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Joan Rubin
Roger Shuy
Editors

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MASS OPINION ON LANGUAGE POLICY: THE CASE OF CANADA

JONATHAN POOL

State University of New York at Stony Brook

1. Theorists of language planning have recognized the need for popular support if government language policies are to be implemented. This recognition is evident, for example, in the components of language planning enumerated by Einar Haugen (Language, 1966: 18 and Dialect, 1966) and by Joshua A. Fishman et al., (1971:293, 299-302); but, as the latter also caution, 'The entire process of implementation has been least frequently studied in prior investigations of language planning' (Fishman et al. 1971:299).

Mass attitudes can be viewed as playing two crucial roles in the implementation of language planning. First, in all situations, mass attitudes will have an effect on the degree to which policies calling for changes in mass language behavior are implemented, once adopted by governmental authorities. And second, in certain situations, mass opinions will have an effect on the initial official adoption of various language policies. Situations of the latter sort presumably exist whenever two conditions are fulfilled: (1) the country is governed by competitively elected officials and has a tradition of respect for mass opinion, and (2) the issue of language policy is one of the salient political issues discussed by the mass media of the country at the time. Under these conditions there will be mass opinions on language policy, and these opinions will have some significant effect on policy adoption or nonadoption.

2. A good example of a situation fulfilling these conditions is contemporary Canada. Governed at the federal and provincial levels by legislatures constituted in multi-party elections, Canada has no perenially dominant party and by now has a tradition of competition for popular support. Generally considered a country in which economic class is a fairly unimportant political factor, Canada's most serious problem--and an increasingly serious one--from before its confederation in 1867 until the present, has been relations between its two 'founding races' (Alford 1963:Chap. 5 and 9; Underhill 1964: 2 and 47). The quest for a public policy that would resolve hostilities and grievances between English Canadians and French Canadians reached such an intensity in the 1960s that the federal government appointed and richly funded a Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism. The mandate and the subsequent recommendations of the Commission both reflected and augmented public concern with an unsatisfactory and ill-defined linguistic regime, as well as a belief that linguistic policies could indeed go far toward ameliorating English-French relations. If anything, the mid-1960s were the high point of preoccupation with linguistic engineering in Canada; for by the end of the decade the issue had escalated and sovereignty for a state of Quebec, not just equality for the French in Canada, was a seriously debated question.

Even if the aforementioned (and now disbanded) Royal Commission's conciliatory recommendations become casualties of the renewed tension between Quebec separatism and English Canadian backlash, the Commission will have performed an undeniable and enormous service by the information and knowledge which it has generated. Considered by some to have been a multi-million dollar pork barrel for the social sciences, the Commission sponsored a total of 146 research projects, including case studies, surveys, and histories, above and beyond its own extensive hearings.[1] Two of the most potentially useful projects were national sample surveys of the Canadian population, one of adults (using interviews) and the other of teenagers (using self-administered questionnaires), conducted in May of 1965.

Unlike any other survey ever conducted in any country of which I am aware, these surveys combined the following characteristics:

(1) they reached large numbers of respondents, thus permitting more refined analysis than the usual simple frequency distributions and uncontrolled cross-tabulations: the adult survey returned 4,071 completed schedules, and the youth survey 1,365;
(2) they oversampled the regional minorities heavily enough to permit controlled analysis for these minorities (English

in Quebec, French elsewhere), not only for the population as a whole;

(3) they collected information about respondents' opinions on a substantial range of language policy issues; and

(4) they collected considerable additional linguistic information about the respondents, including their language backgrounds, experiences, competences, behaviors, and attitudes. In all, the adult survey contains about 260 items of information, and the youth survey about 185, for each respondent.

