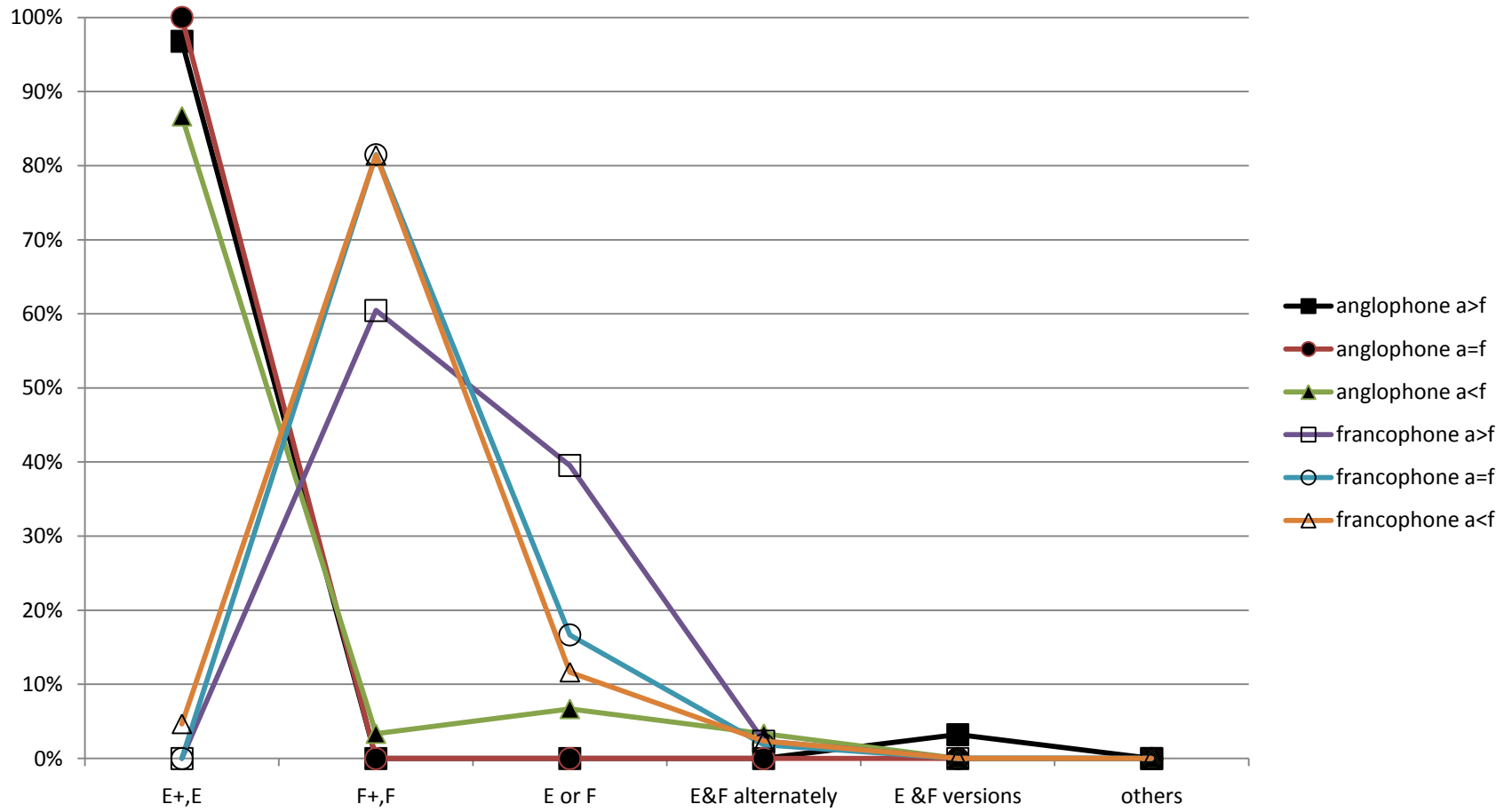# "How do you write formal e-mail