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## **The Canadian Context: Monolingual Education in an “Officially” Multilingual Country**

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### **ABSTRACT**

*This article will examine the sociopolitical language contexts that exist in institutions of Canadian post-secondary education, through investigating how government policies affect the consumption and teaching of language in writing classrooms. A survey of Canadian multiculturalist policy, multilingualism, and post-secondary education in terms of multilingual immigrant student populations will describe steps the federal government has taken to promote linguistic pluralism. Questionnaire and interview analysis will describe how Canadian students see language and multiculturalism interacting in the academic work they do in the context of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act, and will illustrate how language diversity is not cultivated in Canadian post-secondary classrooms.*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Canada promotes itself both nationally and internationally as a cultural mosaic, wherein language is recognized as in flux, multiple, and stratified. And while the image of a mosaic may suggest fixed boundaries, the implication is that within one nation all ethnic communities coexist, yet maintain their distinct cultural heritage. However, an assessment of Canadian research across the disciplines of education, English studies, globalization theory, applied linguistics, translation studies, multiculturalism, second-language writing studies, and sociology (Bleasdale, 1979; Bumsted, 2008; Hayday, 2005; Heller, 2002 & 2007; MacMillian, 1998; Li, 2003; Lotherington, Holland, Sotoudeh, & Zentena, 2008; Taylor, 2008) reveals that although post-secondary student populations are as diverse as the mosaic model implies, linguistic diversity is not cultivated in college and university classrooms. This phenomenon is not unique to Canada; sociolinguists around the globe criticize the homogenizing and standardizing expectations of *Standard Written English* (SWE) taught in North American institutions of higher learning. Moreover, the Canadian government's federal mandates of cultural diversity, which are primarily manifested through the cultivation of immigrant languages, are at odds with such monolingual expectations—classrooms remain overwhelmingly anglocentric. Analyzing data, gathered from a sample of students enrolled in first-year writing at a Southwestern Ontario university, will position this article to examine the Canadian sociopolitical language contexts that

exist within post-secondary education, and critique the government policies that affect the consumption and teaching of language in North(ern) American writing classrooms.

The survey of Canadian language histories, policies, and practices offered herein is seated in multiculturalism. Canadian identity politics, in conjunction with questionnaire and interview data, will provide a description of post-secondary student population demographics in terms of linguistic communities. A critique of government legislation regarding minority language education will draw attention to the unique treatment of language in Canada, with the objective of extending the dialogue surrounding the Canadian Multiculturalism Act and its implications toward post-secondary instruction.

Canadian education systems are similar to those of most Westernized nations in that what is deemed appropriate, in terms of language instruction, is English. Emphasis upon English, specifically SWE, situates minority languages as deficient—an obstacle to be overcome. Rasool's (2004) research, which surveys London classrooms and focuses on linguistic attitudes and choices in relation to cultural diversity, reveals that, historically, student multilingualism has been viewed as a threat to British national character. This depiction of multilingualism is common; supporters of this ideology stress that a singular national language and culture is necessary to uphold a true nation-state, that the status of English is fixed and not dependent upon geographical space or place, that immigrants *only* need to know English to function in society, and that a multilingual society is too precarious and costly to maintain (Bhabha 1996; Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Leung, Harris, & Rampton, 2002). However, Canadian multiculturalist policy deviates in that it makes a conscious effort to include immigrant cultures and languages, rather than designating them as *Other*.

Scholars within a variety of academic disciplines recognize that in Canada citizenship is a matter of continuous negotiation. While many countries around the globe work to create a singular and specific national identity, Canadian citizens are unified by cultural pluralism. Munro (1979), a past minister of multiculturalism, explains:

The history and development of [Canada] is very much the story of successive immigrations and the interaction of these groups with the existing society. How they adapted their way of life to Canadian conditions and influenced Canadian patterns has been and will continue to be one of the determining forces in establishing a Canadian identity and nation. (p. 12)

Thus, Canadian identity itself is somewhat elusive, unable to be pinned down or singularized. One would assume that the acceptance granted to linguistic pluralism in greater Canadian society would carry over into its education systems, yet this is not case. When attention is paid to multilingualism in Canadian research, it is most often concerned with primary and secondary education, or Québec francophone culture versus national French-English bilingualism (Hayday, 2005; Heller, 2007; Taylor, 2008). This project deviates in that it is concerned with post-secondary education and allophone<sup>1</sup> language populations, two areas of language research underrepresented in current scholarship.

Ultimately, this article is framed to offer an analysis of how Canadian immigrant students see language and multiculturalism interacting in the work they do for their writing courses in the context of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act. This will be achieved through outlining the ways in which Canadian multiculturalist policy, multilingualism, and post-secondary education in terms of student populations work to create a distinctly Canadian sociocultural context.

## **THE CANADIAN MULTICULTURALISM ACT**

Passed in 1988, the Canadian Multiculturalism Act established Canada as the first country to adopt an official multiculturalist policy, reaffirming multiculturalism as a fundamental characteristic of Canadian society. Of specific interest, in terms of this project, is the policy's support of Canadian society's "acquisition, retention and use of all languages that contribute to the multicultural heritage of Canada" (Department of Justice, 1985). Such federal policies support the preservation of the nation's collective and diverse heritage, reinforcing the ideology that Canadians share strong attachments to different aspects of their identity—regional, linguistic, religious, cultural, and familial. The *Act* recognizes that language(s) is always in flux, multiple, and stratified—language acts as an element of culture. In essence, the Act functions to promote not simply tolerance, but acceptance of the plurality of discrete languages and language communities that exist within Canada.

