

# “English, French or Both?” — Electronic Communication of Bilingual Federal Public Servants in Canada—

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## **Abstract**

This paper examines how language choice is made in electronic communication by bilingual employees working in government institutions in the National Capital Region of Canada where language policy is in effect. Different types of electronic communication will first be identified and the guidelines for each of these types will be examined. Based on the results of a questionnaire survey, this paper will then discuss how the two official languages, English and French, given equal status by law, are actually used in electronic communication by the people subject to the Official Languages Policy.

## **1. Introduction**

Electronic communication has rapidly become widespread in modern societies since the mid 1990's. The use of e-mails with computers and cell phones is nowadays an essential medium of communication not only in private domains but also in the workplace. In offices, when work has to be done with colleagues, e-mails are usually used in the initial contact, the elaboration and finalization of the working document before the paper-based final document is produced. It is often the case that some work is accomplished only with the use of e-mails.

Studies on electronic communication in the field of sociolinguistics have proliferated in the past decade. For instance, *The Japanese Journal of Language and Society*, a Japanese sociolinguistics periodical, published a special issue in 2001 entitled “Linguistic Science in e-Society.” In the prefatory note, Hasida points out the influence of the development of information technology on the studies of linguistic communication and emphasized the importance of the studies in this field. He identified the following eight detailed themes regarding this field:

- corpus-based language studies
- language behavior in electronic communication

- sociolinguistic studies of computer literacy
- information care as practice of sociolinguistic studies
- language education in e-society
- relation between public information and language studies
- sociolinguistic recommendations to electronic governments
- language governance and language policy in e-society

(Hasida 2001:1)

Among these themes, Hasida observes that although corpus-based language studies and studies on language behavior in electronic communication have seen some development, studies on electronic communication related to language education, electronic governments and language policy have yet to be developed (Hasida 2001:3). In fact, a number of studies that took up electronic communication have come out in the aforementioned periodical since the publication of the special issue<sup>1</sup>. Having reviewed previous studies, however, I have yet to encounter literature on electronic communication related to language policy.

This paper examines the language choice made by bilingual people in electronic communication in a language policy governed workplace. This is part of my study based on a questionnaire survey on language choice of bilingual federal public servants of Canada in various work settings (Yazu 2005/2008) conducted in the National Capital Region of Canada.

Having declared English and French as the two official languages of the nation with the enactment of the Official Languages Act of 1969, Canada enshrined the equality of these two official languages in the Constitution of 1982. The revised Official Languages Act enacted in 1988 sets out a policy regarding the “language of work” among federal public servants as follows:

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. (Official Languages Act 1988, Section 34)

In regions designated as bilingual for the purposes of language of work<sup>2</sup>, federal public servants may use the official language of their choice, as stated above, and “a balanced use of English and French” is encouraged. With regard to electronic communication, which this paper focuses on, guidelines regulated by the policy for written communications apply. In this paper, different types of electronic communications will be identified and the guidelines for each of these types will be

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<sup>1</sup> To mention a few, Mark (2001) wrote a paper entitled “A Parallel Learner Corpus : Using Computers in a Humanistic Approach to Language Teaching and Research,” Sasahara(2002) wrote “Characteristics of and the Influence of Orthography on Cell-phone E-mail” and Arakawa et al. (2006) wrote “Emails with Emoticons Received from Friends.”

<sup>2</sup> These regions are the National Capital Region, northern and eastern Ontario, New Brunswick, Montreal, and some parts of the Eastern Townships, of Gaspé, and of the Outaouais in Quebec.

examined. Then the language choice made by bilingual **anglophones** and bilingual **francophones**<sup>3</sup> will be analyzed – “English, French or both?”

My attention is directed to how the two languages, given equal status by law, are actually used by the people subject to language policy, when these two languages have asymmetric strength in the society. In the case of Canada, English is overwhelmingly the dominant language both demolinguistically and socially compared with French, not only in federal government institutions but also in the whole Canadian society except for the province of Quebec<sup>4</sup>.

## 2. Survey Method

My questionnaires were distributed in 10 federal government institutions<sup>5</sup>, the selection of which was based on the size (number of employees) and the proportion of anglophones and francophones in each institution. Anglophones received the English version and francophones received the French version of the questionnaire. Of the 320 copies distributed, 265 were completed and returned, constituting a high return rate of 82.8%, among which 253 were valid-----113 from the anglophones and 140 from the francophones. The respondents of the questionnaires in my study were identified as “bilingual” by the coordinator of official languages in the institutions where my questionnaire survey was conducted<sup>6</sup>.

