

# The Impact of Education and Culture on the Retention and Propagation of French in Ontario, Canada

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## ABSTRACT

*The Franco-Ontarian identity as a linguistic group has deep historical roots and a significant numerical base. However, its location in a North American Anglo-Saxon dominated stronghold that not only looms largely in linguistic terms, but culturally, as well, presents special challenges as it pertains to retention and propagation of the language and culture. To address this concern, the province has achieved a collaborative effort of government and community-based initiatives to assure the future of the Ontarian francophonie.*

**Key words:** Ontario, French language, francophone, francophones, francophonie

## Impacto de la educación y cultura en la retención y propagación del francés en Ontario, Canadá

### RESUMEN

*La identidad franco-ontariana como grupo lingüístico tiene profundas raíces históricas además de una base numérica considerable. Sin embargo, su localización dentro de un baluarte norteamericano dominado por lo anglosajón, el cual no sólo emerge fuertemente en términos lingüísticos, sino también en términos culturales, presenta retos especiales en lo concerniente a la retención y propagación de la lengua y la cultura. Para enfrentar esta preocupación, la provincia ha logrado un esfuerzo cooperativo de iniciativas gubernamentales y comunitarias para asegurar el futuro de la francofonía ontariana.*

**Palabras clave:** Ontario, lengua francesa, francófono, francofonía

According to Statistics Canada the total Canadian population in 2012 was approximately 35 million, of whom about 13.5 million reside in the province of Ontario. Canada's most populous province, Ontario, has a francophone community that dates back to more than four centuries. Its francophone community numbers 582,690 which represents about 4.8% of the province's total population. Although the francophone community in New Brunswick is larger in percentage of that province's total population, Ontario boasts the largest francophone community in Canada outside of Quebec in real numbers. In addition to residents in Ontario reporting their linguistic identity as francophone, nearly 1.4 million of all residents in Ontario, francophone and non-francophone, have knowledge of French (Statistics Canada, 2006).

As noted above, the Franco-Ontarian identity as a linguistic group has deep historical roots and has a significant numerical base. However, its location in a North American Anglo-Saxon dominated stronghold that not only looms largely in linguistic terms, but culturally, as well, presents special challenges as it pertains to retention and propagation of the language and culture. To be sure, the shared frontier with the province of Quebec, and its 8 million predominately francophone population, has offered somewhat of a barrier from a full onslaught of English throughout its history. But the allure of the omnipresent anglo-cultural production of popular music, film, television, internet sites, and other

products, exacerbates the difficult task of retaining and propagating the French-language and proud Franco-Ontarian identity to the younger generations.

### **Cultural Retention**

According to the Encyclo On-line Encyclopedia cultural retention is the act of retaining the culture of a specific ethnic group of people, especially when there is reason to believe that the culture, through inaction, may be lost.

John Reyhner (1995) writes about maintaining and renewing native languages in the United States. He refers to Joshua Fishman's (1991) continuum of eight stages of language loss. Fishman, writes Reyhner, sees minority-language maintenance embedded in a more general attempt to maintain traditional cultures. He asks minority-language activists to "view local cultures (all local cultures, not only their own) as things of beauty, as encapsulations of human values which deserve to be fostered and assisted (not merely 'preserved' in a mummified sense)." Fishman works from three value positions: 1) The maintenance and renewal of native languages can be voluntary 2) "Minority rights" need not interfere with "majority rights," and 3) "Bilingualism is a benefit for all."

Important factors Fishman finds in successful efforts to maintain minority languages include the need for sacrifice, self-help, self-regulation, and the establishment of boundaries for language use. He logically

locates the key to minority-language preservation in the intergenerational transmission of the language in the home by families, not in government policies and laws. Fishman writes "The road to societal death is paved by language activity that is not focused on intergenerational continuity" (p. 91). He cautions against putting too much effort and reliance on native-language media, schools, and governmental efforts. Policies, such as those embodied in the Native American Language Act of 1990, and native-language radio stations can make a friendlier environment for minority languages, but they are no substitute for grass roots efforts focused on use of the language in homes.