If cultivated and encouraged, multiculturalism has the capacity to create a highly developed society, due to the flexibility of its policies. The Canadian government emphasizes the need for action within the policies, articulating that multiculturalism is simply a springboard that promotes acceptance rather than a set of rules that will lead to cultural pluralism. The government's perspective is that multiculturalism is a living policy that is only achieved through the steps citizens take. Ultimately, the federal government recognizes itself as only one sector of society, and argues that in order for multiculturalism to flourish other levels of government, including business and educational institutions, must work to achieve this goal (Munro, 1979).

As a result of the government's acceptance of multiculturalist ideologies, but deferment of the implementation of tangible programs to promote them, criticism surrounding how Canadians work to support multiculturalism in society thrives. Moreover, there is "little support of the belief that the multiculturalism policy has provided new immigrants with the necessary resources and institutional basis to remain desegregated in Canadian society" (Li, 2003, p. 135). Unlike the federal legislature of biculturalism and bilingualism, which is grounded in preserving francophone minority language rights, multiculturalist initiatives show a commitment to multiculturalism that does not protect immigrant heritage language rights or language retention programs (Comeau, 1979; MacMillian, 1998).

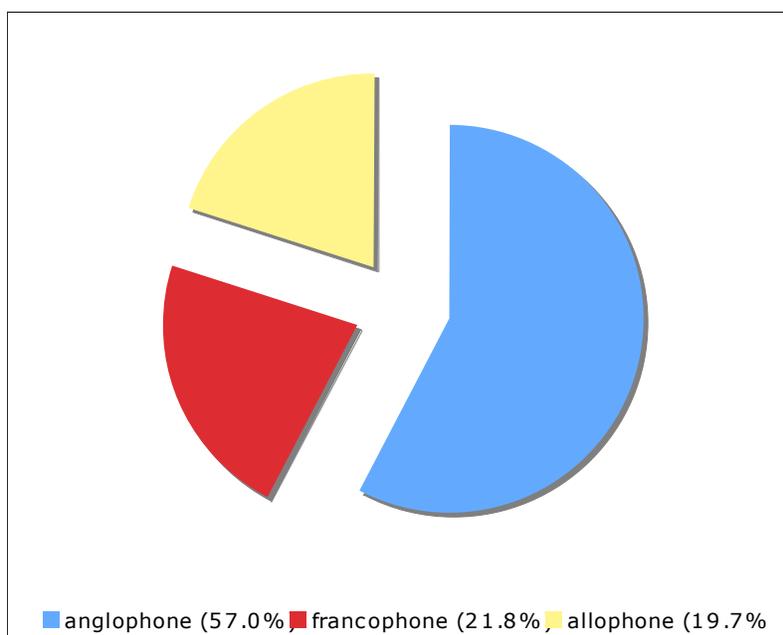
Canadian multiculturalist policies and ideologies exist to ensure that all individuals are able to take pride in, and maintain, individual identities and languages—which arise out of anglophone, francophone, allophone, as well as First Nations heritage. These principles fall in line with scholars (Canagarajah, 2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b & 2007; Lu, 1994; Matsuda, 2006; Matsuda & Silva, 1999; Soliday, 1997) who have argued that if we are to fully understand and teach the complex linguistic ecology of the students in our classrooms, there cannot be a homogenous language (SWE) because there is not a homogenous student population. Nevertheless, there remains a strong tendency in Canadian post-secondary educational programs to minimize language differences brought to the classroom.

## **MULTILINGUALISM IN CANADA**

Language issues have remained central to Canadian identity and, consequently, dominant in Canadian public policy. Canadian multiculturalism accepts that citizens have strong relationships with the country's two founding cultures—French and English—as well as with

various vibrant non-founding cultures (Bumsted, 2008). Table 1 illustrates the national population demographics of these languages, indicating that three distinct groups of linguistic communities exist in Canada, with anglophones being, by far, the dominant.

**Table 1.** National Language Populations



Nevertheless, an essential aim of multiculturalism is to avoid assimilation or integration with the mainstream, and instead work to change the definition of what is *mainstream*. As such, multilingualism has become one of Canada's most sought-after renewable resources. Linguistic diversity functions as a bridge to world marketplaces, positioning multilingual Canadians to excel in areas of global commerce, cultural exchange, and political dialogue (Williams, 1996). The linguistic and social diversity of Canadians has become a form of human capital used by the government to promote the development of Canada as a veritable leader in global relations (Li, 2003). In efforts to promote multilingualism, rather than anglophone or francophone assimilation, the government has taken the stance that "multiculturalism creates a greater appreciation of the value of culture and language which works to the benefit of all Canadians in all parts of the country" (Munro, 1979, p. 13). Thus, we see the government as central in the push towards maintaining a multilingual character.

Cultural lines and linguistic policies are not fixed in attempts to preserve the nation's cultural mosaic, which is often described as uniquely Canadian. The ideologies surrounding the mosaic claim that no other country in the world encompasses inhabitants from so many different backgrounds who exhibit strong loyalty towards Canada, while still maintaining their immigrant cultural heritage. Because Canada is shaped by the interaction of diverse and self-defined groups of peoples, varied and changing notions of identity, community, and nation exist so as to enable belonging (Schaub & Verduyn, 2002). In other words, "Canadians have prove[n] that while the exercise of rights requires some conformity to community norms it does not necessitate the end of group or individual differences and heritages" (Bleasdale, 1979, p. 35). Regional identity

markers are often what citizens most easily associate with; however, it is plurality (of languages and cultures) that is quintessentially Canadian.

