

Understanding Linguistic (In)security

We need to build more linguistic security in Canadian society. That means building more acceptance and acknowledgement of the diverse varieties of English and French in Canada and of people's efforts to learn our official languages, both within the public service and in wider society.

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WHO IS AFFECTED BY LINGUISTIC INSECURITY? EVERYONE!

Linguistic insecurity in English or French is the idea that people aren't comfortable using these languages in situations where they should be able to, whether it's using their first official language or their second official language.

LINGUISTIC INSECURITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Public servants have a lot to say...

Our survey of linguistic insecurity in bilingual language of work regions for the public service got a lot of attention: nearly 11,000 employees who work in these areas responded, and over 4,000 employees outside those areas also wanted to share their views!

*Survey conducted in March 2019; non-probability sample



National Capital Region and New Brunswick

Areas that are bilingual
for language of work
and where employees
may serve the public in
both official languages

Ontario and Quebec

Areas that include
some localities that
are bilingual for
language of work and
where employees
may serve the public
in both official
languages

Other provinces and territories

Areas that are not
bilingual for language
of work but where
employees may serve
the public in both
official languages

SURVEY RESULTS:

French language insecurity was the most significant challenge overall for both Francophones and Anglophones, especially for speaking, but also for writing and when asking to be supervised in French.

Experienced unease in French

44%
of Francophones

39%
of Anglophones

Experienced unease in English

15%
of Anglophones (32% in QC, outside the National Capital Region)

11%
of Francophones (18% in QC, outside the National Capital Region)

- ✓ Many Anglophones and many Francophones wanted more opportunities to use French at work. Some wanted more opportunities to use English at work in areas where French is the majority language.
- ✓ Public servants who felt uncomfortable using their first official language were often concerned about inconveniencing others.
- ✓ Public servants who felt uncomfortable using their second official language were often concerned about being judged.
- ✓ Both Anglophones and Francophones reported a stronger ability to understand their second official language compared with their ability to speak or write it.

REASONS PUBLIC SERVANTS DON'T ALWAYS FEEL COMFORTABLE USING ENGLISH OR FRENCH AT WORK



My supervisor/colleagues aren't comfortable
enough in my preferred official language

People will judge my accent and grammar

There is no budget for training and my workload is
too heavy to maintain my second language

If I try practising my second official language,
my colleagues will just switch to the other language

If I use my first official language,
people will think I'm a troublemaker

The language isn't often used where I work

I'm out of practice



LINGUISTIC INSECURITY: A VICIOUS CYCLE

An unequal use of English and French in the workplace can cause employees to lose confidence in using the lesser-used language and thus lose their skills. Employees lose, and the public service as a whole loses.



BUILDING LINGUISTIC SECURITY: A VIRTUOUS CIRCLE

By encouraging the equal use of both official languages, the public service can build a linguistically inclusive workplace, where employees feel free to use their first and second official language and can build and maintain their skills. It's a win/win!



WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO BUILD LINGUISTIC SECURITY?

- 1 **RESPECT**
for employees' language-of-work rights and for employees' efforts to use their second official language
- 2 **AWARENESS**
of employees' abilities to understand their second official language and of their desire to use their skills in their first and second official language
- 3 **ENCOURAGEMENT**
of employees' willingness to take linguistic risks, whether it is by actively practising in their second official language or using their first official language
- 4 **A MODERNIZED OFFICIAL LANGUAGES ACT!**
that will ensure respect for employees' language rights in the changing 21st-century workplace, including for virtual teams and employees who telework