Fisherman raises important points about the importance of a community and individuals to assume the responsibility for themselves. Common logic tells us that if a specific group and the respective individuals have no interest or desire to nurture a language or culture, then at-large initiatives, be it at municipal, provincial/state, or national level, will more than likely fall short, barring draconian measures to infringe on peoples' rights in the process. However, this article supports the approach of a harmonious relationship between the state/government and the will of a group of people as the ideal arrangement.

### **Several Cases With Similar Concerns**

In the state of Montana, for example, many indigenous and native peoples

struggle to keep the values and practices of their ways of life from giving way to more pervasive and dominant cultures. Native peoples fear that values from other cultures may replace the things that are important in their societies and that are the foundations for effective social and domestic functions. In the past efforts were made by the US government to assimilate American Indians into European-American ways of thought and living. These efforts were only partially effective as Native peoples were not easily torn from their traditional lifestyles.

Today in Montana there is an increased awareness in the value of maintaining indigenous languages and traditional cultural practices and thus transmitting these to the younger generations. There has been significant investment in language and culture retention and revitalization projects. Among these efforts has been curriculum development that addresses historical, linguistic and cultural aspects of Native Americans (State of Montana, 2012).

In Ireland, the Official Languages Act 2003 was approved in an effort to establish a legal base for the two official languages, English and Irish. As such, it would guarantee citizens the right to be served in both languages, establish a minimum threshold for the use of Irish, and create a commission to look after the application of the law. This law was considered necessary because all the other means used to this point had failed.

The law specifies that the State is the primary responsible entity for protecting the Irish language. The linguistic law should satisfy three principal needs if one desires that the linguistic policy is to succeed:

- 1) publication of brochures and government documents in Irish or bilingually;
- 2) services of specialists in the languages in order to serve the Irish speaking community;
- 3) services adapted to specific needs, such as structures and establishments in sectors such as education, media and linguistic planning.

The primary objective would be to support by concrete means the development of the language, not simply taking symbolic measures. However, nobody is forced to speak Irish for the Languages Act was implemented more along the lines of incentive measures. It also intends for the creation of a position of an official language commissioner to address complaints by the public regarding services offered in Irish. In addition, a system of sanctions is provided (L'aménagement linguistique, 2012).

### **The Case of Louisiana**

French has been present in Louisiana from the time of its colonial origins up to the present day. Because of the dominance of the English language in the United States, the steady immigration of

English-speaking settlers into Louisiana, and other socio-political factors, the use of French in Louisiana has steadily declined since the Louisiana Purchase of 1803.

In 1921 the Louisiana Legislature passed a law prohibiting the use of French in public schools. This law was accompanied by a general social opinion in Louisiana that those Louisianans who spoke French were uneducated or unintelligent. As a result, those Louisianans who still spoke French as a first language decided not to teach French to their children in order to avoid this stigmatization. Consequently, the number of fluent French speakers in Acadiana decreased dramatically in the early twentieth century. These conditions led to a political and social movement in the 1960's out of which Louisiana's language immersion programs were born (Camp, 2006).

On the verge of extinction, the French language has undergone a resurgence thanks to the vision and initiative of former U.S. Congressman James Domengeaux. In 1968, while a multicultural sentiment was reforming the public schools throughout the country, the Council for the Development of French in Louisiana (CODOFIL) was created by the state of Louisiana, adopting the slogan, " l'école a détruit le français; l'école doit le restaurer," (the schools destroyed French; the schools must restore it). Hence, began an ambitious program aimed at reviving the French language and culture in Louisiana. With education being the main focal point, this

linguistic and cultural revival involved not only government officials from Louisiana, but also international intervention notably from the governments of Quebec, Canada, Belgium, and France (Natsis, 2008).

We see in these three cases that the role of government in the retention, revival, and/or propagation of a language and culture can be devastating or beneficial. Government was initially used in the cases of the Native Americans, the Irish, and the Louisianais, to strangle the respective languages and cultures in order to assimilate the population into a larger, more common linguistic and cultural group. Ironically, many years later, the government has intervened in each case to serve as an instrument for rejuvenation.