The questionnaire questions were designed to examine the language choice of federal public servants in various settings in the workplace, which I refer to as “subdomains<sup>7</sup>.” 17 of them were identified and presented as questions in the following categories: when initiating a conversation (3 questions), when responding (4 questions), when the topic is work related or non-work related (2 questions), when having difficulty expressing oneself in the second official language (OL2) (1 question), when speaking with a bilingual colleague whose first official language (OL1) is the same as that of the speaker (1 question), when writing e-mails (4 questions) and when attending meetings

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<sup>3</sup> The Canadian federal government defines the terms “anglophone” and “francophone” as follows: **Anglophone : English-speaking person** - Any person, of whatever ethnic origin or mother tongue, whose first official language is English, **Francophone : French-speaking person** - Any person, of whatever ethnic origin or mother tongue, whose first official language is French. (Treasury Board of Canada, 2003, Policy on Official Languages, Chapter 6-1-Glossary)

<sup>4</sup> If we take a look at the whole Canadian population, approximately 68% are anglophones (English-speaking) and 23% are francophones (French-speaking). Most anglophones speak only English, and those who are bilingual in English and French comprise only 17.4% of the total population of Canada, most of whom are francophones (2006 Census, Statistics Canada). Quebec is the only province with a majority of francophones. They comprise 83% of the population of Quebec.

<sup>5</sup> These 10 institutions were the Fisheries and Ocean, Health Canada, Western Economic and Diversification, Atlantic Canada Opportunities Agency, Human Resources Development Canada, Public Works and Government Services, Industry Canada, Heritage Canada, Office of the Commissioner of Official Language and Tax Court.

<sup>6</sup> The selection of the respondents for my survey was based on the results of their second official language test. The employees were required to have at least an intermediate level (B level) in speaking to participate in my survey. It turned out, however, that the second official language proficiency of the francophone respondents was much higher than that of my anglophone respondents. With regard to their speaking ability, 83.6% of my francophone respondents reported to have attained the C (advanced) or the E (highly advanced) level, whereas this percentage was 63.3% for my anglophone respondents.

<sup>7</sup> Chien, in her study on language choice in Taiwan, categorized, for example, her ‘public places’ domain into what she called ‘subdomains’ such as ‘talking to superiors,’ ‘talking to classmates,’ ‘at a government (municipal) office,’ ‘at a hospital,’ ‘at a store (small business)’ and ‘at a department store’ (Chien 2002).

(2 questions).

With regard to the questions on e-mails, I first roughly divided the type of electronic communications into two categories-“formal” and “informal.” This dichotomy does not necessarily correspond to the distinction between work related e-mails and non-work related e-mails. Although “formal” e-mails could be identified as work related in content, “informal” e-mails could be both work related and non-work related. Having examined various types of electronic communications in the workplace, I distinguished the following four types of electronic communications as the target of analysis:

- formal e-mails intended for a larger distribution than one’s work unit
- formal e-mails to a group of colleagues within one’s work unit
- informal e-mails to a bilingual colleague on a one-to-one basis whose first official language<sup>8</sup> is different from one’s own
- informal e-mails to a bilingual colleague on a one-to-one basis whose first official language is the same as one’s own

The last question was added since it was pointed out by some francophone public servants I interviewed during the elaboration of questions in my questionnaire survey that francophones sometimes e-mail each other in English. I considered this question worthy of being included in my study.

The following sections are composed of the description of the policy and guidelines regarding the different types of e-mails and the results of the questionnaire survey along with some example e-mails. The e-mail messages that appear in the following sections were forwarded to me by some public servants with whom I became acquainted in the government institutions where I had the opportunity to stay and observe the language situation.

### **3. Guidelines for different types of e-mails and Survey Results**

#### **3.1. Formal E-mails Intended for a Larger Distribution than one’s Work Unit**

In bilingual regions, formal e-mails intended for a larger distribution than one’s work unit including nation-wide distribution, considered the most formal, are subject to the following policy regarding written communications:

When working papers are distributed for consultation or discussion, they should be in both official languages when the distribution is country-wide or in bilingual regions when the employees consulted are from both linguistic groups. The availability of working papers in both official languages is justified when they are nearly finalized, and when the final version

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<sup>8</sup> **First official language (OL1)** is defined as “the official language with which an employee has a primary personal identification - that is, the official language in which a person is generally more proficient” (Treasury Board of Canada, 2003).

is intended for distribution in both official languages. (Treasury Board, 1993/2004)

It is thus strictly stipulated that the most formal e-mails must be written in both official languages. Further, it is stipulated that “when a bilingual communication is made nation-wide, the English language must appear first and the French language second” (Canadian Heritage, 2001, p.4). However, “when a bilingual communication is made only inside a given province or territory, the language of the majority of the province or territory determines the order of presentation” (Canadian Heritage, *ibid*, p.4). This means that French precedes English in communications in Quebec, a province where francophones are the majority, and reverse in the other provinces and territories, where anglophones are the majority.

Do the public servants abide by this policy, or even know it? With this in mind, I asked the respondents the following question in my questionnaire survey: “How do you write an e-mail at work when sending a formal e-mail message intended for a larger distribution than your work unit?” Figure 1 shows the results.

