



Living in French in Québec



Québec 

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in Québec

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Located in the northeastern part of North America, Québec is the place where the major cultural and commercial currents of Europe and the United States converge. Thanks to this strategic position, Québec is able to act as an interface between Europe and the United States in a number of fields.

With its 7.4 million inhabitants, Québec accounts for 24% of the Canadian population. Over 80% of Québec's population has French as a mother tongue, close to 10%, English, and 10%, another language, in particular Italian, Spanish or Greek. A large proportion of the population masters French and English, and often even a third language.

In an era where the globalization of trade and the growing influence of communications are leading to a homogenization of cultures and a weakening of the universal language heritage, the presence of a French-speaking society on the continent is an asset for North America.

Twenty years ago the Québec National Assembly adopted the *Charter of the French Language*. The purpose of this language law was to re-affirm the desire of most Quebecers to make French the common language of work, instruction, communications, commerce and business.

The objective was to protect the French language and to promote its development within the North American context, without however wanting to isolate Québec. While seeking to preserve its identity, culture and language, Québec has become, in recent decades, much more open to the rest of the world than ever before.

In affirming this willingness to live in French, Québec has respected the institutions of the English-speaking community and the aboriginal nations, and has taken into account the other cultures present on Québec's territory. The language legislation encourages their contribution to the development and influence of Québec, by creating a coherent living space of which they are a part.

The reason why Québec had to adopt this legislation to preserve its identity is that the situation of the French language in North America as a whole is precarious and must be the subject of constant vigilance. Indeed, the some six million francophone Quebecers, who form a majority on their territory, represent a very small minority in North America. Quebecers are surrounded by 300 million Anglophones. Vigilance is particularly called for in the Greater Montréal area, which is home to a large portion of the English-speaking population and the vast majority of immigrants. Moreover, new realities in the field of information technologies and the internationalization of trade pose further challenges to the use of French, not only in Québec but also throughout the Francophonie.

The aim of the language policy is to make French the common public language by which Québec's cultural, scientific and economic vitality is expressed, while remaining open to other languages and cultures.

Before examining the various activities affected by Québec's language policy, a brief look at the breakdown of the population in terms of language is in order.

It quickly becomes apparent that there are marked differences between the Montréal area and the rest of Québec in terms of the language distribution.



A largely French-speaking society

More than 80 % of Quebecers have French as their mother tongue, and the proportion of the population that claims to know French is even greater, namely nine persons out of ten. As a result, French is the language that is commonly used in most areas of Québec.

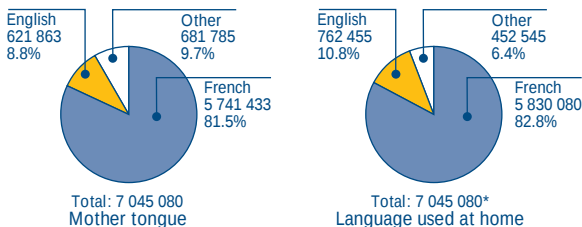
Québec and Montréal: two

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Over the last 20 years, the English-speaking community has seen its demographic weight decline and now represents about 10 % of the total population. However, the proportion of Quebecers who say that they use English at home is slightly greater. The rest of the population has a mother tongue other than French and English (Allophones); recent surveys indicate that the knowledge of French is becoming increasingly widespread among Allophones.

Breakdown of the population of Québec according to mother tongue and the language used at home, all of Québec, 1996



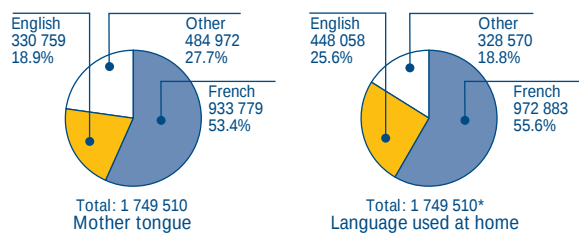
* The language used at home is the one most often spoken there.