Nevertheless, how multilingualism functions in the lives of immigrants is often ambiguous. Intercultural community building is not always cultivated in society, despite initiatives like the Canadian Multiculturalism Act; thus, a central aim of this research is to establish, through gathering data from a selection of students enrolled in first-year writing, the need for universities and colleges to create support systems. Martel (1991) describes culture as central to notions of difference between groups in terms of attachments, customs, values, and languages; she posits “culture is therefore central to notions of instruction and school management” (p. 9). Researchers of immigrant studies have found that in Canada few immigrant languages have survival rates of fifty percent or better (Laponce, 1996). Moreover, first and second generation immigrants show marked differences in their ability to retain heritage languages (Laponce 1996; Li, 2003;). Despite Canada’s multicultural ideologies, studies suggest that Canada, like most westernized nations, expects new citizens to conform.

There is a sacrifice to immigrants’ cultural membership, gained through the maintenance and usage of heritage language and culture, when educational institutions only legitimize English and French. Canagarajah (2002a) would argue that Canada is teaching via a conversion approach, where allophone languages are confined to home communities and French and English are accepted in the academic arena. Such linguistic segregation creates either/or binaries and is not inclusive; it does not correspond to Canada’s multicultural agendas. In order to establish multilingual curricula, a negotiation approach should be adopted which allows a mixing of two worldviews, and wherein home languages would be brought into the classroom. Furthermore, Canagarajah’s (1999) stance that immigrant students who have solid comprehension of their home language(s) will have easier experiences in grasping additional languages corresponds with Genesee’s (1979) argument that once literacy in heritage languages is gained, the learning of English is faster and easier. Laponce (1996) further suggests that languages need to be given social recognition outside the immigrant community in order to be maintained. Establishing multiculturalism as central to Canadian instruction will connect culture to the classroom, thereby recognizing the importance of out-of-school linguistic communities.

### **Post-Secondary Education and Student Populations**

Lotherington, et al. (2008) makes the claim: “Language at home cannot be divorced from language at school” (p. 139). Because Canada is recognized as an “immigrant nation” that encourages and promotes multiculturalism, it is important for educators and policy makers to fully understand how post-secondary coursework, specifically writing instruction, can serve multilingual immigrant students. Canada may strive for diversity in its implementation of multiculturalist policy, but there also need to be practical attempts at creating spaces where immigrants can maintain their cultural membership. One of the central ways this can be done is through educational initiatives. Li suggests that “there is a danger that Canada could lose its linguistic diversity because of insufficient institutional and social support to preserve non-official languages beyond the first generation of immigrants” (2003, p. 140). In order to provide “institutional and social support” educators must work with policy makers to visibly respect the many cultures they interact with on a daily basis. To respect diversity is more than quietly accepting and acknowledging cultural and linguistic difference; it is encouraging people to come together and to share experiences, to ask questions, and to engage in conversation. Intercultural

community building needs to be supported institutionally and the most logical location for such work to take place is within educational institutions. In a way, the Canadian government fundamentally supports such cultural attention in schools with its 1982 passing of Section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* titled “Minority Language Educational Rights”; however, the institution of a law does not guarantee enforcement.

In Canadian post-secondary instruction, those who fail to fall in line with the norms of the hegemonic linguistic community—anglophone speakers—are seen as problematic. In Canada, like much of the world, the lingua franca of post-secondary institutions is English, which is maintained by

Politics of semiotic stratification that assumes the existence of a uniform system... This mechanism is homogenizing, and often appears as a discourse of standards, ‘normalcy’ and monocentricity, where the norms and customs of the ‘centre’... are taken to be the only valid ones. (Blommaert, Muyliaert, Huysmans, & Dyers, 2005, p. 379)

Yet, government legislature and policy in Canada would lead an observer to believe that post-secondary and societal culture is heterogeneous, and encourages multilingual speaking communities. To borrow from Larsen-Freeman and Freeman (2008), one would expect Canada to embrace notions of *plurilingualism* in its multicultural initiatives. In this model “languages are seen not to exist as hermetically sealed and distinct intact systems in the minds of language users but rather more generally to grow from experience, which makes knowledge of language dynamic, situated, sometimes partial, and shaped through time by use” (p. 149). Multicultural policy dictates a call to action, articulating that multiculturalism is simply a springboard that promotes acceptance and action rather than a set of rules that will lead to cultural pluralism. The government maintains that multiculturalism is a living policy that is only achieved through the steps citizens take (Munro, 1979). The data concerning post-secondary student populations to be analyzed will necessitate this “call to action.”

The data provided will stress an impetus for creating curricula that recognizes the diverse out-of-school linguistic communities Canadian students are members of, as well as emphasize the need to shift classroom practices so that student work is situated within local contexts, needs, and objectives (Larsen-Freeman & Freeman, 2008). For the purposes of this project the term *multilingual* is used to refer to immigrant students with allophone language backgrounds; however, various other terms are employed in multilingual research including Non-English Background Students (NEBS), multicultural speakers, Non-Native English Speakers (NNES), English as a Second Language (ESL), English as an Additional Language (EAL), Generation 1.5, L2, and so on.