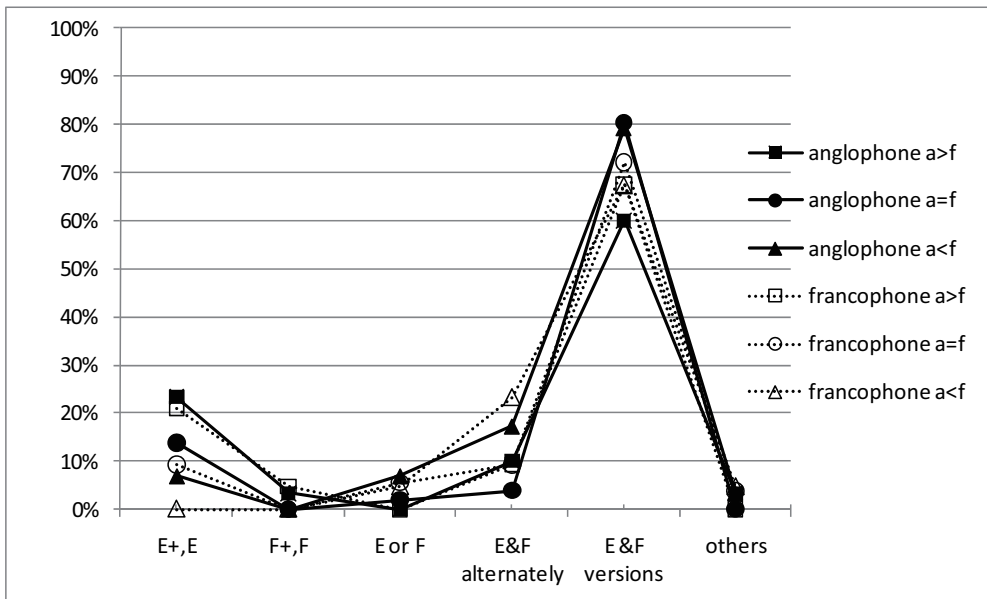


Figure 1: Language choice when sending a formal e-mail message intended for a larger distribution than one’s work unit

\*description of choices for answers

E+, E: in English only / mostly

F+, F: in French only / mostly

E or F: either in English or French, depending on the situation

E & F alternately: in both English and French, alternating by paragraphs

E & F versions: write both the English version and the French version of the same content

Figure 1, along with the other figures in the following sections, breaks down the anglophones and francophones into 3 groups respectively according to the linguistic composition of the institutions: those working in institutions in which anglophones are over-represented ( $a > f$ ), those in which francophones are over-represented ( $a < f$ ), and also those in which the proportion of anglophones and francophones is quite balanced ( $a = f$ )<sup>9</sup>. It was inferred, and also pointed out in various government studies, that in institutions where anglophones were over-represented ( $a > f$ ), English was extremely dominant, whereas in those where francophones were over-represented ( $a < f$ ), English was not as dominant. Thus the proportion of anglophones and francophones in each institution was an important factor in the analysis of my data.

The results of figure 1, however, do not show much difference among the above categorized groups. An average of approximately 70% of both anglophones and francophones report to send formal e-mail messages intended for a large distribution in both English and French versions of the same content. It could be said that a great majority of my respondents, who were identified as bilingual, know and abide by the language policy regarding this type of e-mails.

Scrutinizing the differences among the groups, however, we can observe that over 20% of anglophones and francophones working in institutions in which anglophones are over-represented ( $a > f$ ) chose « English only (E+) and English mostly (E) », which is much higher than the other groups. As for the anglophones in this group, only 60% of them chose « both English and French versions (E & F versions) », which is lower than the other groups. Also, a considerable number of anglophones and francophones in institutions in which francophones are over-represented ( $a < f$ ) report to write them in English and French alternately by paragraphs, which is a way that could only be understood by bilingual employees.

### **3.2. Formal E-mails Intended for Distribution within one's Work Unit**

Unlike the formal written documents and e-mails distributed widely, the policy and guidelines are not strictly regulated for formal written documents and e-mails intended for limited distribution. The guidelines issued by the Treasury Board read :

Written communications within a federal institution, or between federal institutions, must reflect the equality of status of both official language. It is the final use of written communications that determines whether or not they should be produced in both official languages, or in one or the other alternately.

Documents may be distributed in only one official language for consultation, especially when the distribution is limited, provided that the above-mentioned principle of alternation is respected. (Treasury Board, 1993/2004)

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<sup>9</sup> The average proportion of anglophones and francophones in each institution was 69.0% for the anglophones and 31.0% for the francophones (Treasury Board 2002a).

It is thus suggested that formal written documents and e-mails intended for limited distribution do not have to be written in both official languages. It is not clear, however, what the “final use of written communications” is that “determines whether or not they should be produced in both official languages, or in one or the other alternately.” Also ambiguous is the way the documents could be “distributed in only one official language” when the “principle of alternation” must be respected. The guidelines on language of work issued by one institution that I visited during my research elaborated on the Treasury Board guidelines as follows :

The writer and his supervisor should allow common sense to guide their decision as to whether a document should be translated. If the writer and his supervisor decide that it is not necessary to circulate the consultative document in both official languages, the writer should prepare a covering memo informing those being consulted of that decision and giving reasons for this decision. (Canadian Heritage, 2001, p.6)

The guidelines of this institution, referring to the “common sense” of the persons involved, are also ambiguous as to the factors that determine whether the written communication should be prepared in both official languages, in one language only or in the two languages alternately. Moreover, the way to write “in the two languages alternately” is not specified in the guidelines.

