BELONGING AND BOUNDARIES: LINGUISTIC DIVERSITY AND LANGUAGE RIGHTS IN CANADA

ABSTRACT

This paper explores critical issues surrounding language rights in multicultural Canada and how language rights are connected to ethnic identity, representation, boundaries, and belonging. This paper focuses on language rights of allophones (those whose first language is neither English nor French) from the perspective of Canada’s language policies, including the socioeconomic and political values that allophone immigrants place on Canada’s official languages. Changes to Canada’s language policies since the 1970s have created alternative spaces for allophone groups to challenge the dominant status of English and French and to recreate ethnolinguistic identities and belonging simultaneously from various locations.

Increases in international migration, in conjunction with changes to Canadian language policies over recent years, have generated new discussions and debates about language rights and the socioeconomic and political values that allophone immigrants place on English and French, Canada’s official languages. Canada is currently facing new challenges in ensuring that the identities of linguistic groups are recognised and that members of these groups are guaranteed equal participation in all social, economic, and political activities. Accordingly, the Canadian federal government has made important changes to its language policies. This paper will argue that changes to Canada’s language policies since the 1970s provide allophone immigrants with new opportunities to challenge the dominant status of English and French, as well as enabling them to reconstruct new identities and belonging simultaneously from multiple locations. Issues around language rights in multicultural and multilingual societies like Canada are significant, because these rights are connected to ideas about ethnic identity, belonging, representation, and boundaries.

LANGUAGE AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF IDENTITY

I. The significance of language

Within the anthropology discipline, culture is defined as a system of symbols in ‘people’s heads [that] is accessible to analysis largely through language’ (Darnell, 2005: 154). For these reasons, language, perception, and reality are interwoven and subject to analysis by social actors (154–155).
Furthermore, all languages change according to specific historical, socioeconomic, and political conditions (Winter, 2007: 483). Within the context of nation-states, the stratification of languages or the practice of ranking languages is formed through power relations between insiders, or the majority, and outsiders, the minority. Differences between insider and outsider status have various and significant implications for individual and group privileges and access to resources (Winter, 2007: 483).

In order for individuals to construct and confirm their belonging and boundaries in relation to others, there must be a distinction between majority and minority. The establishment of an official language or languages is necessary for the elites to achieve and maintain political legitimacy, and it enables those endowed with the dominant language(s) to differentiate themselves from others within the nation (Bourdieu, 1991: 53). Linguistic differences are also used by members of minority groups to delineate ‘clear linguistic boundaries in relation to a surrounding dominant language and culture’ (May, 2005: 331). May’s view sought to emphasise ‘cultural and linguistic autonomy rather than one of retrenchment, isolationism, or stasis’ (332).

Pierre Bourdieu’s (1991) theory of linguistic capital is useful in analyzing the values allophone immigrants place on Canada’s official languages and patterns of second language acquisition among immigrants. Linguistic capital refers to the individual ability to use language ‘sufficiently’ in specific settings. Interactions between individuals can be seen as forms of linguistic exchange that occur within a linguistic market. When individuals use language in certain ways, they demonstrate their accumulated linguistic resources (35–37). In this sense, participants in the linguistic market are assumed to possess a certain amount of linguistic capital. In the Canadian context, linguistic capital is recognised by the knowledge or the ability to speak either of the state official languages.

Knowledge of the language(s) of the host society seems to be an important strategy for immigrants in acquiring information (e.g., with regard to employment opportunities, health care, social programmes, and legal and civic rights) in the newly adopted society. Research on immigration and linguistic practices in Canada demonstrates that immigrants who possess little or no knowledge of English or French (the latter mainly in the province of Quebec) often experience challenges in accessing the labour market and public services such as health care and housing upon arrival (Boyd, 1999: 285–286).

The acquisition of linguistic capital is multifaceted and requires speakers’ participation in the society that the language is used in. Knowledge of a majority language, learned in childhood, can be assumed to endow the speaker with greater linguistic capital. In multicultural and multilingual
societies like Canada, it is not surprising that many people possess the knowledge of more than one language that and they use different languages in various settings or institutions. Many immigrants use English or French at work and their mother tongue when they are at home or with friends (Harrison, 1999: 311–312); this example reflects strategies used by most allophone immigrants to integrate themselves into the Canadian labour market and simultaneously retain their first language.