The usage of terms among scholars to describe multilingual speakers is as diverse as the many languages spoken in our classrooms. The drawback to many of these terms, *multilingual* included, is that (a) they are not specific enough, and (b) many are moot, as they have been deconstructed into sub-categories. For instance, students labeled as ESL are regularly being reclassified as ESL-international, ESL-North American born, and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). Reasons for classification shifts are negotiable and include scholars becoming both more specific in their categorization, negative connotations that have become associated with terminology, and students’ avoidance of labeled course sections. A further difficulty in creating categories for multilingual speakers is that there are a variety of disciplines that study populations with plural language abilities, but there is no common taxonomy. For instance, Valdes’ (1972) multilingual research comes out of education and is concerned with elective

bilinguals and circumstantial bilinguals; yet, her description of bilingual speakers deviates from traditional Canadian definitions. Additionally, scholars in different countries have different labels for similar populations. For example, the allophone designation is unique to Canada; in contexts outside this nation the term has a phonetic denotation and is used in linguistics.

Consequently, the term *multilingual* was chosen because it includes all students who have multiple language abilities, and who may be bilingual, trilingual, or polyglot. By then adding the term *immigrant* we include students who are Generation 1.5<sup>2</sup> as well as second generation, third generation, and so on. A purpose for employing such labeling practices is that this project intends to survey the larger population rather than discrete groups of multilingual immigrant students. This categorization serves to exclude anglophone Canadians who have learned French as a part of their education, or francophone Canadians who have learned English. In other words, this project is concerned with students who have an allophone or heritage-language background, rather than a French-English bilingual background. A further reason for not studying those with a French-English (bilingual) mother tongue<sup>3</sup> is that they comprise less than one percent of Canada's total population.

## THE STUDY

### Introduction and Context

This project emerged out of personal inquiry into the pedagogical experiences and struggles the researcher encountered when teaching multilingual students for the first time. Relocating to a new region of Canada can be disconcerting; the expansive size of the country has created unique populations of diverse peoples whose provincial and territorial identities are quite distinct. Firm boundaries exist between regions, emphasized by provincial and territorial school systems that maintain regionally specific curricula in terms of minority language education. Thus, moving from a province with an anglophone population of 97.6% and relocating to a province with a population of 68.4% forced the revelation that, in many instances, anglophone speakers are members of a linguistic minority. Moreover, as a writing teacher the researcher was in no way prepared to attend to the needs of multilingual immigrant students.

This study took place in a city in Southwestern Ontario. The total population of this locality is just under a quarter million, with mother tongue populations: 67% anglophone, 28% allophone, and 4% francophone. Of the allophone population, half use their mother tongue as first language at home. Moreover, of the city's total population 28% are recent immigrants, with 91% of all citizens claiming Canadian citizenship.

The institution where this research took place is a mid-sized university, with a student population of approximately 16,000 students. The university is self-described as internationally oriented, with broad student diversity. Further, this institution prides itself in its awareness and appreciation of difference, specifically in terms of ethnicity and culture. Data was collected in the fall of 2009 from students enrolled in five sections of first-year writing. Participants were undergraduate students (46 female and 44 male) and the majority (60%) were first-year students; the remainder were fairly equally distributed between their second, third, and fourth years of post-secondary study. In terms of language use, 32% of the undergraduate students surveyed had a first-spoken language other than English, 24% of these being Generation 1.5. The data collected pays special attention to multilingual students' perceptions of their heritage languages

in terms of the monolingual and monocultural expectations maintained in current academic discourse communities. As such, this study contributes to the growing research on multilingual student populations globally (Bhabha, 1996; Blommaert, Muylleert, Huysmans, & Dyers, 2005; Canagarajah, 2002a, 2002b, 2006a, 2006b, & 2007; Horner & Trimbur, 2002; Leung et al., 1997; Rassool, 2004), as well as building upon Canadian research (Hayday, 2005; Heller, 2007; Taylor, 2008) that is most often concerned with anglophone-francophone communities. Consequently, this project extends the Canadian discussion to multilingual immigrant post-secondary students who maintain their heritage languages outside the university.

## **Methodology**

In recent years there has been an increase in research involved in academic writing contexts and the social practices of students and teachers. The social practices studied herein are associated with linguistic communities, specifically the heritage language practices of multilingual immigrant students. This project focused on real-world contexts, with no experimental conditions; it attempted to understand community events from information provided by participants; data was collected from a number of sources which was analyzed in terms of the meaning and function of participant actions. In this study, participants were asked to talk around texts, where data was collected via surveys, face-to-face interviews, and email. Lillis (2008) explains that using such a methodology creates opportunities for contextualizing research on academic writing. Central in this methodology is the literacy-history interview (eliciting autobiographical accounts of language and academic literacy learning in order to understand current situations) and cyclical dialogue around texts (more focused talk; topics come out of literacy-history interviews), which were achieved in this project by distributing general surveys and then later meeting with focus students for follow-up interviews. This strategy ensures triangulation, implementing three or more systems of data collection, to confirm validity and “thick description” (Lillis, 2008).

This study gathered data from students ( $n = 90$ ) enrolled across five sections of first-year writing. Questionnaires were distributed to participants at the beginning, middle, and end of the semester; the three topics surveyed were: language background and personal use, language use inside and outside the university, and language use in the writing classroom. Of the 90 participants, two focus students participated in follow-up interviews; the first interview occurred following the initial questionnaire and the second upon completion of the final questionnaire. One interview participant was Generation 1.5 and the other was first-generation Canadian. While the participants did offer rich examples and descriptions, a larger sample size would have offered stronger conclusions and a more thorough evaluation of the experiences encountered by multilingual students.

