

Day 2 of Bill 96 hearings (English summary and critique prepared by Elizabeth MacDougall)

1.1 Summary of main points

French and English bilingualism at the workplace, accessibility to English-language CEGEPs, institutional and systematic bilingualism, and newcomer linguistic integration were at the heart of the debates between plenary and keynote speakers in this second day of the Bill 96 public hearings.

The French-English bilingual employment requirements established by companies in Québec are said to be unfavourable to monolingual francophones wanting to access certain business markets and apply for higher paying positions. If companies have a bilingual status, communications can be in French and in English; hence, allowing their employees to communicate in French and in English at the workplace. Certain attendees claim that it has become too easy to say that English is used at the workplace due to their affairs with international clients. Therefore, some plenary speakers are in favour of strengthening enterprises' francization program and committee requirements. One of the goals of implementing stricter francization regulations for companies is to make French the common language at the workplace in Québec. Some have argued that although it is step in the right direction to hold companies accountable for the quality and rigor of their francization programs and committees, it still does not prevent them from requiring employees and job candidates to be bilingual in French and in English. The management rights of the employer and the many loopholes in the hiring process then presented pragmatic reasons as to why it would be ambitious, challenging to forbid enterprises from requiring bilingualism for job applicants.

As for the issues related to higher education institutions and the French language, plenary speakers have expressed their great concern for the number of francophone and allophone students that choose to go to English CEGEPs. It is mentioned that there is an urgent need to be more proactive and to break this alarming tendency to choose English higher education institutions over the French ones. The reasons why this is a great concern are that English language higher education institutions create workers who generally work in English-speaking environments, so by default, these students have a great impact on the maintenance of the French language in Québec society. Specialists assert that the nation of Québec needs to intervene to ensure that the proportions of francophones and allophones in English CEGEPs reflect the linguistic portrait of Québec; hence, the proposed amendment is to cap the number of students allowed to enroll in English CEGEPs. Some speakers have stated that they are looking for a significant decrease, a "stop" in the enrollment of francophones and allophones in English instruction higher education institutions. According to a study conducted by *Le Parti Québécois, Québécois.es.* are in favour of stretching Bill 101 eligibility requirements to higher education institutions. This reflect the dissatisfaction of this separatist political party and their position throughout this public hearing, which is that the Bill 96 amendments are not enough and too vague to protect the French language in Québec.

Institutional bilingualism in Québec was discussed as being a pressing issue. Denis Bolduc, general secretary, mentions that "to fight for bilingualism in Québec is to fight for the death of French". The presence and status of bilingualism in certain Québec municipalities is called into question. A speaker uses the following example to demonstrate how the bilingual

status and its adverse impacts affects monolingual French speakers in Québec society: A municipality with a 12% English-speaking population can keep its bilingual status and request spoken and written English for work positions. Some plenary speakers argue that municipalities should not be able to preserve their bilingual status due to their low English-speaking population. Other specialists assert the importance of English in communicating, in being understood, and in maintaining a strong collaboration between municipalities. Daniel Côté, president of *Union des municipalités du Québec* (UMQ), argues that institutional and systematic bilingualism does not exist in Québec, as some regions in Québec do not have bilingual requirements and bilingual statuses; hence, to say that it is widespread and systematic is incorrect.

The French language in Québec is said to be in rapid decline due to two major factors: (1) low childbirth rates among French speakers in Québec and (2) the language choices of immigrants. One speaker claims that one in two immigrants residing in Québec choose using the English language over the French language. Thus, the francization process of immigrants is said to be crucial to the survival of the French language in Québec. The new Bill 96 amendment offers a period of six months for immigrants to completely switch to French for all communications. The short amount of time allocated for immigrants to learn, communicate, and understand French is highly critiqued. Patrick Sabourin, a researcher and demographer, discusses the issue of language use at home; hence, delving into the private spheres of newcomer residents. According to his research, language use at home affects language use in public spaces; hence, it is important to consider and analyse its impacts on the maintenance of the French language. The concept of cultural convergence, the idea that there is one Québec identity to converge to, is put forward by François Côté, lawyer and spokesperson for *Mouvement national des Québécoises et Québécois*, to demonstrate the importance of linguistic, cultural, and social cohesion in Québec. Moreover, he demonstrates that Québec' legal system, which is said to be more connected to a civil-law and a republican approach, is considerably different to Canada's legal system. He asserts that these two systems are based on distinct ways of thinking and doing; hence, when national linguistic and cultural affairs are discussed, Québec's voice, agency, and ideologies on its own future as a nation holds more importance, authority, power than Canada.