Before I discuss the relationship between Canada’s official languages and allophone immigrants, I need to clarify what I mean by the term immigrants. The term has various meanings and is also used as a legal definition and an analytical category (Li, 2003: 39). Under Canada’s legal definition, immigrants are divided into three categories: family class, economic class, and refugee class (Samuel and Schachhuber, 2000: 14). Within the public discourse, the term immigrants is ambiguous and distorted, because it is often used to refer to those who are racially and culturally different from most Canadians (Li, 2003: 44). As an analytical category, the term is used by researchers to explain the process of moving from one country to another permanently (46). This paper makes reference to all three contexts.

II. Historical background

Beginning in the seventeenth century, large numbers of European immigrants migrated to North America and in the process displaced the many indigenous communities. At the time of European contact, indigenous groups throughout Canada spoke approximately 450 aboriginal languages and dialects in eleven language families (Burnaby, 1996: 162; Hare, 2007: 52). However, by 1991, the number declined significantly to sixty languages in eleven language families (Burnaby, 1996: 208; Hare, 2007: 52). This decline has important implications for the status of indigenous languages in Canada.

Throughout the nineteenth century, gold rushes in conjunction with the expansion of land development in western provinces attracted a large number of immigrants from various parts of Europe, Asia, and Africa (Li, 2003: 16). Even though many people immigrated to Canada under forced conditions, a large number of immigrants came voluntarily in search of employment and a better life. A significant number of immigrants from Eastern and Southern Europe (e.g., Ukrainians, Poles, and Doukhobors) who came to Canada in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries chose to settle and expand the agricultural industry in the western provinces (Samuel and Schachhuber, 2000: 16). Nonwhite immigrants, including people from various parts of Asia (e.g., China, India, and Japan) and African Americans from the United States, arrived in Canada during the same time period (Li, 2003: 17). Although these groups contributed significantly to the social and economic development of
various regions throughout the country, Canada’s restrictive immigration policies failed to reflect the contributions of nonwhite immigrants.

From the late nineteenth century to the early twentieth century, the Canadian federal government created a series of immigration legislations aimed at limiting the number of Asian immigrants into Canada. From 1886 to 1904, an estimated 45,000 Chinese immigrants were forced to pay a head tax in order to work in Canada. The head tax effectively limited the number of Chinese immigrants (Li, 2003: 17; Burnaby, 1996: 208). Despite the country’s economic growth, Canada’s immigration policy continued to use race as a basis for restricting the number of nonwhites from entering the country (Li, 2003: 17). Immigrants with European backgrounds, such as the Irish, were deemed by the Canadian government to be ‘desirable immigrants’ and were encouraged to integrate into Canadian society (Burnaby, 1996: 206–207). The Canadian federal government hoped that over time these immigrants would be assimilated into the society (208).

The emphasis on assimilation of immigrants lessened over the years. However, English and French continue to dominate Canada’s social, economic, and political structures. As Will Kymlicka (1998) suggests, the emphasis on integrating immigrants into Canada’s existing structures cannot be seen purely as a matter of cultural imperialism or ethnocentric prejudice. Historically, it is true that policies aimed at integrating citizens into a common societal culture were often justified on the grounds that cultures of ethnic minorities were backward and uncivilised. But there are a number of important and legitimate reasons for promoting a common societal culture that are not based on ethnocentric attitudes, and that remain relevant even as these prejudices fade. A modern economy requires a mobile, educated and literate workforce, and standardized public education in a common language has often been seen as essential for generating solidarity within modern democratic states. (29)

Recent public debates on immigration in Canada often focus on the influences immigrants have on shaping Canadian cultural and linguistic diversity (Li, 2003: 54). Because early immigrant groups were mainly of European origin, mostly from France and Britain, descendants from these groups do not perceive or identify themselves as immigrants (46). Alternatively, members of ‘visible minorities’, whether they were born in Canada or not, are often represented in the dominant languages media as immigrants because of their physical features and cultural practices (47–48). Differences in race and cultural practices thus become social markers that serve to differentiate ‘Canadians’ from ‘immigrants’, allowing for some individuals to confirm their belonging and national status while simultaneously dislocating others.
The ability to speak an official language is important in accessing government funded training programmes, health services, the labour market, education, citizenship, and governmental employment. Unlike immigrants of the business class, many refugees and family class immigrants who enter Canada on humanitarian grounds have little or no knowledge of English and French (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 136). Lack of knowledge of an official language has limited allophone immigrants’ access to public and social services and contributed to income inequality among allophone immigrants.