Although the guidelines for formal written documents and e-mails intended for limited distribution are ambiguous, each institution carries out their own practice under the direction of the official languages coordinator of each institution. During my research, some employees in the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages indicated the following two ways of writing formal e-mails intended for distribution within one’s work unit:

- prepare the same content in both official languages
- write alternately in English and French ensuring equal proportion of the two languages

Having interviewed some coordinators of official languages in the institutions I visited, I learned that the above two ways are recommended to write e-mails for distribution within one’s work unit. Furthermore, it was pointed out that documents of great importance tend to be prepared in both official languages. Both versions are usually prepared by the same person, but in cases where the person’s second official language proficiency is not sufficient, this person would consult a highly bilingual colleague or send the document to the editorial services<sup>10</sup>. The following examples are some e-mail messages that were forwarded to me:

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<sup>10</sup> I found in my study that the employees working in the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages mostly had high second language proficiency (Yazu 2005/2008). Therefore the same person would usually write both English and French in this institution.

E-mail example 1)

A formal e-mail message: the same content written in both official languages

(The French version is shown in *italics*.)

Subject: Office Refit-*Réaménagement des locaux*

*(La version française suit.)*

This week, we made significant progress by completing the tendering process and awarding the contracts for all the mechanical, electrical and architectural work. A meeting of all the companies involved will take place next week and the proposed schedule of work will be finalized...at last! A separate contract is being prepared for the informatics laboratory and it will be awarded next Monday. Once awarded, the laboratory will begin its construction, which is expected to take 10 days to complete. In addition, the mechanical electronic work will begin next week...

Please do not hesitate to contact me, should you need additional information.

*Cette semaine, d'importants progrès ont été réalisés par la clôture du processus d'appel d'offres et l'octroi des contrats pour tous les travaux mécaniques, électriques et architecturaux. Une réunion de toutes les compagnies impliquées aura lieu la semaine prochaine et le calendrier proposé des travaux sera finalisé...enfin! Un contrat distinct est en préparation pour le laboratoire informatique; il sera octroyé lundi. Débutera alors la construction de laboratoire, qui durera quelque 10 jours. Toujours la semaine prochaine, les travaux mécaniques et électriques commenceront...*

*N'hésitez pas à communiquer avec moi pour tout le renseignement additionnel.*

The above e-mail message was written by an anglophone employee. When both versions are prepared, I observed that the text written in their first official language appears first.

The next example is an e-mail message written in English and French alternately.

E-mail example 2)

A formal e-mail message written alternately in English and French

(The parts written in French are shown in *italics*.)

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

I would like to announce that Ms. L\*\*\*C\*\*\* joined the Human Resources Division on Tuesday, October 15, as our Junior Human Resources Advisor.

*A 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 correctionnel du Canada.*

Please note that she will be located in Room 342 and you can reach her at 996-9\*\*\*. Effective November 4, she will be located in Room 327 : *on pourra alors la joindre au 995-0\*\*\*.*

*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 with the \*\*\* and to wish her much success in her new responsibilities.

Welcome aboard L\*\*\*! / *Bienvenue au \*\*\* L\*\*\*!*

Example 2), which alternates paragraphs or sentences in English and French, is written in a way to ensure equal proportion of both languages. This is a typical example that respects the “principle of alternation” stipulated in the guidelines. Readers of this e-mail message must be bilingual in both official languages in order to understand the whole text since the content of the part written in one language is not repeated in the other language. In contrast, readers do not have to be bilingual in the case of Example 1).

In my questionnaire survey, I asked my respondents how they write formal e-mails intended for distribution within one’s work unit. Figure 2 shows the results.

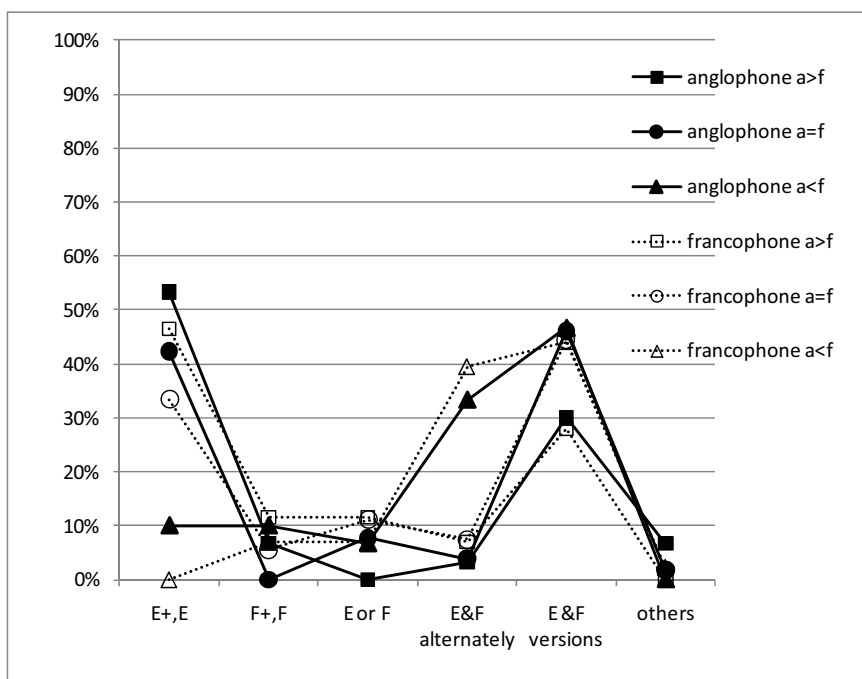


Figure 2: Language choice when sending a formal e-mail message intended for distribution within one’s work unit

