

Day 4 of Bill 96 hearings (prepared by Elizabeth MacDougall)

1.1 Summary of main points

On day 4 of the Bill 96 public hearings, many organization representatives were given a voice to express their concerns regarding the implementation of Bill 96 on their communities and on Québec society. Topics including notaries and bilingual requirements, the role of the OQLF (*l'Office québécois de la langue française*), the lack of linguistic and cultural inclusivity in Québec, the decline of the French language as a mother tongue, and the impacts of Bill 96 on indigenous communities were discussed.

First, Hélène Potvin, president of Québec notaries, highlights the need for professional training opportunities in view of improving the notaries' French language abilities. She expresses that it is crucial for all notaries to demonstrate exemplary use of the French language. Increasing professional training opportunities and language development courses may ensure the maintenance and development of the quality of the French language use at the workplace. Hélène David, member of the Québec Liberal Party, then sheds light on the roles of the OQLF and their professional order to provide tools in supervising the quality of the French language for all notaries. Pascal Bérubé then questions the necessity of requiring French and English for the employment of notaries in Québec. He challenges the vagueness of policies related to language use at the workplace for notaries, and demands more factual and reliable statistics to draw a clearer linguistic portrait for notaries in Québec.

Marie-Anne Alepin, president of the *Société Saint-Jean Baptiste* (SSJB) of Montréal, claims that Bill 96 is simply not enough to protect the French language in Québec. From extending Bill 101 to CEGEPs to reducing funding for English higher institutions, her suggestions clearly indicate a strong desire in strengthening Bill 96 amendments. She also proposes to change policies for temporary work immigrants in Québec. Temporary work immigrants in Québec are allowed to enroll their children in English schools for a maximum of three years, and then can apply for an extension if necessary. With Bill 96, temporary immigrant workers will not be able to request for an extension after this 3-year period. Marie-Anne Alepin asserts that strengthening the linguistic integration of newcomers in Québec is crucial and closing this loophole in Bill 101 is a step in the right direction. The French language and Québec culture are inseparable and interrelated; hence, having strong linguistic policies that support the dominance of the French language is a necessity in its maintenance and development. Christian Daigle, president of *Syndicat de la fonction publique et parapublique du Québec* (SFPQ), posits that linguistic policies are not always known nor implemented correctly in various public sectors. Moreover, he also indicates his concern about the French-English bilingualism requirements to obtain job promotions in sectors of the public service. Simon-Jolin Barette, Minister Responsible for the French Language and Minister Responsible for Laicity and Parliamentary Reform, highlights the importance of providing government services in diverse languages for a period of six months to then subsequently switch to all services being in French only. Christian Daigle disagrees with this amendment and proposes that this period should be extended to two years, as he believes that with the strengthening of the francization committees and programs and adequate governmental services and support, the French language will inevitably be the language of integration for all newcomers.

Quebec Community Groups Network (QCGN) state that Bill 96 is the most significant derogation from the Charter of human rights and freedoms since the Quiet Revolution. They

propose that Bill 96 should be withdrawn in its totality as it does not represent the cultural and linguistic realities in Québec. This non-profit organization recognizes the considerable decrease in French language mother tongue speakers, but also sheds light on similar issues for the English-speaking communities in Québec. The vitality of the English-speaking community in Québec is said to be significantly compromised, and Bill 96 will only suppress and restrict bilinguals/multilinguals in Québec. Simon Jolin-Barette denounces the organization's suggestion to eliminate Bill 96 in its entirety and states that Bill 96 will not generate any changes or impacts on their community.

Jacques Girard, president, and Myriam D'Arcy, general director, of *La Fondation Lionel-Groux* highlight the historical decline in people having French as a mother tongue, and that predictions for 2036 are increasingly worrisome. The significance of extending Bill 101 eligibility restrictions to CEGEPs is put forward as they reiterate the importance of college training and the protection of the French language. Issues related to the language choice for research publications are also discussed. They bring forward the importance of writing and publishing research in French. Hélène David argues that many world renowned Québec scholars used English and other languages to publish their research and have reached an international presence in the world as Québec-based scholars. Hence, publishing in French only would considerably restrict Québec scholars in their professional development and global presence. They also claim that the government funding between English universities and French universities is unequal and requires drastic modifications. Hélène David strongly disagrees with this statement and states that students and programs from French and English universities in Québec currently receive equal funding, and that it should continue to be this way. She also indicates that if the government were to follow their suggestion, which is to cut funding for English CEGEPs and universities, these institutions would become private, and this would ultimately reduce accessibility to higher education institutions for all students. Moreover, she mentions that changing the entire ecosystem of English language CEGEPs and universities is not realistic.

John Martin, chief of Gesgapegiag, argues that the French language has always been, and will always be a foreign language to indigenous communities. He points out that, throughout history, indigenous peoples were physically and psychologically attacked for speaking their languages, and confined to spaces of poverty and insalubrity. He continues to demonstrate that Bill 96 does not allow children from indigenous communities to learn in their indigenous language, and that history is unfortunately repeating itself. The systemic barriers in place devalue and marginalize indigenous languages and cultures, and in turn, reinforce the idea that the languages and cultures of the colonizers are superior. Ghislain Picard, chief of *l'Assemblée des Premières Nations du Québec et du Labrador*, demands more understanding of their precarious linguistic situation and a more appropriate space and consideration for indigenous communities in Bill 96. Simon Jolin-Barette indicates that all nations should support one another in preserving and maintaining their languages, and that a language is "the soul of a nation, the vivacity of a community". This said, no place or exemptions were given to indigenous communities in Bill 96.