Moreover, datum obtained during interviews is not replicable and, as such, may be deemed as unreliable. Nevertheless, of the themes that arose the most startling concerned the volume of heritage-language variety and usage of heritage languages among respondents. The remainder of this article will focus on these issues through providing an analysis of the various languages held by the undergraduate students surveyed, as well as discussing how these languages are employed inside and outside the classroom.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

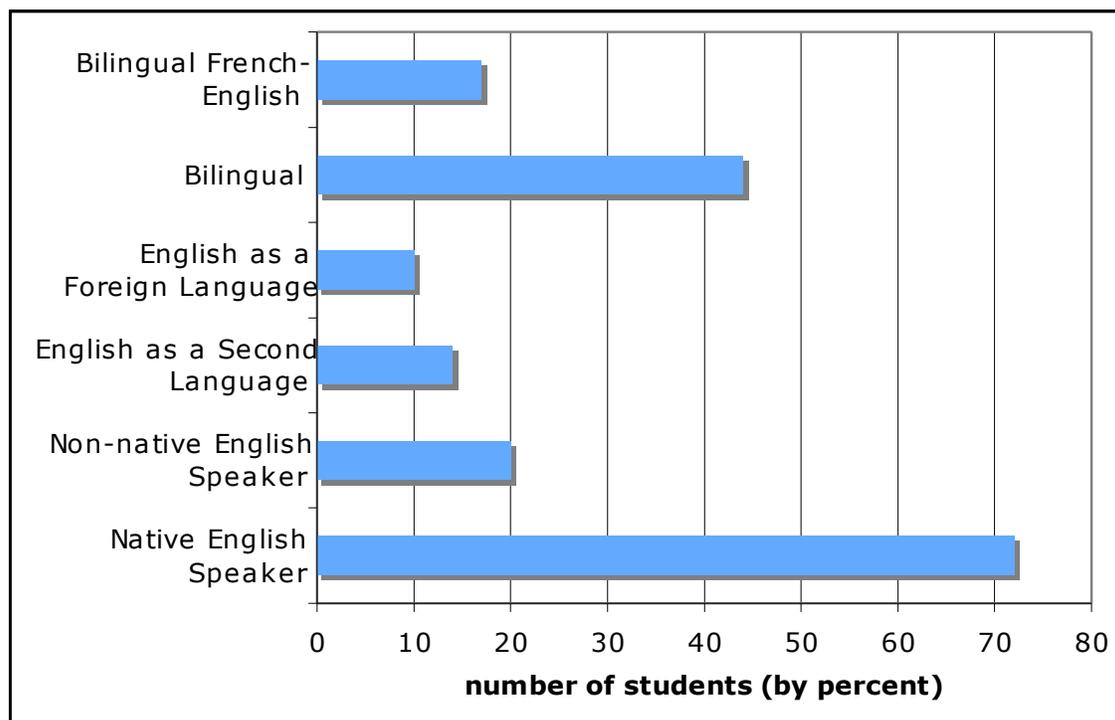
### Variety

More than half of immigrants who have come to Canada settle in Ontario. Due to high levels of urbanization and industrialization in this region, it is considered the most multicultural province in the country. It is the norm for students in the public school system to speak English as a second language (King, 1998). The data collected herein upholds multilingual expectations for the province of Ontario. In terms of recent immigrants, approximately one quarter (22%) of the total students surveyed were born outside of Canada and could be categorized as Generation 1.5, three quarters (77%) identify as first, second, third, or fourth generation immigrant, and the remaining students' (<1%) families have been living in Canada for at least the last five generations. As Table 2 indicates, students have emigrated from a variety of countries. Moreover, there are no startling trends in emigration background. Immigrant students literally come from all over the world, with no specific region boasting majority numbers.

**Table 2.** Birth Countries of Generation 1.5 Students

Birth Country	Students
Bangladesh	1
Bulgaria	1
Chile	2
China	2
Congo	1
India	5
Jamaica	2
Kenya	1
Lebanon	2
Nigeria	2
Russia	1
Saudi Arabia	1
Taiwan	1
Thailand	1
Yugoslavia	1

While the first language learned by many multilingual students is not English, the lingua franca of the Canadian school system is. Consequently, all Canadian-born students surveyed had knowledge of English for most of their lives. Despite this, the researcher was interested in how students classified themselves linguistically and asked them to qualify themselves in terms of their language use. Students were provided with a list of categories scholars most regularly use to refer to multilingual speakers and asked to select whichever they identified with. The categories provided were: *Native English Speaker* (NES), *Non-native English Speaker* (NNES), *Native French Speaker* (NFS), *French-English Bilingual*, bilingual in languages other than French and English, *English as a Second Language* (ESL), and *English as a Foreign Language* (EFL). Included in Table 3 are categories that students selected at least ten percent of the time.