The answer most chosen by all groups is «both English and French versions (E & F versions)» which is one of the recommended ways to write formal e-mails for distribution within one’s work unit although differences among groups are observed. In institutions where anglophones are over-represented (a>f) this answer was chosen by 30% of the anglophones and 27.4% of the francophones,

whereas over 40% of the respondents of the other groups chose this answer. Moreover, it is observed that approximately half of the respondents in a>f tend to write these e-mails in English only (E+) or English mostly (E) and quite a high percentage of respondents in institutions in which the proportion of anglophones and francophones is quite balanced (a=f) show a similar tendency.

With regard to the other recommended way of writing, «in English and French alternately», respondents working in institutions in which francophones are over-represented (a<f) chose this answer at a high rate compared with the other groups. 33.3% of the anglophones and 39.5% of the francophones in this group chose this answer. The percentage of English only (E+) or English mostly (E) was very low for this group.

Since writing in English and French alternately can only be performed by highly bilingual employees and also understood by bilingual employees, it is inferred from these results that many employees in a<f institutions are highly bilingual and its work environment is conducive to the use of both official languages. In a>f and a=f institutions, however, English tends to dominate. E-mails such as the above e-mail example 2) are more likely to be seen in a<f institutions than in other institutions.

### **3.3. Informal E-mails sent to a bilingual colleague whose first official language is different from one's own**

Guidelines for informal e-mails are not established although supervisors are advised to “communicate with employees, insofar as possible, in their official language of choice, both orally and in writing” (Treasury Board, 1993/2004).

The linguistic style of informal e-mails is different in nature from that of formal e-mails. A study on e-mails points out that informal e-mails on a one-to-one basis “use a more casual lexicon, they are less carefully edited than traditional written forms and they have developed their own stylistic features” (Colley & Todd, 2000, p.382). In the workplace, informal e-mails could be both work related and non-work related, and are observed to be written differently from formal e-mails.

In my questionnaire survey, I asked the anglophones how they write informal e-mails to a bilingual francophone colleague, and the francophones how they write informal e-mails to a bilingual anglophone colleague. Figure 3 shows the results.

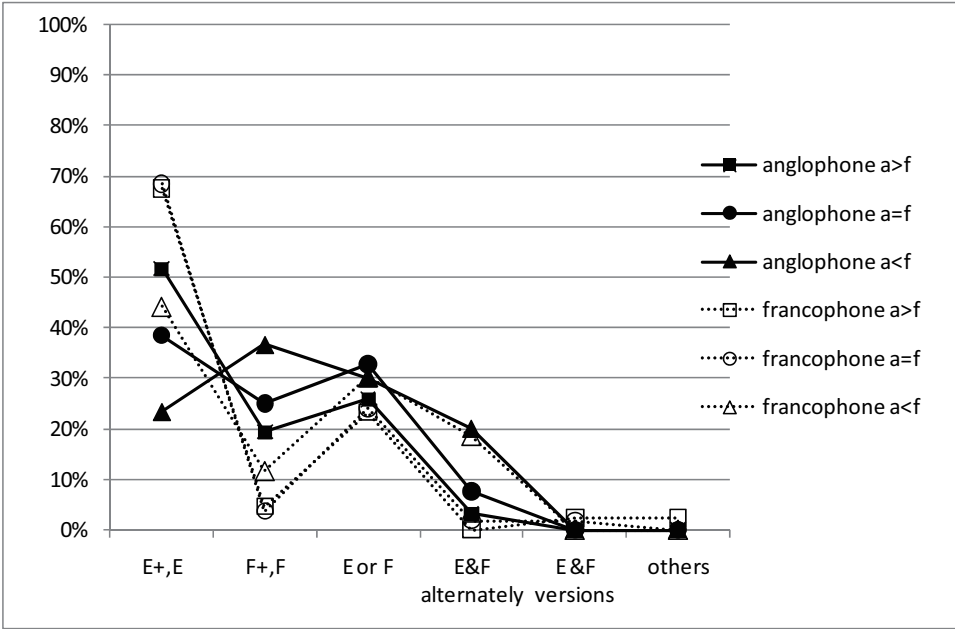


Figure 3: Language choice when sending an informal e-mail message to a colleague whose first official language is different from one's own

The overall tendency of figure 3 for both anglophones and francophones is that many of them use only or mostly English (E+, E) when writing informal e-mails to a bilingual colleague whose first official language is different from one's own. This tendency is more salient in the language choice of the francophones than that of the anglophones. In a>f and a=f institutions, nearly 70% of the francophones report to write informal e-mails in English to a bilingual anglophone colleague, whereas 51.6% of the anglophones in a>f institutions and 38.5% of the anglophones in a=f institutions report to write informal e-mails in English to a bilingual francophone colleague.