Many caveats are in order for him who would interpret or rely on these surveys. There are reasons to doubt the veracity of any verbal interview or self-administered questionnaire, in the first place. There is also evidence that unsophisticated respondents are not reliable reporters of their own linguistic competence and behavior. And in addition, there is some reason to believe that the adult survey responses were somewhat distorted in the coding or punching process.[2] But given the current absence of alternatives, I shall not bother you with complaints that the best is not good enough. Rather let us now, with appropriate caution, take one of the topics illuminated by these surveys and see what knowledge they can provide thereon.

3. For argument's sake let us say that there are two ways to explain the opinion of a given individual on a given policy. First, we can subsume this fact (i.e. his opinion) under a generalization to the effect that the same individual will have predictably different opinions about policies which differ in particular ways. And second, we can also explain an opinion on a policy by generalizations that different individuals having particular different characteristics will also differ in a predictable fashion in their opinions on policies of a particular type. The Royal Commission surveys permit us to explore how opinions on language policy differ, both across policies and across individuals.

In a truly bipolarized situation, proposed language policies would be evaluated according to their expected effect on the balance of privileges and burdens between the two groups, and each member of one group would support all policies favoring it and oppose all policies favoring the other group. Such situations have been described as existing in numerous countries (Rabushka and Shepsle forthcoming); but opinions on language policy in Canada, as revealed by the Royal Commission adult survey, definitely did not fit this pattern. Of the proposed or suggested policies enquired about, some were supported overwhelmingly, others received mixed support, and others were largely rejected among those who would presumably stand to lose

from these policies if their effect on the English-French balance of forces were the guide.

The most consensual proposed concession among the English Canadians was that of making the federal government accessible to the people in both English and French. This policy, if implemented, would shift the status quo toward greater indulgence for speakers of French; but 81 per cent of the monolingual English-speaking respondents supported it.[3] Close behind in popularity was the proposed policy of teaching French to English-speaking children in Canadian schools, receiving support from 75 per cent of the monolingual English speakers. The same percentage supported the idea that it would be 'good' (no sanctions for noncompliance) if all Canadians spoke both English and French.

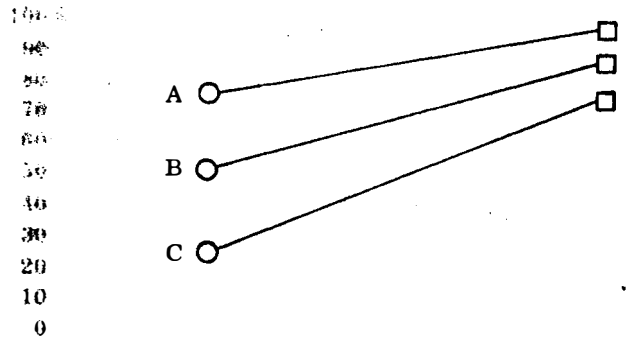
Not all concessionary policies were consensually popular among English-speaking monolinguals, however. Although equal access to the federal government was willingly granted, only 53 per cent favored the policy of making English and French the official languages of all the provincial governments. And while three-fourths of the monolingual English speakers were willing to have English-speaking children learn French in school, only 51 per cent agreed that persons working in a company where the majority were French Canadian should themselves learn French if they did not know it already.[4]

Finally, some proposed language policies offered concessions to the speakers of French that only a minority of monolingual English speakers were willing to endorse. Just 26 per cent agreed that English Canadians should speak French when they are in the province of Quebec. And access to service in French in stores, restaurants, and other public accommodations for French Canadians was considered a justified French Canadian want by only 16 per cent of the English monolinguals.

Among the monolingual English-speaking respondents, then, support for concessionary language policies ranged from more than three-fourths to under one-fourth. The obligation to learn French was accepted most readily on behalf of the next generation and least often in situations (such as inter-provincial travel) where the respondents would see themselves disadvantaged. And the right of French speakers to be served in French was accorded by a large majority for the federal government, by about one-half for the provincial governments, and by only one-fourth for privately owned public accommodations.

A similar pattern emerges for monolingual French speakers vis-à-vis policies of concession to English. Given the nature of the status quo, the spirit of the times, and the policy orientations of the Royal Commission, however, there is not a corresponding policy of

FIGURE 1. Opinions of monolinguals on policies of language-learning using obligation.



