

LANGUAGE IDEOLOGIES AND LANGUAGE PRACTICE IN FRENCH ADULT LITERACY CENTERS IN CANADA: THE CASE OF FRENCH ONTARIO

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1. Introduction

In this paper I focus on the relationship between language ideologies and language practices in French adult literacy, by looking at the ways in which language ideologies are bound up with processes of communication and language learning in francophone community centres. Other than in the outside world where English is the dominant language, French adult literacy centres privilege French as the language of instruction and want to provide with their services an exclusively francophone clientele.

In sociolinguistic research a lot of evidence was given for the involvement of language ideologies in various educational settings (Heller, 1999a, 1999b; Cazabon, 1988, 1989; Cazabon & Frenette, 1989; Clavel *et al.*, 1984). As in many institutional spaces where linguistic capital is transmitted and social reproduction is organised, such ideologies also underlie the rules of language management in francophone literacy centres. The rules have to do with questions of how to manage the linguistic border between French and English and how to conceive and built up a standard variety of French in the Canadian context.

Especially in French schools in and outside Quebec considerable efforts are made to formulate and diffuse a standardised French which aims to exclude not only English but also non-standard French varieties such as vernacular French mostly spoken by members of the working class (Boucher, 1989; Heller, 1999a, 1999b). The pressure of social distinction through language is comparatively high in francophone schools. In this institutional space the mastery of standard French is a condition for social recognition and success and serves as a means to control the access to material and symbolic resources. Thus, standard French as the normative model in French schools

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represents symbolic power; furthermore it is a key that allows accessing a position of power (Bourdieu, 1977).

Monolingual francophone spaces such as schools, credit unions or social and charitable clubs emerged as a result of francophone emancipation and political mobilisation; claims that were made especially by the francophone elite. In this move, the attention also turned to adult literacy in French, understood as a means for entering the modern world and gaining control over cultural and economic resources. Starting from an idea of the French community as a bounded up whole, the making literate of community members should not only help in reproducing the linguistic community, it also should allow francophones accessing collectively the modern economic world. But in fact, initiatives of this kind in Ontario turned out to serve mostly the interests of the French middle class while illiterate people with French background most of the time stayed away from this opportunity or chose to be literate in English.

As I pointed out earlier and according to Quebec's linguistic nationalism, literacy centres are meant to contribute to the maintenance of a French speaking community, which is understood as a monolingual homogenous body with distinctive cultural features. That's why the centers privilege French for their internal communication and as the only language of instruction. Maintaining this idea only French speakers and those who can prove a French descent are admitted in the programs. This poses a lot of problems on a theoretical and practical level. Theoretically it is problematic to define who counts as French, because the rate of assimilation among francophones is sometimes high, that their ability to actually speak French is quite limited. Although they don't speak French anymore, they are still considered –or consider themselves– French because of their genetic roots. In opposition, anglophones who do not have the benefit of a French family background are excluded from francophone programs. On a practical level, the demand for only using French in the centres and the surrounding social activities poses problems, given the very unequal mastery of French among adult learners. The management of the language boundary, thus, raises a variety of problems and conflicts that certainly have an impact on people's perceptions and actions. Even if the exclusion of English is not explicitly outlined in the statute or official statements of the centres, as a language ideology it obviously does its effect, so for instance when anglophone partners feel excluded from social activities that

take place outside the classroom, but where the atmosphere is likely not to welcome non French-speakers. Some other issues of this kind and the ways in which people represent themselves and act with respect to linguistic norms will be discussed in this paper.

As an ethnographic observer in literacy classes of francophone centres who doesn't know the self-chosen internal policy very well you probably would get the impression, that such kind of normative behaviour including permanent control and correction, as it was described for francophone schools, is less present, or at least less obvious. As an attempt to explain this situation which turns out to be more than a first superficial and somehow wrong impression two hypothesis can be made: Either language ideologies are less spread or less powerful among the social actors involved in literacy centres (including literacy workers as well as course participants) what could have to do with a lower degree of consciousness for these issues; or language ideologies are as present as somewhere else in peoples heads, but the relations of power what structure this institutional space are different from those in schools, that's why the rules for language use are not handled with the same strength. This may have to do firstly with the differences between schools and literacy centres as educational institutions – one dealing with the education of children and the other with the training of adults– and secondly, as an effect of the first reason, with differing relations of power between literacy workers and learners. Compared to the school where the pressure to respect the standard variety is high, in the community centres all linguistic resources available to the participants seem to be valued or at least taken into account, even if they don't conform to the high expectations regarding a standard French or the policy of its unique use.