Very few francophones report to write informal e-mails in French to a bilingual anglophone colleague. Less than 5% of francophones in a>f and a=f institutions chose French only (F+) and mostly French (F). Even francophones in a<f institutions have a tendency to write them in English more often than in French although it is not as salient as that of the other two groups.

Figure 3 shows that the language choice of the anglophones in a<f institutions stands out from that of the other groups. 23.3% of them report to write informal e-mails in English to a bilingual francophone colleague and 36.7% of them report to write them in French.

Also worthy of note is that both anglophones and francophones in a<f institutions report to write informal e-mails in English and French alternately with a higher frequency than the other groups. In a<f institutions, 20% of the anglophones and 18.6% of the francophones chose «in English and French alternately» whereas 7.7% of the anglophones in a=f institutions and nearly none in the other groups chose this answer.

It is inferred from figure 3 as from figure 2 that both anglophones and francophones in a<f institutions are highly bilingual and its work environment is conducive to the use of both official languages.

The following is a short informal e-mail message sent by a bilingual francophone employee to her bilingual anglophone colleague on a one-to-one basis. It was forwarded to me at one of the a<f institutions where I conducted interviews with some employees during my research.

E-mail example 3)

An informal e-mail message written in English and French  
sent to a bilingual colleague on a one-to-one basis  
(The parts written in French are shown in *italics*.)

Subject: Re : *collectif gestion de l'info* (Document link not covered)

*Jeudi matin* is OK for me but S\*\*\* is on holidays until Monday.

This is an example of insertion of a French noun phrase in an English-based sentence. Due to the lack of collection of informal e-mail examples on a one-to-one basis, I cannot assert that this is a common practice in a<f institutions, but it was reported to me by some employees in a<f institutions during my research that many highly bilingual employees often switch within a sentence and between sentences when writing informal e-mails.

The results of figure 2 and figure 3 for «in English and French alternately» show that both anglophones and francophones in a<f institutions write formal e-mails intended for distribution within one's work unit in this manner more often than informal e-mails sent to a bilingual colleague on a one-to-one basis. This tendency could be interpreted in two ways. One is that the employees in a<f institutions are aware of the language policy since the formal e-mails are the target of the guidelines and the informal e-mails are not. The other is that employees who tend to switch between English and French within a sentence and/or between sentences as exemplified in E-mail example 3) did not choose «in English and French alternately» as this had been described in my questionnaire as “in both English and French, alternating by paragraphs.” My questions did not include answers which implied other forms of code-switching.

The following examples are informal e-mail messages for distribution within one's work unit, a type of electronic communication which was not included in the questions in my questionnaire survey. They were also collected in one of the a<f institutions during my research.

E-mail example 4)  
An informal e-mail message written in English and French  
for distribution within one's work unit  
(The parts written in French are shown in *italics*.)

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 laissez pas tentés par M\*\*\* qui va faire du charme et sûrement essayer de vous « acheter » avec ses merveilleuses sucreries...*

This informal e-mail message was sent by a bilingual francophone employee to the employees in her work unit. Although the proportion of French is larger than that of English, it is written in both languages alternately. The first sentence is marked by intra-sentential code-switching<sup>11</sup>, starting with English and terminating in French. The second sentence is marked by inter-sentential code-switching.

E-mail example 5)  
An informal e-mail message written in English and French  
for distribution within one's work unit  
(The parts written in French are shown in *italics*.)

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 (soit sept depuis la mi-octobre). 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!*

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<sup>11</sup> Poplack defines code-switching as “the alternation of two languages within a single discourse, sentence or constituent...categorized according to the degree of integration of items from one language (L1) to the phonological, morphological and syntactic patterns of the other language (L2)” (Poplack, 1980:583). In my present study, inter-sentential code-switching means the switch at a sentence boundary, and intra-sentential code-switching means the switch at a clause boundary or within a clause boundary. My definition of these two terms does not correspond to that suggested by Hamers and Blanc (2000:259-60).

The above is an informal e-mail message sent by a bilingual anglophone employee to some employees in her work unit. The subject is written in English first and French next. Starting with an English greeting, the body of the message starts with inter-sentential code-switching in French and continues the next sentence in French. This is followed by inter-sentential code-switching in English. The last sentence is an example of intra-sentential code-switching, starting in English and switching to French at a coordinate conjunction (*et*).

Whether the content of the e-mail message is formal or informal, in a<f institutions, it is inferred that e-mails sent to a group of people, which usually has a mix of both linguistic groups, are often sent in such ways as examples 3), 4) and 5) although guidelines regarding language choice of informal e-mails are not formally set out.