messages intended for limited distribution? "
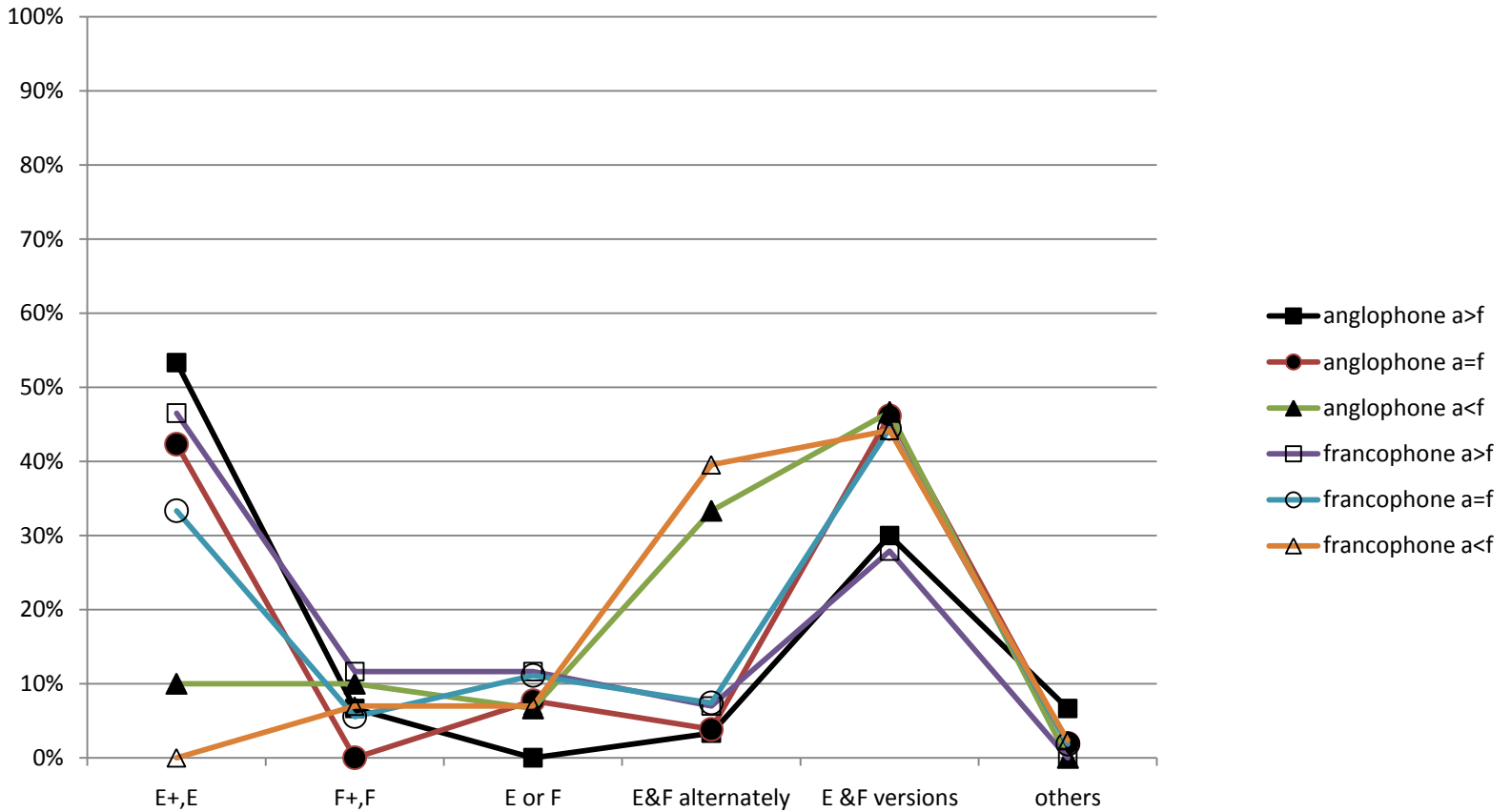