Culture

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Volume 1, numéro 2, 1981

URI : https://id.erudit.org/iderudit/1077827ar
DOI : https://doi.org/10.7202/1077827ar

Aller au sommaire du numéro

Éditeur(s)

Canadian Anthropology Society / Société Canadienne d'Anthropologie (CASCA), formerly/anciennement Canadian Ethnology Society / Société Canadienne d'Ethnologie

ISSN

0229-009X (imprimé)
2563-710X (numérique)

Découvrir la revue

Citer cet article

Hubbell, L. (1981). Coping in a Bilingual Community: Sixth Graders in Châteauguay, Québec. *Culture, 1*(2), 42–48. https://doi.org/10.7202/1077827ar

Résumé de l'article

Dans le cadre d'une étude faite avec des enfants bilingues et monolingues à Châteauguay, Québec, des élèves de sixième année, provenant de cinq types de milieu linguistique (familial et scolaire), ont été interviewés afin de comparer leurs opinions sur leur compétence linguistique dans un environnement où on parle deux langues. Les questions portaient sur leurs propres perceptions de leurs aptitudes en anglais et en français, sur leurs expériences dans les deux langues et sur leurs réactions tant face à des situations quotidiennes qu'à des situations hypothétiques. Les résultats furent décevants : les enfants des cinq différents groupes disent avoir des contacts entre eux mais ces contacts ne conduisent pas à une véritable interaction.

Coping in a Bilingual Community: Sixth Graders in Châteauguay, Québec

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As part of a larger study of bilingual and monolingual children in Châteauguay, Québec, interviews were conducted with Grade 6 students from five types of home and school language backgrounds to compare their varying view of their own linguistic competence in confronting a world of two languages. Questions focussed on their self perceptions of their skills in English and French, their past experiences in both languages, and their reactions to real-life and hypothetical situations. Results were discouraging in that children of all five backgrounds report intermixing without interacting.

Dans le cadre d'une étude faite avec des enfants bilingues et monolingues à Châteauguay, Québec, des élèves de sixième année, provenant de cinq types de milieu linguistique (familial et scolaire), ont été interviewés afin de comparer leurs opinions sur leur compétence linguistique dans un environnement où on parle deux langues. Les questions portaient sur leurs propres perceptions de leurs aptitudes en anglais et en français, sur leurs expériences dans les deux langues et sur leurs réactions tant face à des situations quotidiennes qu'à des situations hypothétiques. Les résultats furent décevants: les enfants des cinq différents groupes disent avoir des contacts entre eux mais ces contacts ne conduisent pas à une véritable interaction.

As part of a larger study of sociolinguistic aspects of the day-to-day life of children in a French and English bilingual community (Châteauguay, Québec), I investigated children's perception of their own linguistic competence and of their ability to confront a world of two languages, particularly the world beyond home and school. While the overall project involved twelve months' residence, extensive observations in varied school settings, interviews with children in Grades 2, 4, and 6, and tape-recording of spontaneous speech, this article concerns only interviews with sixth graders from five types of home and school language background. I hope in later papers to address the problems of development by age and to contrast these children's self-perceptions with the realities of life in Châteauguay.

The town and its school systems

Châteauguay is a town of some 40,000 people on the south shore of the St. Lawrence west of Montréal, somewhat isolated by surrounding farmland and the Caughnawaga Indian Reserve from other Montréal suburbs. Châteauguay was founded as a seigneurie in 1673, but the population did not reach 5,000 until 1961. The present town of Châteauguay represents the conglomeration of several separate towns between 1961 and 1975 (Châteauguay, Châteauguay Centre, Châteauguay Heights, etc.). The town is fairly

uniform in social class (upper working class to middle middle class); many commute to work in Montréal. Neighborhoods are all linguistically mixed and are composed largely of single-family dwellings, with a sprinkling of four-plexes and a few large apartment buildings.