### 3.4. Informal E-mails sent to a bilingual colleague whose first official language is the same as one's own

In my questionnaire survey, I asked the anglophones whether they write informal e-mails to their bilingual anglophone colleagues, and the francophones whether they write informal e-mails to their bilingual francophone colleagues on a one-to-one basis. Figure 4 shows the results.

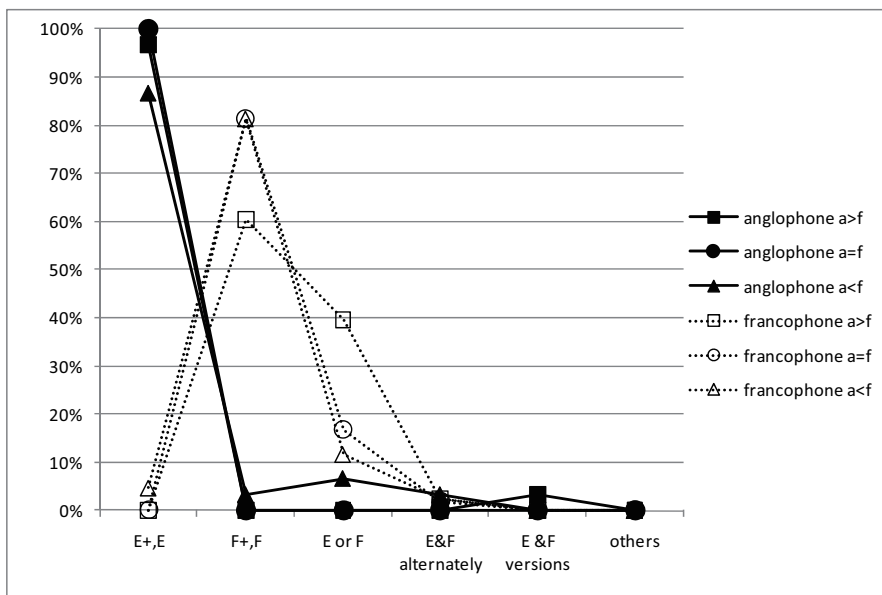


Figure 4: Language choice when sending an informal e-mail message to a colleague whose first official language is the same as one's own

The reported overall tendency is that both anglophones and francophones usually write these e-mails in their first official languages. 95.6% of the anglophones report to write informal e-mails to anglophone colleagues «in English only (E+) or English mostly (E)». 74.5% of the francophones, on

the other hand, report to write informal e-mails to francophone colleagues «in French only (F+) or French mostly (F)», which implies that the francophones sometimes write e-mails to each other in English. 22% of them chose «either in English or French, depending on the situation (E or F)».

Figure 4 shows the results broken down by the types of institutions based on their linguistic composition. It shows that the francophones in institutions where anglophones are over-represented (a>f) have a stronger tendency to write informal e-mails in English to each other on a one-to-one basis. About 40% of the francophones in a>f institutions chose «either in English or French, depending on the situation (E or F)» whereas this percentage was only 16.7% for francophones in a=f institutions and 11.6% for francophones in a<f institutions. It is presumed that in a>f institutions the work environment is not conducive to the use of both official languages and the francophones being a minority are inclined to use English not only with the anglophones but also sometimes with the francophones.

This question was followed by an additional question regarding the reason why and in what situation the respondents write e-mails in their second official language (OL2) to their colleagues whose first official language (OL1) is the same as theirs. Anglophones who did not choose «in English only / mostly (E+, E)» (4.4%) and francophones who did not choose «in French only / mostly (F+, F)» (25.5%) were expected to answer this additional question, but it turned out that 21.2% of the anglophones (24 out of 113) and 45% of the francophones (63 out of 140) answered it. Figure 5 shows the results.

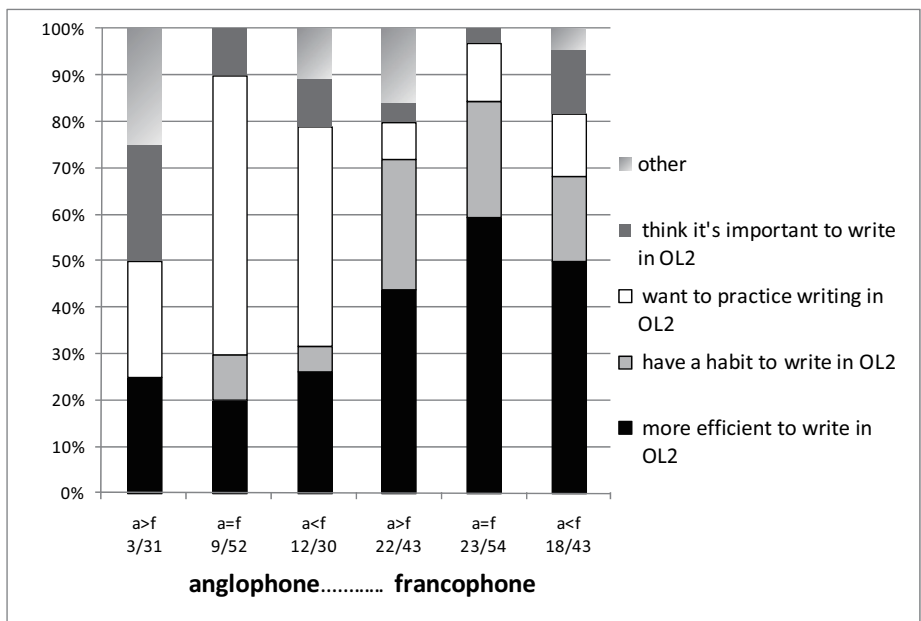


Figure 5: “If you ever send an informal e-mail message in OL2 to a colleague whose OL1 is the same as yours on a one-to-one basis, why and in what situation?” (Multiple answers permitted.)