Percentage agreeing that:

A = Your group's children should learn the other language in school.
B = Your group's members should learn the other language if most speak it at work.
C = Your group's members should use the other language when in any province where most speak it.
○ = English monolinguals □ = French monolinguals

concession to English mentioned for each question about a concession to French.

The proposals for equal access to the federal government for, adoption by provincial governments of, and the desirability of all Canadians being able to speak, both languages were, from the point of view of French Canadians, no concessions at all, so it is not surprising that these policies were favored by 98 per cent, 97 per cent, and 99 per cent of the monolingual French-speaking respondents, respectively. On the other hand, this finding is not trivial either. Given the legendary devotion of the French Canadian people to la survivance, are we to suppose that the nearly unanimous belief in universal Canadian bilingualism reflects an understanding, with Lieberson, that bilingualism need not lead to assimilation? (Lieberson 1970:Chap. 6-8).

The most willingly accepted concessionary policy among the monolingual French was that French-speaking children should learn English in school, a proposal supported by 96 per cent. Like their English-speaking counterparts, fewer approved the principle that employees

not speaking English should learn it if the majority in their company was English Canadian; but the approval rate was still 88 per cent. Fewer, but still 72 per cent, agreed that French Canadians should speak English everywhere in Canada except Quebec.

As might be expected, both language groups, in their frequencies of support, ranked these three proposed policies of language-learning obligation in the same order.[5] But the differences in support for the three policies were much greater among the speakers of English than among the speakers of French. What is most interesting is that a large majority of the French monolinguals were willing to accept every one of the concessionary policies. They exhibited the typical response pattern not of a group in revolt, but of a subservient group: glad to greet any concessions from the dominant group, but also willing to grant it a much more generous definition of justice than it is willing to grant in return.

The policies which were agreed to by large majorities of the English speakers were also agreed to by even larger majorities of those speaking French, but not vice versa. This means that there was substantial English-French consensus on at least some set of policies, including:

(1) that all citizens of Canada should be able to deal with the federal government in either English or French, whichever they choose;
(2) that English-speaking and French-speaking children should be taught French and English, respectively, in school; and
(3) that all Canadians should (ideally) be able to speak both English and French.

Thus the elements of this consensus include forms of both individual bilingualism and state bilingualism.

4. Beyond this consensus, we have also discovered much dissensus--both within each language group and between the two groups. Let us conclude by testing a couple of explanations for the different opinions held by different respondents on the same policies. Much social analysis, of course, does just this, resorting to socioeconomic status, religion, party affiliation, age, sex, and many other characteristics to explain and predict opinions. This brief report, however, will examine (cursorily at that) just two out of the many such questions that might be asked: they deal with language competence and with ethnic environment.

If we define the language repertoire of an individual as the set of all languages and language varieties in which he has any competence, plus the respective competences that he has in them, an analogous

concept suggests itself in the realm of language policy. The language policy repertoire of an individual could be defined as the set of all language policies on which he has any opinion, plus the respective opinions which he has on them. The question then arises as to whether the language repertoires and the language policy repertoires of individuals tend to be associated. And the answer to this question is both yes and no.

Neglecting for the present purpose those few Canadians who speak neither English nor French as a principal home language, we can locate every respondent on some point of an English-French linguistic continuum. On one end of this continuum are those speaking English as a principal home language but having no competence in French. On the other end are those with French as a principal home language but having no competence in English. These two extremes are almost the same as the groups earlier referred to as English and French monolinguals, respectively.[6] Half-way between these extremes are those who have both English and French as principal home languages. On either side of this midpoint, arrayed in order of their competence in the second language, are those who speak one of the two as a principal home language and have some, but not native, competence in the other.

If the respondents are ordered on such a continuum, there are some policies receiving close to equal support from all points on it, and other policies for which support varies markedly along the continuum. In general, two fairly consistent patterns emerge.