## History of the French Presence in Ontario

The French presence in Ontario dates back nearly 400 years. The French were the first to explore the province and establish permanent settlements. They are an integral part of Ontario's history. Most of the following historical background and timelines was sourced from the *Office of Francophone Affairs and Education en Langue Française en Ontario*:

The story of the French presence in Ontario begins with the explorations of young Étienne Brulé in 1610 and the establishment of the first Jesuit mission at Sainte-Marie-Among-the-Hurons in 1639.

The French were the first Europeans to use the natural and economic resources of the land that would become Ontario. They were also the first to forge alliances with its Native peoples. However, following wars with the Iroquois and the British, the French positions were weakened and France ceded all its North American possessions to Great Britain in the First Treaty of Paris (1763).

Under British rule, Francophones played a role in the economic and social development of Upper Canada and became more autonomous. Efforts by religious communities resulted in the creation of the first French-language educational institutions.

After Confederation in 1867, Ontario experienced a period of immigration and prosperity as a result of industrialization and the construction of the railways. French Canadian settlement followed the rail lines. At this time, internal divisions increased amongst English Canadians leading to further assimilation. French Canadians called for equal status. French Canadian leaders demanded equal recognition of their religious and educational rights. The following is a timeline of important events that marked the francophone community in Ontario:

In 1885, English officially became a mandatory subject; in 1890, another law was passed to make English the language of instruction in Ontario's schools except where it was impossible to do so. Schools therefore became bilingual.

Anglophones used political decisions to minimize the teaching and instruction of French. When Ruling 17 (1912) made English the only language of instruction in Ontario's public schools, Francophones protested and created a separate school system. The crisis abated in 1927 when bilingual schools were re-established. From then on, the right to teach in French was established in elementary schools throughout Ontario. However, the struggle to obtain the same in secondary schools carried on until 1968.

From 1910 to 1960, Ontario's Francophones created numerous organizations to defend their rights and promote their culture. During this time, the Association canadienne-française d'éducation de l'Ontario (ACFÉO), the first Francophone credit union, Caisse Populaire (1910), and a daily newspaper, *Le Droit* (1913), were founded.

In 1969, Ontario's laws authorized French language schools at the elementary and secondary levels. In 1970, the administration of French language government services was entrusted to the Office of the Government Coordinator of French-Language Services (which would become the Office of Francophone Affairs in 1985). The 1970s represented a time of tremendous artistic and cultural creativity, particularly in the Sudbury area. The Franco-Ontarian flag was created and raised for the first time at the University of Sudbury on September 25, 1975. This event has since become an important

symbol for the Franco-Ontarian community and is celebrated each year.

In 1982, Section 23 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms was enacted. The legislation granted official language minorities the right to have their children schooled in their mother tongue whenever the number of children justified this right. In 1980, TVOntario began to offer programming in French. In 1984, the Courts of Justice Act gave French the same official language status in the courts as English. In 1986, the Government of Ontario adopted the French Language Services Act. The Act gives French legal status in the Legislative Assembly and guarantees the public the right to receive government services in French. In 1986, the *Loi sur la gouvernance scolaire* was enacted, which granted francophones complete and exclusive governance of their French-language schools and teaching units.

The 1990s and 2000s were marked by many advancements and accomplishments, such as the creation of twelve French-language school boards in 1997 and the recognition of the Franco-Ontarian flag by the Legislative Assembly of Ontario as an emblem of the Francophone community of Ontario in 2001. The anniversary of the Franco-Ontarian flag has become a symbolic date and is celebrated every year by francophone communities across the province.

In 1990, the *Cité Collégiale* (Ottawa) was

created; it was the first French-language college of applied arts and technology in Ontario.

Two French-language colleges opened in 1995: *Collège Boréal* and the *Collège des Grands Lacs*; a permanent site was also created for the *Cité Collégiale's* campus. In 2002–2003, the *Collège d'Arts Appliqués et de Technologie des Grands Lacs* ceased its activity.

In spite of the advances in francophone education, it was not until 1997 that the Ontario government created French-language school boards throughout the province, with the enactment of Act 104, the *Fewer School Boards Act, 1997*. These French-language school boards—4 of them public and 8 of them Catholic—were created on January 1, 1998. The Act also ensured these school boards would receive the same funding as English-language school boards. Thus after many years of struggle, the Ontario francophone community was finally authorized to manage its own French-language elementary and secondary schools (The Office of Francophone Affairs, 2012; *Education en Langue Française, 2012*).