GLOBALISATION, TRANSNATIONAL MIGRATION, AND THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ETHNIC IDENTITIES

Since the 1960s, economic expansion throughout the country has further increased the labor shortage in Canada (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 137). In response to this problem, in the late 1960s the Canadian federal government introduced a point system aimed at increasing the number of skilled immigrants (Burnaby, 1996: 207). The point system operates under the assumption of ‘human capital criteria that predict success’ (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 137). Among the criteria for immigration admission under the point system is knowledge of one of Canada’s official languages (Li, 2003: 23). Those who speak either official language are considered by the government to have a better chance of integrating within Canadian society (Burnaby, 1996: 207).

In 1991, about 16% of Canada’s total population consisted of immigrants. By 2006, approximately 20% of the population identified themselves as immigrants (Statistics Canada, 2008). Research in linguistic practices among immigrants in Canada demonstrates that those who speak English and French at home or at work on a daily basis are likely to possess more linguistic capital than individuals who communicate in their first language (de Vries, 1999: 262). Studies on immigrant resettlement show that family class immigrants and refugees tend to have low educational qualifications and therefore limited employment options (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 136).

The majority of immigrants who arrived in Canada since the 1960s opted for English as a second language. Although Canada is officially bilingual, ‘beyond the borders of Quebec, and of federal politics and bureaucracy, social, political, and commercial advantage depend almost entirely on mastery of English’ (Heller, 2003: 473–474).

Factors such as age, gender, and education influence patterns of language acquisition among immigrants (Harrison, 1999: 307–308; Boyd, 1999: 284; Hou and Beiser, 2006: 138). Hou and Beiser’s (2006) study on linguistic acquisition patterns among allophone immigrants in Canada indicate that young individuals learn the official languages at a faster rate than the older
Male immigrants tend to attain better linguistic proficiency in the dominant languages than their female counterparts (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 139; Boyd, 1999: 284–286). This difference is often explained by premigration aspects such as access to formal education, and postmigration factors that include differences in accessing language training programmes and opportunities in the labor market (Boyd, 1999: 284).

Mixed-language couples in Canada often communicate with each other through a medium dominant language, mostly English (Harrison, 1999: 313; Hou and Beiser, 2006: 140). Couples in endogamous marriages are more likely to use their first language at home (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 140). These findings highlight the complex relationships between language, migration, and marital practices.

In Canada, knowledge of English or French is an important social indicator for upward mobility. This fact simultaneously places pressures on new allophone immigrants to conform to Canada’s dominant linguistic structure.

**IMMIGRANTS AND SECOND LANGUAGE ACQUISITION**

Knowledge of Canada’s official languages is important in the process of acquiring citizenship. In addition to living in Canada for three years or more, applicants for citizenship must demonstrate a ‘reasonable’ knowledge of the country’s official languages, as well as its political and social systems (Burnaby, 1996: 188). Despite the language requirement, limited proficiency does not necessarily pose a barrier to citizenship for immigrants, because immigration judges often show leniency toward those who are not fluent in either of the official languages (188).

Research on the changes in immigration patterns in Canada shows that there has been an increase in the number of immigrants from Southern countries since the 1960s (Sullivan, 1992: 122; Hou and Beiser, 2006: 140). The various waves of immigrants correspond to the political and economic changes in these regions. For example, political crises in Southeast Asia from the 1960s onward forced many people to relocate in Canada. One study estimates that between 1979 and 1981, Canada admitted approximately 60,000 refugees from this region. As a result of this trend, a large number of residents of Canada speak neither official language. In an attempt to encourage active participation of citizens in resolving this situation, the Canadian government has provided support for private and public programmes to help immigrants learn one of the official languages (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 142). Although education remains under provincial jurisdiction, the federal government agreed to contribute half of the costs of teacher training and learning materials for these language classes. Even though the
agreements offer incentives to provinces to expand language training
programmes for immigrants, the federal government cannot force the
provinces to provide such services (Burnaby, 1996: 188).

