

What makes Quebecers Learn the Other Official Language? Assessing the Quantity and Quality of Quebecers Bilingualism

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Introduction: Is Bilingualism the Threat to French?

The year 2023 was marked by the introduction of various measures to diminish access to services in the English language by the Quebec government and increasingly promote the notion that French is more than ever under siege from English, especially in Montreal. Underlying government discourse over the threat of English is the preoccupation about bilingualism. Quebec thought leaders seem reticent to explicitly criticize, bilingualism which surveys reveal that Quebecers generally value. Hence the threat to the French language is often directed at first language English-speakers and predominantly English language institutions. Yet on the ground in Montreal, the interaction in the two languages between Montreal Francophones, Anglophones and Allophones is a reality of daily life as evidenced from a survey commissioned by the Association for Canadian Studies and conducted by the firm Léger Marketing. The survey reveals that it is those Francophones, Anglophones and Allophones that are most frequently in contact with each other that end up having the high rates of bilingualism that Quebecers value.

The survey was conducted during the week of September 18, 2023. The ACS-Leger survey was done via web panel with 1,000 Quebecers). A margin of error cannot be associated with a non-probability sample in a panel survey for comparison purposes. A probability sample of 1,000 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.5\%$, 19 times out of 20.

The Majority of Montrealers are Bilingual

| Montréal (CMA), Quebec, 2021 | Total | English only | French only | English and French | Neither English nor French | Percentage Bilingual |
|---------------------------------|-----------|-----------------|----------------|-----------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------|
| Total - Mother tongue | 4,246,060 | 346,430 | 1,434,620 | 2,396,535 | 68,485 | 56% |
| English | 474,735 | 144,945 | 2,355 | 326,865 | 565 | 68% |
| French | 2,543,265 | 1,575 | 1,164,690 | 1,376,170 | 830 | 54% |
| Non-official language | 990,820 | 175,640 | 226,480 | 522,950 | 65,755 | 53% |

Francophone Interaction with English-speaking Quebecers

Some 45% of Francophone Quebecers say they interact sometimes or often with English-speaking Quebecers.

| How often do you interact with English-speaking Quebecers? | Total | Born in Canada | Born outside of Canada | French | English | Other |
|--|-------|----------------|------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| (NET) OFTEN/SOMETIMES (1,2) | 52% | 50% | 77% | 45% | 92% | 92% |
| Often | 25% | 23% | 47% | 17% | 73% | 61% |
| Sometimes | 27% | 27% | 30% | 28% | 20% | 30% |
| Rarely | 39% | 41% | 20% | 45% | 7% | 8% |
| Never | 9% | 9% | 3% | 10% | 1% | 0% |

Anglophone and Allophone Interaction with French-speaking Quebecers

Some three quarters of Anglophones and Allophones often interact with French speakers.

| How often do you interact with French-speaking Quebecers? | Total | Born in Canada | Born outside of Canada | English | Other |
|---|-------|----------------|------------------------|---------|-------|
| (NET) OFTEN/SOMETIMES (1,2) | 97% | 98% | 93% | 97% | 96% |
| Often | 72% | 71% | 75% | 72% | 72% |
| Sometimes | 25% | 27% | 18% | 25% | 24% |
| Rarely | 2% | 1% | 4% | 1% | 4% |
| Never | 1% | 0% | 3% | 1% | 0% |

English-speaking & French-speaking Quebec Interaction

In the Montreal Metropolitan Region, a majority of English Quebecers report often having contact with French-speaking Quebecers and over one in four French Quebecers often have contact with English-speaking Quebecers – a majority report often or sometimes having such contact.

| Montreal | English Quebecers degree of interaction with French-speaking Quebecers? | French Quebecers degree of interaction with English-speaking Quebecers? |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| (NET) OFTEN/SOMETIMES (1,2) | 93% | 58% |
| Often | 55% | 28% |
| Sometimes | 38% | 30% |
| Rarely | 3% | 36% |
| Never | 4% | 6% |

Francophone Interaction with English-speaking Quebecers

Over one in four Montreal Francophones often interact with English-speaking Quebecers while the majority have contact often or sometimes.

| | How often do francophones interact with English-speaking Quebecers | | |
|-----------|--|------------|-------------------------|
| | Montreal CMA | Quebec CMA | Other Regions of Quebec |
| Often | 27.8% | 4.4% | 11.4% |
| Sometimes | 30.4% | 24.4% | 26.3% |
| Rarely | 35.9% | 53.3% | 50.6% |
| Never | 5.8% | 17.8% | 11.7% |

Allophone Interaction

A significant majority of Allophones often have interaction with French and English-speaking Quebecers.

