SO THEY WANT US TO LEARN FRENCH

PROMOTING AND OPPOSING BILINGUALISM IN ENGLISH-SPEAKING CANADA

Matthew Hayday
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GRAHAM FRASER

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The history of language policy in Canada has tended to be more political than social and more likely to have been written in French Canada, where historians have examined the elimination of French-language education in English-speaking Canada, in particular in Ontario and Manitoba. The emergence of language legislation and language policy following the recommendations of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism beginning in 1967 was an effort to repair the damage caused by a century of measures taken to eliminate the use of French as a language of instruction and administration outside Quebec. The five decades since then have shown not only progress but also occasional setbacks in the face of constitutional controversy and strong opposition.

One of the many refreshing things about the approach in this book is that Matthew Hayday broadens the perspective for looking at the policy-making process beyond politicians and public servants to consider other players: idealistic parents, academics, and commissioners of official languages on one side and disillusioned parents, conspiracy theorists, and anti-bilingualism crusaders on the other. As he puts it, the policy emerged from a “bureaucracy–civil society dynamic.”

The result is not merely a rich account of a remarkable period in the history of Canadian public policy but also a description of key actors in a democratic society, ordinary people who mobilized on behalf of something that they thought critical: the education of their children. To achieve success,
they had to defend themselves from attacks by those who were (and in some cases still are) convinced that Canada was being taken over by people who wanted to transform it into a French-speaking country.

The challenge of developing a federal policy for second-language learning is inherent in our constitutional history. As I have often remarked to foreign visitors, Canada's Fathers of Confederation gave all of the powers that they considered to be important – the military, the major tools of the economy, foreign policy – to the federal government and relegated to the provinces what they thought to be trivial – health and education. Since the Second World War, Canadians have tended to disagree with those priorities, and the result has been the source of many federal-provincial tensions.

Hayday captures the vigour and commitment of several of my predecessor commissioners, and, though Max Yalden and D'Iberville Fortier have passed away, all of the others remain charismatic and passionate about official bilingualism. It is an honour to follow in their footsteps or, as an academic might put it, to take advantage of the process of path dependency that their initiatives created.

Immersion education, as Hayday demonstrates, has gone from a small experiment in a single school to a widely acclaimed model of second-language learning adopted across the country. However, funding caps have limited its growth. In 1989, André Obadia – often cited in this book – predicted that, if the increase continued at the rate that it had achieved by then, there would be 1 million students in immersion by 1999. But the continued expansion did not happen; enrolment plateaued at about 300,000, where it has remained ever since.

The suggestion persists that immersion is simply an elite program or, as Hayday summarizes its critics’ argument, “private school for yuppies on the public dime.” It is a particularly frustrating argument; principals, teachers, and school board officials across the country pressure parents to remove their children from immersion whenever a learning difficulty emerges, whether or not the language of instruction is a factor. Then, when all of the children with learning problems are systematically removed, immersion is attacked as elitist. This is still happening four decades after Dr. Margaret Bruck demonstrated that there was no need to remove children from immersion, research that has been confirmed more recently by Fred Genesee at McGill University.

As Glenna Reid pointed out in 1972, immersion contributes to what she called “other-culture understanding.” Anecdotally, I can confirm this through the experiences of friends of my children and children of my friends. Through
them, I can name young people who went to China and learned Chinese, who taught English in Japan and learned Japanese, who worked on solar projects in India and learned Hindi or on water projects in Vietnam and learned Vietnamese, who travelled to Central America and learned Spanish or joined the expatriate musical community in Berlin and learned German. They all learned Canada’s other official language first. It is easier to learn a third language than it is to learn a second language; learning French is not a barrier but a bridge to the rest of the world.

There has been progress. In 1992, Victor Goldbloom flew to Alberta to refute eloquently Premier Don Getty’s claim that official bilingualism was an “irritant” that should be “removed from the force of law.” No premier would say that now; in 2014, for the first time in Canadian history, a majority of Canada’s premiers were bilingual. It is now taken for granted that bilingualism is a prerequisite for leadership of a political party in Canada, and it is now a legislative requirement that agents of Parliament be bilingual. There are excellent language-training programs for judges to improve the bilingual capacity of the provincial and superior courts. Some 40 percent of new employees were bilingual when they joined the federal public service.

But there continue to be challenges. Canada welcomes 250,000 newcomers every year, and it is not surprising that they are not fluent in both of our official languages when they arrive. In addition, they have not learned the history of our struggles for language equality.