Over the years, there have been considerable controversies over language
training programmes for immigrants across the country. In addition to there
being a limited number of qualified instructors, many ESL programmes have
suffered in recent years from significant cutbacks to federal government
funding (Hou and Beiser, 2006: 143). These conditions ultimately affect the
quality of language training services for allophone immigrants—especially
women and the elderly, as many classes are now offered only at night.
Unequal access to language training programmes has a wider implication of
income inequality between ‘old settlers’ (Boyd, 1999: 284) and newcomers,
as well as among newcomers. Increases in income disparity between
immigrants and other Canadians undermine newcomers’ economic and social
contributions to the country and further reflect state failure to provide
adequate services to meet the diverse needs of newly arrived immigrants.

Since the early 1990s, the Canadian federal government has developed a
series of strategies to discourage immigrants who have little or no knowledge
of English or French. One means has been to raise the point value for those
who possess knowledge of either of the country’s official languages. Even
though this strategy aids in curbing the number of immigrants who speak
neither English nor French, it reflects the increasingly limiting role the state
plays in the provision of language training to immigrants. It also does not
address the situation of those already in the country and in need of these
services (Burnaby, 1996: 192).

MULTICULTURALISM AND POLITICS OF DIFFERENCES

The term *multiculturalism* was first used by the Royal Commission on
Bilingualism and Biculturalism in the early 1960s (Samuel and Schachhuber,
2000: 14). Since then, the term has been used in many countries, most notably
in Europe. There seems to be a lack of agreement among contemporary
Canadians over the meanings of multiculturalism (Wood and Gilbert, 2005:
679–680). Accordingly, there are three main ways of understanding
multiculturalism in Canada:

- a society that is characterized by ethnic or cultural heterogeneity, an ideal
  of equality and mutual respect among a population’s ethnic or cultural groups,
  and a government policy proclaimed by the federal government in 1971 and
  subsequently by a number of provinces. (Samuel and Schachhuber, 2000: 31)

These different meanings acknowledge the racial, ethnic, and cultural
diversity in Canadian society, and multiculturalism is often considered one of
the nation’s prominent features. In essence, multiculturalism means that full
participation in all aspects of Canadian society is officially recognised regardless of cultural, ethnic, racial, religion, and language backgrounds.

In 1971, the government under Pierre Trudeau introduced multiculturalism as Canada’s official policy. Initially, it was designed within a bilingual framework where the federal government would assist immigrants in acquiring at least one of Canada’s official languages in order to become full participants in Canadian society. (Hobbs, Lee and Haines, 1986: 667)

The government also committed to provide funding to ethnic groups ‘whose members express a desire to maintain their ethno-cultural heritage and who can demonstrate a need for such support’ (Hobbs et al., 1986: 667). Emphasis on promoting and preserving cultures and languages shaped Canada’s image as a ‘mosaic’ society in which the contributions made by different linguistic groups are officially recognised and valued (Dusenbery, 1997: 741).

Within the two years following the announcement of the multiculturalism policy, the Ministry of State for Multiculturalism and the Canadian Consultative Council were created. Soon after its establishment, the Council began to lobby the government to increase support for heritage language training programmes (Dusenbery, 1997: 667). In 1976, Canada signed the International Covenant of Political and Civil Rights, which aimed at protecting minorities’ language rights. This agreement requires that in states in which ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities exist, persons belonging to such minorities shall not be denied the right, in community with other members of their group, to enjoy their own culture, to profess and practice their own religion, or to use their own language. (Elijah, 2002: 2)

The government offers financial funding to provinces willing to expand heritage language programmes that are designed to encourage allophone immigrant children to retain their first language (Dusenbery, 1997: 667). Questions and criticisms about the effectiveness of these programmes in helping allophone immigrant children retain their first languages have been raised over the years. Specifically, critics argue that the majority of the heritage language programmes are largely aimed at the beginning level of learning the languages, do not capitalise on the non-official language skills that children bring with them from their homes, and are not coordinated with the goals and methods of ESL or FSL programs focused on getting children to learn an official language. (Burnaby, 1996: 207)

Additionally, a decline in financial support from the federal government for heritage language programmes, beginning in the early 1990s, further devalued the contributions of nonofficial languages (Burnaby, 1996: 207).
In 1988, Canada became the first liberal democratic country to introduce legislation regarding multiculturalism. Under the Multiculturalism Act, the federal government has a responsibility to ‘preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada’ (MacMillan, 1998: 85). The Act was welcomed by many Canadians and critics as an attempt by the federal government ‘to accommodate the ongoing presence of minority languages’ (May, 2005: 336). Accordingly, the emphasis on accommodation reinforced Canada’s image as a mosaic society that encourages ethnic and cultural pluralism.