Châteauguay was chosen for this research because the community is fairly balanced linguistically, with a high percentage of bilinguals. In the 1976 Census (Statistics Canada, 1976), mother tongues were listed as 40% English, 55% French, 4% other. This represents little change since 1971 (Statistics Canada, 1971a). In 1971 (the most recent figures available), 34% of Châteauguay residents spoke English, 29% spoke French, while 38% spoke both official languages (Statistics Canada, 1971b). English was most often spoken in 47% of Châteauguay homes in 1971, French in 53% (Statistics Canada, 1971b).

The Protestant School Board of Châteauguay Valley had four English-language elementary schools (K-6) in the town proper during 1978-9, with a total enrollment of 1274 students. La Commission Scolaire de Châteauguay (Catholic board) ran two English language elementary schools and six French language elementary schools in Châteauguay during 1978-9 (all K-6). This inclued 662 children in the English sector, 3,179 in the French sector. Therefore, the overall balance for elementary school-age children was 38% in English schools, 62% in French schools.

The English language high school, with approximately 2,000 students in grades 7-11, is run by the Protestant Board, but enrolls the Catholic board's English-speaking students as well. The main French high school (Grades 7-11) and one "feeder" school (Grade 7 only) accommodated approximately 2,500 students. All high schools include some students bussed in from outside Châteauguay proper.

The Protestant Board used to have a total French immersion program, but this is now being phased out. Originally for Grades K-6, with English being introduced gradually in Grades 4-6, only Grades 2-6 remained in 1978-9 (subjects in Group II were in this program). Instead, a one-year French immersion program (called "6+") has recently been introduced as an option between Grades 6 and 7. The Catholic Board has a similar 6+ program. In addition, one French language Catholic school in Châteauguay has a single French immersion kindergarten for anglophone children. Since this began only two years ago, it does not involve any of the children described here.

Methodology

The detailed conclusions presented here are based on data from interviews with 34 Grade 6 students, conducted by the author in three Châteauguay schools between February and June 1979. The children involved were already acquainted with me as I had previously spent 3-4 hours in each classroom, observing them at times when they were relatively free to talk to each other and to me (e.g., during art, physical education, and recess). Children with a third language in their homes (other than French or English) were excluded, even if the child himself claimed not to speak the third language. Children who had lived in Châteauguay less than five years were also excluded. Actually, all but eight reported living in Châteauguay all their lives. Their ages at the time of interview ranged from 11.7 to 13. 5. Children were interviewed and tape-recorded only with their parents' permission and only if they themselves were willing.

Each subject was interviewed individually and privately for 20-30 minutes in an empty classroom. Questions were open-ended and other related topics were often discussed as well. The interview itself consisted roughly of five sections:

1) background on the child and his family,
2) the child's contacts with English and French at school and outside school,
3) for some children, special questions about French immersion classes or attending a school whose language was not the child's first language,
4) the child's views of his own language skills and self-confidence,
5) the child's political knowledge and views about French / English relations.

While this paper focuses on sixth graders' responses to the fourth section of the interview, general observations made here are based on all the interviews and on discussions with teachers, principals, administrators, and parents. No sex differences in responses were found, although boys and girls were equally represented in the samples.

The thirty-four sixth graders interviewed fall into five groups, based on linguistic competence, home language background, and the language of schooling. Group I are monolingual anglophones attending an English-language school. Group II are anglophone bilinguals in their seventh year of a French immersion program. Group III are bilingual francophones who have attended English school since kindergarten. Group IV are bilinguals of mixed home language background who have attended French school since kindergarten. Finally, Group V are monolingual francophones in a French-language school. (See appendix for details.)

Self-rating of linguistic competence

The first set of four questions was designed to discover how the children felt about their own lin-

guistic skills from several different points of view. I therefore requested that they rate their French and English skills separately and then contrast their skills in the two languages. Two further questions asked whether they wished to improve their language skills and how they felt about bilingualism in general.

In Question I, each child was asked how well he thought he spoke his own language, for a person of his age. I specified that I was not interested in his school grades, but just in "ordinary talking". The same question was then asked about his "other" language. Bilinguals of Groups III and IV were asked about both their languages without designating either one as their native tongue. Questions were asked about both the child's languages so as to provide comparison (e.g. many monolinguals stated that they were "only ok, pretty bad, pas très bon" in their native tongue). This knowledge permits better judgment of similar remarks about their skills in their second language: "really bad, terrible, un petit peu, j'ai de la misère".

