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Mass Opinion on Language Policy: The Case of Canada

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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 discussions by Einar Haugen[1] and by Joshua A. Fishman et al.[2] of the components of language planning. But, as the latter caution, "The entire process of implementation has been least frequently studied in prior investigations of language planning."[3] We have few hard, empirical data about the conditions under which language policies receive public support and the effects of public opinion on the success or failure of such policies.

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

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[1] *Language Conflict and Language Planning: The Case of Modern Norwegian* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1966), 18. Cf. his "Dialect, Language, Nation", *American Anthropologist* 68 (4): 933 (Aug., 1966).

[2] Joshua A. Fishman et al., "Research Outline for Comparative Studies of Language Planning", in *Can Language Be Planned?*, ed. Joan Rubin and Björn H. Jernudd (Honolulu: East-West Center Books, 1971), 293, 299-302.

[3] Fishman, "Outline", 299.

changes in mass language behavior are implemented, once adopted by governmental authorities. And second, in *certain* situations, mass opinions will have an effect on whether or not a given language policy is officially adopted in the first place. Situations of the latter sort presumably occur 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 non-adopiton.

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 now has no perennially dominant party and 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".[4] The quest for a public policy that would resolve hostilities and grievances between English Canadians and French Canadians reached such an intensity in the 1960's 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 not only public concern with an unsatisfactory and ill-defined linguistic regime, but also 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

[4] Robert R. Alford, *Party and Society: The Anglo-American Democracies* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1963), chs. V and IX; Frank H. Underhill, *The Image of Confederation* (Toronto: CBC Publications, 1964), 2, 47.

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.[5] Two of the most potentially useful projects were national sample surveys of the Canadian population, one of adults (using interviews) and the other of teen-agers (using self-administered questionnaires), conducted in May of 1965.

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

a. 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;
b. 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;
c. They collected information about respondents' opinions on a substantial range of language policy issues; and
d. 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 those who would interpret or rely on these surveys. There are reasons to doubt the veracity of *any* verbal inteview 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.[6] But given the current

[5] See the annotated list of studies in *Report of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism*, vol. 1 (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1967), Appendix V, 201-212. 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*.

[6] See, e.g., Hubert M. Blalock, Jr., *An Introduction to Social Research* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1970), 47-51; Joshua A. Fishman, "Bilingual Attitudes and Behaviors", *Language Sciences* 5 (1969), 5-11; Joshua A. Fishman and Charles Terry, "The Validity of Census Data on Bilingualism in a Puerto Rican Neighborhood", *American Sociological Review* 34 (5): 636-650 (1969); Stanley Lieberson, *Language and Ethnic Relations in Canada* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1970), 17-20; and Jonathan Pool, "Language and Political Integration: Canada as a Test of Some Hypotheses" (Ph.D. dissertation, University of Chicago, 1971), 218-219. The latter study is based on the same data but does not consider attitudes toward language policy.

absence of alternatives, it would be vain to complain 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 some of the ways in which they can provide knowledge 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 subsumption under generalizations about how different individuals having particular different characteristics will also differ in a predictable fashion in their opinions. 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,[7] 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 largely rejected, but others received mixed support and still others were supported overwhelmingly by 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% of the monolingual English speaking respondents supported it.[8] Close behind in popularity was the proposed policy of teaching

[7] See Alvin Rabushka and Kenneth A. Shepsle, *Politics in Plural Societies: A Theory of Democratic Instability* (Columbus: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Company, 1972).

[8] 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, "Integration", 75-76. By monolingual English speakers I refer to those whose principal home language was English and claimed to speak no French.