Despite the focus on diversity, multiculturalism has been contested and remains controversial in Canada. Supporters of multiculturalism often perceive it as a distinctly national model of ‘toleration and accommodation’ to ethnonational diversity (Banting, 2005: 103). Alternatively, critics of multiculturalism argue that it encourages further ethnic fragmentation, endangers national unity, and prevents individuals from acting collectively as citizens (Banting, 2005: 102; Kymlicka, 1998: 16).

**CHALLENGING LINGUISTIC DOMINANCE AND REDEFINING ETHNOLINGUISTIC AND NATIONAL IDENTITIES**

I. Canada’s official languages

The history of French Canadians has often been portrayed as an ongoing struggle to gain equality with the dominant English group (Pak, 2007: 45). The 1867 British North America Act (BNA) declared French and English to be Canada’s official languages, and everyone in the country has the right to use either language in public places such as courts of law (MacMillan, 1998: 64). The tendency to privilege English and French reflected the government’s failure to accommodate the diverse needs of allophone immigrants. Early demands from various ethnic and religious groups for political recognition of allophone languages were largely rejected by the federal government. Nevertheless, allophone immigrant groups sought to establish their own schools that would provide education to children in their first language. For example, since the nineteenth century, members of certain ethnic and religious communities (e.g., Ukrainians, Doukhobors, and Mennonites) organised and funded nonofficial language classes for their children across Canada, and nonofficial language programmes continue to play important roles in many ethnic and religious communities (Burnaby, 1996: 203–204). Since the 1970s, changes in Canada’s languages policies have offered new incentives for
Previously, allophone immigrant children were either coerced or forced to replace their first language with English or French (Burnaby, 1996: 203). Although French was officially declared one of Canada’s official languages under the BNA in 1867, the decline in the number of French speakers and the increased popularity of English among allophone immigrants since the 1960s pose serious threats to the prominent status of French in Canada. In response to these perceived threats, a political movement was organised by a group of Francophone nationalists who demanded political sovereignty for Quebec. This movement, which later came to be known as the Quiet Revolution (162), ultimately transformed Quebec’s economic, linguistic, social, and political landscapes. At the time, many Canadians perceived the Quiet Revolution as a threat to national unity. The movement led to the formation of a new political party in Quebec, the Parti Quebecois (PQ), under the leadership of Rene Levesque (Forbes, 1993: 73). In response to the threat of Quebec separation, the federal government under Prime Minister Pierre Trudeau introduced the Official Languages Act in 1969, declaring the equal status of English and French under federal jurisdiction (Samuel and Schachhuber, 2000: 17). The federal government also committed to providing services in both official languages, increasing opportunities for federal government employees to use French at work, and promoting the use of French in Parliament in order to ensure equal participation (Forbes, 1993: 74). In 1978, the PQ developed legislation that prioritised French in Quebec (MacMillan, 1998: 103). By prioritizing the French language, these legislations contradicted the federal government’s policy of equality between English and French.

In 1982, the federal government reinforced the equal status of English and French through the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Although the Charter received significant support from anglophones, reactions from French Canadians were mixed. Many francophones in Quebec perceived the Charter as an attempt by the federal government to exert more power on the province. It should be mentioned here that issues concerning aboriginal language rights and allophone immigrants’ language rights were not covered in detail under the Charter. The issue over Quebec sovereignty was raised throughout the 1980s and the mid-1990s under the leadership of Prime Minister Brian Mulroney, who, like Trudeau, set out to solve the issue of Quebec sovereignty. Mulroney’s proposed solution to the issue was the Meech Lake Accord, a package of constitutional amendments that would restore Quebec’s veto power. The Accord received overwhelming support in the Quebec legislature, but opposition in Newfoundland and Manitoba resulted in the amendments not being passed (Forbes, 1993: 75). The failure of the Meech
Lake Accord regenerated the separatist movement, and the issue of Quebec sovereignty continued to be a subject of debate among Canadians.

II. Aboriginal languages

So far, much of my discussion about Canada’s language policies and accommodation has been about the two dominant groups, English and French. In the following sections, I will explore issues concerning allophone language rights of aboriginals and immigrants in Canada. In the 2001 census, 3.3% of people in Canada identified themselves as aboriginal, and approximately 4.4% claimed aboriginal ancestry. By 2006, more than 1 million people in Canada identified themselves as aboriginal (Statistics Canada, 2008). The majority of aboriginal people live in cities (Agocs, 2007: 168).