1.2 Critique

In this second Bill 96 recapitulatory video carefully prepared by Miss Langevin, many issues were discussed and addressed in view of validating the legitimacy of some of the proposed Bill 96 amendments. Language use at the workplace was a significant topic for discussion in this second video as Bill 96 introduces transformative measures regarding francization committees and programs for "enterprises employing 25 or more persons" (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021, p.3). Language use at the workplace is already closely monitored and restricted following Bill 101 policies: "In the workplace, written communications to staff and offers of employment must be in French. Employers are also prohibited from requiring knowledge of a language other than French, unless this is necessary for the particular employment" (Oakes & Warren, 2007, p.87). Hence, Bill 96 presents even more robust and restricting linguistic policies for enterprises in Québec. A study from *L'Office québécois de la langue française* suggests that French remains the dominant language at the workplace, with 90.4% of workers using French alone or accompanied with another language at their place of work (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). The freedom to speak freely in a given language at the workplace has been proven to elicit significant communicative, social, and affective affordances for bilinguals/multilinguals (Goldstein, 1995). With the significant strengthening of francization committees and programs, and "section 139 of the Charter [being] amended (1) by replacing "50" in the first paragraph by

“25” (Gouvernement du Québec, p.49, 2021) for enterprises, employees will be closely monitored in their language use and will adhere to monolingual language restrictions and rules at the workplace. When employees are allowed to communicate in the language of their choice without repercussions, meaningful friendships are developed, productivity increases, and assistance is provided more efficiently at the workplace (Goldstein, 1995). It is safe to say that the needs of diverse linguistic and cultural communities in Bill 96 are not prioritized nor taken into consideration. Instead, there is a clear desire to suppress languages other than French at the workplace.

As mentioned by Denis Bolduc, encouraging bilingualism in Québec is like intentionally advocating for the death of the French language in Québec. It is, thus, clear that the monolingual perspective is at the heart of the implementation of Bill 96 policies.

Article 58 of Bill 96, which states that “the Minister of Higher Education, Research, Science and Technology shall determine, for each school year, a defined total number of students for each of the English-language institutions providing college instruction” (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021, p.34), would significantly impact the English language learning opportunities of francophones and allophones in Québec. In view of legitimizing this amendment, Sabourin, Dupont and Bélanger (2011) have conducted a research which justifies and supports the need to extend the French language charter at the CEGEP level. Their findings highlight the adverse impacts of choosing English-language institutions at the CEGEP level on Québec society. It is unfortunate that findings from Vieux-Fort (2019), which suggest that francophones attending English-language instruction CEGEPs do not negatively impact the maintenance of the French language in Québec, are intentionally overlooked to strengthen the monolingual narrative that is used to legitimize the purpose of Bill 96.

Ideas and perspectives related to cultural convergence are deeply ingrained within the fabric of Bill 96 amendments. Rousseau and Côté (2014) propose the adoption of a cultural convergence and Québec values law, which would focus less on races and religions, and more on the sharing of Québec’s common values and culture. These authors suggest that “the culture of convergence is linked to the survival of the French language and the existence of a separate nation in North America” (Rousseau & Côté, 2014, p.6). It is evident that the need to remain monolingual and monocultural in view of creating social, linguistic, and cultural cohesion is put forward to preserve the status and dominance of the French language in Québec.

Day 2 of Bill 96’s public hearings encompass topics of language at the workplace, English-language instruction in higher education institutions, and impacts of newcomers’ language use in public and private spheres of life. These debates and discussions about Québec’s past, present, and future linguistic portrait cultivated interesting perspectives about what should be done and what is to come for Québec culture and the French language.

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