Montréal, a different portrait

The language portrait of Québec's economic capital is quite different. Fifty-seven percent of the residents of the Island of Montréal have French as their mother tongue, with the rest of the population having English (19 %) or another (28 %) language as their mother tongue. More than half of Québec's Anglophones and more than three-quarters of its Allophones can be found in Montréal. Montréal has an ever growing number of bilingual and multilingual citizens. Over half of the work force active in the Montréal area speaks French and English. And the use of a third language, mainly Spanish, is increasing.

A growing number of firms are discovering that this labour force which masters more than one language represents an important “added value” for Québec’s economic capital.

Breakdown of the population of the Island of Montréal according to mother tongue and the language used at home, Island of Montréal, 1996



* The language used at home is the one most often spoken there.

Hence, it is mainly in Montréal that the question of the use of French in the various activity spheres arises. The language choices that a constantly growing allophone population makes are decisive. Yet for a significant portion of immigrants, language transfers continue to be to English, even though this trend has been less pronounced in recent years, and over 80 % of Montréal residents state that they can carry on a conversation in French. Recent data show that the evolution may become favorable to French over the medium term.



These few observations allow us to better understand the importance of a policy which seeks to ensure the perennial nature of the French aspect of life in Québec. In the particular case of Montréal, this policy must reconcile the metropolitan vocation of the region with its French roots and the need for constant francization.



Two languages for legis- lation and

justice

Since its adoption, the *Charter of the French Language* has undergone amendments which have focussed on the sections dealing with legislation and justice. Basically, the aim of these amendments was to bring the Charter of the French Language into line with the Constitution Act (Canada) which imposes a bilingualism requirement in both these fields.

Two languages for the Law

Québec respects this bilingualism requirement in the various phases of its legislative process as well as for certain types of regulations and acts. Statutes and regulations are adopted in French and English, with both versions having the same official status.

However, for those texts which are not subject to the bilingualism requirement, the Charter of the French Language maintains the principle of the pre-eminence of the French version over the English version when such texts exist in both languages. This is the case, in particular, for in-house administration rules, and municipal and school by-laws.

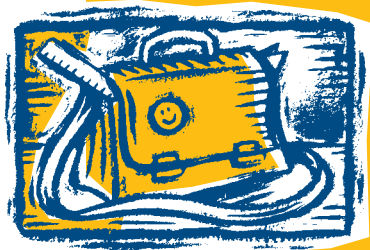
Access to justice in the language of one's choice

As for the language of the courts, persons who are on trial, lawyers, witnesses, judges and other justice officers are entitled to use either French or English when they speak or act within the framework of proceedings before the courts of Québec.



As a result, a judge can render a judgment in English even if the persons on trial who addressed him only speak French. The opposite is also true; a judge can render a judgment in French even if the language of the person on trial is English. However, the Charter of the French Language allows the person on trial to obtain, as the case may be, a translation in French or English of a judgment rendered in the other language.

In Québec, every person may address the courts in English or in French and obtain in his/her language a translation of the judgment if the latter was rendered in the other language.



Instruction: priority given to French schools

Québec has a high quality school network which, by its organization and teaching methods, is among the most modern education systems of the industrialized world. There are also universities, internationally recognized for their instruction and research activities. They attract a large number of students from throughout the Francophonie as well as from other countries.

French is the language of instruction in Québec. With a population that is more than 80 % French-speaking, one may rightfully expect that most students will receive their instruction in French. Moreover, with a view to integrating immigrants in the French-speaking majority, the children of immigrants must attend French school until the end of their secondary studies.

In addition to the French-language public network, Québec has maintained a complete public system of English-language instruction, from kindergarten to university, for a very long time. There are also several private French and English institutions which do not benefit from public funding. Attendance at these institutions is not governed by the legislative provisions pertaining to the choice of the language of instruction.

In the case of elementary and secondary instruction, the law takes into account certain situations when determining the eligibility of a child to attend a subsidized public or private English-language establishment. Here are the main situations:



- one of the parents, whether or not he or she is a Canadian citizen, received most of his/her elementary instruction in English in Québec;
- one of the parents, a Canadian citizen, received most of his/her elementary instruction in English in Canada;
- a child, one of whose parents is a Canadian citizen, received most of his/her elementary or secondary instruction in Canada;
- a child who is temporarily staying in Québec because one of his/her parents is working or studying here.

