

## UNOFFICIAL MULTILINGUALISM IN AN INTERCULTURAL PROVINCE: POLYVOCAL RESPONSES TO POLICY AS LIVED EXPERIENCE

CASEY BURKHOLDER, University of New Brunswick

ALISON CRUMP, McGill University

LAUREN GODFREY-SMITH, Royal Roads University

MELA SARKAR, McGill University

**ABSTRACT.** Daily language use in Montréal (Québec) is a delicate balancing act that goes beyond *bilingual / multilingual* categories or *multicultural / intercultural* frameworks. Language policy, which to an extent dominates the Québec linguistic landscape, can also be seen as the object of constant manipulation and negotiation by individuals and communities who exercise agency in locally-determined and locally significant ways. Our Montréal-based research community, BILD (Belonging, Identity, Language and Diversity), draws on perspectives from outside as well as inside Montréal, and Québec, to show how people and policies interact in real-life contexts that defy description in terms of neat dichotomies. We take advantage of our many voices to harmonize a polyvocal conversation about language use on the ground in Montréal and further. Weaving together several strands of research and lived experience, we form a tapestry of complex language practices in constant combination and recombination. We further offer suggestions for ways to rethink official models of multiculturalism and bilingualism as frameworks for understanding how individuals in cities like Montréal use language in their everyday lives.

**RÉSUMÉ.** À Montréal, Québec, l'utilisation courante de la langue devient un délicat exercice d'équilibre qui va bien au-delà des catégories de bilinguisme / plurilinguisme ou des cadres théoriques reliés au multiculturalisme / interculturalisme. Les politiques linguistiques qui jusqu'à un certain point dominant le paysage linguistique québécois, peuvent être vues en tant qu'objets de manipulation et de négociation constante, par des individus et des communautés qui mettent en pratique des actions sur le plan local. Ces actions sont déterminées et significatives seulement à ce niveau. Notre communauté de recherche basée à Montréal, LIDA (langue, identité, diversité et appartenance) se fonde sur des perspectives situées à l'extérieur ainsi qu'à l'intérieur de Montréal et du Québec; nous cherchons à montrer comment les gens et les politiques interagissent dans divers contextes de la vie quotidienne, contextes qui défient toute description en termes de dichotomies nettes. En utilisant nos multiples voix, nous harmonisons une conversation polyvocale autour des usages linguistiques sur le terrain à Montréal et au-delà. Nous tissons une riche tapisserie de pratiques langagières complexes, en combinaison et recombinaison constante, à partir de plusieurs fils tirés de la recherche et de notre expérience vécue. Nous offrons aussi des suggestions qui permettraient de repenser les modèles officiels de multiculturalisme et de bilinguisme en tant que cadres conceptuels pour comprendre comment les gens habitant des villes comme Montréal utilisent le langage dans leurs vies quotidiennes.

**Keywords:** *multilingualism, interculturalism, language policy, polyvocality.*



## INTRODUCTION: OFFICIAL MULTICULTURALISM, UNOFFICIAL MULTILINGUALISM

Individuals who live in Montréal interact with several layers of government-mandated language policies on a daily basis. On the one hand, Canadian federal policy is bilingual (Official Languages Act, 1969), whereas Québec provincial language policy is not<sup>1</sup> (Lamarre, 2007). Moreover, in contrast to Canada's *multiculturalism*, which has been official policy since 1971, Québec draws from an intercultural framework that is seen to respond to its own distinct and diverse society (Meer & Modood, 2012). On top of these notions of bilingualism, multiculturalism, and interculturalism is the added layer of *multilingualism*. While not official policy, multilingualism is a lived-reality for many in Canada's larger cities including Montréal (Lamarre, 2013), where there are daily collisions between official language policy, interculturalism, and individuals' experiences.

These complexities suggest that it may be time to rethink official models of multiculturalism and bilingualism as frameworks for understanding how individuals in cities like Montréal use language in their everyday lives. Indeed, we argue that a more complex set of locally-responsive perspectives is needed in order to gain an in-depth understanding of multicultural and multilingual realities in Québec. However, before such a rethinking can take place, we explore individuals' lived experiences of language policy, guided by the following questions:

- How do individuals in Montréal negotiate their language identities within the context of official interculturalism and unofficial multiculturalism?
- What do their lived experiences tell us about tensions between language ideologies, rules, and practices?
- How might these insights inform language policy research in the future?

In order to address these questions, we offer our experiences as multilingual Montréalers through polyvocal reflections on language policy by drawing on research being done both within and beyond Québec that has informed and shaped our perspectives on local policy.

## RESEARCHER POSITIONALITY

As members of the Belonging, Identity, Language, and Diversity (BILD) research community (<http://bild-lida.ca/>), we share the view that language is a social practice and approach our inquiry from the perspective of critical language scholars. In this paper, we attend to a theoretical stance grounded at the intersection of two areas of literature: interculturalism (Meer & Modood, 2012; Waddington, Maxwell, McDonough, Cormier, & Schwimmer, 2012) and language policy (Shohamy, 2009; Spolsky, 2004; Tollefson, 1994, 2006). We begin this article by exploring the notions of interculturalism and multiculturalism, which provide the backdrop to the current article. We then discuss the model of language policy that we have used as a conceptual framework to our study. Following this, we briefly outline the polyvocal method that we used to explore the lived realities of language policy in Canada. This article closes with some



final thoughts on the importance of locally-responsive perspectives on unofficial multilingualism in an intercultural province.