The background of indigenous language rights in Canada differs from that of French Canadians and allophone immigrants, in that the history of indigenous language rights in Canada is fraught with the histories of European colonisation, imperialism, and decolonisation. Discussions and debates about aboriginal language rights are often framed within the context of social inequalities and suppression. Under the Indian Act of 1876, indigenous education was proclaimed under federal jurisdiction. From 1876 to the 1960s, the federal government entrusted the provision of education to various Christian groups that maintained residential schools for Native children. With few exceptions, provisions in indigenous education mainly followed the assimilation approach (Burnaby, 1996: 210; Hare, 2007: 52). For many indigenous children, the acquisition of Western education took place at residential schools, requiring them to be away from their homes from an early age (Burnaby, 1996: 211; MacMillan, 1998: 189–190). Aboriginal children were discouraged from using their first language while living at the schools, and as a result, many experienced a loss or decline in their ability to use their languages. Because language plays a central role in social activities on a daily basis, the loss of aboriginal languages came to have significant implications for the cultural identities and socioeconomic status of First Nations peoples (Hare, 2007: 57). Despite the education they attained through the residential school system, many aboriginal people experienced discrimination in the labour market, where they often earned low wages and worked under poor conditions.

MacMillan (1998) suggests that the loss of aboriginal languages ‘has partly induced an erosion of traditional values and norms that offered continuity and self-respect to Aboriginal people’ (184). The residential school experience has other profound effects on individual identity and belonging within the nation. Recent accounts of sexual abuses of aboriginal children in residential schools generated new discussions and debates about the
influences that the federal government had on aboriginal education and
cultures. Although many former residential school students found the
experiences too traumatic to talk about, some have come forth to discuss their
experiences. In addition to requiring that indigenous children go to residential
schools, where they were not allowed to speak their languages, the federal
government did not offer any services in aboriginal languages (185). These
policies further reflect the government’s desire to assimilate aboriginal
cultures and languages. In recent years, the Canadian federal government has
made serious attempts, including apologies and offers of financial
compensation to victims, to redress the effects of the residential school
system.

A White Paper put forward by the Minister of Indian Affairs in 1969
brought an end to residential schools. Shortly after the White Paper, various
groups such as nonstatus Indians, the Metis, and the Inuit began to form
political organisations and demand political recognition of their rights and
status (Hare, 2007: 57; Burnaby, 1996: 207). Many groups criticised previous
residential school policies and current education funding agreements between
the federal government and provincial school boards and demanded a revision
of indigenous education that would put aboriginal people in control at the
local level (Burnaby, 1996: 207). The National Indian Brotherhood, a political
organisation representing aboriginal issues at the time, published Indian
Control of Indian Education in 1972. This document contends that indigenous
parents and local bands should have control and responsibility over the
education of their children. It also emphasises the need for aboriginal children
to acquire a good grounding in their ancestral languages (Elijah, 2002: 1).

Since the publication of Indian Control of Indian Education, important
changes have been made to indigenous language policies in Canada. For
example, federal, provincial, and band-controlled schools began to offer
classes in indigenous languages (Hare, 2007: 54; Burnaby, 1996: 208).
Despite these changes, it should be noted here that these language immersion
programmes are available only to elementary school children who live on
reserves (MacMillan, 1998: 107). Other aboriginal children attend provincial
schools, because ‘they are Metis or non-status or because their status Indian
families are living away from their home reserves’ (Burnaby, 1996: 212).
These developments pave the way for many aboriginal communities to take
control over the education of their children. Despite the progress,
administration of aboriginal education varies across provinces.

During the 1990s, negotiations were made between the federal
government and various indigenous groups in the Yukon and Northwest
 Territories to recognise French, English, and aboriginal languages as official
languages (Burnaby, 1996: 214). In the Northwest Territories, six aboriginal
languages (Chipewyan, Cree, Dogrib, Gwich’in, Inuktitut, and Slavey) were
declared to have equal status with Canada’s official languages (MacMillan, 1998: 174). The federal government agreed to cover the cost of French-language public services and the development of indigenous language programmes (Burnaby, 1996: 215). Since the 1960s, the Quebec government has signed a series of agreements whereby the Cree and Inuit would develop schools and hire staff for the teaching of aboriginal languages, with the provincial government sharing the cost of teaching materials. Quebec also revised its language law under Bill 101, which offered official recognition to Cree, Inuktitut, and Naskapi languages in the territories covered by the James Bay Agreement (Shabani, 2004: 212; MacMillan, 1998: 175). With regard to education, Bill 101 declared that Cree and Inuktitut were to be the languages of instruction and that aboriginal peoples had control over school boards. At the same time, the Quebec provincial government stipulated that the French language was to be taught in these schools to provide opportunities for those who chose to pursue higher education in Quebec (MacMillan, 1998: 175).