Moreover, when a child is authorized to receive instruction in English, his/her brothers and sisters are also eligible to receive such instruction.

Once a student has completed his/her secondary studies, he/she can choose an English or French college. The same is true for university studies.



Québec's health and social services network is mainly French-speaking and health services are offered in French everywhere. However, to allow anglophone patients to be treated in their language, certain establishments have been entrusted with the responsibility of providing services in English.

Receiving
medical

care

in
one's
language

As a result, every Anglophone who resides in Québec can receive health services and social services in his/her language, to the extent that the human, material and financial resources of the establishments providing such services allow. In practice, Anglophones have access to health and social services in English throughout the territory.



Community organizations, certified private establishments, ambulance services and other services also serve Anglophones in English.

The reason why the ministère de la Santé et des Services sociaux du Québec has made available such services is that it recognizes that everything must be done to facilitate communication between the patient and the attending staff, in the difficult situations that may result from illness. In this field, the welfare of patients and the success of treatments must take priority over language considerations.



Working in French

As Québec is a largely French-speaking society, it is only normal to want to work in French, regardless of the place or the field. Rarely have the demands of Francophones given rise to such a general agreement among political and social circles. It is therefore understandable that the language of work is at the heart of Québec's language policy.

The *Charter of the French Language* has reaffirmed this desire on the part of most Quebecers to make French the normal and everyday language of work, as well as the language in which firms operate.

This objective, which in a way is a part of the social contract of Québec society, is quite reconcilable with the desire of workers and firms to profit from the economic advantages afforded by Québec's industrial and technological potential.

Since the adoption of the *Charter of the French Language*, the use of French in the workplace has grown. The latest data reveal that all across Québec the percentage of the work force that generally works in French has increased; in 82% of the firms of the Montréal area, workers make a predominant (albeit not exclusive) use of French in their written communications.



By generalizing the use of French, the firms established in Québec can increase their profitability and productivity. Indeed, it appears that productivity is greatest when the language used is the one that employees best master. This is one of the factors that led Québec's business circles to agree to actively participate in the francization efforts.

Similarly, firms that would like to set up operations in Québec to carry out production, marketing or research activities will make the most of their decision to establish themselves here by embarking upon a francization process that will make them partners in Québec's social contract.

What does it mean to work in French in Québec?

Generalize the use and knowledge of French

To ensure that life at work can take place in French, it is important that managers and all staff members know French and be able to use it in their daily exchanges. If this is not the case, the business firm must take the necessary steps to ensure that its staff acquires this knowledge of French, in particular through courses given in the workplace. The business firm must also ensure that the fact that an employee only speaks French does not constitute an obstacle to his/her being hired or promoted, unless the position in question requires the use of another language.



Posting signs in French in the business firm

The business firm must make sure that in-house signs are in French and give preference to the exclusive use of French. In those cases where French and another language are used, the business firm must see to it that French is in predominance or at the very least is given equivalent treatment.

In-house signs include all notices and signs in the workplace as well as the designation of products and parts. They also include identification plates, indicators and lights on machines, as well as computer and cash register keyboards and monitors, for which indications must be in French.

Communicating in French in the workplace

Official communications between senior management of the business firm and its staff as well as communications between staff members must take place in French. Notices, guidelines, memoranda and company newsletters must be written in French or, when the need so justifies, in French and in another language.

Having work documents in French

The business firm must make sure that commonly used work documents such as forms, work methods, plans, specifications, reports, etc. are printed and completed in French. The same rule applies to all technical documents and reference documents.



Communicating in French with customers, the public and public agencies

Every business firm established in Québec must make sure that it is able to inform and serve its Québec customers in French. Whether it is on the telephone or in person, the language of initial contact and service must be French. Administrative, commercial and publicity documents intended for Québec customers and the Québec public must also be in French, as must be the documents that accompany products (instructions, warranty, etc.)