Compared to other contexts, language seems to be understood less as a means for creating social standing than as a tool for assuring communication and learning progress. In the language practice this leads to renegotiations of linguistic norms and communicational rules, which diverge from the “linguistic ideology of homogeneity” suggesting the only use of French and, furthermore, the use of a particular French as it is required in other institutions of the French minority such as schools. However, the goal of this paper consists not only in revealing the tension between language ideologies and linguistic practices in French literacy centres, but also in showing strategies to deal with institutional, ideologically based norms of language use and the creation of

alternative ways by which linguistic practices and communicational norms get negotiated and redefined.

My paper is divided into two sections. In the first section I'm discussing language ideologies as they were expressed in personal interviews with learners and teachers in French literacy classes. The statements reveal different aspects of how to create a French standard based on various sources of legitimacy. In the wide range of opinions there are mainly two language ideologies, one relying on the beneficial historical legacy of French colonialism and the other referring to ideas of purism that evoke social elitism as well as Quebec's linguistic nationalism aspiring to create its own standard. Although some of the statements describe a more general perspective on attitudes towards language and language use, others relate directly to the speakers own linguistic production revealing stereotypes and prejudices, which are the material from what social categorisations are made.

In the second section I'm looking at statements where learners and literacy workers describe their linguistic practices and their strategies to manage the linguistic border between French and English. Exploring the data, it comes out that there is a gap between linguistic norms individuals believe true in general and linguistic norms, which they consider valid in the context of French literacy centres. This tension underlines, once again, the well-known fact that social interaction including linguistic production is a battleground where the rules of communication are context-related and negotiable. That also means that social hierarchies are flexible and depending on the communicative context and institutional space. The process we can observe in francophone community centres is, that established rules (the exclusive use of French) are ignored in favour of a more equal use of the participant's linguistic resources (which means a certain acceptance of English) in order to neutralise the asymmetric relation of power between literacy workers and learners. These processes, which lead to the creation of alternative norms, show the instability or relativity of hegemonic linguistic ideologies as well as the limits of their reasonable use in some educational settings.

2. Language ideologies: Ideas of standard French

2.1. Français de France

Large parts of the academically educated francophone elite still refer to the standard French from Paris, the so called “bon usage” as it was named by Vaugelas in the 17th century. The long tradition founded by grammarians, authors and other linguists at the service of the French court evokes even in modern times values of high education, culture and a qualitative writing. This reference made by French Canadians or Quebecers implicates the will of belonging to that glorious tradition in which also the francophone Canada recognises its roots and history as different from those of their British compatriots.

At the same time tones of critique at the French colonialism and cultural imperialism are becoming loud. In the first example Francine, a literacy worker, explains and evaluates phonetic differences between the French from Paris and the variety she and other Quebecers speak. Phonetic features, here, serve to create social hierarchy by putting up a ranking of speech varieties.

Example 1. F: Francine, literacy worker; C: Camille, learner, G: Gabi, interviewer.

F: les sons sont purs / les la façon qu'ils prononcent ses *i* là / c'est certainement leur façon de prononcer *i* ils ils prononcent le vrai le vrai son du *i* / le vrai son français du *i*

C: ah oui

F: oui / parce que on vient que / ici des fois

G: ici c'est qu'est-ce qu'on prononce ici

F: tu vois ça tu vérifies tu t'entoures / dans ce que je dis là / [...] on devrait dire je l'ai dit [prononce le *i* dans *dit* plus tendu] / il faut il faut que le *i* soit pointu / et toi c'est comme ça que tu le dis là / tu l'as dit [prononce le *i* dans *dit* plus tendu] toi / moi c'est pas comme ça que je le dis

C: [rire]

