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## Canadian Opinion Toward Second Language Knowledge and Education

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Commissioned by the Association for Canadian Studies (ACS), the Environics / Focus Canada survey of 2,002 Canadians 18 years of age and over (1572 anglophones / 478 Quebec francophones) assesses Canadians' opinion toward second language knowledge and education. The survey was carried out by telephone at the end of January 2003. Results are accurate to within plus or minus 2.2%, 19 times out of 20.

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What impact might Canada's changing demographics have on attitudes towards second language knowledge and instruction across the country? In a survey of over 2000 Canadians done at the end of January 2003, the Association for Canadian Studies found that

- (i) **a majority of Canadians believe that it is important to know a second language,**
- (ii) **a majority agree that some French language instruction should be mandatory in elementary and high schools outside of Quebec.**

### Two questions were asked

- (i) Do you agree or disagree that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada? Would that be strongly or somewhat?
- (ii) How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

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On Wednesday March 12<sup>th</sup>, the Federal Minister responsible for Language Policies (Stéphane Dion) will release his much anticipated action plan on official languages. Over the past 15 years, the focus on policy in this area has been on support for official language minorities. While reinforcing this objective, the "Dion" plan will likely reinvest significantly in the promotion of bilingualism amongst the population. Last December Statistics Canada revealed that levels of bilingualism amongst English Canadians had stalled and remained below ten percent. Yet surveys have revealed that the gap between the majority support for learning French and the extent to which it is indeed acquired might be described as the 'bilingualism gap'. In the survey conducted by the ACS in advance of the release of the "Dion" plan two issues were examined.

In Canada, most recent surveys suggest that 90% of Francophones are in favour of English-French bilingualism for all of Canada (CRIC-Environics, 2000) while 44% are indeed bilingual. 67% of Allophones are in favour of English-French bilingualism and 14% speak both official languages, and 50% of Canada's Anglophones are in favour of bilingualism with just below 10% speaking both official languages. In the case of Francophones outside of Quebec and Anglophones within the province, support for bilingualism is more closely in line with levels of bilingualism.

The 2003 ACS-Environics poll reveals that 75% of Canadians believe it is important to learn to speak a second language other than English. According to the 2001 census, some 35% of Canadians speak at least two languages (that is all forms of bilingualism).

The ACS-Environics poll suggests that another expression of the gap is illustrated in Tables 1 and 2. That is the extent to which we believe it important to learn a second language and the extent to which it should be mandatory in this case in French. It is in western Canada where the gap is the strongest.

**Table 1**  
**Level of agreement, by region**

|                    | Importance of learning a second language other than English | Agree that some French lang. Education should be mandatory | Difference |
|--------------------|---|--|------------|
| Canada             | 75  | 65   | - 10       |
| Atlantic Provinces | 82  | 79   | - 3        |
| Quebec             | 100   | 85   | - 15       |
| Ontario            | 76  | 69   | - 7        |
| Western Canada     | 70  | 54   | - 16       |

**Table 2**  
**Level of agreement, by political preference**

|                   | Importance of learning a second language other than English | Agree that some French lang. Education should be mandatory | Difference |
|-------------------|---|--|------------|
| Liberals          | 81  | 71   | - 10       |
| Conservatives     | 76  | 67   | - 9        |
| NDP               | 80  | 68   | - 12       |
| Canadian Alliance | 58  | 47   | - 11       |

**Below are more highlights of the ACS-Environics survey**

- (i) Do you agree or disagree that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada? Would that be strongly or somewhat?

**BY REGION**

|                   | <b>Canada</b> | Atl. Prov | Quebec | Ontario | Western Can. |
|-------------------|---------------|-----------|--------|---------|--------------|
| Strongly agree    | <b>40</b>     | 54        | 78     | 44      | 29           |
| Somewhat agree    | <b>25</b>     | 25        | 7      | 25      | 25           |
| Somewhat disagree | <b>14</b>     | 10        | 4      | 12      | 18           |
| Strongly disagree | <b>20</b>     | 9         | 12     | 18      | 27           |
| DK/NA             | <b>1</b>      | 2         | -      | 1       | 1            |

Without regard to regions of the country, approximately 2 of every 3 Canadians agree that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada. 40% strongly agree. There is a variation in support along regional lines as 78% of Quebecers strongly agree, while only 29% of respondents from Western Canada strongly agree. Respondents from the Atlantic provinces (54%) and Ontario (44%) fall in between. In five provinces French language instruction is not mandatory-they are Newfoundland, Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Alberta and British Columbia (in BC however second language instruction is mandatory and while there are three languages to choose from, the majority of students in that province opt for the French language. In BC, Alberta and Saskatchewan the majority of respondents agreed that French language instruction should be mandatory. Only in the province of Manitoba did the majority disagree with mandatory French at the elementary and high school level.