Groups I, II, III, and V had definite perceptions of themselves as either English or French. They felt adequate or more than satisfied in their first language, though some French bilinguals attending English school (III) noted that they weren't as good as French children attending French schools.

Groups IV (bilinguals of mixed background at French school) seemed to feel themselves as "in between". They made similar and fairly confident statements about both their languages, but also made remarks like "My French is better than most English kids, but not as good as some French kids". Overall, this group indicated a perceived lack in both languages, especially in the finer points of vocabulary and spelling. As we will see later, this does *not* mean a lack of confidence in facing a bilingual world. In fact, these sixth graders (IV) were the most confident and versatile of all five groups.

The two monolingual groups (I and V) most vociferously stated that their competence in their second language was "not too good, pas bien, really bad", though no better or worse than that of others in their own school class. While neither monolingual group commanded very much of the second language, the French monolinguals felt better about their performance in second language classes and about their general ability to get along in English, if necessary. This slight edge of confidence is borne out in their later answers.

The French immersion students, logically enough, felt themselves better in French than the average English child, "medium" for their own class, and not as good as "real" French children. Group III (French bilinguals in English school) felt fairly confident about their English, except for slight reservations by half about their grammar, pronunciation, or vocabulary.

The second question asked, "Is there anything you can do in one language that you can't do in the other?" The intent here was to jog the 3 bilingual groups into thinking more precisely about their abilities in their two languages. The two monolingual groups (I and V) were not asked this question, since it was apparent from their answers to the first question that there was little they thought they could do in their second language. In retrospect, they should have been asked for comparison's sake and because the monolingual francophones (V) seemed more confident in English, though they could speak only a little of it.

All three bilingual groups (II, III, and IV) did respond, however, and their answers generally reflect their estimates of their competence in French and English. Two francophones in English school (III) and two bilinguals of mixed background in French school (IV) felt their abilities in the two languages were completely equal. One girl in Group IV stated she had problems in speaking, reading, and writing English. The others in both groups had no oral problems, but found it difficult to read and write in the language not used in their school (French for III, English for IV), especially accent marks in French and spelling generally. (The Catholic School Board, which administers both schools concerned, felt it lacked funds to provide special language programs for such students.)

The anglophone bilinguals in French immersion (II) expressed no concern about reading and writing English, not surprisingly as they have received increasing amounts of English instruction since Grade 4. They likewise expressed no reservations about reading and writing French. (They are the only subjects receiving non-second language instruction in both languages). However, working in French and general communication as adults were mentioned as things they would be unable to do without learning more French in high school. This lack of confidence in their ability to communicate in face-to-face interaction stands in direct contrast to the confidence of the other two bilingual groups (III, IV) in their oral capabilities, despite problems in written language. This difference in self-perception correlated with the lesser contact with francophones reported by these immersion students and is reflected in their later discussions of real-life and hypothetical bilingual situations (Questions 5-9).

In the third question, monolinguals were asked if they wished they could speak their second language better. Both francophone (V) and anglophone (I) monolinguals answered affirmatively, mentioning future jobs and general communication with others as reasons. Half of the francophone monolinguals spontaneously stated that they did indeed *expect* to

improve in English, while monolingual anglophones were less optimistic about actual possibilities for improvement.

Bilinguals were asked about their desire to improve in either language. Most of the bilingual anglophones in French immersion (II) were satisfied with their English (4 of 5), but all wanted to improve their French in order to make homework easier, to get along better, and for future jobs. Most francophones attending English school (III) were satisfied with their abilities in both languages, only one wanting to improve his English and two wishing to improve in French. A greater proportion of Group IV (mixed background bilinguals in French school) sought improvement in English (6 of 8) or in French (4 of 8). These results are generally consistent with the self-ratings of the first two questions, in that children with lower self-ratings in a language express greater desire to improve in that language.