**Table 3.** Student's Linguistic Self-Identification

The majority of students, 72%, selected the NES category. However, almost half also recognized themselves as bilingual or trilingual in a language other than French. 20% self-identified as NNES, 17% as bilingual French-English, 14% as ESL, and 10% as EFL. As Ontario is primarily an anglophone province it is hardly surprising that the majority of students associated their linguistic capabilities as NES. However, it is of interest that despite Canada's duality of official languages (French and English) significantly fewer students categorized themselves as officially bilingual when compared to allophone bilingual. In other words, in the selection of students studied, those who identify with an allophone language, rather than the official language of French, as their second language is higher than anticipated. One would expect Canada's official languages to trump immigrant mother tongues. As Table 3 indicates, the number of students bilingual in English and a heritage mother-tongue is more than double the number of students bilingual in Canada's official languages. Students who self-identified as multilingual made up three quarters of the total pool, leaving just one quarter of the students surveyed as having English-only capabilities. The range of languages used by these multilingual students was staggering. Students provided 42 combinations of languages used, ranging from two known languages, which was the majority trend, to one student with linguistic capabilities in five languages (Table 4).

**Table 4.** Combinations of Languages Spoken by Students

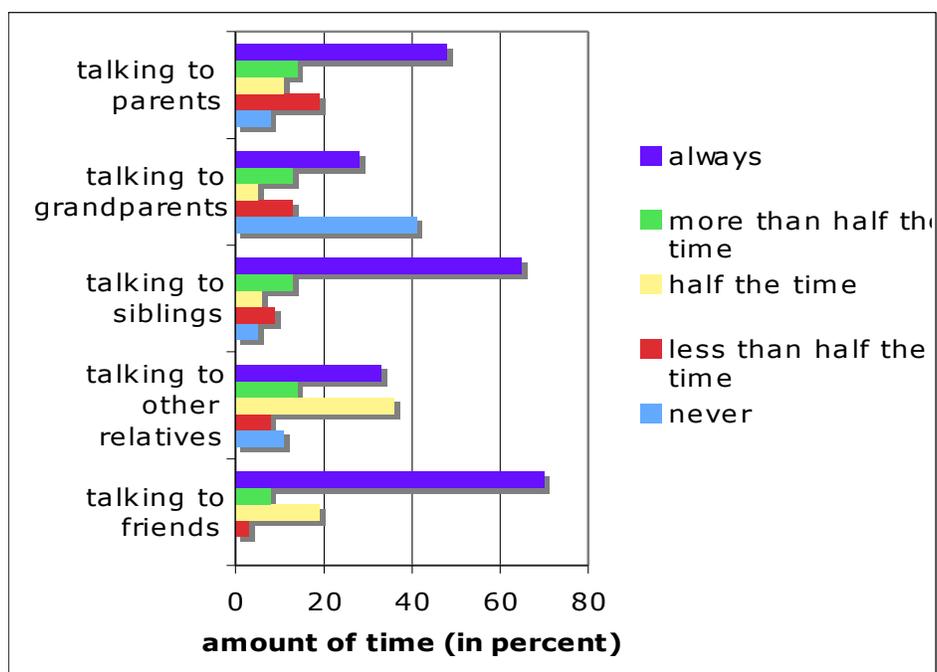
Language Combinations	Students	Language Combinations	Students
English, Punjabi	1	English, Dutch	1
English, Serbian	2	English, French, Spanish	1
English, Hindi	2	English, Polish	1
English, French (INT)	4	English, Chinese	2
English, Marathi, Hindi	1	English, Vietnamese, Chinese, Spanish	1
English, Cambodian	1	English, French, Italian	1
English, French, Arabic	4	English, Portuguese	1
English, Vietnamese	2	English, Italian	1
English, Bangla, Arabic, Hindi, French	1	English, Macedonian	1
English, Gujarati, Hindi	2	English, Arabic	1
English, French (CAD)	12	English, French, Urdu	1
English, French, Polish, Serbian	1	English, French, Moroccan	1
English	24	English, Spanish, Urdu, Russian	1
English, Lebanese, Japanese	1	English, Urdu, Hindi	1
English, French, Portuguese	2	English, Urdu	1
English, Swahili, French	1	English, Chinese, Taiwanese	1
English, Patois	1	English, Bulgarian	1
English, French, Greek	1	English, Hindi, Telugu	1
English, French, Lebanese	1	English, Spanish	2
English, Hebrew	1	English, Bini	1
English, Chinese, Cantonese	1	English, Hindi, Punjabi	2

## Usage

All data compiled in this section looks exclusively at the responses of multilingual students, which reduces the sample size of students surveyed by approximately 25% ( $n = \sim 68$ ). Table 5 demonstrates that students use English as their language of choice outside the classroom. As Canada is primarily an English-speaking nation (see Table 1) it is not surprising that most students have chosen to communicate in the country's most dominant language. What is noteworthy about the information provided in Table 5 is that students most often choose English

when speaking to peers (siblings and friends), and students choose English less often when speaking to elder family members: parents, grandparents, and other relatives. One reason for this may be, particularly in the case of communication with grandparents, that English is not a viable option. Another possibility may be due to language expectations among older members of ethnic communities, or country of residence (students were not asked if these relatives were Canadian citizens). However, the cause could simply be due to findings that few immigrant languages have survival rates of fifty percent or better in later generations (Laponce, 1996; Li, 2003).