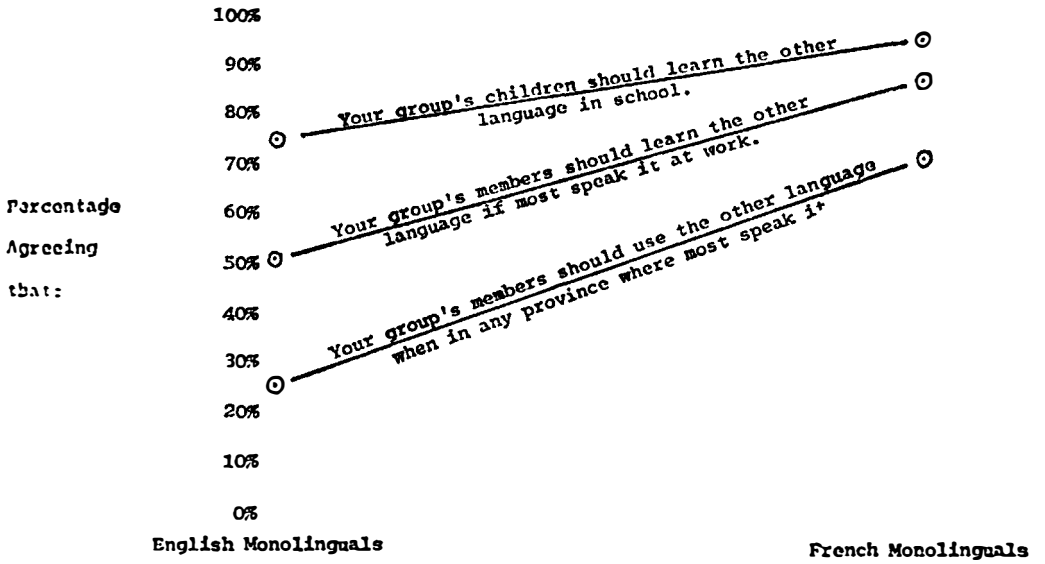

Figure 1. Opinions of Monolinguals on Policies of Language-Learning/Using Obligation.

French to English speaking children in Canadian schools, receiving support from 75% of the monolingual English speakers. The same percentage supported the idea that it would be *good* (no sanctions for non-compliance) 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% favored the policy of making English and French the official languages of all the *provincial* governments. And while 75% of the monolingual English speakers were willing to have English-speaking children learn French in school, only 51% agreed that persons working in a company where the majority were French Canadian should themselves learn French if they did not know it already.[9]

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% 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 private enterprises rendering a service to the public was con-

[9] An additional 13% agreed to such a principle if it were limited to the province of Quebec.

sidered a justified French Canadian goal by only 16% of the English monolinguals.

Among the monolingual English speaking respondents then, support for concessionary language policies ranged from more than three-quarters to under one-quarter. The obligation to learn French was accepted most readily on behalf of the next generation or in the abstract, 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 half for the provincial governments, and by only a quarter for privately owned service establishments.

A similar pattern emerges for monolingual French speakers vis-a-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 concession to English mentioned for each question about a concession to French.

The proposals of 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%, 97%, and 99% 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?[10]

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%. 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%. Fewer, but still 72%, 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.[11] 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

[10] See Lieberson, *Language*, chs. 6-8.

[11] Such an identical ranking of concession types by the two groups is in general a barrier, not an aid, to accommodation, because it makes logrolling more difficult.

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:

a. That all citizens of Canada should be able to deal with the federal government in either English or French, whichever they choose;
b. That English-speaking and French-speaking children should be taught French and English, respectively, in school; and
c. 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 *dis*sensus – 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 inquiry, 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 con-

tinuum. 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.[12] 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.

a. 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.
b. 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 than on the edge of a French opinion plateau. The most divisive issues were

[12] *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 John Meisel, "Language Continua and Political Alignment: The Case of French- and English-Users in Canada" (paper presented at the 7th World Congress of Sociology, Sept. 15, 1970, Varna, Bulgaria). My continuum, though intended 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.