Finally, one non-personal question was included to determine if subjects felt differently about bilingualism when the question was not phrased in terms of their own lives. (This question also served as a lead-in to that section of the interview dealing with general political knowledge and attitudes). *Question 4* read, "Do you know what the word "bilingual" means? If so, do you think it's better to be bilingual or better to speak one language? Why?" All the Grade 6 students (except Group III, who were inadvertently not asked) could define "bilingual", although a few thought of it only in terms of speaking English and French. (The definition was requested because some younger subjects did not know what it meant). All sixth graders also responded that being bilingual was better (kind of like mother-hood!).

The variation lay in the pattern of advantages mentioned for being bilingual, which I categorized as instrumental or integrative. Instrumental reasons included getting a job more easily, the demands of a job, and general "practicality". Integrative reasons comprised communicating more freely, contact with speakers of the other language, and foreign travel.

A striking difference emerged between the anglophones of Groups I and II (in immersion or not) and all children in French schools (Groups IV and V). Two-thirds of the answers given by students of Groups IV and V are intrumental. In contrast, two-thirds of the responses of students in Groups I and II are integrative. (The answers of Group III, French bilinguals in English school, are evenly divided). If these patterns hold on a larger scale, they would seem to reflect the traditional language stereotypes in Québec: the French learn English to "get ahead on the job", while *sympathiques* anglophones learn French for more personal reasons.

Facing Real-Life and Hypothetical Situations

The second set of questions concerned the sixth graders' estimations of their capabilities in bilingual contexts, both hypothetical and real. Here I was interested in how the children's linguistic self-confidence (or lack thereof) was reflected in their reactions to hypothetical situations and in their real-life behavior. For example, does a low self-rating in French (Question 1) or a desire to improve one's French (Question 3) lead an anglophone sixth grader to enroll in the 6+ French immersion program (Question 8)?

In Question 5, both sets of monolinguals and bilingual anglophones in French immersion were asked: "What if your whole family moved to a part of [Québec or Ontario] where nobody speaks [your native language] and you had to go to an [opposite language] school. Would you like that? Would it be hard?" Bilinguals of Groups III and IV were asked similar questions about moving to all-English and all-French areas of Canada.

The English monolinguals (I) gave an unqualified "no!" or "never" as responses, citing as reasons the difficulty of work in French and the "scariness" of the idea of moving to an all-French area. Those in French immersion (II) were not overjoyed at the prospect, but did not give emphatic negative answers as Group I had done. To paraphrase, they responded "It'd be OK for a year or so, I'd survive, but I wouldn't want to stay forever."

The other three groups were divided in their answers about moving to either all-French or all-English areas. Many said they would miss, or might forget, the language to be "left behind". Several bilinguals stated they preferred areas where they could speak either French or English. Even three monolingual French children liked the idea of moving to an all-English area, although they anticipated great difficulties of adjustment. On that point, let me add that not one student in any group, not even among the monolinguals strongly opposed to such a move, felt he could not catch up, given a year or two in the new location.

The remaining two hypothetical questions involved setting up (verbally) situations in which the subjects were obliged to speak their second languages or, for bilinguals, each language in turn. *Questions 6* concerned having to ask a strange, monolingual store clerk where to find a gas station, while on vacation with a monolingual parent (hypothetically monolingual, if necessary). *Question 7* involved helping a lost, crying, monolingual four-year-old whom the subject encountered while on his way home alone from school. In both cases, I asked the children to pretend that I was the hypothetical addressee and to say to me, in English or French as required, what he would say if

the situation were real. Continuing in the role of the clerk or lost child, I would answer in the appropriate language and then check whether the sixth-grader understood my response. (e.g., "2 miles to the left", "deux milles à gauche", "I want my mommy", "où est ma maman?").

As expected, all three groups of bilinguals quickly produced acceptable responses for both situations, in both languages, and understood the clerk's or lost child's answer.

While none of the anglophone monolinguals could produce a truly correct or complete French utterance in either situation, half were able to come up with a partially comprehensible response in the "gas station" question. (e.g., "Station de gazoline?" or "où est la station?"). They were the only subjects to comment spontaneously on how "dumb" or embarrassed they would feel.