### INTERCULTURALISM VS. MULTICULTURALISM

An unexpected impact of Québec’s four-decade-old French language policy, *La charte de la langue française* (colloquially, « *la loi 101* » or “Bill 101”), has been an increase in multilingualism among Montréalers, rather than French monolingualism. While people are learning and speaking French, they are also responding to a strong and very contemporary pull towards English as the language of the Canadian and international economy. Montréal is the city where most immigrants to Québec settle, and is the city in North America that has the highest number of trilinguals (Lamarre, 2013). There is another layer to the often uneasy French-English bilingual tension: the *multilingual* lived reality of many Montréalers who maintain “heritage” languages (Cummins, 2005) as markers of family and community belonging (Lamarre, 2003).

Multiculturalism—as defined within Canada’s 1971 Multiculturalism Policy (Haque, 2012)—has been described as “a dirty word in Québec” because it suggests that all cultures, peoples and language practices exist in a celebratory mosaic, where non-dominant language and cultural practices are in theory to be respected equally (Waddington, Maxwell, McDonough, Cormier, & Schwimmer, 2012, p. 3). However, this notion represents “a betrayal of Québec’s historical status within the Canadian federation and undermines Québec’s grounds for seeking greater political autonomy from Canada” (p. 3). Acknowledging that the presence of diversity does not in itself guarantee an inclusive society, Québec’s *interculturalism* seeks to create a public sphere for the integration of newcomers with longtime residents while also respecting the diversity of its citizens. Instead of diminishing racialized and minoritized citizens’ diverse experiences and linguistic and historical reserves, interculturalism directly acknowledges social asymmetry, or the idea that a society privileges specific cultures, language practices, and ethnicities in an asymmetrical fashion (Maxwell et al., 2012). Interculturalism, in practice, requires that citizens dialogue through a common language to address issues that may arise in pluralistic societies (Abdallah-Pretceille, 2006; Seidle, 2009). In Québec, that common language is French.

### LANGUAGE POLICY: PRACTICES, IDEOLOGY, MANAGEMENT

We refer to language both as a verb (i.e., language as a doing) and as a noun (i.e., language as a thing). This conceptualisation of language as an action and a resource provides the space to explore fluidity, individual agency, and creativity, as well as recognizes how boundaries around categories and identity labels are socially constructed (García, 2009; Heller, 2007; Pennycook, 2010). It allows us to examine how power has become associated with certain linguistic resources in certain spaces and how individuals navigate their identities in these spaces (thus changing the spaces through acts of resistance). We see languages and languaging as part of a given set of socially distributed resources that individuals draw from in their negotiation of social meaning (Heller, 2007), and approach our inquiry from a perspective that views social relations as embedded within relations of power (Lamarre, 2013).



We draw on Spolsky's (2004) tripartite model of language policy, which connects written documents with, first, language practices, second, language ideologies, and third, language management. Language practices account for what people do with language; that is, their languaging and translanguaging (García, 2009). However, a language practices perspective is interested not only in the action of languaging, but also in understanding what shapes the doing of language, including socio-historical influences (Shohamy, 2009; Tollefson, 1994). Language ideologies account for beliefs and values assigned to particular languages and ways of languaging. Contemporary views of language ideologies have to do with the workings of power in everyday life and are reflective of sociopolitical and historical, not linguistic, facts (Weber & Horner, 2012; Woolard, 1998). Finally, language management is often understood as the top-down language planning that nation-states engage in to regulate the language behaviours of citizens. However, we take the view that language management occurs at all levels of social interaction, and we are interested in how language practices and ideologies are managed within individuals' lived experiences (e.g., Crump, 2017).

### POLYVOCALITY AS METHOD AND PRACTICE

When considering how we might explore and argue for a more complex set of locally-responsive perspectives on multicultural and multilingual realities in Québec, we sought a research method that would allow us to reflect on our respective research projects, each which focus on language policy as lived experiences. Our desire was to do this through a research method that was collaborative, reflecting our identity as a research community. Thus, we were drawn to the collaborative research method known as polyvocality, which brings together multiple narratives allowing for multiple readings within a text (Gergen & Gergen, 2003). We assume a polyvocal approach where our multiple research narratives are drawn together through a collaborative writing approach.

Siry and Ali-Khan (2011) wrote that collaborating through writing “challenge[s] hierarchies. . . as a means to agency and transformation” (p. 7). Exploring polyvocality in participatory research, Pithouse-Morgan et al. (2014) described the value of the method to address community members' contributions in knowledge production and to bring these contributions to the sharing of the collaborative findings. Arnold and Brennan (2013) considered that polyvocal ethnography provides a rhetorical space for “democratic debate, more hegemonic resistance and more openness and honesty among practitioner researchers” (p. 353). This spirit of polyvocality makes it an ideal methodology for language policy research. Language policy as an academic discipline and as a branch of political discourse tends to be couched in top-down terminology; however, as real and conflicted the persons-as-speakers may be who come under its impersonal gaze; discussions of interculturalism are no less abstract. Through our use of polyvocality as method, we bring the voices of individual speakers back into the collective space defined by the policy *fiats* of bureaucrats pontificating on issues of language and culture.

