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English-Spanish Bilingualism in the United States and English-French Bilingualism in Canada and the overall state of dual language Knowledge in the two countries

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Introduction

Driven by an expanding Spanish-speaking population, the United States is becoming increasingly bilingual and has more Spanish speakers than Spain. The language is increasingly heard in the public domain, commerce and education making for ever growing linguistic diversity. The Hispanic or Latino population in the United States was estimated to be approximately 20% of the total U.S. population in July 2024, with an estimated 68 million. In Canada, some 21% of the population had French as their first official language spoken representing some 8 million persons.

The percentage of English-French bilinguals in Canada is higher than the share of English-Spanish bilinguals in the US as the non-French population of Canada is more likely than the non-Hispanic population to respectively speak French and Spanish. While Canada is the more bilingual of the two countries, there is considerable regional variation in rates of bilingualism as revealed in a new study issued by the Association for Canadian Studies and Metropolis Americas.

According to the report, some 22% of Americans are able to hold a conversation in both English and Spanish (the combined number of Hispanics able to hold a conversation in English with combined number of non-Hispanics able to hold a conversation in Spanish) compared with about 29.5% that say that they are able to hold a conversation in both English and French in Canada. Amongst American non-Hispanics, about 9% say they are able to hold a conversation in Spanish compared with 21% of Canada's non-francophones able to hold a conversation in French. There is however considerable regional variation in the two countries in rates of English-French bilingualism in Canada versus English-Spanish bilingualism in the US. Finally the study suggests that there is little evidence of financial incentives for English-Spanish bilingualism in the US whereas there does appear to be some advantage for English-French bilinguals in Canada.

Methodology

The findings are based on surveys conducted via web panel in the United States and Canada by the firm Leger for the Association for Canadian Studies between August 29 and 31, 2025 with 1627 Canadians and 1114 Americans. An earlier survey by Leger on overall levels of bilingualism was conducted on November 22-24, 2024 with 1539 Canadians and 1009 Americans.

While no margin of error can be associated with a non-probability sample (Web panel in this case). However for comparative purposes, a probability sample of 1539 and 1627 respondents would have a margin of error of $\pm 2.52\%$, 19 times out of 20 and a sample of 1009 and 1114 respondents yields a margin of error of $\pm 3.9\%$, 19 times out of 20.

Americans in the Northeastern part of the country are most likely to say they are able to hold a conversation in Spanish

I am able to hold a conversation in Spanish. (United States)	Total	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Yes	17%	25%	9%	16%	20%
No	77%	69%	87%	79%	72%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	6%	5%	4%	5%	8%

Quebecers overwhelmingly followed way back by Atlantic Canadians are most likely to say that they can hold a conversation in French

I am able to hold a conversation in French (Canada)	Total	Atl.	QC	ON	MB/SK	AB	BC
Yes	36%	28%	95%	19%	13%	13%	17%
No	61%	70%	4%	79%	74%	83%	81%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	3%	1%	1%	2%	13%	4%	2%

Younger Americans are most likely to say they are able to hold a conversation in Spanish

I am able to hold a conversation in Spanish. (United States)	Total	18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	65 +
Yes	17%	23%	26%	19%	13%	9%
No	77%	68%	65%	77%	82%	89%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	6%	9%	9%	5%	4%	2%

Younger Canadians are more likely to say that they can hold a conversation in French

		18 and 24	25 and 34	35 and 44	45 and 54	55 and 64	65+
I am able to hold a conversation in French (Canada)	Total						
Yes	36%	43%	40%	33%	32%	37%	34%
No	61%	50%	54%	65%	65%	62%	66%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	3%	7%	6%	1%	3%	1%	0%

Americans Non-Hispanic's ability to speak Spanish vs non-francophones ability to speak French

Northeastern US has highest percentage of Non-Hispanics able to speak Spanish

I am able to hold a conversation in Spanish.	US Non-Hispanic			
	Northeast	Midwest	South	West
Yes	12%	6%	8%	9%
No	83%	90%	86%	86%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	5%	4%	6%	5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Over one in five non-francophone Canadians say they can hold a conversation in French but there is a massive gap between the majority French Province of Quebec and the rest of the country

I am able to hold a conversation in French. -	Canada: Non-French Population						
	Canada	British Columbia	Alberta	Prairies	Ontario	Quebec	Maritimes
Yes	21%	16%	11%	13%	17%	86%	17%
No	76%	82%	85%	74%	81%	13%	81%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	3%	2%	4%	13%	2%	1%	2%

Some 36% of Canadians say that they are able to hold a conversation in French with youth more likely to say so

		Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	65+
I am able to hold a conversation in French.	Total						
Yes	36%	43%	40%	33%	32%	37%	34%
No	61%	50%	54%	65%	65%	62%	66%
I don't know / I prefer not to answer	3%	7%	6%	1%	3%	1%	0%

In the highest Income cohort in Canada there is a higher percentage of non-francophones that say they can hold a conversation in French yet that is not the case for non-Hispanics that speak Spanish in the highest income cohort in the US

I am able to hold a conversation in Spanish	US Non Hispanic Household Income			I am able to hold a conversation in French	Canada English First Language Household Income		
	Less than \$35,000	Between \$35,000 and \$75,000	\$100,000 but less than \$150,000		Less than \$60,000	Between \$60,000 and \$79,999	\$100,000 or more
	7.5	11	7.7%		17%	17%	24%

The overall state of bilingualism in the United States and Canada (November 2024)

Canadians are far more likely to speak at least two languages than are Americans

I speak more than one Language	Canada	United States
Yes	45%	28%
No	53%	69.5%
I don't know	2%	2.5%
Total	100.0%	100.0%

Younger Canadians are far more likely than Americans to report knowledge of more than one language though large decline is seen in both countries amongst older cohorts

Canada	I speak more than one language						
	Between 18 and 24	Between 25 and 34	Between 35 and 44	Between 45 and 54	Between 55 and 64	Between 65 and 74	75 or older
Yes	68.4%	58.8%	44.5%	50.2%	35.9%	30.3%	27.4%
No	28.4%	40.0%	53.9%	49.0%	62.6%	69.3%	71.7%
I don't know	3.2%	1.2%	1.6%	0.8%	1.5%	0.4%	0.9%
Total	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

United States		I speak more than one language				
		18-29	30-39	40-49	50-64	>= 65
I speak more than one language	Yes	41.9%	34.8%	28.2%	22.3%	15.9%
	No	56.6%	61.2%	66.9%	75.7%	81.8%
	I don't know	1.5%	3.9%	4.9%	2.0%	2.3%
Total		100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

Canadian Born are more likely than American born to speak more than one language while immigrants in both countries have roughly similar rates when it comes to the ability to speak more than one language

	I speak more than one language			
	Born in the USA	Not Born in the USA	Born in Canada	Born outside of Canada
Yes	24.2%	70.4%	38.3%	73.8%
No	73.6%	29.6%	60.8%	24.1%
I don't know	2.3%		1.0%	2.0%
	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%	100.0%

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