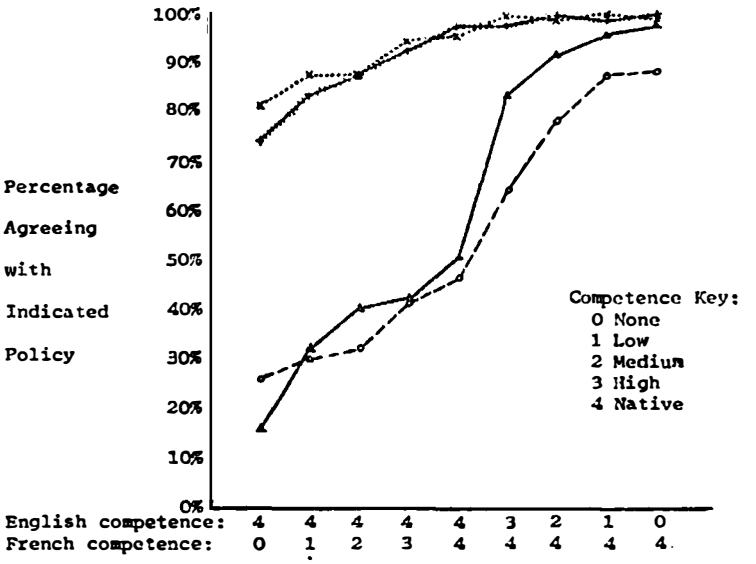

Figure 2. Language Repertoire and Language Policy Repertoire.

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 on the English extreme, through 46 in the bilingual middle, to 88 on the French end. There is a similar and even steeper incline from 16% through 50% to 97% on the question of whether French Canadians are right in wanting to be served in French in private establishments.

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.[13] The second pattern, of steep

[13] See Pool, "Integration". This difference, in turn, is reasonable in the light of

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.[14] 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 of all 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 benefitting 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.

In places where most of the registered voters had French names, a larger proportion of the English speakers responding to the adult survey favored almost every policy of concession to French than in places where there were few French-named voters. Likewise, French-speaking respondents favored pro-English policies more frequently in districts having fewer French Canadians. 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 privately owned service establishments.

Moreover, these differences are not merely an artifact of the greater likelihood of bilingualism in districts where one's own ethnic group is

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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 John C. Johnstone, *Young People's Images of Canadian Society* (Ottawa: Queen's Printer, 1969), 83-88.

[14] See, e.g., Wallace E. Lambert, "A Social Psychology of Bilingualism", *Journal of Social Issues* 22 (2): 105-108 (April, 1967); Charles F. Gallagher, "North African Problems and Prospects: Language and Identity", in: Joshua A. Fishman et al., *Language Problems of Developing Nations* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1968), 144-145; Pool, "Integration", 168. Of course, a question asking whether bilinguals should be paid more might well elicit a peaked response pattern.

scarce. To the extent that we can tell – and this extent is limited because of the small numbers involved – *monolinguals* were in general more likely to approve of concessions, the smaller the proportion of the local population that their ethnic group constituted. Thus, as Table 1 shows,

TABLE 1

		Ethnic Environment: Percentage of French Names in Polling District Electoral List		Region	
		Less than 25%	25% up	Outside Quebec	Inside Quebec
Percentage of Monolingual English Speakers Approving Concession to French Regarding:	Federal Govt.	81%	87%	80%	92%
	Schools	74%	87%	74%	93%
	Bilingual Idea	74%	86%	73%	89%
	Provincial Official Languages	53%	57%	53%	53%
	Work Places	51%	55%	50%	67%
	Regional Tongue	25%	40%	25%	39%
	Shops, etc.	13%	43%	12%	57%
	(Minimum N)	752	75	750	77
		Less than 75%	75% up		
Percentage of Monolingual French Speakers Approving Concession to English Regarding:	Schools	100%	96%	100%	96%
	Work Places	93%	87%	92%	87%
	Regional Tongue	68%	73%	27%	74%
	(Minimum N)	25	262	11	276

English monolinguals with substantial French populations in their environments more often approved of concessions than did their linguistic peers living outside of probable contact with French Canadians. Even on the question of whether English Canadians should use French 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.[15]

[15] The number of French monolinguals outside French Canada was so small that

If familiarity breeds contempt, the Royal Commission surveys do not show it. 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 not only linguistically, but also 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.

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it would be hazardous to make inferences about what the responses from a larger but otherwise identical sample would have been. Interestingly, on five out of the seven concessions to French, English monolinguals living in *mixed* environments, i.e. 25-75% French, were the *most* frequent supporters of concessions.