In this polyvocal article, we draw on the reflections of eight members of BILD (including ours as authors) who responded to a series of questions about our respective research projects.



To elicit the polyvocal reflections of our own and other BILD members' reflections on different aspects of policy as lived experience in research contexts both inside and outside of Québec, we posted several questions (see Table 1 below) on BILD's private social media platform between February and April 2016. As BILD is made up of McGill current and former graduate students and faculty members, responses to questions reflected individuals' current status in their respective research projects at the time that the data was generated; this means that some contributions to the conversations represented here come from research projects that were in the planning or early execution stages. Rather than reporting on findings, three contributors—Medhi, Stephen and Sumanthra—describe the context of their studies and how they respond to diverse language practices in multicultural (e.g., Saskatchewan, Canada) and/or intercultural (Québec) contexts. In addition, it is important to note that while this paper was authored by four members of the BILD community, the voices of several other members of the community are also represented here as contributions to the generation of polyvocal data.

In the section that follows, a polyvocal dialogue is distilled from these exchanges, presented in narrative form to reflect the participatory and polyvocal nature of the research process that we engaged in. After sharing these reflections, we discuss key threads that emerged vis-à-vis our theoretical lens, which draws on both interculturalism and language policy.

What is our research about? Who are we working with? What methods are we using?
What issues arose in relation to language policy in our research?
What were our participants' ideas about language use in public places?
How did participants describe lived experiences of language rules?

Table 1: Questions to prompt polyvocal reflections

## POLYVOCAL REFLECTIONS

### What is our research about? Who are we working with? What methods are we using?

**Alison:** I did my doctoral research with multilingual Japanese-Canadian preschoolers in their Montréal homes (Crump, 2014). Using a creative approach to doing research *with* (not about) young children (Crump, 2017), I engaged in play-based research, which created spaces for the children to talk about their experiences of positioning themselves as more or less multilingual in different language policy contexts, such as home, daycare, and heritage language school.





Figure 1: Doing research with young children (Alison)

*Source: Crump, 2014*

I was interested in how the children expressed understandings of how language practices were influenced by their understandings of associations between language and race. That is, English and French have been constructed as White languages, whereas Japanese has not – this understanding seems to influence each child’s languaging.

**Lauren:** My research also focused on individuals’ experiences, but I worked with young adults. Specifically, I was interested in what it means for learners of French to experience non-classroom language anxiety in Montréal and how language anxiety can shape and be shaped by social experiences. I did qualitative case studies with ten individuals in Montréal who experienced language anxiety about their French. I used a non-static approach (Lamarre, 2013) to data collection, drawing on multiple instruments including interviews, language maps, in situ recordings, journals, walking interviews, and focus groups.





Figure 2: Walking interview with Sophia (Lauren)  
 Source: Godfrey-Smith, 2017

**Michaela:** I was also interested in the ways in which people live and language in Montréal. My research—with women from North Africa who immigrated to Montréal in 2009—is about looking at policies and how they affect people. I developed a conceptual framework where language is positioned as a proxy for race and otherness (Haque, 2012). I have realized that looking broadly at policies was imperative. I was able to see how language issues can come through diversity and immigration policies too (particularly in Québec).

**Sumanthra:** My research will look at heritage identity maintenance for learners who have limited knowledge of their heritage language (May, 2001, 2005). Through the use of semi-structured interviews and focus groups, I aim to explore the following questions: Is it important to know the heritage language in order to claim the heritage identity? For mixed heritage language learners, how is their heritage language proficiency, or lack of it, a factor in their in-group affinity?

**Mehdi:** I am exploring how multilingual immigrants with higher education qualifications perceive their language learning experiences in intercultural Québec. I am to explore how they are invested in learning French as an additional language, what barriers they perceive, and how their new identities are constructed and negotiated through their use of multiple languages.

**Mela:** Coming to this collective project as an older researcher, I see this as an opportunity to remake my research identity in my new role as grandmother (since 2012) to, now, three young trilingual children growing up in multilingual Montréal. These children are the main focus of my current thinking, but they also live in families within which several adults from a variety of backgrounds must constantly negotiate with each other, with members of their extended



families, and with the outside world. All the groups we have mentioned — adult immigrants, heritage-language learners (mixed and not), “children of Bill 101” (and grandchildren!) are represented. As I move from one young family to the next in a caregiving role, I use the “family ethnography” method (Sarkar, 2009; Tillmann, 2010).

**Stephen:** I’m going to take us out of Québec for a moment as I discuss my thesis work with students in French immersion programs in Saskatchewan. I explored the experiences of newcomer Allophone-citizens, learners “whose mother tongue is neither French nor English” (Mady, 2007, p. 728). Mady and Turnbull (2010) and Mady and Black (2012) found that very few provincial and territorial policies ensure access to education in both English and French for Allophone students; thus, these students are often limited to studying only one official language. Through semi-structured interviews and a Likert-scale questionnaire, I have examined the perceptions of different stakeholders (administrators, teachers, and Allophone parents) regarding the inclusion of Allophone students in Saskatchewan French immersion programs.