## **Tools of Retention and Propagation**

### **Communications**

#### **Radio stations serving the francophone community**

Ontario has six French language radio

stations serving the francophone community. They are situated in Hearst (CINN 91,1 FM), Kapuskasing (CKGN 89,7 et 94,7 FM), Penetanguishene (CFRH 88,1 FM), Toronto (CHOQ 105,1 FM), Cornwall (CHOD 92,1 FM) and Ottawa (CJFO 94,5 FM). Each are members of the *Mouvement des Intervenants en Communication Radio de l'Ontario (MICRO)*; these stations have the potential to reach more than 330,000 francophones listeners daily. There are other francophone community radio projects in the works notably in the regions of Niagara-Hamilton, Oshawa, Welland and Windsor.

The following quote sums up the importance of these community radio stations that provide a vital link:

“Les radios communautaires francophones en milieu minoritaire sont plus qu’une simple radio de divertissement, mais bien un outil de développement au service des communautés. La radiophonie communautaire canadienne répond à des besoins d’information locale, de promotion de la culture et de l’identité locale et, dans notre cas, de protection et de promotion d’une langue officielle minoritaire (*Alliance des Radios, 2007*) »<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Alliance des radios communautaires du Canada, mémoire présenté au Sommet des communautés francophones et acadiennes, 2007. Disponible en ligne : <http://www.fcfa.ca/documents/541.pdf> (page consultée en avril 2011). (From webstie : <http://www.csf.gouv.on.ca/files/files/Etude-radios-communautaires.pdf>) “The francophone community radio stations in minority regions are more than a simple entertainment radio, but rather a tool

As stated above, radio has always served as a vital link to communities. An important radio organization in Ontario, MICRO, was created in the early 1990s. It seeks to be the common voice and spokes-person of francophone community radios in the province among the government, community partners and enterprises. It also represents its members among advertisers and national advertising agencies in order to obtain this important type of revenue stream. The group consists of six regular members, but this number is due to increase. In fact, the MICRO has tasked itself the objective of supporting the creation of several new French-language community radio stations in Ontario by 2014.

Another important radio network in Ontario (and throughout the rest of Canada) is CBC/Radio-Canada. This network is committed to helping French-speaking minorities outside Quebec achieve their full potential, while also supporting their development and fostering full recognition and use of French in Canadian society. The Radio Canada stations in Ontario are located across various parts of the province—Windsor, Sudbury, Toronto, Ottawa (Ontario—Commissariat, 2012).

### **Choq FM 105**

Created in May 2006, Choq FM seeks as its mission «la promotion et le dé-

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of development serving the communities. La Radiophonie canadienne responds to local information needs, to cultural promotion and local identity, and in our case, the protection and promotion of an official language among minorities.”

veloppement de la diversité culturelle francophone.» It is transmitted throughout the greater Toronto metropolitan area as well as worldwide live on the internet. The station will also upgrade its antenna during the summer 2013 which will allow for clearer reception throughout the area.

CHOQ-FM and the website www.Grand-Toronto.ca are two francophone Toronto media sources that are administered by la Coopérative Radiophonique de Toronto (CRT). The station’s charter requires that a minimum of 70% of the musical content must be francophone (Personal Communication, 2013).

### **The Case of Cjfo-FM 94.5 Ottawa**

On November 5, 2010, Cjfo-FM was officially launched in the Ottawa region. The radio station aims to create a social interactivity by the participation of the francophone communities in the conception, the elaboration, and the production of the multithematic and interdisciplinary radio broadcasts. This will assure a sustainable development that favors the economic and sociocultural vitality of francophones in Ottawa.

The station seeks to meet the need of the francophone population living on the Ontario side of the national capital region to be better served than by the current francophone stations. In spite of their efforts, these stations, in the view of many, have not succeeded in balancing their programs to reflect the presence of

Franco-Ontarians in their market, since the socio-economic, political, and cultural weight of Quebec still dominates. Cjfo seeks to fill that void.

Among its varied program offerings is the broadcast of the National Hockey League Ottawa Senators games in French.