F: ça fait que toi c'est toi qui a la bonne façon // [...] nous on déforme les sons / tandis que toi t'as des sons / c'est pour ça que je dis qu'elle a le le sens / un peu l'accent français dans le sens que les sons sont purs

C: elle fait le vrai son français [...] (sur les Français de France) oui ce que j'étais ben pour dire ils expriment ben leurs mots / i veulent être certains qu'on les entende [rire]

English translation: (about French from Paris)

F: the sounds are pure / the way in which they pronounce the *i* / their way to pronounce the *i* is the right way / it is the right way

C: oh yes

F: yes / that's why / here some times

G: here / how do you pronounce it here

F: you see / look at the way I am talking / [...] one should say dit (which means said) / the i needs to be tense / that's exactly the way you say it / you said dit / that's not the way I talk

C: [laughter]

F: that means that you have the right way of talking // [...] we are deforming the sounds / compared to you / that's why I say she has got the / her accent is close to the French accent in the sense that the sounds are pure

C: she speaks the true French [...] (and related to the people from France) yes what I wanted to say is that they express their words very well / to make sure you listen to them

Although we seemingly assist to a discussion of phonetic features, the quote reveals more than the purely linguistic dimensions. It reveals that the relationship of French Canadians towards the Parisian norm is ambiguous. On the one hand Canadian Francophones identify themselves positively with the historical and cultural legacy of French colonialism –and estimate highly the Parisian accent– because the French kingdom and its colonial expansion laid the basis for a French Canada. On the other hand France is criticised for declaring itself the heard of “la francophonie” showing a paternalistic and sometimes arrogant behaviour towards other francophone cultures. Especially Quebec, who has achieved to counterbalance culturally and economically the earlier uncontested hegemony of France wants a recognition as equal member of “la francophonie internationale”.

2.2. Français québécois

As a consequence of growing Quebec nationalism another idea of a French standard variety has emerged. The standard of French is no longer seen as an imitation or identical portrayal of the Parisian French but as an original creation from Quebecers for Quebec. Of course, with respect to grammar and syntax and due to the criteria of international communicability only a very few digressions are allowed. But the important process here is the distancing from the historical father figure France, which correlates with the emancipation movement and the Quebec state nationalism finding its expression also in linguistic and cultural matters.

Example 2. F: Florence, literacy worker; G: Gabi, interviewer.

G: et aux questions de la norme linguistique la variété est-ce que c'était important est-ce qu'ils t'ont demandé d'enseigner un certain standard ou

F: non pas nécessairement //

G: mais tu as quand même une perception de ce que c'est le standard pour toi

F: oui

G: par rapport

F: oui par rapport à finalement à ce qui est exigé tout ça c'est certain que / bon je pense que c'est important de phraser pour avoir des règles très / importantes surtout que l'enfant maîtrise bien la langue et puis / qu'il essaie d'être capable par la suite de retrouver ce français quand il lit / tout ça pis qu'on veut qu'il réinvestisse au niveau de l'écriture pour avoir un niveau de français acceptable comparé au langage / finalement qu'on parle là dans la vie qui est peut être un peu moins complet / tout ça / un français je ne dirais pas européen parce que je pense qu'il y a une distinction entre le français québécois et le français européen / mais le français serait courant

G: mh / avec des expressions québécoises

F: oui oui / mais mais [XX] pas vraiment de dire les expressions pour certaines choses oui mais je préfère qu'on utilise les mots justes / je trouve qu'au Québec souvent / on utilise des expressions il y a beaucoup d'anglicismes / ou / des expressions qui veulent plus ou moins pas dire grand chose en / bien parler en français / pas impeccable mais qui qui est quand même axé au standard

G: and with respect to linguistic norms / was language variety important / did they ask you to teach according to some kind of standard

F: no not necessarily //

G: but in general you have a perception of what counts as standard French for you

F: yes

G: with respect to

F: with respect to what is finally expected / ok I think it's important to know the rules / that the child has a good mastery of spoken language / that it's able to reencounter the language when it comes to reading / and all this you'd like the child to invest in its writing skills to reach an acceptable level compared to spoken language / the French we use in daily life is perhaps somehow incomplete / all this / this French I wouldn't call it European because I think there is a difference between français québécois and the français européen / but anyway the French should be commun