**Casey:** My doctoral research takes a participatory visual approach to understanding multilingual and multiethnic young people’s lived experiences of growing up, going to school, and living in Hong Kong—a linguistic landscape with similar intercultural tensions to Québec. For the purposes of this article, I would like to reflexively revisit (Burawoy, 2003) some multilingual street art that I viewed in my neighbourhood (Rosemont) when I was living in Montréal. I see street art and street image production as a kind of public scholarship, and this way of thinking is not unique. Lyman Chaffee’s *Political Protest and Street Art: Popular Tools for Democratization in Hispanic Countries* took up ideas of politics and street literacies in the early nineties. Moje’s (2000) article, “To be part of the story” looked at the street art literacy practices of youth who self-identified as gang-affiliated, and she noted if we accept the analysis that these literacy practices are an important aspect of young people’s identity construction and representation, then we need to ask how they learn these practices and how they articulate these unsanctioned practices and identities with other practices and identities that they have constructed in various contexts (p. 672). Other scholars have explored street art as an act of civic engagement, of identity, as a way to speak back to dominant discourses. It can be sexy, and dissenting, and problematic, and angry, and it is all of these things that have caused me to search out street art as I walk through everyday spaces.

### What issues arose in relation to language policy in our research?

**Alison:** A main issue that emerged among the young children’s parents was how to support their children’s multilingual language development. Many parents talked to me frequently about their hopes for their children to grow up knowing three languages (Japanese, English, and French) (Crump, 2014). They had explicit strategies for how they could support that development. For example, one family hired a French babysitter to come to the house once a week to ensure that the children would be exposed to French in the home, in addition to English and Japanese (the parents’ respective languages). The mother was studying French and even though she admitted that she was really struggling and didn’t really enjoy the classes, she never complained in front of the children because she wanted them to have positive attitudes towards French. Talk about



investment in fostering multilingualism! The three families I did my research with made a point to take a trip to Japan at least once a year to spend time with grandparents and other extended family members to help support the children's Japanese language. All the children also attended a Japanese heritage language Saturday school in Montréal.



Figure 3: Play-based research with Taichi (Alison)  
*Source: Crump, 2014*

The children, of course, had their own perspectives on their parents' efforts. They had many comments about their parents' language rules. As we were playing on the floor with Japanese characters, 4-year old Taichi lamented to me that, "everything [is] in French for me."

**Lauren:** Language policy—specifically Bill 101—came up in my research in a couple of ways. On the one hand, my participants appreciated the value of knowing French and wanted their future children to grow up bilingual; yet, on the other hand, they were worried about losing their *ayant droit* status (referring to families who have the right to send their children to English schools in Québec) for themselves and future generations. For example, one participant said, "Bill 101 is only assimilation over 100 years. Right? Because sooner or later, we're going to mingle and all the English is going to mingle with the French. . . . So in my head, it's assimilation over a few hundred years." Another way that Bill 101 came up had to do with participants' own experiences of schooling. It was interesting to contrast two participants who were both visible minorities and had grown up in Montréal. One attended French school because of Bill 101, and one attended private English school to avoid Bill 101. The one who attended French school called herself a "Bill 101 baby" and felt frustrated that people always commented on how well she spoke French. The



other participant said, "I wish I were a Bill 101 baby" because people always commented on how she didn't speak French very well. I should add that, in both cases, these experiences definitely interplayed with their language anxieties.



Figure 4: Walking interview with Ryan (Lauren)  
Source: Godfrey-Smith, 2017

**Michaela:** The biggest issue that came up in my research was the *labelling* of language and speakers, and the implications for belonging and identity. More specifically, my participants talked about the mismatch between, on the one hand, policy documents on immigration claiming French to be a community unifier and, on the other hand, the lived experience of those being denied the “Francophone” label.

**Mela:** In my own extended family, as long as the children are babies and mostly at home with their parents, language policy is family-internal and, I think, not different here in Montréal from what it might be in any other biracial/bicultural family, where the parents bring different languages to their union and feel strongly about passing those languages on to the children. The parents may try to stick exclusively to one language with the children (as my Mexican son-in-law does with Spanish) or they may feel comfortable constantly translanguaging among all the parts of their communicative repertoire, while promoting comprehension in a minority language (that’s my Hindi-speaking daughter-in-law, who was raised with both Punjabi, Hindi and English in the home and who is passing *that* on). Translanguaging, in this context, transcends code-switching (García & Wei, 2013); the blended languaging that emerges is a far cry from the neater boundary-crossing that the term code-switching implies. But there are also family contexts in which neither translanguaging nor code-switching is appropriate. These young parents all have one language they speak to their children and another they speak to their partner. That, too, is part of their family language policy.



**Stephen:** Those examples really show the ways in which language policy comes into people’s everyday lives in Québec. Most provinces and territories do not have policies that ensure access to bilingual education for Allophone families, which often limits them to learning only one official language. In my research, I am finding that language education policy influences the inclusion or exclusion of ethnically and linguistically diverse students in other parts of Canada as well.