The francization of business firms: an on-going effort

To ensure that the use of French becomes generalized throughout the workplace, the language legislation has made provision for special measures for firms employing 50 persons or more in Québec. The latter must embark upon a process the aim of which is to ensure that they comply with the law and that the use of French is generalized in their operations. Once this objective is

reached, these firms are issued a francization certificate by the Office de la langue française, the organization in charge of the application of the *Charter of the French Language* and the ensuing regulations.

Analysis of the language situation

To obtain this certificate, the business firm must first of all register with the Office de la langue française and then analyze its language situation with the assistance and advice of the Office. Large firms employing over 100 persons must also set up a francization committee, in charge of guiding the entire francization process.



Francization program

If the use of French is already generalized in the business firm, the latter will receive its certificate. If this is not the case, the Office will ask the firm to submit and then implement a francization program. The aim of this program will be to generalize the use of French in the business firm and will deal with various elements such as the staff's knowledge of French, the increase in the number of persons having a good knowledge of French, the use of French in in-house communications, documents, etc.

Francization certificate

When the Office de la langue française deems that the program has achieved the target objectives, the Office issues a francization certificate to the business firm. The fact that a business firm has obtained this certificate does not mean that it is no longer necessary to improve the situation and the quality of French in the business firm. Rather the issue of this certificate must be seen as the beginning of the normal life of the business firm in French. The business firm must see to it that French retains its place and is used in a real and durable manner.

To ensure the permanent nature of the francization process, the *Charter of the French Language* stipulates that every business firm having a francization certificate must submit to the Office a report on the evolution of the use of French every three years.



Special cases

When determining the francization measures that a business firm must adopt, the Office takes into account the constraints that the business firm faces. Those firms for which a major share of their activities extend outside Québec and whose head office or research centre is located in Québec may reach special agreements with the Office de la langue française giving them greater latitude in the use of a language other than French in all positions which are part of the head office or research centre. However, these firms are asked to favour the use of French in communications and documents distributed in Québec.



French has its place in commerce and business

In Québec, French is the normal and everyday language of communications, work, commerce and business. The *Charter of the French Language* and the Regulation respecting the language of commerce and business specify the rules governing the use of French on public and commercial signs. But commercial communications are not limited to signs. They also include business firm names, product labeling, commercial documentation, as well as all of the contacts with customers. A very large majority of Quebecers want store employees to welcome and serve them in French, and believe that signs help to convey the French character of Québec society. A recent study revealed that more than one Quebecer in four disapproved of the use of English names as business firm names, thereby expressing their concern about the use of French.

Here is a summary of the rules that apply to the various facets that make a major contribution to the language image of Québec's commercial landscape.

Public and commercial signs

French is obligatory on public signs. A public sign is any message intended for passers-by and posted in a public place, be it a neon light, a notice, a poster or a temporary text on a billboard or on a storefront.



All these messages must be in French, whether they are placed inside or outside the establishment.

One or more other languages may be added, but the law requires that French have marked predominance, namely that it have a much greater visual impact.

Exceptions

There are a few exceptions to this rule:

- commercial advertising on the subway, on busses, on bus shelters and on large billboards must only be in French;
- public signs related to health and safety must be in French, but another language may also be used in a way that is equivalent to the French version;
- religious, political and humanitarian messages, etc. which are intended for a public speaking a language other than French may be written exclusively in that language.

Product labeling

Product labeling refers to the inscriptions on the actual products, the containers and the packaging as well as the documents that accompany the products (instructions, notices for users, assembly manuals, warranty certificates, etc.).



French is obligatory on the labeling of all products sold in Québec. The use of one or more other languages is however possible and, in this case, the inscriptions written in French must be at least equivalent to the versions in the other languages.

Save for a few exceptions provided for by regulation, labeling in French applies to all products offered in Québec, whether they are made in Québec or imported, sold on a wholesale or a retail basis.

Names of firms

The names of firms established in Québec must be in French. A business firm name is the name used by a business firm on public signs, in commercial advertising and communications as well as on printed matter and products.