These initiatives represent a significant shift from previous government policies concerning aboriginal education and the preservation of aboriginal languages.

These changes were welcome in many First Nations communities, as many recognised these initiatives as important resources for the preservation of their languages. However, research indicates that many indigenous language programmes ‘give only lip service to pluralist approaches and that they are actually assimilationist in intent’ (Shabani, 2004: 216). Specifically, critics point out that the demand for government services in aboriginal languages continued to be denied by the federal government. The government’s rationale is that these languages have too few speakers and that there would not be enough qualified staff if the government were to offer such services. The status of indigenous languages remains controversial in Canada.

The creation of the new Canadian province, Nunavut, in 1999, resulted from twenty years of negotiation between the Canadian federal government and the Inuit in the region. The Nunavut government declared Inuktitut (the local Inuit language), English, and French to be the official languages of the province (May, 2005: 326). The Nunavut government also chose to decentralise government programmes and services to the local level to ensure that aboriginal people would have control over these services (MacMillan, 1998: 202).

Attempts have been made by the federal and provincial governments to hire aboriginal interpreters in courts. This change reflected the idea that individuals have the right to fully understand the state legal procedure. The governments also support the expansion of aboriginal media such as radio broadcasts and television programmes. TV North Canada, the Northern Natives Broadcasting Access Program, and Watawau are examples of some of
the broadcast programmes controlled by aboriginal people (Nancoo and
Nancoo, 2000: 38). Additionally, the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network
(APTN), which was created in Manitoba in 1999, features event, culture, and
news programming that caters to both aboriginal and nonaboriginal audiences
(40). These programmes serve as an alternative to mainstream English and
French mass media. The rise in aboriginal media and education has aided the
growth of aboriginal languages in Canada. In 1996, approximately 186,000
people in Canada reported that they speak aboriginal languages at home. By
2006, the number had increased to 210,000 (Statistics Canada, 2008).

III. Other languages

With regard to allophone language rights for speakers of other languages,
the federal government has been subject to questions and criticisms from
activists, government officials, and scholars over the years. Public discussions
and debates about language rights for allophone speakers are often framed
within the contexts of national unity, toleration rights, or accommodation
rights (Forbes, 1993: 76). Allophone language rights claims are generally
assessed according to certain criteria, including group size, the visibility of the
language within the community, and the persistence of the language
(MacMillan, 1998: 197). Currently, no allophone language groups can gain
official recognition, ‘either because of insufficient numbers or insufficient
elapsed time for the languages to have visibly taken root in Canadian society’
(200). However, a stronger commitment from the provincial governments to
the provision of allophone languages education in schools would encourage
the growth of these languages.

In the 1991 census, 8% of Canadians reported a nonofficial language as
their home language (Samuel and Schachhuber, 2000: 15). In 1986, Italian
and Chinese were each spoken by 1% of Canadians in their homes
(MacMillan, 1998: 200). According to one study, the number of Chinese
speakers rose from 94,900 in 1971 to more than half a million in 1991 (201).
By 2006, there are more than 1 million Chinese speakers throughout Canada
(Statistics Canada, 2008), many of whom are raised and educated in their first
language.

After the influx of Italian immigrants during the late nineteenth and early
twentieth centuries, the Italian language was sustained in Canada for many
decades (Ballarini, 1993: 23–24). However, the Italian language has
undergone a significant decline since the 1980s. In 1996, about 484,000
people in Canada reported their first language as Italian. By 2006, the number
of Italian speakers had declined to 455,040 (Statistics Canada, 2008).
Research indicated assimilation as the main cause for the decline (MacMillan,
The experiences of Ukrainian immigrants with regard to language rights differ from those of Chinese and Italian speakers. In the past, Ukrainian language rights claims had their focus at the regional or provincial level rather than at the national level. In some provinces, most notably the Prairie provinces, Ukrainian language communities succeeded in claiming their language rights (McLeod, 1993: 35). The 1971 census reported that more than half a million people declared their first language to be Ukrainian. However, by the 1990s, there was a significant decline in the number of Ukrainian speakers (Chumak-Horbatsch, 1993: 94). In 1996, approximately 162,695 people reported their first language as Ukrainian. By 2006, the number had declined to 134,000 (Statistics Canada, 2008). Together, the Chinese, Italian, and Ukrainian cases reflect the shift in values that allophone immigrants placed on their first languages and Canada’s official languages.