### **Policy of musical content at CJFO**

Although the website has been modified recently, the following content was publicly reported in the recent past. It contended that the musical content diffused by Cjfo “aspires to be original and open to the world. This policy is consistent with that of the radio’s mission.”

### **Context :**

- Cjfo is a community radio in Ottawa.
- Cjfo aspires to be the expression of francophone and francophile culture
- Cjfo promotes the development of artist from the Canadian, Ontarian, and regional francophonie
- Cjfo aspires to develop the role of “chef de fil” in the francophone Canadian radio industry.

Framework for musical content broadcasting:

1. Respect the rules of the CRTC.
2. Prioritize the broadcast of vocal francophone and franco-canadian music during peak hours Monday – Friday from 6 :00 – 9 :00 am, 12 :00 – 1 :00 pm, and 3 :00 – 6 :00 pm.

3. A maximum of 8% of vocal music in English is broadcast daily.
4. Program musical broadcasts according to the following order of priorities :
  - Francophonie Canadian music (outside of Québec)
  - World francophone and Quebec music
  - Instrumental and classical music
  - Canadian English language music

Other music (American, other languages, etc.)

5. Concerning the broadcasting of vocal music in English, rest assured that the broadcasts will be done according to context. During the peak listening times, there must be a reason for Cjfo to play a song in English. For example, if Cjfo is talking about a show by an English-speaking Canadian artist in Ottawa, it is reasonable to play a song in English by the artist. On the other hand, if Cjfo interviews a French-speaking political representative from Ontario, it is natural and logical to play a franco-ontarian song. The playing of a song in English in this context will be moved. Each animator, volunteer, employee, or technician should show good judgement in this regard.
6. Survey the listeners and members every 6 months. The use of different survey methods is highly recommended (website, email, Facebook, telephone, analysis of complaints and comments, survey firm, etc.)

## Television

### Télévision francophone de l'Ontario

The Télévision francophone de l'Ontario (TFO) is the French-language public cultural and educational television network of Ontario. TFO offers multiplatform media content for Francophone and Francophile audiences. TFO's educational content is designed for children attending French schools and French immersion schools. It is also a leader in education, producing and distributing multimedia teaching resources in French in accordance with the curriculum of the Ontario Ministry of Education.

Other francophone television sources include Télévision Communautaire de Rockland – TV 22, Télévision Rogers – Câble 23 Ottawa, and Radio Canada – Hearst, Hawkesbury, Windsor, Timmons, Sudbury, Toronto, Ottawa (Ontario Office 2012).

## Cultural

Le Carrefour Francophone de Sudbury is an important center for francophone activities in the greater Sudbury area. Among the various francophone services found at the Carrefour is la Slague. In the spring of 2006, la Slague du Carrefour was reborn after years of dormancy. Since its renaissance, la Slague has brought dozens of artists to Sudbury and attracted more than 15,000 spectators to shows held in about different venues.

“We wanted to fill a void, of course, but we also wanted to benefit from the explosion of musical talent that we saw happening in French Canada over the past years and provide memorable evenings where Sudburians get to know these artists” stated the Carrefour francophone's executive and cultural director Stéphane Gauthier during a recent interview with the Sudbury Star newspaper. “Being recognized as one of the top three producers in French Ontario gives us a shot in the arm and makes us want to keep up the good work.” (La Slague 2009)

The formation of Regroupement des Organismes Culturels de Sudbury, known as ROCS, was never intentional. About seven years ago, the member groups decided that in order to sell tickets, attract artists and put out the best possible product, they couldn't compete with each other — they had to work together.

“Les ROCS was an accident,” said Carrefour's Stéphane Gauthier. It was born from “the plain need to talk to each other.” “The challenge is everyone has their own space and time,” he said. “That means we have to talk to each other. When you do a lot of stuff and do it at the same time as your neighbours, you start stepping on each other's toes,” Gauthier said. Mirroring Francophone culture as a whole, in Sudbury there is “an unsaid tradition that solidarity is key to thriving (La Slague).”