**Casey:** By looking back at a specific piece of street art in Montréal (see Image 5 below), I see the ways in which the production of language and literacy practices are political. In this image, where a protestor holds a sign reading “FUCK TOUTE” (fuck everything) so much is said. The image speaks to language practices, to the legacy of Bill 101, to Franglais, to dissent and protest, where youth cultures are all implicated. When I first looked at the image, I wondered, who is this for? As the image appears on the side of a building that is easily viewed from the bus line-up, I assume that the audience is those who take the #18: a mixed bag folks with diverse language practices. I regularly hear Québécois, Haitian and West African French dialects, as well as Spanish, English, and Arabic on this bus. Rosemont (the neighbourhood that is intersected by the # 18) is also a politically charged and diverse neighbourhood. Walking down the side streets of this neighbourhood, one observes a lot of nationalistic propaganda mixed with left-leaning socialist-y texts, posters, and graffiti. Much of this is written in the French language. I also thought about how I am implicated as an audience member for the piece.

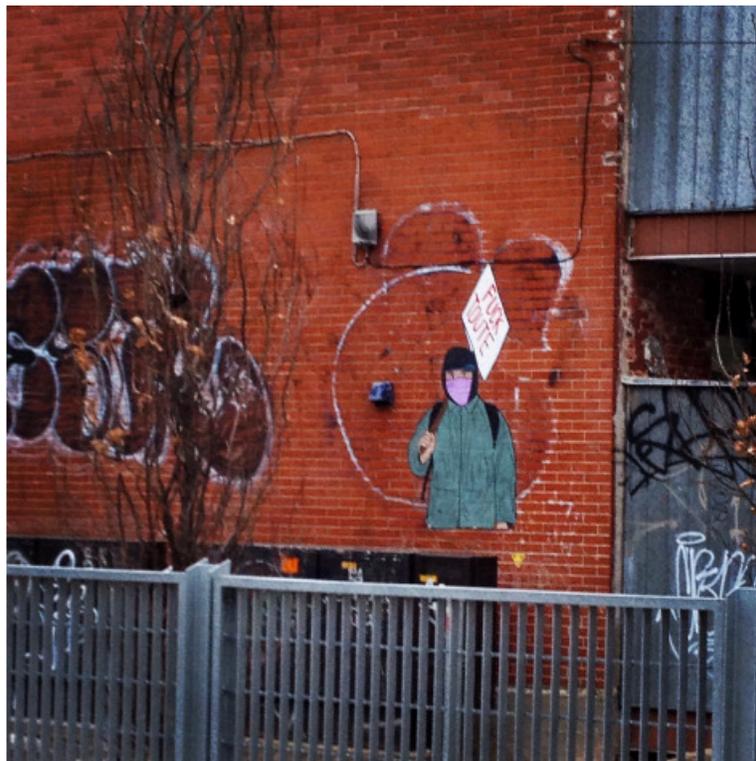


Figure 5: Multilingual Graffiti (Casey)

*Source: Burkholder, 2016*



### What were our participants' ideas were about language use in public places?

**Alison:** Six-year-old Henry told me, with confidence, that if someone in a store talked to him in French, he would answer in French. Likewise with English. He was at ease living in and with multiple languages. Taichi (age 4) seemed to feel that his parents focused too much on French, and he felt the weight of his parents' efforts to maintain and develop his French. James (age 4) said that no one at his daycare knew that he speaks Japanese. What I heard from the children was an understanding of how some places have fixed rules about language use. But, on the playground the children talked about multilingual languaging with their friends. And, while there were language use rules in the home (English with Dad, Japanese with Mom), the children's homes were a fluid multilingual space. For these participants, there were fixed language rules, but fluid language practices, especially in settings where the ideas about language use were more relaxed (e.g., on the playground).

**Lauren:** Participants in my study also had very clear ideas about whether a given space was an English "zone" or a French "zone." For example, the McGill campus was an English zone, but east of Boulevard St. Laurent was a French zone. My participants' conceptualizations of these zones guided their language choices. For example, some of my participants felt uncomfortable speaking English in French zones. There seemed to be an awareness of an overarching language ideology that confirmed that being a monolingual Anglophone isn't attractive here in Montréal. One participant told me, "I guess I feel like the environment is speaking to me in French so I should speak to the environment in French first. . . . And for respect I guess it's better to let them know that you, as an immigrant, are trying to adapt to their environment."

Another theme that emerged about language use in public places had to do with switches into English. Most of my participants wanted to speak French but found that people they spoke to in public often switched into English with them. One participant said: "Yeah, cause like I am trying, and then if all of sudden they just switch, and I didn't even show that I didn't understand. It's like, man, wasn't I speaking properly? Did they not understood (*sic*)? What happened? So it's like, dammit." In the end, I think this all comes down to a sense of lost agency. As articulated by another participant, I think I'm much more receptive to the agree of switching if, as you say, I have some kind of control over it. So let's say where it's happened where I ask in French, they answer in English, if I respond again in French because I really want to try, I'll be insulted if they respond again in English after I've made it clear that I want to keep in French.





Figure 6: Walking interview with Lex  
*Source: Godfrey-Smith, 2017*

**Mela:** For our family, it is in public places that the effects of language policy make themselves especially felt. I speak English to my three-year-old granddaughter, wherever we are. I have been reprimanded for doing this in parks, stores and her daycare. The message is quite explicit: I am asked (in French) if I don't want her to speak French. This is an example of the monolingual mindset at work: because the child is heard to speak/understand English, the eavesdropping listener assumes that she must not speak French.