| Montreal | Allophone Quebecers degree of interaction with French-speaking Quebecers? | Allophone Quebecers degree of interaction with English -speaking Quebecers? |
|-----------------------------|---|---|
| (NET) OFTEN/SOMETIMES (1,2) | 94% | 92% |
| Often | 77% | 68% |
| Sometimes | 17% | 24% |
| Rarely | 5% | 8% |
| Never | 1% | 0% |

**Do Anglophones speak better French than
Francophones speak English?**

Confidence in Speaking French

Results confirm that most Anglophones and Allophones are confident in their French-speaking abilities.

| How would you rate your current ability to speak French? | Total | Born in Canada | Born outside of Canada | French | English | Other |
|--|-------|----------------|------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| (NET) GOOD (1,2) | 94% | 95% | 85% | 99% | 75% | 89% |
| Very good | 82% | 83% | 62% | 91% | 54% | 56% |
| Good | 13% | 12% | 23% | 8% | 21% | 33% |
| Fair | 4% | 4% | 7% | 1% | 14% | 7% |
| Poor | 2% | 1% | 8% | 0% | 9% | 4% |
| I cannot speak French | 0% | 0% | 0% | 0% | 1% | 0% |

Confidence in Speaking English

A narrow majority of francophones rate their spoken English as good.

| How would you rate your current ability to speak English? | Total | Born in Canada | Born outside of Canada | French | English | Other |
|---|-------|----------------|------------------------|--------|---------|-------|
| (NET) GOOD (1,2) | 62% | 60% | 82% | 51% | 95% | 94% |
| Very good | 36% | 35% | 49% | 22% | 84% | 69% |
| Good | 25% | 25% | 33% | 29% | 11% | 25% |
| Fair | 22% | 23% | 8% | 28% | 4% | 2% |
| Poor | 13% | 14% | 8% | 17% | 0% | 5% |
| I cannot speak English | 3% | 4% | 2% | 5% | 0% | 0% |

Confidence in English & French among Bilinguals

Amongst bilinguals, Montreal Francophones think their ability to speak English is slightly better than Anglophones ability to speak French.

| Montreal | French Mother Tongue evaluation of current ability to speak English | English Mother Tongue evaluation of current ability to speak French |
|-----------|--|--|
| Very good | 30.3% | 27.5% |
| Good | 30.6% | 30.4% |
| Fair | 25.5% | 23.2% |
| Poor | 13.6% | 18.8% |

Confidence in Speaking French Regionally

Some 57% of bilingual Montreal Anglophones describe their French as very good or good and 88% of bilingual Montreal Allophones say that their French is very good or good.

| | How would you rate your current ability to speak French? | What is the language you first learned at home in your childhood and that you still understand? | | |
|-------------|--|---|---------|--------|
| | | French | English | Other |
| Montreal | Very good | 94.50% | 27.50% | 48.80% |
| | Good | 4.20% | 30.40% | 39.00% |
| | Fair | 1.30% | 23.20% | 4.90% |
| | Poor | 0.00% | 18.80% | 7.30% |
| Quebec Prov | Very good | 90.60% | 28.40% | 55.30% |
| | Good | 8.20% | 27.40% | 34.00% |
| | Fair | 1.20% | 25.30% | 4.30% |
| | Poor | 0.00% | 16.80% | 6.40% |
| | I cannot speak French | 0.00% | 2.10% | 0.00% |

French Mother Tongue (MT) Responses

The degree of interaction between Francophones and Anglophones is key.

| How would you rate your current ability to speak English? (French MT) | How often do you interact with English-speaking Quebecers? | | | |
|---|--|-----------|--------|-------|
| | Often | Sometimes | Rarely | Never |
| Very good | 50.4% | 21.6% | 12.8% | 16.0% |
| Good | 29.5% | 45.7% | 21.4% | 12.0% |
| Fair | 14.0% | 25.5% | 38.1% | 13.3% |
| Poor | 3.9% | 7.2% | 21.7% | 45.3% |
| I cannot speak English | 2.3% | 0.0% | 6.0% | 13.3% |

English Mother Tongue (MT) Responses

Bilingual Quebec Anglophones who report often having contact with Francophones are far more likely than those reporting low contact to rate their French as very good or good.

| How would you rate your current ability to speak French? (English MT) | How often do you interact with French-speaking Quebecers? | |
|---|---|-----------|
| | Often | Sometimes |
| Very good | 40.4% | 18.4% |
| Good | 30.8% | 21.1% |
| Fair | 25.0% | 26.3% |
| Poor | 3.8% | 28.9% |
| I cannot speak French | 0% | 5.3% |

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