When it comes to commercial and public signs, the rule is simple: a French business firm name must be used. However, a distinct version in another language may also be posted, provided that the French business firm name has marked predominance. On printed matter or labels, the business firm name will only be in French or accompanied with a version in another language, presented in an equivalent manner.

A few exceptions

Only the French business firm name may appear on billboards, in public transit and on access ways to public transit services.

A business firm name in another language may be used on an equal basis with the French business firm name on vehicles travelling both in and outside Québec as well as within the framework of international events.

Commercial documentation and advertising

Commercial documentation refers to printed advertising such as catalogues, pamphlets, brochures and commercial directories. It also encompasses invoices and receipts given to customers, order forms sent to suppliers and other similar documents.



Commercial documentation distributed in Québec must be in French. One or more other languages may also be used, but the French version must be given at least equivalent treatment as the other versions.

Language of conventions, fairs, exhibitions, symposia and shows

The use of French is desirable, normal and customary in the everyday communications associated with events held in Québec. However, for an event that is intended for a specialized or limited public, the choice of the language(s) used on the premises is left up to the discretion of the persons in charge and the participants.



An adminis- tration that functions in French

The government expects the Administration to play an exemplary role and to be a driving force in the language field. That is why the government favours French unilingualism in its activities in order to reflect the fact that French is the official language and the common language of public life in Québec.

As a result, the name of the government, departments and agencies of the Administration is only in French. The same rule applies to the correspondence of the Administration, which must be drafted in French, except where it is intended for natural persons who address the Administration in another language, in which case the Administration may respond in that language.

As for written communications addressed to legal persons in Québec, they must be in French. When such communications are intended for legal persons outside Québec, having an establishment in Québec and not having French as the language of their operations, these communications are in French and may include a translation on paper with no letterhead, with no signature and bearing the remark “Translation”. Finally, in the case of communications addressed to legal persons outside Québec, not established in Québec and which do not have French as the language of their operations, these communications may be in another language, on paper with a letterhead and be signed.



To ensure the cohesion of its practices in the language field, the government has established a policy concerning the use and the quality of the French language in the Administration. This policy sets the orientations that departments and organizations should follow when drawing up and adopting their own language policies.

The general policy is that the Administration shall make exclusive use of French when drafting and publishing its texts and documents, as well as in its communications. Only the French version of an information document is distributed by anonymous mail-out or by publication. A version in another language may be sent to a person who requests it.

Documents distributed on electronic support shall also be in French. However, to give greater visibility to Québec at the international level, these documents may also be presented in other languages. But in this case, the French version must always be distinct and be accessible directly.

The personnel of the Administration shall address the public in French first, whether on the telephone or in person. Recorded messages shall be in French; they may also be in another language if they can be accessed separately.

Certificates, attestations and licences of all types must be in French. However, diplomas attesting to training received in another language may also be in another language, provided that French has marked predominance.

In keeping with these general orientations, each department adopts a language policy adapted to its mission and the public it serves. Thus, certain departments and agencies can take into account the fact that they are dealing with an English-speaking community or an aboriginal community or that they have functions related to welcoming persons immigrating to Québec and helping them to settle.



Government's purchasing policy

The government has also adopted a purchasing policy which requires that all documents and instructions accompanying the products that it acquires and the services that it uses be in French. When a product or a device involves the use of a language — we are thinking here of computers and software of course — it must be in French. This purchasing policy also stipulates that all documents related to the purchase, whether they come from the purchaser, such as calls for tenders, contracts, order forms, etc., or from the supplier such as tenders, invoices, receipts, etc. must be in French.



Moreover, the government policy concerning the use and the quality of the French language in the Administration stipulates that the latter shall not grant any contract, subsidy or benefit to a business firm employing 50 persons or more which does not comply with the provisions of the Charter of the French Language with respect to francization. The call-for-tender documents mention this requirement.



French in computers and on the infor- mation highway

The development of computers and the information highway poses new challenges to the use of French in the work field and in electronic games.

It is clear that English has occupied a predominant place in information technologies from the outset. But computers, which constitute both a work and communications tool, can easily be adapted to French just as they can be adapted to most languages in use around the world. As French is the common language of communications in Québec, it is only normal that French should be the language of computers, whether it is in the choice of hardware, the use of software or surfing the net.