Canada’s 1971 multiculturalism policy, with its emphasis on linguistic diversity and the accommodation of allophone languages, contributed to the expansion of heritage programmes throughout the country (Derwing and Munro, 2007: 94). This growth reflects the values and contributions of allophone immigrants in Canada. In 1971, Alberta became the first province in Canada to legalise allophone languages in the public school system. In other western provinces, public schools are permitted to provide instruction in bilingual classes (e.g., Chinese–English, Ukrainian–English, and German–English; MacMillan, 1998: 20). By 1989, approximately 129,000 students reportedly studied 60 allophone languages in schools throughout Canada (200). In 1988, the Ontario provincial government introduced a policy that allows public schools to provide instruction in allophone languages if more than 25 students’ parents in a given school board make the request (Derwing and Munro, 2007: 97). In contrast, the provincial governments in the Atlantic provinces do not support heritage education in public schools (98). The discrepancies in the level of commitment by provincial governments reflect the diverse perceptions and influences of some allophone languages in various regions and communities throughout Canada.

Ethnic media and media catering to specific language groups have increased in some major urban cities (e.g., Toronto and Vancouver) in recent years, in response to the needs of those who do not possess the knowledge of either official language. Ethnic newspapers in Canada enjoy a significant degree of independence from government regulation. Increasingly, allophone immigrants find the mass media (e.g., newspapers and television) to be important sources of information about Canada. In 1989, an estimated 131 newspapers were published in allophone languages. Recognising the linguistic barriers experience by many allophone immigrants, *Maclean’s* and *Toronto Life* magazines began to publish Chinese-language editions in 1995. Aside from these magazines, the *Vancouver Sun* also agreed to reprint its newspaper

Radio stations such as CHIN and CHUM in Toronto air programmes sponsored by various ethnic groups (Nancoo and Nancoo, 2000: 42). Many ethnic groups in urban centres buy television time on weekends to broadcast news and entertainment to diverse groups of audiences. Additionally, AT&T and the American telecommunication networks expanded their Language Line Services into Canada, offering a wide range of allophone language services, and some hospitals in Toronto reportedly use these services for clients who do not speak English or French (201). The rise in ethnic media, in conjunction with the popularity of allophone languages education, provides important avenues for immigrants to redefine their belonging and identities in their newly adopted society.

**CONCLUSION**

As we have seen, issues concerning language rights in multicultural societies like Canada remain highly controversial and contested. Prior to the 1960s, Canada’s language policies followed the assimilationist approach and prioritised the nation’s dominant languages, English and French. Changes to the economy, immigration patterns, and language policies since the 1960s have provided major impetus for researchers and scholars for rethinking and problematising language issues within existing socioeconomic and political contexts. The closing gap between local, regional, national, and global markets brought newcomers into competition with old settlers and created advantages for those who know English or French. At the same time, the values attached to these languages produce constraints for some residents of Canada, mainly allophone immigrants who do not possess linguistic skills in the dominant languages.

The shift in language policies, in conjunction with the rise in ethnic media over the recent years, encouraged many to retain their first language. With regard to second language acquisition among allophone immigrants, factors such as gender, race, ethnicity, age, generation, education level, and marital status can be barriers to acquiring a second language. These factors also influence the complex relationships between language, identity, boundary and belonging. The establishment of multiculturalism policies since the 1970s created opportunities for various ethnic groups to assert their claims to language rights. The establishment of allophone language schools in various ethnic and religious communities in the nineteenth century and the aboriginal language rights movement in the early 1970s redefined the roles of allophone
languages and effectively challenged the dominant status of English and French. In addition, the expansion of ethnic media and heritage education programmes in recent years have provided allophone groups with opportunities to gain public visibility and thereby promote the growth of allophone languages. Despite these changes, the reluctance of the federal government to establish clear and comprehensive allophone language rights policies, in conjunction with the discrepancies among provincial language policies, indicates a need for more changes.
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