The French monolinguals did somewhat better, as expected from their earlier self-ratings and self-confidence. About half of them produced partially correct English utterances to inquire about the gas station. (e.g., "Station gaz?" or "Where is buying the gas?"). However, in contrast to the anglophone mo nolinguals (none of whom could understand or speak to the lost child), three of the French monolinguals did produce complete and correct English utterances (e.g., "Where is your house?"), while two more came up with at least partially comprehensible ones. However, few children in either monolingual group could understand the hypothetical answers of the strange clerk or lost boy.

Despite these difficulties of communication, all but two subjects, monolingual or bilingual, had definite, realistic plans of what to do for the lost child. The most frequent plan was to take the child (who didn't know his own address or last name) to the subject's own home and parents, in order to call the police. Others would knock on doors near where the child was found, ask if the inhabitants knew the child and, if necessary, call the police from there. A few planned to walk directly to the police station (at most a mile from each school) or to find a Block Parent (an active program in Châteauguay). No difference in plan were found among the five groups.

The three hypothetical questions were followed by two questions about real-life situations and decisions. *Question 8* asked what high school each child planned to attend the following year or, for Group I, whether they planned to enroll in the 6+ immersion program (see above). These were decisions which these sixth graders (and their parents) were making at the time of the interviews.

Unfortunately, any anglophone monolingual student (I) who will be over 13 on September 30 cannot register in 6 immersion. Due mostly to the "continuous progress' system in Grades 1-4 (in which many students take 5 years to do 4 years' work), about half of the sixth grade class from which subjects of Group I were drawn were "average". Six of the eight students randomly chosen for interviews were thus ineligible for 6 . Three of these six said they would have liked to enroll; four said their parents had even appealed this matter (unsuccessfully). Of the remaining two eligible, one had enrolled. Half of the monolingual anglophones, therefore, were concerned enough about their French skills to at least seriously consider taking French immersion (6+).

All but one anglophone now in French immersion (II) will attend the English high school, where an enriched French program is available to them (one period of advanced French and usually 1-2 other subjects offered in French). The fifth boy will attend a private French high school. All Group III students (Francophones at English school) also want to attend the English high shcool, though the parents of one are considering the French high school.

All but one bilingual of mixed background in French school (IV) will go on to French high school. The exception is glad to be switching to the English high school (she is one of two in Group IV with an English monolingual parent). All French monolinguals (V) will attend French high school, although one thinks attending the English high school "ça serait le fun" (he said elsewhere that he'd rather be English and live in the U.S.).

When asked why, the two monolingual groups, as might be expected, received the idea of switching as a joke, as impossibly difficult. Group II and III's main objection was "My friends aren't going there"; few worried the work would prove too difficult. In contrast, the objection of Group IV (mixed background at French school) was not loss of friends, but the tough reputation of the English high school's students and that their parents would forbid them to go.

Thus, 15 of 16 children in French elementary schools will go on to French high school; 17 of 18 children in basically English programs (Groups I, II, and III) will attend English high school. Thus, few of these sixth graders, even the 18 bilinguals who probably have the capacity to switch (Groups II, III, IV), will risk changing school language. While the choices of these sixth graders are not surprising, given their previous choices, the structure of the school systems, their reluctance to leave friends, and fears that linguistic skills will be inadequate in a new situation, the outcome is not conducive to the increased bilingualism desired by many of those involved.

Finally, and most discouraging, in *Question 9*, the children were asked to recount a real-life situation where they had been forced to try to use their second language outside school or, for bilinguals, where they

had difficulties with either language. All but two students in Group III and IV reported encountering no difficulties in situations involving either language, because they became bilingual so young.