On the basis of age younger Canadians were most favorably disposed to the idea of some mandatory French in the school system.

Do you agree or disagree that some English language education should be mandatory in French elementary and high schools in Canada? Would that be strongly or somewhat?

**BY AGE**

|                   | 18-29 | 30-44 | 45-59 | 60 + |
|-------------------|-------|-------|-------|------|
| Strongly agree    | 45    | 40    | 39    | 37   |
| Somewhat agree    | 26    | 23    | 22    | 27   |
| Somewhat disagree | 12    | 14    | 15    | 16   |
| Strongly disagree | 16    | 21    | 24    | 19   |
| DK/NA             | -     | 1     | -     | 2    |

There is a direct correlation between agreeing that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada and one's level of education. 71% of those with at least a university degree agree, while 57% with less than a high school education in agreement.

**BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED**

|                   | Less than H.S. | H.S. | Comm. Coll./ Vocational | Some Univ. | Univ. Deg. |
|-------------------|----------------|------|-------------------------|------------|------------|
| Strongly agree    | 30             | 33   | 33                      | 37         | 54         |
| Somewhat agree    | 27             | 25   | 26                      | 30         | 21         |
| Somewhat disagree | 17             | 20   | 15                      | 12         | 10         |
| Strongly disagree | 23             | 22   | 25                      | 20         | 15         |
| DK/NA             | 3              | 1    | 1                       | -          | 1          |

There is little evidence that recent immigrants do not support the teaching of French. Indeed as observed below, some of European immigrants agree that some French instruction should be mandatory as do a similar percentage of non-Europeans (though their sentiment is less strongly felt than in the case of European immigrants).

**BY NON-BRITISH IMMIGRATION**

|                   | Europe | Other |
|-------------------|--------|-------|
| Strongly agree    | 58     | 43    |
| Somewhat agree    | 12     | 26    |
| Somewhat disagree | 11     | 3     |
| Strongly disagree | 20     | 27    |
| DK/NA             | -      | -     |

Those Canadians residing in major census metropolitan areas where in effect much of Canada's immigration is concentrated are more likely to support mandatory French instruction in schools.

**BY COMMUNITY SIZE**

|                   | 1 Mill + | 100K to 1 Mill | 5K to 100K | Less than 5K |
|-------------------|----------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Strongly agree    | 47       | 40             | 39         | 31           |
| Somewhat agree    | 22       | 23             | 28         | 27           |
| Somewhat disagree | 11       | 13             | 15         | 18           |
| Strongly disagree | 20       | 24             | 17         | 21           |
| DK/NA             | *        | 1              | 1          | 2            |

As to voter preference Liberal and NDP supporters were most inclined to endorse the idea of mandatory French language instruction whereas those who favor the Canadian Alliance were the least likely to support the idea, In fact a majority of Alliance supporters are opposed to requiring French language instruction.

**BY POLITICAL PREFERENCE (FEDERAL)**

|                   | Lib. | P.C. | NDP | CA |
|-------------------|------|------|-----|----|
| Strongly agree    | 47   | 39   | 48  | 20 |
| Somewhat agree    | 24   | 28   | 20  | 27 |
| Somewhat disagree | 12   | 15   | 16  | 18 |
| Strongly disagree | 16   | 16   | 16  | 33 |
| DK/NA             | *    | 1    | *   | 1  |

While there may be variations in the strength of agreement over making some French mandatory in English language schools in Canada, some three-quarters of respondents agree that it is important to learn a second language. More so than other Canadians some 9 out of 10 Quebecers feel that it is very important to learn to speak a second language.

- ii) How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**BY REGION (anglophones only)**

|                      | Region |           |        |         |              |
|----------------------|--------|-----------|--------|---------|--------------|
|                      | Canada | Atl. Prov | Quebec | Ontario | Western Can. |
| Very important       | 36     | 44        | 91     | 38      | 28           |
| Somewhat important   | 39     | 38        | 9      | 38      | 42           |
| Not very important   | 15     | 11        | -      | 14      | 17           |
| Not at all important | 10     | 6         | -      | 9       | 11           |
| DK/NA                | 1      | 1         | -      | 1       | 1            |

Younger anglophone Canadians (18-29) are slightly more inclined (79%) to believe that it is important for Canadians to learn to speak a second language other than English than older (30+) anglophone Canadians.

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**BY AGE (Anglophones only)**

|                      | 18 to 29 | 30 to 44 | 45 to 59 | 60 or more |
|----------------------|----------|----------|----------|------------|
| Very important       | 34       | 35       | 36       | 40         |
| Somewhat important   | 45       | 38       | 39       | 35         |
| Not very important   | 14       | 16       | 13       | 14         |
| Not at all important | 6        | 10       | 11       | 12         |
| DK/NA                | *        | 1        | 1        | *          |

9 of 10 Anglophone non-British immigrants from Europe (89%) believe that it is important for Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English. 6 of 10 felt it was very important. 3/4 of anglophone non-European immigrants also felt it was important.