**Table 5.** Use of English Outside of School

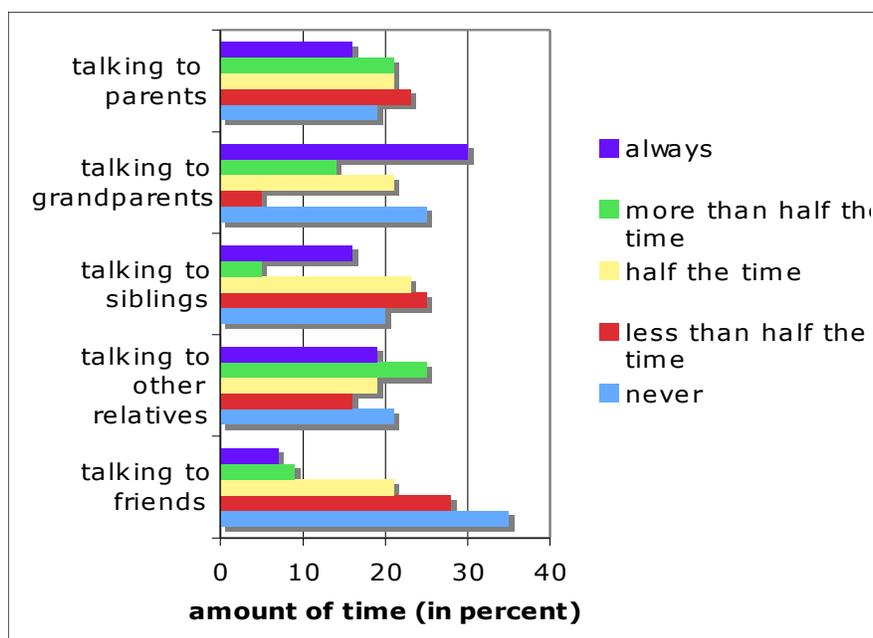


It is of note that students mix languages in out-of-school communication quite consistently among all relatives—siblings included (Table 6). Again we see that students use English most often in communication with friends, a possible reason being that friends are not members of their immigrant communities. Yet, across the board, students with multilingual language capabilities mix languages, on average, 20% of the time, regardless of whom they are communicating with. Still, they mix languages more often with grandparents than with friends, which corresponds to the above analysis of Table 5. Most simply, English use correlates to the age of members in a linguistic community; English use increases as age decreases. These findings suggest the students surveyed regularly employ strategies of language mixing, which supports the conjecture that allowing only SWE in our writing classrooms is naïve. Students exist inside and outside the academy as members of diverse linguistic communities. This data is consistent with that of Taylor who argues that, “students bring to school increasingly diverse linguistic repertoires acquired and practiced through multiple pathways and combined for complex multiple purposes in heterogeneous out-of-school contexts” (2008, p. 91). Tables 5 and 6 indicate that the same Canadian students who speak and write in SWE in their university classrooms do not necessarily use English when communicating with friends and relatives outside the university. Some may argue that there is no need for the academy to teach writing

beyond SWE, as this is the lingua franca of the post-secondary system. However, supporting government multiculturalist policy, and consequently its relationships to multilingualism in the writing classroom, via pedagogies of language mixing, would serve to prepare students to anticipate the diverse communities of speakers they will encounter outside the university, both on and off the job market. Further, in Canada, the commodity of language has evolved from segregated shopping districts (e.g., little-Italy, Chinatown, etc.) into a position of centrality in identity building.

The linguistic and social diversity of Canadians has become a form of human capital used by the government to promote the development of Canada as a veritable leader in global relations (Li, 2003, p. 142). In efforts to promote multiculturalism, rather than anglophone or francophone assimilation, the government has taken the stance that “multiculturalism creates a greater appreciation of the value of culture and language which works to the benefit of all Canadians in all parts of the country” (Munro, 1979, p. 13). Thus, we see the government as central in the push towards maintaining a multiculturalist national character within trade relations, positioning language mixing necessary in Canada’s pursuit of “global economics” regarding trade, employment, science and technology, globalization, as well as peace and security.

**Table 6.** Mixing of Languages Outside of School



In formal writing situations which took place inside of school, less than 12% of respondents used a language other than English. Situations where a language other than English was used included note taking and brainstorming activities. However, when questioned about cognitive activities, mixing of languages occurred more often, specifically when thinking about a difficult subject (34%), when considering an essay topic (22%), or when trying to remember the appropriate word (59%). This information tells us that students understand the subject matter and are attempting to create texts in SWE, despite the fact that the English words they choose may not be the best fit. Often when students choose inappropriate words, their writing is deemed

deficient. As mentioned, the multitude of languages being used by the students surveyed indicates that within the classroom English is often the *lingua franca*. Canagarajah (2007) has argued that uniformity is not a constraint of *Lingua Franca English* (LFE) students, that each participant brings their own immigrant language to the table when writing in English. As such, these students should be encouraged to negotiate their home language vocabulary and that of SWE—particularly if this negotiation creates texts that demonstrate student’s rhetorical savvy in language awareness; as one student put it, “as long as you explain what the word means it would add richness to your writing.” When teachers encourage students to use multiple languages in the negotiation of their writing, those who successfully integrate languages obtain cultural capital through their development of multilingual competence.

Furthermore, when asked if there were classroom situations when mixing languages would help them articulate their ideas, 43% of respondents answered affirmatively, explaining:

- It would be interesting to communicate in a wider-range of ways.
- Some English words do not explain my thought expression.
- I think it is a great way for me to express my opinions as sometimes it helps in conveying the subject matter.
- I think it’s important to know how to speak other languages.
- Because it can be helpful in life to know more than one language.

These responses demonstrate that students are not looking to find an easy way out; they are explaining that English doesn’t always work. Yet despite our educational system’s reliance on English, monolingual communication is itself deficient. Moreover, the respondents’ recognition of these obstacles exhibits a language competence that the system has ignored. It is hardly an effortless endeavor to move between languages and employ *plurilingual competence* in writing. Such rhetorical choices demonstrate communication that is dynamic, situated, and use-driven. Through realizing the need to acquire plurilingual writing skills these students have made a conscious decision to integrate aspects of language and culture, wherein knowledge and experience come together as a comprehensive meaning-making activity (Larsen-Freeman et al., 2008).