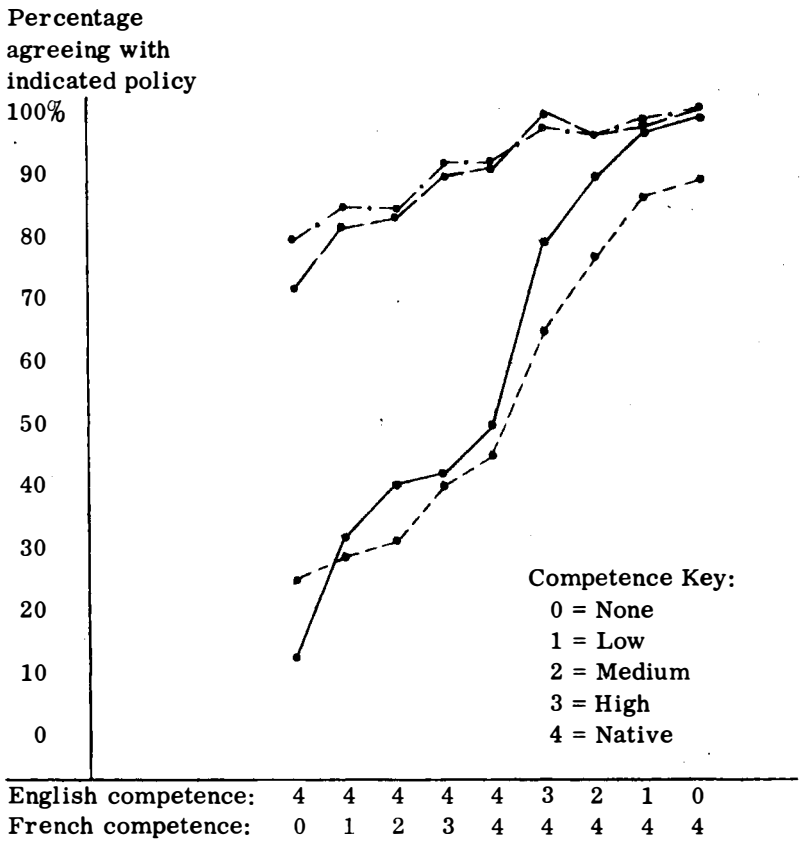
(1) Those policies which were largely consensual among both groups of monolinguals show only moderate or no variation along the continuum, and the variation which does exist tends to be confined to the half of the continuum where English is the home language.

(2) Those policies on which either or both groups of monolinguals were split, or on which the two groups differed, show strong variation along the continuum, and this variation tends to be monotonic rather than peaked.

For example, both monolingual groups were largely agreed that it would be good if all Canadians were bilingual. On the language continuum, the percentage agreeing with this proposition rises slowly from 74 on the English-only end to 97 in the middle, and then remains at between 97 and 99 all across the French side. A similar pattern exists for the policy of making citizen contact with the federal government possible in either language.

On more divisive issues, however, those in the midpoint of the continuum are also closer to the middle of the support range, rather

FIGURE 2. Language repertoire and language policy repertoire.



than on the edge of a French opinion plateau. The most divisive issues were over proposed policies that would force English speakers to use (more than to learn) French. The percentage agreeing that English Canadians should speak French when in Quebec rises sharply from 26 per cent on the English extreme, through 46 per cent in the bilingual middle, to 88 per cent on the French end. There is a simila

and even steeper incline from 16 per cent through 50 per cent to 97 per cent on the question of whether French Canadians are right in wanting to be served in French in public accommodations.