**Casey:** I can see some parallels between the ways Lauren's Montréal-based participants talked about language use in public spaces and the complexities of street art in Montréal. Different actors take up language, signs and symbols for specific purposes in their street art. Here I am thinking about my interactions with the work of the graffiti collective Wall of Femmes' in my wanderings around Montréal. I love their use of repetitive imagery and the way that they aim to create a public scholarship around particular women.





Figure 7: Wall of Femmes' Chief Theresa Spence (Casey)

*Source: Wall of Femmes, 2014*

On their [blog](#), the members of the Wall of Femmes (2014) argue our aims are many: to promote the recognition and knowledge of women we find inspirational, assert the people's ownership of public space, counter the bombardment of negative messages in mainstream media, and engage in public discourse by contributing to the unique culture of our city in a meaningful way. (para. 1)

These texts are in English, and at one time they appeared throughout the city. I think that street art can be a way to pay attention to the everyday spaces, language and multiliteracy practices that we regularly ignore. I also think that street art can encourage a research process, from the conversations that people have about it as an artifact, to the photographing and social media archiving of the images, as well as being written about. Street art as a literacy practice encourages public discourse in a multitude of spaces (such as the bus stop or neighbourhood meetings or online spaces). I continue to wonder: What can we see when we look at these multipurpose and multilingual texts? How can we engage with space in new ways that attend to citizens multilingual practices?

#### How did participants describe lived experiences of language rules?

**Alison:** In my work, the children talked about rules *a lot*. Japanese in Japanese school. French in daycare. English with Dad. Japanese with Mom. Mostly English with siblings. Japanese with family and friends in Japan. French in stores. The children demonstrated a good awareness of how rules shift depending on place and people. They manage those transitions and movements expertly. And they know it and are proud of it. My findings suggest that young children have an



explicit awareness of their own language repertoires, are extremely proud of them, and also know that everyone in their family has a very distinct repertoire. This is certainly not a “one nation-one language” kind of situation that often informs top-down language policies.

**Lauren:** For the most part, my participants didn't necessarily talk very much about language rules. Instead of rules, ideologies of language were revealed instead. My participants often discussed ideologies about who should use what language, and in what place. In fact, I found that these ideologies interplayed with their language anxiety because they felt a sense of shame when their language practices didn't reflect these ideologies. There were a few instances where rules came up. I am thinking particularly of one participant who worked in a corporate business firm. She had francophone clients that she was expected to speak French with. In cases like this, where participants' agency was taken away by a rule, I observed more language anxiety. Overall, I found that my participants wanted their language choice to be a choice. Even if the outcome was the same (e.g. speaking French), they felt more at ease with that outcome if it had come from a place of choice, rather than it being dictated by a rule.



Figure 8: Walking interview with Denise (Lauren)  
Source: Godfrey-Smith, 2017

**Casey:** I think that many of the realities of our research speak back to the experience of living in an intercultural province within a larger multicultural national framework and the ways in which multilingual citizens live and language across dominant language policies.

#### KEY INSIGHTS FROM OUR POLYVOCAL PROCESS

What we see in our polyvocal reflections is that individuals make use of language resources differently and agentively in and across their social contexts and spaces and that this is always informed by ideologies; this is met with either resistance to or alignment with top-down rules. In



all our work, we have found a strong sense of agency in individuals to negotiate and perform language identities that do not always align with official policy frameworks. In the next section, we frame our discussion of key insights from the polyvocal reflections around our theoretical stance that draws on intersections of three aspects of language policy (practices, ideologies, management) and interculturalism.

At the outset of this paper, we argued that a more complex set of locally-responsive perspectives is needed in order to gain an in-depth understanding of multicultural and multilingual realities in Québec. In order to bring to light such understandings, we posed the following questions:

- How do individuals in Montréal negotiate their language identities within the context of official interculturalism and unofficial multiculturalism?
- What do their lived experiences tell us about tensions between language ideologies, rules, and practices?
- How might these insights inform language policy research in the future?

In the paragraphs that follow, we consider the implications of our polyvocal dialogue in light of these questions and close the discussion with some suggestions for the future of language policy in and beyond Québec.

### **How do individuals in Montréal negotiate their language identities within the context of official interculturalism and unofficial multiculturalism?**

Our polyvocal reflections bring to light some of the ways in which individuals' lived experiences of language policy are complex and often problematic. There is clearly a diversity of issues that were revealed across our various research projects and that also intersect: the fluidity of language practices and identities, race, visibility, individual agency, explicit local strategies for language management, and public dissent.

From our polyvocal responses, we can see that official models of multiculturalism and bilingualism are somewhat limited in how they can help us understand individuals' everyday language practices in cities like Montréal. One significant theme that emerged in our polyvocal reflections was the interplay between space/context and language ideologies/practices/rules. We discovered that space and context affect language ideologies, practices, and rules. For example, Alison noted that the children in her study understood what fixed language rules were, but they also engaged in fluid language practices in their different social spaces. In other words, their language practices were shaped by the space and context that they inhabited in any given moment. Similarly, in Lauren's study there was a strong interplay between imagined spaces and language practices within Montréal. This was evident when she described English zones and French zones across the city as well as the role that language policy played in framing others' preconceptions about legitimate language use. Similarly, Mela's reflections suggested that there was an assumed monolingual mindset in certain social contexts speak to an interplay between space/context and language ideologies/practices/rules.