A member of the group, Théâtre du Nouvel-Ontario (TNO), has an excep-

tionally high percentage of sold-out shows per season. Another member, the publishing house, Éditions Prise de Parole, is winning awards for its works. Paulette Gagnon, director of development at ROCS, said when organizations join their energies, they can accomplish more. “How can we maximize the resources we have? How can we find ways to work more closely? That’s the mindset we have.” Each of the organizations involved caters to a different sector within the genre, but still fall within the category of the arts, and shares a common goal. “The movement came from the strong urge to tell our stories,” Gagnon said (Jelen, 2012).

Along with Carrefour francophone, TNO and Éditions Prise de parole, ROCS consists of:

- Centre franco-ontarien de folklore (provincial folklore centre)
- Éditions Prise de parole (publisher)
- Galerie du Nouvel-Ontario (artist-run centre and gallery)
- La Nuit sur l’étang (festival)
- Salon du livre du Grand Sudbury (bookfair and literary festival)
- Concerts de musique contemporaine 5-Penny New Music Concerts (music presenter). (Jelen, 2012)

Le Theatre francais de Toronto (TfT) is also a dynamic actor in the community. According to the TfT website, it is a professional French-language theatre

presenting repertoire as well as new works. While appealing to all lovers of French-language theatre, it contributes to the cultural and educational development of Toronto’s francophone community.

## Education

The French Language Education (FLA) system is thriving in Ontario; it includes 12 school boards (8 Catholic and 4 public), more than 230 daycare services, 335 elementary schools, 94 high schools and 12 French-language and bilingual post-secondary institutions.

Of the 130,000 students who are eligible for a French-language education, 93,000 are currently availing themselves to the continuum of programs and services offered by the FLE system. For post-secondary institutions and training agencies, access to higher education is open to everyone who wants to further his or her education in French. (French Language Education, 2011).

The Globe and Mail reported that more than 342,000 students in Canada attended immersion programs in elementary and secondary schools in 2011 – an all-time high number, compared to 45,000 in 1977; 300,000 in 1992; and 318,000 in 2000.

In Ontario, 155,000 students were enrolled in a French immersion program during the 2010-11 school. The total number of students enrolled in Core, Extended, or Immersions French pro-

grams in Ontario in 2010-11 was 978,000 (Canadian Parents for French, 2010). These language immersion programs are valuable assets in the propagation of the French language throughout the province, and within the non-French-speaking communities. There are also two publicly funded French-language colleges in Ontario and nine bilingual and French-language schools offering university programs.

## Organizations and Associations

The Office of Francophone Affairs in Ontario offers a “partial” list of 27 community organizations that are active in francophone Ontario. The following is a list of several:

Assemblée de la Francophonie de l’Ontario

This is the rallying body and the political voice of the francophonie in Ontario. It coordinates the francophone collectivity of the province and serves as a voice and representative to:

- claim francophone rights
- promote the overall development and propagation of the francophonie
- represent French Ontario on the municipal, provincial, national and international stages
- reflect francophone priorities
- establish a strategic community plan
- negotiate and administer agreements,



such as Entente Canada—communaute Ontario (L'assemblee)

L'Association française des municipalités de l'Ontario provides a forum for officials of municipal councils as well as the employees and management personnel of municipal corporations. The Association maintains relations with francophone and bilingual associations interested by the management of municipalities in Canada (L'Association ). La Fédération de la jeunesse franco-ontarienne (FESFO) was created in 1975 by the youth who wanted to "assure that the Franco-Ontarian youth participate fully in the development of its community." It is the representative organization of

25,000 young francophones who attend one of the 94 French secondary schools in Ontario.

Among the group's most popular activities one finds the Stage franco-ontarien de formation en leadership (SFOFEL), and the Forums : ta région, ton impact ! et les Jeux franco-ontariens. The expertise of the FESFO is recognized and utilized by important partners such as the Minister of Education in Ontario, the Canadian Association for the United Nations, Canadian Patrimony and la Fondation Trillium. The FESFO also plays an important role as incubator for leaders of the franco-ontarian community (La Federation).

## Conclusion

The province of Ontario has enjoyed a collaborative effort of government and community-based initiatives to assure the retention and propagation of the French language and culture. Education, in the form of French schools and French language immersion provide a strong base for francophones and non-francophones to both obtain and strengthen a knowledge of the language. French language radio, television, organizations and other social means of communication have a strong presence and following in the province.

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