Computer tools

In the case of hardware (keyboard, monitor, printer, etc.), tools that are adapted to the needs of workers and services that are offered to consumers in French ensure better communication and a better understanding for all concerned. The rule for Québec's Administration is to use equipment having controls and displays in French, and that produce all the signs specific to the French language.



French versions exist for most common programs and educational software. The generalization of French as a language of work requires that preference be given to the French version, making it possible to use all the characters of French and to carry out the various operations in French.

The documentation related to hardware and software must also be in French. This documentation includes advertising material, installation and user guides as well as training manuals.

Dissemination and processing of information

The dissemination of information is closely linked to knowledge, education, culture and the economy. Moreover, with the phenomenon of globalization and the development of the information highway, information crosses borders rapidly, calling into question all types of barriers, including language barriers.

The production and transmission of knowledge and information by the information highway pose a twofold challenge to Québec: first, that of taking the necessary steps to ensure that the technology allows the French language to be present and to be capable of processing the information desired; secondly, that of ensuring, in cooperation with international partners, that the national languages, and in particular French, are respected in the intense circulation of information on the information highway.

To achieve these objectives, it is necessary to have not only material that is adapted to the French language, but also production tools and browser systems that



allow the public to surf the net in French and to increase French language content there. The Government of Québec calls on all partners of the private sector to promote the French language on the

information highway and to offer web-surfers French-language content.

Language and culture are always closely linked. As a result, the French language is a basic component of everyday life in Québec and the most obvious mark of its cultural identity.

French, a language of creation and culture

In this perspective, the French language is not just a communication tool, but first and foremost a living environment, a way of being, of thinking, of writing and of creating for all Quebecers, whatever their language or culture of origin. It is in this spirit that the cultural policy of Québec has adopted as its first orientation the enhancement of the French language as a means of creation and access to culture.



The
language
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the
world

French is the language of expression of an extremely creative and dynamic cultural life that extends well beyond the borders of Québec. Whether it is in the realm of theater, music or plastic arts, many Québec artists have acquired an international reputation and have given Québec culture an influence that is the envy of a number of countries.

An openness to other cultures

Québec also offers the distinctive characteristic — probably due to its geographical location — of being very open to all creations and contributions likely to enrich its culture. While affirming its feeling of belonging to a French-speaking culture, Québec favours exchanges and is very receptive to cultural products from foreign countries.



Québec's culture also draws a part of its vigor and diversity from the contribution of Anglophones, aboriginal nations and cultural communities which, while expressing their cultural vitality in their own artistic events, are becoming more open to and increasingly participating in French-language cultural life. These creators contribute to the evolution of Québec's imagination and its attachment to the "global village", an attachment which the development of communications is continuously shaping and strengthening.

The Office de la langue française, partner in francization

The Office de la langue française was created to oversee the application of the Charter of the French Language. In actual fact, it mainly plays an advisory role and offers the general public and firms numerous services the aim of which is to generalize the use and improve the quality of French.

Firms that embark upon a francization process can call on the services of one of the Office's francization advisors, at every stage.

The Office also offers all firms a range of services to help them generalize the use of French in their daily operations:

- all the information they need about the Charter of the French Language;
- advice and constant assistance in their francization efforts;
- assistance in the choice of computer products in French;
- linguistic assistance to improve the quality of French, in particular on forms and in commonly used documents;
- a telephone consultation service for terminology questions;
- numerous documents, such as lexicons, newsletters, pamphlets and signs, to make known French vocabulary in the technical and scientific fields;
- the Terminology Bank of Québec on CD-ROM, where these firms can find French terms specific to their field.

In the computer field, the Office also offers designers, manufacturers, suppliers and users various services and products intended to facilitate the use of French:

- assistance of francization advisors for the acquisition of information technologies;
- specialized consultation in the francization of computers and computer programs;
- linguistic and terminology consultation by telephone;
- lexicons and vocabularies dealing with computers and other information technologies;
- specialized documentation on the francization of work tools.

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