Yet, space and context are not always perceived or imagined, as was evidenced in Casey's reflections on the visual spaces created by street art. Indeed, Casey's reflections highlight the complex ways in which languages are afforded different kinds of power, and that in the context of Montréal street art, language practices are made visual. Finally, Sumanthra's contributions underscore the need to understand and acknowledge diverse heritage language practices in different cultural environments, including public spaces. Overall, it is clear that while the contexts and populations within which we research may change, space plays a great role in shifting individuals' language practices and that individual lived experiences of language policy, as the intersection of language ideologies, language practices, and language rules, are shaped by social, economic, and cultural contexts.

### **What do their lived experiences tell us about tensions between language ideologies, rules, and practices?**

With respect to language management, it is evident that language rules manifest in ways that are sometimes unpredictable and problematic. Emerging from our discussion, the different ways that language rules can manifest were revealed. Through the stories told and reflected on here, we see that language rules are much more than policy; rather, language rules can manifest in ways that can be ideological, formal (as in educational settings regarding language of instruction), as well as technical and rules related to lexis and syntax.

The implications of these rules for individuals on the ground in contexts like Montréal can be serious for one's language practices. For example, Lauren commented on how language rules—whether formal or ideological—made her participants anxious because they felt their agency had been removed, and guilty/ashamed when their language practices didn't reflect such rules. Casey's responses captured how language practices within Montréal-based street art are themselves political acts. Further to this, Sumanthra touched on how *mechanical rules* of language can be used as markers of belonging and identity, especially in terms of how heritage language learners feel accepted in their communities and their identity. Sumanthra made us wonder how heritage language learners who break the rules of grammar, for example, might be affected. The unpredictable and problematic nature of language rules is also evident in Alison's contributions; she shared how the children in her study talked a lot about language rules, which shows us that children—from a young age—are aware of formal and ideological rules. She talked about how the children in her study expertly managed these rules through code-switching.

### **How might these insights inform language policy research in the future?**

To address the reality of on-the-ground lived experiences of individuals in Québec, we suggest that a more complex set of locally-responsive perspectives is required so that we can understand multicultural and multilingual realities more coherently. Because our work takes up urban perspectives, we observe a real need to explore the complexities of languaging within rural spaces in Québec as well. How do individuals outside of urban centres language within, around, and speak back to interculturalism and language policy? As scholars engaged in living and researching issues of belonging, identity, language, and diversity, we suggest that multilingual



citizens manage their language practices differently depending on their audience and depending on where they are speaking. What, we wonder, gives us permission to privilege particular language practices in particular areas, even when these practices work against existing language policies?

Because we have found that a single provincially-mandated language policy does not match the experiences of Montréalers, we challenge the concepts of multiculturalism and multilingualism as appropriate lenses for understanding the lived experiences of language policy in Montréal and beyond. As citizens operating within this intercultural context, we learn about the spaces where dominant language practices belong, and the different spaces where we are permitted to draw on our multilingual resources. Language policies exist within complex social contexts, and thus must acknowledge the non-universality of people's language practices and preferences. Our polyvocal reflections, our lived realities of languaging in Montréal, and our research spaces lead us to believe that, above all, we need more locally-responsive perspectives that are sensitive to the social dimension of language policy in order to address the unofficial, but very real multilingual realities of an intercultural Québec. These perspectives could, we suggest, complement top-down policy documents, especially in the context of the city of Montréal's pronouncements on language. They could potentially also be used in the training of teachers, community/social workers, and local government employees in Montréal.

## CLOSING THOUGHTS

Our polyvocal reflections speak to the realities and complexities of multilingualism within the context of Québec's intercultural framework, which counters the notion that the success of interculturalism rest upon a single common language—French. Instead, we find, in all our projects, instances of individual agency, resistance, and creativity. Our reflections come together to suggest that in our research and in our own lives, living and languaging in Montréal may appear to be marked mainly by Bill 101 and Québec's intercultural framework. However, as we point out, citizens' language practices occur within and beyond the determinations of official policy. Whether the policy context for local living and languaging bears an *intercultural* or *multicultural* label is less important than the commonalities across contexts. Only a high-resolution, close-up look will reveal what is really happening as individuals fashion languaging practices to suit their ever-changing, often very challenging surroundings.

## REFERENCES

- Abdallah-Pretceille, M. (2006). *Les métamorphoses de l'identité*. Paris: Economica, Antropos.
- Arnold, C., & Brennan, C. (2013). Polyvocal ethnography as a means of developing inter-cultural understanding of pedagogy and practice. *European Early Childhood Education Research Journal*, 21(3), 353-369.
- Burawoy, M. (2003). Revisits: An outline of a theory of reflexive ethnography. *American sociological review*, 645-679.
- Burkholder, C. [@biensurcasey]. (2016, February 6). My neighbourhood is multilingual. Also,