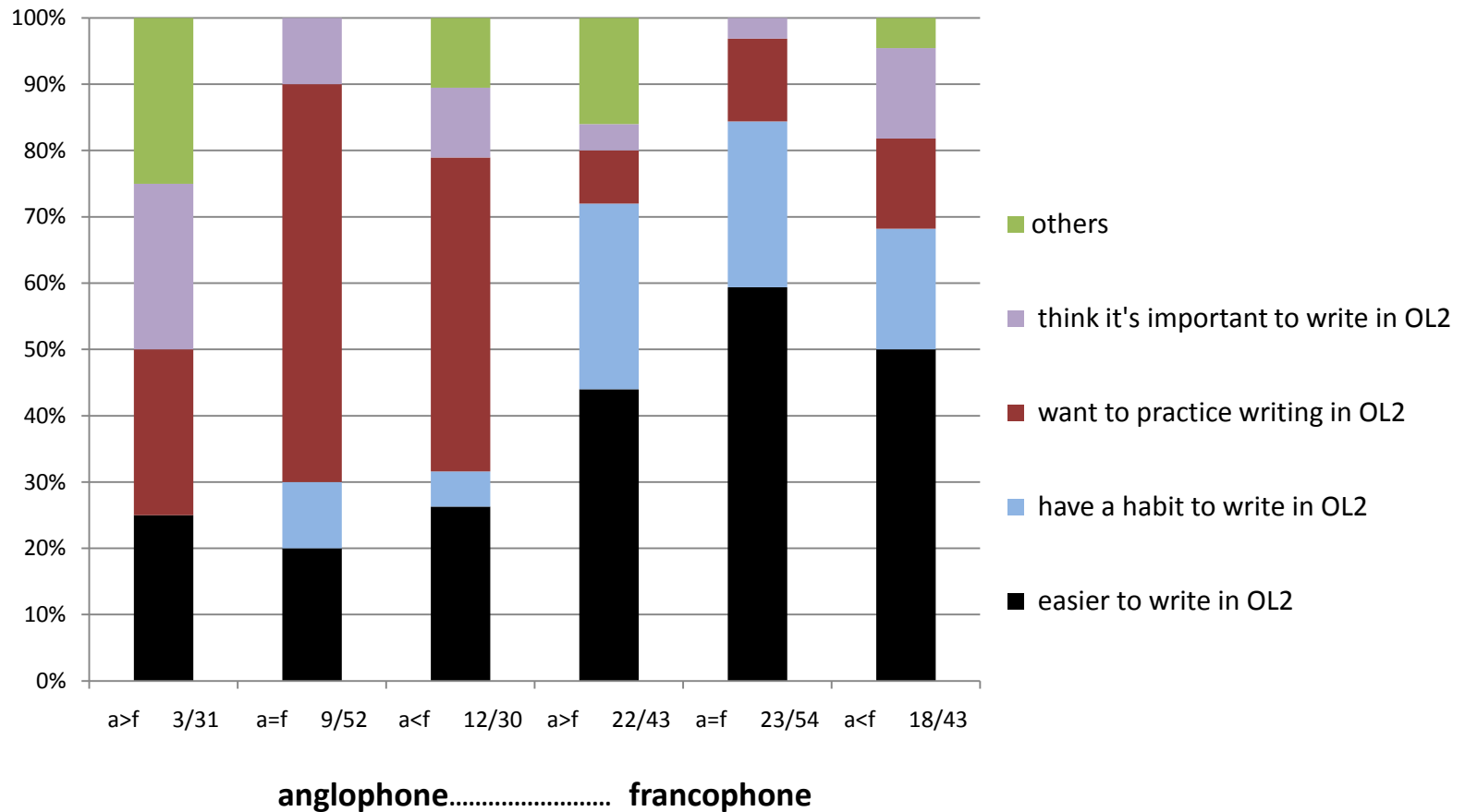
Informal e-mails   no policy