Charles Castonguay, a retired associate professor of Mathematics and Statistics at the University of Ottawa, claims that since the early 2000s, the French language has been in rapid decline, and that Bill 96 does not present sufficient strength and influence to protect the French language in Québec. He mentions that assimilating allophones is necessary to stabilize the unequal power distribution between the French and the English language. He also states that immigration is at the heart of issues related to the linguistic imbalance in Québec. He firmly

believes that native speakers of a language ensure the perennity of a language; not second language speakers. Hence, second language speakers of French are not as important as first language speakers of French in protecting, maintaining, and preserving the French language in Québec. In order to put an end to the anglicization of francophones, more particularly in Montréal, he proposes to extend Bill 101 eligibility restrictions to baccalaureate.

1.2 Critique

In the past decades, issues related to the endangerment or rapid decline of the French language in Québec have been an integral part of Québec's political narratives: "The Quebec that we want to build will be essentially French. The fact that the majority of its population is French will finally be visible: in the workplace, in communications and in the landscape. [...] There will no longer be any question of a bilingual Quebec" (Gouvernement du Québec 1977: 36–7). On August 26th 1977, the Charter of the French language, more commonly known as Bill 101, made French the official language of Québec.

Plenary and keynote speakers in this video have expressed their desire to expand Bill 101 eligibility rights to CEGEPs and universities. "[...] the Charter states that '[i]nstruction in the kindergarten classes and in the elementary and secondary schools shall be in French' (Charter, s. 72), a requirement which applies to both state schools and those private schools partially funded by the Quebec state" (Oakes & Warren, 2007, p.87). One of the exceptions to this policy is if the child's mother or father received their primary education in English in Canada. If the government were to follow these recommendations made by speakers at the Bill 96 hearings, many francophones and newcomers would be legally obligated to attend French CEGEPs and universities. This would exclusively target and exclude francophones and allophones from attending English-language higher education institutions in Québec. Thankfully, Bill 96 does not intend on following through with these recommendations. Instead, they are envisioning on capping the number of students in English CEGEPs. As mentioned by H  l  ne David, world renowned scholars from Québec publish their research in many languages, and therefore can develop their presence at the international level. Preventing or reducing access to English-language instruction for students at the CEGEP level may significantly impact their ability to approach future professional, social, and linguistic opportunities.

With the implementation of Bill 96, the desire for newcomers' cultural and linguistic assimilation in Québec society is increasingly apparent. The goal of Bill 101 was to make French the common language of Québec, but representatives made sure to distinguish this objective from linguistic assimilation: "The total assimilation of all new immigrants [...] is not a desirable objective. A society that allows its minority groups to maintain their language and culture is a society that is richer and probably better balanced" (Gouvernement du Québec 1977: 26, cited in B  land 1999: 9–10). In Bill 96 amendments related to newcomers, such as imposing a short 6-month linguistic transition period before shifting to French communications only, as well as the recurring concept of cultural convergence brought to the table, the term assimilation cannot be left outside of Bill 96 narratives and discussions. Although the language choice and usage of newcomers in Québec is a major topic for discussion in the Bill 96 public hearings, the presence of the French language is continuously increasing and is expected to continue increasing in the private sphere of the foreign-born population in Québec (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). By 2036, a decline is expected in two areas: 1) French as a mother tongue and 2) French as the main language used at home (Gouvernement du Québec, 2021). A lot of emphasis is placed on newcomers' linguistic integration, and their language use in public and private spaces. Newcomers in Québec are expected to converge into Québec culture and the French language,

leaving little to no space for their linguistic, social, and cultural identities to evolve in this new landscape.

Although Canada's official languages are composed of French and English only, many other languages were here long before the presence of these two languages : "There are currently 58 distinct Indigenous languages in Canada, comprising more than 90 distinct dialects (Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson & Dunbar, 2019, p.4). A study by Sarkar et al. (2011) demonstrates that the mi'gmaq language is not estimated to survive the next century due to significant linguistic loss throughout generations. No comparison can be made between the decline of the French language in Québec and the linguistic issues in diverse indigenous communities. The mi'gmaq community in Québec is, therefore, in dire need of support from the federal and the provincial government. Indigenous languages are continuously and intentionally left out of Québec political, social, and linguistic narratives, despite their continuing decline to this day (Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson & Dunbar, 2019). Not only are indigenous languages excluded and ignored by the provincial government, but also by the Canadian federal government: "The Canadian federal government 'delivers \$8,189 per francophone for language programs in Nunavut, while providing \$186 per Inuktitut speaker, meaning the federal government spends 44 times more on French in Nunavut than it does on Inuktitut', reports Aluki Kotierk, the President of Nunavut Tunngavik Inc..." (Skutnabb-Kangas, Phillipson & Dunbar, 2019, p.10). This passage underscores the deliberate erosion of indigenous languages in Canada, and the importance, status, and privilege that is attributed to both official languages in Canada. Indigenous languages should be supported by the federal and the provincial government to allow members to contribute to the rich language and cultural development.

Day 4 of Bill 96's public hearings allowed for different perspectives from organization representatives to be discussed and debated. From wanting more robust language policies to wanting the complete withdrawal of Bill 96, both sides of the spectrum were explored, and in turn, a more holistic portrait of the impacts of Bill 96 on diverse communities was drawn.

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