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**NON-BRITISH IMMIGRANT (anglophones only)**

|                      | Europe | Other |
|----------------------|--------|-------|
| Very important       | 59     | 48    |
| Somewhat important   | 30     | 26    |
| Not very important   | 7      | 16    |
| Not at all important | 2      | 8     |
| DK/NA                | 1      | 2     |

Those with more education tended place more slightly more importance on Canadians learning to speak a second language other than English.

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**BY HIGHEST LEVEL OF EDUCATION ATTAINED (anglophones only)**

|                      | Less than H.S. | H.S. | Comm. Coll Voca | Some Univ. | Univ. Deg. |
|----------------------|----------------|------|-----------------|------------|------------|
| Very important       | 32             | 30   | 32              | 33         | 46         |
| Somewhat important   | 37             | 43   | 41              | 44         | 33         |
| Not very important   | 14             | 16   | 15              | 16         | 13         |
| Not at all important | 16             | 10   | 11              | 6          | 7          |
| DK/NA                | 1              | 1    | 1               | 1          | -          |

Those residing in major census metropolitan areas tended place more slightly more importance on Canadians learning to speak a second language other than English than those in smaller centres. Still, even in the smallest communities (less than 5,000), 74% believe it to be important.

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**BY COMMUNITY SIZE (Anglophones only)**

|                      | 1 Mill + | 100K to 1 Mill | 5K to 100K | Less than 5K |
|----------------------|----------|----------------|------------|--------------|
| Very important       | 41       | 34             | 35         | 33           |
| Somewhat important   | 38       | 41             | 41         | 38           |
| Not very important   | 11       | 16             | 15         | 18           |
| Not at all important | 10       | 9              | 10         | 10           |
| DK/NA                | 1        | 1              | -          | 1            |

On the basis of federal political party preference, supporters of the Liberals (81%), the PC (76%) and the NDP (80%) believe it is important for Canadians learning to speak a second language other than English. 58% of the Canadian Alliance supporters agree and 41% disagree.

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than English? Is it...?

**BY POLITICAL PREFERENCE (FEDERAL) (Anglophones only)**

|                      | Lib. | P.C. | NDP | CA |
|----------------------|------|------|-----|----|
| Very important       | 45   | 35   | 39  | 21 |
| Somewhat important   | 36   | 41   | 41  | 37 |
| Not very important   | 12   | 14   | 14  | 25 |
| Not at all important | 7    | 10   | 7   | 16 |
| DK/NA                | 1    | -    | -   | 1  |

### Quebec francophones

Quebec francophones clearly believe that its important (76% very important) that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than French. 95% agree that some English language education should be mandatory in French elementary and high schools in Canada

How important is it that Canadians learn to speak a second language other than **French**? Is it...?

|                      |    |
|----------------------|----|
| Very important       | 76 |
| Somewhat important   | 18 |
| Not very important   | 4  |
| Not at all important | 2  |
| DK/NA                | -  |

Do you agree or disagree that some English language education should be mandatory in French elementary and high schools in Canada? Would that be strongly or somewhat?

|                   |    |
|-------------------|----|
| Strongly agree    | 75 |
| Somewhat agree    | 20 |
| Somewhat disagree | 2  |
| Strongly disagree | 3  |
| DK/NA             | -  |

### Cross-referencing the 2 questions

We now look at those who agree or disagree that some French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada with the level of importance they place on Canadians learning to speak a second language other than English. There is a clear correlation between believing that some French language education should be mandatory with feeling it is important (or very important) that Canadians learning to speak a second language.

#### Anglophones only

|                   | Very | Somewhat | Not Very | Not  |
|-------------------|------|----------|----------|------|
|                   | Imp. | Imp.     | Imp.     | Imp. |
| Strongly agree    | 71   | 31       | 12       | 6    |
| Somewhat agree    | 15   | 34       | 30       | 13   |
| Somewhat disagree | 6    | 18       | 26       | 10   |
| Strongly disagree | 7    | 16       | 32       | 69   |
| DK/NA             | 1    | *        | *        | 1    |

Francophones place a very high importance on Canadians learning to speak a second language and agree that French language education should be mandatory in English elementary and high schools in Canada

#### For francophones only

|                   | Very | Somewhat | Not Very | Not  |
|-------------------|------|----------|----------|------|
|                   | Imp. | Imp.     | Imp.     | Imp. |
| Strongly agree    | 85   | 50       | 28       | 14   |
| Somewhat agree    | 12   | 41       | 57       | 46   |
| Somewhat disagree | 2    | 5        | -        | -    |
| Strongly disagree | 1    | 4        | 16       | 39   |
| DK/NA             | -    | -        | -        | -    |