The overall tendency is that the anglophones and francophones generally give different reasons for writing to each other in their second official language. As for the francophones, 65.1% chose «when the work is done in English, it is more efficient to write in English» and 30.2% chose «because I am used to writing in English». As for the anglophones, in contrast, 66.7% chose «when I want to practice writing French» and only 33.3% chose «when the work is done in French, it is more efficient to write in French».

The results broken down by the types of institutions based on their linguistic composition are shown in figure 5. It must be noted that the number of anglophones who answered this question was not large enough to depict any tendency regarding the reasons by linguistic composition of the institutions. It could be inferred, however, from the number of anglophones who answered this question in each institution that anglophones in a<f institutions have the strongest tendency to write e-mails in French to each other. The percentage of the anglophones who answered this question was 40% for those in a<f institutions (12 out of 30), only 9.7% for those in a>f (3 out of 31) and 17.3% for those in a=f (9 out of 52). This is a tendency that could not be observed in figure 4.

With regard to the francophones, figure 5 shows that the linguistic composition of the institutions does not have much influence on the reasons they give for writing e-mails to each other in English.

#### **4. General conclusions**

This paper examined different types of electronic communications of bilingual federal public servants in Canadian government institutions and the guidelines for each of these types. It was pointed out that the most formal e-mails are subject to established regulations while others are not. My survey results showed that the linguistic composition of institutions is an important factor in analyzing the language choice of my respondents. The general conclusions from my survey results are as follows:

Firstly, a great majority (more than 70%) of both anglophones and francophones know and practice the policy regarding “formal e-mails for wide distribution.” This implies that with established regulations, language policy tends to be observed. It may be worthy of note that among all the 17 questions asked in my entire questionnaire survey, “formal e-mails for wide distribution” was the subdomain in which balanced use of both official languages was observed the most (Yazu, 2005/2008). It could be said, however, that even in this subdomain approximately 30% of my respondents do not know or do not follow the policy. It should also be noted that my respondents are all bilingual employees who are likely to be more conscious about language policy than their monolingual colleagues, many of whom are anglophones<sup>12</sup> and who constitute the majority of the

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<sup>12</sup> A study commissioned by the Canadian Government found that even in “bilingual regions for the purpose of language of work” only 51% of anglophones could speak French “fluently” or “with some ease” and 63% of them could understand French “perfectly” or “mostly.” Including the anglophone federal public servants in unilingual English regions, the average bilingual percentage of the anglophones would be 32% for speaking and 35% for understanding. (Treasury Board, 2002b)



whole Canadian federal public service. Had the latter been included in my study, this percentage would have been much lower.

Secondly, although two ways of writing in both official languages are recommended for “formal e-mails for limited distribution,” English tends to be used especially in institutions where anglophones are over-represented (a>f). This may imply that without established regulations, the dominant language tends to prevail in these institutions. However, institutions where the dominant group is under-represented show a different tendency: in institutions where francophones are over-represented (a<f), 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”.

Thirdly, both anglophones and francophones in institutions where francophones are over-represented (a<f) are also observed to write in English and French alternately more often than other groups when writing “informal e-mails to a colleague whose first official language is different from one’s own.” In general, many anglophones’ second official language 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. Some of the example e-mails shown in this study imply that their way of writing informal e-mails “alternately” is not limited to alternating English and French by paragraphs. Although data are not sufficient, it is inferred that in a<f institutions, highly bilingual employees, both anglophones and francophones, tend to write informal e-mails using intra-sentential and inter-sentential code-switching.

Lastly, quite a few francophones are observed to write informal e-mails to each other in English. This tendency is strong in institutions where anglophones are over-represented (a>f). They report that when the work is done in English, it is more efficient to write in English and they are used to writing in English. Very few anglophones, except for those in a<f institutions, would write to each other in French unless they want to practice writing French.

The results of my study, all broken down by the linguistic composition of the institutions, imply that the larger the presence of anglophones, the dominant group, in an institution, the more predominant English would be over French as the language of work. It is only in institutions where francophones are over-represented (a<f) that a fairly balanced use of both official languages is observed, but it must be noted that the number of these institutions is very small. When equal status is given to two languages by law, the equal use of these two languages will not be practiced if they have asymmetric strength in their society. In government institutions in the National Capital Region of Canada, English is overwhelmingly dominant as the language of work. A work environment conducive to the balanced use of both official languages could be created only if both anglophones and francophones make conscious efforts to use French.

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