G: mh / with regional expressions from Quebec

F: yes yes / but but [XX] not every expression / for certain things / I prefer the right words / I think in Quebec / people often use expressions I mean there are a lot of Anglicism / or / expressions which don't really have any meaning / to speak good French means not to speak impeccably but still oriented towards the standard

Florence is a speech therapist by profession and has a lot of experiences in working with disabled children. She knows perfectly well about the link between language performance and cognitive development, that's why she emphasises the psychological dimensions related to the acquisition of language, literacy and learning in

general. For her the mastery of standard has a double function; first it facilitates to become literate and lays the ground for school success –here she underlines the different character of spoken and written language, and second she criticises the use of anglicisms subscribing to the purist argument we already heard. Interestingly, she detects such linguistic traces not only in the English language but also in “regional expressions from Quebec” for those I was asking, and stigmatises, by this, mainly vernacular speakers, who live in rural areas and who are from a working class background. When she restricts her demand to speak purely standard, she doesn’t mean to allow improper expressions (like English ones), but she rather thinks of properties you may find in the spoken language which is naturally less precise, more redundant and syntactically less complex. Her expectations of a standard based French are nevertheless high.

2.3. Mixed language

Most of the times standardizing processes come along with selection procedures that are organised around specific criteria. Issues of purity, insinuating cultural, moral or religious qualities, often legitimise these criteria. They are not only meant to constitute a guideline for people who want to be good speakers of a language; they also establish extra-linguistic values, which are considered to be important for the upbringing and education of good citizens (see for instance Higonnet, 1980; Outram, 1987; Schlieben-Lange, 1983, 2000). Regarding the linguistic and social context of French Quebec, one ideological pattern has always been prevalent when it came to define the Canadian French. Since the 19th century the French elite, notably representatives of the church, conducted a debate against the influence of English and banished every English expression from the French language (Bouthillier & Meynaud, 1972). This linguistic battle, also called “Chasse aux anglicismes”, did not only serve to protect the French community from assimilation to English; it also guaranteed the leadership of the church over the francophone community (Choquette, 1987, 1993).

This purist debate is still going on, even if the leadership and the political goals have changed with the Quiet Revolution in Quebec (Heller, 1999a, 1999b). However, the effect to exclude not only English speakers but also speakers of the French vernacular, which is said to be contaminated by English has not so much changed over time. How deeply the reproach of impurity and contamination is rooted in people’s

minds and how powerfully it still works to inculcate critical self-control and self-incrimination shows the following example.

Example 3. M: Maryse, learner; G: Gabi, interviewer.

M: oui / j'aimerais ça le bien parler / comme toi

G: qu'est-ce que ça veut dire bien parler

M: ehm / comme moi je trouve que je parle / pas bien français [rire] comme toi tu parles c'est bien tu tu utilises les bons [accentuation] mots / nous autres c'est slang comme / tu tu you know / à place de dire moi c'est [mwe] / tu vois c'est différent / mais j'essaie de vraiment concentrer pour sortir mes mots bien en français / mais comme toi là je trouve que tu parles différent à moi like tu parles le bon français [rire] [...] nous autres c'est je trouve c'est plus slang / parce que quand on ne connaît pas un mot en français on le dit en anglais

M: yes / I would like to speak well / like you

G: what does it mean to speak well

M: ehm / like me I don't think I speak / French very well [laughter] like you you speak well you are using the good expressions / we are using slang like / you you you know / instead of saying moi we say [mwe] (which means English me) / you see that's different / but I'm trying really hard to pronounce my French words correctly / but you I think your French is different from mine like you speak the good French [laughter] [...] I think our language is more slang / because every time you don't know the word in French you say it in English

Maryse is a typical vernacular speaker. This shows in morpho-syntactical constructions such as verb prepositions and in lexical elements borrowed from English like *you know*, *well* and so on. As the quote shows she is very well aware of her language use being a vernacular speaker and the social stigmatisation related to it. To strengthen her point, my way of speaking French is cited to give the good example, a comparison that was made not only ones. Identified as a European my French had to be and certainly was closer to the Parisian standard than that of many French Canadians.