Of these two patterns, the former is consistent with the findings of earlier research on the same data, namely that while social and economic 'activity' tends to vary more with second-language competence in English among speakers of French than with competence in French among English-speakers, cultural 'attitudes' tend to be associated with competence in exactly the opposite way (Pool 1971).[7] The second pattern, of steep monotonic variation, is significant in that it fails to reveal the presence of a distinct group of bilinguals with separate policy interests. Given the speculation and findings of other scholars about the 'linguistic schizophrenia' and other conditions uniquely characterizing bilingual individuals, and given the fact that the Canadian surveys themselves reveal some other attitudes on which bilinguals tend to respond one way and both English and French monolinguals another way, the monotonic pattern found here on language policy questions was not a foregone result.[8] We find, then, that several language policies, especially those which arouse disagreement between English and French Canadians, evoke considerable differences in support among those with different language repertoires, most consistently among English speakers with different levels of competence in French.

This association between language repertoire and language policy repertoire is of special import given the fact that language repertoire is closely associated with ethnic environment. On the basis of what has been found we must expect that, on an important selection of language-policy issues, those who live amidst members of the other language group are more likely to agree with policies benefiting that group than are those living in comparatively segregated environments, since those surrounded by members of the other language group are more likely to have high competence in the other language. This expectation is confirmed by the data.

If we compare responses in polling districts where one-fourth or less of the names on the electoral lists were French with responses in districts where three-fourths or more of the names were French, we see that for almost every policy a larger proportion of the English speakers favored a pro-French policy in the high-French districts than in the low-French districts. Likewise, French-speaking respondents favored pro-English policies more frequently in high-English districts. The differences are, as one would expect, especially strong for the dissensual policies, such as (for English speakers) whether French Canadians should have a right to service in French in public accommodations.

If familiarity breeds contempt, the Royal Commission surveys do not show it. Even on the question of whether English Canadians should use French when in Quebec, a considerably higher percentage of monolingual English speakers living in Quebec itself supported this principle than of monolingual English speakers outside Quebec--in spite of the fact that those in Quebec who agreed with this policy could easily be interpreted as declaring themselves personae non gratae.

As opposed to a pattern of polarization in which those who live in closest contact with other groups oppose them the most, the Canadian pattern seems to be one of attitudinal buffering, at least on language policy: those with the most irreconcilable policy opinions are geographically the farthest removed from each other. This distribution of mass opinions is undoubtedly an important asset to those, represented by the Royal Commission, who hope to use creative language planning to salvage coexistence in Canada.

NOTES

[1]See the annotated list of studies in Appendix V of Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, vol. 1.201-12. The products of this work have been appearing under three serial titles: Report, Studies, and Documents, respectively, of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

[2]See, e.g. Blalock 1970:47-51; Fishman 1969:5-11; Fishman and Terry 1969:636-50; Lieberson 1970:17-20; and Pool 1971:218-19. The latter study is based on the same data but does not consider attitudes toward language policy.

[3]This and subsequent percentages are based on the total of those giving definite answers. The sample has not been reweighted to provide estimates of the responses that an unstratified random sample would have given, for reasons explained in Pool 1971:75-76. By monolingual English speakers I refer to those whose principal home language was English and claimed to speak no French.

[4]An additional 13 per cent agreed to such a principle if it were limited to the province of Quebec.

[5]Such an identical ranking of concession types by the two groups is a barrier, not an aid, to accommodation, because it makes log-rolling more difficult.

[6]Almost, because the two extreme points of the continuum are here defined to include also those claiming two principal home languages, English or French and some other language, a very small group excluded definitionally from either of the 'monolingual' groups. For another type of language continuum, based on performance rather than competence, see Meisel 1970. My continuum, though

included as a ranker on competence, makes the assumption that those speaking a language regularly at home are more competent in it than others who claim fluency in it: hence the distinction between 'native' and 'high' competence in the continuum.

[5] This difference, in turn, is reasonable in the light of the fact that, in Canada, English is learned more often out of 'instrumental' and French out of 'integrative' motives. This distinction is from Lambert. See Johnstone 1969:83-88.

[6] See, e.g. Lambert 1967:105-08; Gallagher 1968:144-45; and Peal 1971:168. Of course, a question asking whether bilinguals should be paid more might well elicit a peaked response pattern.

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