One would expect the monolinguals, and perhaps children in French immersion, to have encountered many such situations. Nevertheless, two of the anglophones in French immersion had never found themselves in a totally French milieu (except school), although they professed to be unworried. The other three all mentioned enjoyable exchanges with French schools as the sole occasions when they had been forced to speak only French. In this, and certain other respects, these French immersion students resembled other anglophones more than other bilinguals. It is obvious, then, that the Châteauguay French immersion program, unlike the St. Lambert program reported by Lambert and Tucker (1972: 207), has not enabled these children to "break through the language and cultural shell that isolates the English — and French-Canadian communities". This despite that fact that the children of Châteauguay, by their own report and according to my observations, live in a community where both languages are heard virtually everywhere.

The monolinguals fared no better. About half of the monolinguals (4 of 8 anglophones, 5 of 8 francophones) claimed they never had such an experience in their entire lives. All but one of the experiences which *were* described to me took place *outside* Châteauguay (on vacations, visiting relatives, out-of-town tournaments, etc.). The lone exception was a friend's birthday party. Therefore, none of these monolinguals is forced to try to speak the other language in Châteauguay in any regular or frequent fashion.

If the children's perceptions are accurate, this evidence supports my other data on children's activities outside school. (E.g., monolingual children report avoiding situations involving contact with monolingual children of the other language, unless bilingual adults are present.) A monolingual child may indeed "encounter" his second language (in a literal sense), though not as often as one might think, but is seldom forced to try to speak it, because bilingual adults (coaches, Scout leaders, store clerks, parents, etc.) function as mediators for the child. This would seem to present one concrete picture of how the "two solitudes" can continue to intermix without really interacting.

APPENDIX: Characteristics of subject groups

GROUP I: monolingual anglophones
School language: English
French competence: very little, just from L2 classes
English competence: native
L2 instruction: since kindergarten; now 30 min / day
Language of interviews: all in English
Parents' language: all English, except 1 mother and 1 father are bilinguals. Only English spoken at home.
Number of subjects: 8, 4 of each sex
Selection of subjects: 28 in class; 8 at random from 18 monolinguals with permission
Age range: 11.7 to 13.4

GROUP II: anglophones in French immersion
School language: Half of children in regular English program; half in French immersion.
French competence: sufficient for Grade 6 immersion, none have failed. Little or no French before kindergarten.
English competence: native
L2 instruction: K-3 all French; increasing English in 4-6. Grade 6: 25% school time in French; 75% in English
Language of interviews: mostly English, partly French
Parents' language: all English, except 1 French bilingual father. English spoken at home.
Number of subjects: 5, 2 girls, 3 boys
Selection of subjects: 14 in class; all 5 with permission selected
Age range: 11.8 to 13.0

GROUP III: French bilinguals in English school
School language: English
French competence: native
English competence: Sufficient for Grade 6; two are one year behind
L2 instruction: all schooling in English since kindergarten, except 30 min / day of L2 French
Language of interviews: both French and English
Parents' language: All French and mostly bilingual, except 1 mother and 1 father are English bilinguals. French is spoken in 3 homes; both in 2 homes.
Number of subjects: 5, 3 girls, 2 boys
Selection of subjects: 28 in class (same as I); all 5 francophones interviewed.
Age range: 11.9 to 13.4

GROUP IV: Bilinguals of mixed language background in French school
School language: French
French competence: Sufficient for Grade 6; none have failed
English competence: excellent; no problems in interviews
L2 instruction: all schooling in French since kindergarten, except 2 hrs / wk of L2 English
Language of interviews: both French and English
Parents' language: All children have 1-2 bilingual parents. Both languages are spoken in 6 homes; English in 2 homes.
Number of subjects: 8, 4 of each sex
Selection of subjects: Drawn from 2 Grade 6 classes (58 pupils). All 5 qualifying and with permission were interviewed.
Age range: 11.9 to 12.5

GROUP V: monolingual francophones
School language: French
French competence: native
English competence: very little, just from L2 classes
L2 instruction: Since kindergarten; now 2 hrs / wk
Language of interviews: all in French
Parents' language: all French and mostly bilingual. Only French spoken at home.
Number of subjects: 8, 4 of each sex
Selection of subjects: 29 in class (same school as IV); 13 unsuitable. 8 of remaining 13 children with permission were interviewed.
Age range: 11.9 to 13.5

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