## CONCLUSION

The data presented herein indicates that the vast majority of student participants enrolled in first-year writing retain strong connections to immigrant languages. However, Canadian post-secondary education remains entrenched in monolingual assumptions that favor SWE. Despite Canada’s bilingual and multilingual pro-active initiatives, multilingual students who enroll in post-secondary institutions continue to practice Makoni’s (2003) “plural monolingualism,” rather than incorporate elements of language mixing into their academic writing. The data collected overwhelmingly situates Canadian students (in the region studied) as extremely ethno-linguistically diverse, but, as demonstrated, this diversity continues to be confined to home environments and communities. Inaccessibility to home languages in government institutions, such as post-secondary education, contributes to immigrant social alienation and fails to recognize the importance of home languages upon greater society (Makoni, 2003). However, there exists the possibility to change the current conditions of Canadian writing classrooms, the research indicates that participant diversity provides a valid reason to bring multicultural

initiatives into the classroom, which will create learning environments to foster the very ideologies of the Canadian government's cultural mosaic.

The notion of bringing immigrant home-languages into the classroom responds directly to policies of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act that support the retention of immigrant minority languages. Thus, the introduction of allophone languages into the English-medium classroom would function to uphold Canada's current model of pluralism through offering a practical educational initiative that would potentially preserve the nation's cultural mosaic through its valuation of immigrant languages.

One specific strategy, offered by Canagarajah (1999), is language negotiation. He argues that multilingual students who have solid language abilities in a home language are more apt to gain and use other languages. Canagarajah identifies a level of creativity that arises out of the interaction and negotiation between languages. Specifically, culturally-based assignments would allow students room to negotiate between languages because certain words, concepts, and traditions are unable to be lucidly translated into SWE. Through encouraging language negotiation, writing teachers would also be teaching critical thinking—students who are aware of and have to make a variety of rhetorical choices when moving back and forth between languages have no choice but to be critically reflective. Lu (1994) offers insight into how code-meshing and the “creativity” of multilingual students can be used pedagogically. Instead of looking at language which varies from mainstream definitions of SWE as wrong, Lu encourages teachers of writing to enter into a process of stylistic negotiation when looking at language deviations. Similarly, instead of reading texts that offer deviations from SWE as deficient, Canagarajah emphasizes that we need to view difference as a resource. In such situations students' home languages and cultures become an asset to multilingual student writing.

The development of writing curricula that utilizes themes of Canadian multiculturalism and multilingualism to teach effective communication and critical thinking would work within a traditionally English-medium based classroom, as this is the lingua franca of both the education system and the greater Canadian society. However, while there are many communicative situations where English is the language of choice in Canada there are also instances when language negotiation is more effective, particularly in areas saturated with immigration, and writing teachers should be trained to offer options beyond straight English. In his research, Gentil (2005) suggests that social forces are central to our commitment to the empowerment of students who possess allophone languages. I believe one of these forces is the recognition of government multiculturalist policies in the classroom. Gentil considers the establishment of social conditions which embrace multilingual sustainability as central to writing instruction, bringing ideologies of the Canadian Multiculturalism Act into the writing classroom would serve to empower multilingual students through engendering student awareness and encouraging multilingual dialogue.

Because a large population of students across Canada have plurilingual capabilities, ideologies of language negotiation in respect to culture could quite easily be addressed in the classroom. This project focused on the first-year writing classroom because of the flexibility of potential writing prompts, research projects, and final portfolios. Additionally, the diversity of allophone languages and cultures provides a rich infrastructure for students to engage in critical thinking activities that are both familiar and strange. In such a classroom students would be encouraged to consider what is similar between cultures and what is different.

The existence of a policy such as the Canadian Multiculturalism Act would suggest that language variety and moving between languages are constants in all areas of Canadian society.

However, students who attend postsecondary institutions in Canada are confined to English. This monolingual expectation works to multilingual students' detriment, ensuring that what they write is void of their diverse cultural and linguistic knowledge. A consequence of this is that multilingual student writing will continue to be read in terms of English-only ideologies of deficiency. Canagarajah (2006b, 2007) emphasizes that we need to view differences as resources, where students' home languages and cultures become an asset to their linguistic development. Writing classrooms need to be redesigned as spaces where students can draw upon sameness and difference without inhibition. Moreover, because the Canadian government's commitment to intercultural community building places universities and colleges as integral in the creation of linguistic support systems, it is necessary to provide educational spaces where students can draw upon their plurilingual abilities. This project illustrates that the multicultural and multilingual ecology of our Canadian classrooms situates them as ideal sites for engendering student awareness and encouraging multilingual dialogue. However, it is not enough to realize the linguistic potentiality of Canadian society and its education systems; future research must work to implement the government's multilingual policies in post-secondary classrooms.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>A Canadian citizen whose first language is neither English, French, nor First Nations.

<sup>2</sup> Students who arrive to North America at a young age and attend North-American grade schools. English is most often the only language that these students have received writing and literacy instruction in; however, often they do not define themselves as native English speakers, which is often strengthened by their placement into internationally geared ESL courses.

<sup>3</sup> Refers to the first language learned at home in childhood, which is still used and understood.

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