 (3)"How do you write informal e-mails on a one-to-one basis to a colleague whose OL1 is different from yours?"

# (4)"How do you write informal e-mails on a one-to-one basis to a colleague whose OL1 is the same as yours?"

"If you ever send an informal e-mail message in OL2 to a colleague whose OL1 is the same as yours on a one-to-one basis, why and in what situation?"

Proportion of anglophones and francophones in the public service:

---------67% anglophones, 32% francophones

2nd official language ability of federal public servants in NCR
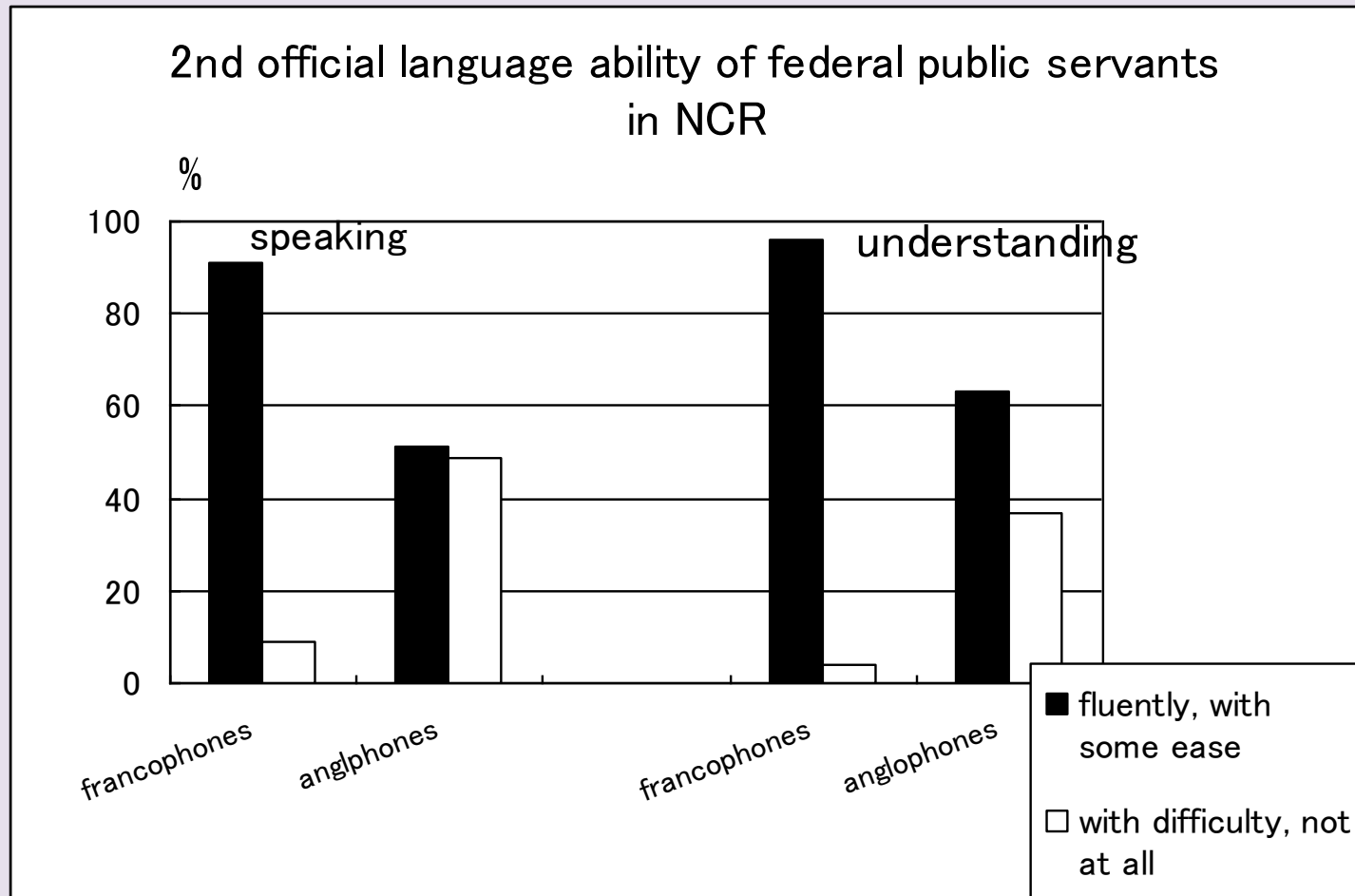
Some examples of informal e-mail messages written by highly bilingual public servants:

-intra-sentential & inter-sentential code-switching
(English / French)

SUBJECT: Jeu de cartes – United Way

As some of you may know by now, M*** G*** a réussi deux ans de suite à me dépasser dans la distribution des cartes. This year It's my turn! Alors je compte sur chacun et chacune de vous – même si je ne suis pas là les mercredis, ne vous laisser pas tentés par M*** qui va vous faire du charme et sûrement essayer de vous "acheter" avec ses merveilleuses sucreries.....

SUBJECT: Appreciation / Appréciation

Hello everybody!

J'aimerais simplement vous remercier toutes et tous pour votre aide et votre bonne collaboration reliées à l'organisation de l'arrivée des nouveaux membres du personnel de la DGE. C'est grandement apprécié. Most of these employees told me that they were quite impressed with how much we were organized!

Y***: Pourrais-tu envoyer ce message aux personnes que j'aurais oublié, s.t.p.?

Thanks again gang et bon après-midi!

SUBJECT: collectif gestion de l'info (Document link not converted)

jeudi matin is OK for me but S*** is on holidays until Monday…

General conclusions

- A great majority (more than 70%) of both anglophones and francophones know and practice the policy toward "formal e-mails for wide distribution."

  →With firm regulations, language policy tends to be observed.

- Although two bilingual ways of writing are recommended for "formal e-mails for limited distribution," English is used especially in institutions where anglophones are over-represented.

  →With ambiguous regulations, the dominant language tends to prevail (except for institutions where the dominant group is under-represented.)

- In institutions where francophones are over-represented, both anglophones and francophones tend to write in English and French alternately more often than other groups when writing "formal e-mails for limited distribution" and "informal e-mails to a colleague whose OL1 is different."

→In general, many anglophones' OL2 ability is lower than that of francophones, but highly bilingual anglophones are concentrated in a<f institutions where both English and French tend to be used as the language of work.

- It is inferred that highly bilingual public servants tend to write informal e-mails using intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching.

→More data needed to prove this point.

-----Further research could also be conducted in a natural linguistic environment free of language policy.

Thank you!

References

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