As we have seen, ideas about standard French are not at all absent from community literacy centres. At the contrary, they are vibrant and deeply internalised with respect to positive connotation as well as a source of stigmatisation.

3. Language practices: Tensions and creation of new norms

In the second part I look at language use and the negotiation of linguistic norms in social interaction. The question here is to know, to what extent language ideologies

which were articulated in the first part of the paper apply to specific situations of social interaction and where lies the potential for negotiating new norms. As I pointed out earlier, in order to protect the French language and the community of homogeneously French speaking individuals, the preferred language in the centres is French. The following example shows that this rule is contested and a new order is established according to the linguistic resources available for the participants. Andy and Rose are learners whose dominant language is English. Because of their limited resources in French they have difficulties in following the class, which is lead by a women from Quebec who speaks only French and this rather fast and difficult to understand for learners like Rose and Andy. On the other hand the literacy worker from Quebec doesn't understand very well English, so they decide to make a deal.

Example 4. A: Andy, learner; R: Rose, learner; G: Gabi, interviewer.

A: s'ils [les apprenants] se parlent trop en anglais quoi

G: elle comprend pas

R: ben elle a de la misère / si tu parles trop vite / en en anglais / pis nous autres

G: elle est du Québec c'est ça

A/R: oui oui

R: ok on a eu ben du fun on a appris ben pis tout eh well / il faut qu'elle parle slow plus slow

A: oui

A: every time they (the learners) talk to much together in English

G: she doesn't understand

R: well she has got a problem / if you talk to fast / in in English / and we do so

G: because she is from Quebec

A/R: that's right

R: ok it was fun and we really learnt a lot and well / but she needs to talk more slowly more slowly

A: yes indeed

The deal between the literacy worker and the learners that Rose and Andy are describing consists in a mutual agreement that recognises the linguistic resources of all the participants. The women from Quebec has agreed to talk more slowly, Rose and Andy take the freedom to speak in English when they lack the language competence in French. In doing so, they ignore a major policy of the French centre which is to renounce at the use of English inside the institution. A relation of power, which is

different from those in the school, creates the possibility for this renegotiations. The main reason for this is due to the learning context, which involves adults on both sides, literacy worker on the one and adult learners on the other. In order to create a balanced and hypothetically equal relation between those two, concessions regarding the use of language are made. Both are supposed to equalise the position of power teachers usually occupy in schools, and both signify a reduction of power the literacy worker is willing to give in. Firstly, the permissive attitude towards English in the classroom puts her in a position of weakness given the fact, that she doesn't speak English very well. Secondly, while the literacy worker is adapting the speed of his speech she recognises the needs of their learners and reacts to them by adjusting her way of speaking. This example shows how linguistic norms are negotiated in the classroom taking into account the asymmetric distribution of linguistic capital and, by doing so, equalising the asymmetric relation of power between the literacy worker and the learners.

In the next example we can observe a situation where linguistic norms interfere, which are designed for different learning context, notably the school and the adult learning centre. Relations of power between the literacy worker and the learner are central also to this example. Francine, the literacy worker, is talking about the management of the French/English linguistic border and criticises the translation method which consists in translating words into English whenever a pupil doesn't know a word in French.

Example 5. F: Francine, literacy worker; J: Jocelyne, learner; G: Gabi, interviewer.

F: elle [la méthode de traduction simultanée] est correcte en soi d'une manière par contre si on veut sauver notre langue française qui est quand même nos racines / c'est un facteur que je trouve qui l'ébranle [...] quand ils arrivent au niveau secondaire et que ils ont là pour apprendre du vocabulaire pour apprendre d'autres mots parce que ça force en savoir qu'on peut jouer avec ses mots / ben les professeurs passent dans les corridors les portes sont ouvertes / pis l'élève c'est un élève qui lui demande [au prof] qu'est-ce que c'est ça ce mot là alors au lieu de lui dire un autre mot pour lui expliquer qu'est-ce que c'est / le commutateur faire le contexte au lieu de prendre un synonyme ou de prendre d'autres mots pour expliquer qu'est-ce que c'est pour qu'il puisse le répéter en français / on dirait le mot anglais alors ça devient de la traduction simultanée / c'est pas un cours de français que de faire de la traduction à mon / à mon point de vue