- best. [Instagram post]. Retrieved November 7, 2017, from <https://www.instagram.com/p/BBYSqRIEjKu/?taken-by=biensurcasey>
- Crump, A. (2014). *“But your face, it looks like you’re English”: LangCrit and the experiences of Japanese-Canadian children in Montréal*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). McGill University.
- Crump, A. (2017). “I speak all of the language!”: Engaging in family language policy research with multilingual children in Montréal. In J. MacAlistar & S. H. Mirvahedi (Eds.), *Family language policies in a multilingual world: Opportunities, challenges, and consequences* (pp. 154-174). London: Routledge.
- Cummins, J. (2005). A proposal for action: Strategies for recognizing heritage language competence as a learning resource within the mainstream classroom. *Modern Language Journal*, 585-592.
- García, O. (2009). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell.
- García, O., & Wei, L. (2013). *Translanguaging: language, Bilingualism and Education*: Palgrave Pivot MacMillan.
- Gergen, K. J., & Gergen, M. (Eds.). (2003). *Social construction: A reader*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Godfrey-Smith, Lauren. (2017). *“Pardon my French”: A non-static case-study of the social dimensions of non-classroom language anxiety in Montréal*. (Unpublished doctoral dissertation). McGill University.
- Haque, E. (2012). *Multiculturalism within a bilingual framework: Language, race, and belonging in Canada*. Toronto: University of Toronto Press.
- Heller, M. (2007). Bilingualism as ideology and practice. In M. Heller (Ed.), *Bilingualism: A social approach* (pp. 1–22). New York: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Lamarre, P. (2003). Growing up trilingual in Montréal: Perceptions of college students. In R. Bayley & S. Schecter (Eds.), *Language socialization in bilingual and multilingual societies* (pp. 62–80). Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Lamarre, P. (2007). Anglo-Québec today: Looking at community and schooling issues. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 2007(185), 109-132.
- Lamarre, P. (2013). Catching “Montréal on the Move” and challenging the discourse of unilingualism in Québec. *Anthropologica*, 55(1), 41–56.
- Mady, C. (2007). Allophone students in French second-official-language programs: A literature review. *Canadian Modern Language Review*, 63(5), 727-760.
- Mady, C. & Black, G. (2012). Access to French as a second official language programs in English-dominant Canada. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 57(4), 498-501.
- Mady, C. & Turnbull, M. (2010). Learning French as a second language - Reserved for Anglophones? *Canadian Journal of Educational Administration and Policy*, 99, 1-23.
- May, S. (2001). *Language and minority rights: Ethnicity, nationalism and the politics of language*. London and New York: Pearson Longman.
- May, S. (2005). Language rights: Moving the debate forward. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 9(3), 319–347.



- Maxwell, B., Waddington, D. I., McDonough, K., Cormier, A. A., & Schwimmer, M. (2012). Interculturalism, multiculturalism, and the state funding and regulation of conservative religious schools. *Educational theory*, 62(4), 427-447.
- Meer, N., & Modood, T. (2012). How does interculturalism contrast with multiculturalism?. *Journal of intercultural studies*, 33(2), 175-196.
- Official Languages Act. (1969). Retrieved from the Department of Justice Canada website: <http://lois.justice.gc.ca/en/O-3.01/texte.html>.
- Pennycook, A. (2010). *Language as a local practice*. London and New York: Routledge.
- Pithouse-Morgan, K., Naicker, I., Chikoko, V., Pillay, D., Morojele, P., & Hlao, T. (2014). Entering an ambiguous space: Evoking polyvocality in educational research through collective poetic inquiry. *Perspectives in Education*, 32(4), 149.
- Sarkar, M. (2009). Getting into med school or becoming a healer? Western medical education and Indigenous knowledges. In J. Langdon (Ed.), *Indigenous knowledges, development and education* (pp. 109-133). Rotterdam: Sense Publishers.
- Seidle, F. L. (2009). Testing the limits of minority accommodation in Québec: The Bouchard-Taylor Commission. In J. Fossum, P. Magnette and J. Poirier (Eds.), *The ties that bind: accommodating diversity in Canada and the European Union*, (pp. 77-104). Brussels: Peter Lang.
- Shohamy, E. (2009). Language policy as experiences. *Language Problems & Language Planning*, 33(2), 185-189. doi: 10.1075/lplp.33.2.06sho.
- Siry, C., & Ali-Khan, C. (2011). Writing we: Collaborative text in educational research. *Critical pedagogy in the 21st century*, 233-249.
- Spolsky, B. (2004). *Language policy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tillmann, L. M. (2010). Coming out and going home: A family ethnography. *Qualitative Inquiry*, 16(2), 116-129.
- Tollefson, J. W. (1994). Review of Linguistic Imperialism. *Language Culture and Curriculum*, 111, 175-79.
- Tollefson, J. W. (2006). Critical theory in language policy. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 42-59). Oxford: Blackwell.
- Wall of Femmes (2014, November 15). *Spence and space*. [Screen shot from video file]. Retrieved November 7, 2017, from <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G08utQRT3do&index=14&list=PLDFeso1RUVGY75Ar mHuM48LHA-S1gXzTA>
- Wall of Femmes. (2014). Home. *Wall of Femmes*. Retrieved from <http://www.walloffemmes.org/>.
- Weber, J.-J., & Horner, K. (2012). *Introducing multilingualism: A social approach*. London: Routledge.
- Woolard, K. A. (1998). Language ideology as a field of inquiry. In B. B. Schieffelin, K. A. Woolard, & P. V. Kroskrity (Eds.), *Language ideologies: Practice and theory* (pp. 3-50). Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press.

---

<sup>1</sup> Québec's French language policy, Bill 101, does, however, acknowledge the historical as well as the contemporary importance of English (Lamarre, 2007).