J: même moi / ça devrait pas être anglais du tout du tout

F: non non c'est correct /

J: ça devrait pas être l'anglais du tout du tout même la traduction ça devrait pas l'être [...] ou bien l'enfant va dire I don't understand comme je

comprends pas ça / alors / c'est quelque chose qu'on devrait jamais faire
mais / des fois ça

F: ça va plus vite là [rire]

F: [the method of simultaneous translation] is correct by itself but if we want to preserve our language and our roots / that's a factor which strangle [...] when they reach the level of secondary school they need to learn new words to enlarge their vocabulary because that allows them to play with these words / ok the teachers are strolling in the corridors and the doors are open / and the student asks him (the teacher) what does this word mean and instead of choosing another word to explain what it means / to give a synonym to contextualize or to give an explanation with other words in French which can be repeated / they usually say the word in English and this becomes a simultaneous translation / from my point of view that's not what a French class should be

J: even me / it shouldn't be English at all

F: no no that's correct

J: I shouldn't be using English at all I shouldn't use translation [...] otherwise the kid will say I don't understand like I don't understand this / so / that's something I should never allow / but sometimes

F: it goes simply faster [laughter]

Talking about the right linguistic upbringing for francophones kids the literacy worker refers to the schools and criticises the behaviour of teachers who do, in her opinion, neglect the linguistic development of French kids by using English instead of paraphrasing in French. While she is talking about the schools Jocelyne who is an anglo-dominant learner feels concerned by the critique and acts as if she was meant by it. Now we assist to an extraordinary act of repairing from Francine's side. She realises that she had gone to far and tries to convince Jocelyne that the rules she was demanding to be respected in schools do not apply for Jocelyne who is not a schoolteacher but a learner in an adult literacy centre. Having different social positions and responsibilities both are not to be judged by the same law. Thus, rules of linguistic behaviour are relative and do not apply to everybody in the same way. The attempt to repair the situation almost fails because Jocelyne feels so wrong and culpable. The only way to stop Jocelyne blaming herself is to cut off the discussion by the sharply pronounced phrase *it goes simply faster* followed by a nervous and loud laughter. Curiously, the argument of speech effectiveness Francine now brings into the discussion was earlier totally rejected by her. This shows that not only rules apply differently to various social actors but also arguments on linguistic norms are invested unequally in the debate.

4. Conclusion

As a conclusion we retain that French literacy centres are a place that is penetrated by language ideologies as much as any other educational institution in French Canada. People who work and learn in these centres have grown up with the same imposture of linguistic norms that still dominate the public debate in francophone Canada. Nevertheless, they are differences in applying these ideologies and in putting up norms that regulate communicational processes and the organisation of social structure. While the school is handling the language border between French and English in a way, which tries to exclude English at least in the class rooms literacy centres for adults who may have a theoretically similar position seem to follow this convention even less. At least, in practice we observe the negotiation of new interactively created, linguistic norms that take into account all of the participants' resources to equalise an asymmetric relation of power between the interacting partners.

Currently, a new literacy policy that follows neoliberal standards is imposed by the Ontario government. According to their political priorities that focus on labour market policies and professionalised training programs for adults, literacy classes are becoming more oriented towards individualised and result oriented learning. If this, in a long-term perspective, will change the attention paid to questions of quality of language cannot be foreseen. A certain strengthening of practices that control the purity and quality of language seems rather probable because from an economic point of view language quality counts more and more as an evidence of professionalism and competency in serving clients (Budach, Roy & Heller, 2003). However, there is no doubt that the pressure to follow school curricula rises and, by that, the need for testing competencies and documenting results. Nevertheless, even if there is a touchable approach towards schools, literacy centres should maintain their different character as institutions that originally aimed to somehow compensate the effects of exclusionist practices exerted in schools and other mainstream educational institutions.

Transcription conventions

/	short pause
//	longer pause (up to 2 seconds)
[...]	skipped sentence
[XX]	incomprehensible
(in English me)	commentary from the author

[laughter]	metalinguistic commentary
<i>you know</i>	code-switching (English in the French transcript)
<i>moi</i>	word or sentence not translated into English to keep the sense of the argument
good	emphatic accentuation

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