And, as Hayday makes clear, second-language education and other language-learning initiatives are often the victims of budget cuts, government reorganization, and austerity measures. Constitutional or political crises can increase hostility to the French fact in Canada. And, though there were three times as many bilingual Canadians living outside Quebec in 2011 as there were in 1961 – and 142,900 more than in 2001 – the percentage slipped from 10.3 percent in 2001 to 9.7 percent in 2011.

Although it is disconcerting to see that some of the unfounded arguments made thirty years ago are still repeated, and that some of the good ideas proposed then were never implemented, the support for Canada’s linguistic duality that Hayday describes is still strong. Canadian Parents for French, which has been so important in the fight for effective second-language education in Canada, is still hard at work.

This is an important story that needed to be told.

Graham Fraser,
Commissioner of Official Languages
In the 1960s, Canada’s two solitudes encountered and clashed with each other. Quebec’s Quiet Revolution signalled that French-speaking Canadians were no longer going to accept passively being treated as second-class citizens. Some, such as Jean Lesage and Paul Gérin-Lajoie, worked to expand the powers and roles of the Quebec state. Others were drawn to more radical options, such as sovereignty association or separation. While the extremist minority who belonged to the Front de Libération du Québec exploded bombs around the province, many more were drawn to René Lévesque’s Parti Québécois and other separatist political parties and used political channels to accomplish their goals. Pierre Trudeau, supported by Lester Pearson, pursued another path. Trudeau went to Ottawa with the goal of making the federal government a bilingual institution so that French-speaking Canadians – including the French Canadian and Acadian minorities being left behind by Quiet Revolution Quebec – would consider Ottawa to be their government as well. This was part of Trudeau’s vision of a “just society” in which all Canadians, regardless of language, class, or ethnicity, would have equal opportunities to thrive and succeed.

But Canada could not have a bilingual federal government and institutions without more Canadians who could speak both English and French. At least some more English-speaking Canadians would have to become bilingual rather than leaving this to French speakers who had been forced to learn English to work in Ottawa. It would be even better if English speakers
voluntarily embraced this ideal and came to see bilingualism as part of Canada’s identity. This would be a challenge. At hearings of the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (B&B Commission) in the 1960s, English-speaking Canadians groused that they did not understand why all Canadians did not just speak English. Many French Canadians encountered nastier versions of this sentiment and were told to “Speak White!” when they spoke their own language. It was not a big surprise when, after passage of the Official Languages Act in 1969, many Canadians asked “Why are they trying to force French down our throats?”

English-speaking Canadians have changed their attitudes toward bilingualism since the 1960s. The majority now accepts (though not always embraces) what was once fervently resisted. This is partly because of improved opportunities for Canadians to become bilingual. Starting with a few pilot projects in the 1960s, the Canadian innovation of French immersion took off. Hundreds of thousands of English-speaking children are now enrolled in these programs. Canadian parents have fought to improve the French as a Second Language (FSL) programs offered as part of the regular school curriculum. They hoped that these classes might actually produce language learning, rather than frustration, in the children who took them. These families are part of a rather remarkable phenomenon. Despite speaking the majority language of their country and continent – arguably the dominant language of the planet – these Canadians thought that it was important for their children to learn the language of their country’s official language minority community.

On the other hand, while the total number of Canadians who can speak Canada’s two official languages has increased over time, as a percentage of the total population this figure has remained both fairly constant and quite low – always less than 20 percent of the total population. Bilingualism remains less common among English speakers (anglophones) than among French speakers (francophones). Although polling data have consistently shown that a majority of English-speaking Canadians accept the official languages policy and think that children should have opportunities to learn French in school, they are not actually becoming bilingual in droves. The question “Why are they trying to shove French down our throats?” has frequently been replaced by the statement “Sorry, I don’t speak French.” Indeed, this was the title of journalist Graham Fraser’s 2006 book, which examined the limitations of Canada’s language policies in reaching their goals.¹

How do we reconcile these more favourable attitudes and increased opportunities with the rather limited increase in personal bilingualism
among the Canadian population? To find the answer to this question, this
book explores the various ways in which bilingualism on an individual level
was promoted to English-speaking Canadians from the 1960s to the late
1990s. Over these decades, governments and social movement actors
undertook major projects to recraft Canada’s national identity – and others
resisted these efforts. The book aims to explain how Canadians engaged
with the language-related dimensions of these nation-shaping efforts. While
opponents of bilingualism claimed that the government of Canada was
trying to “shove,” “force,” or “cram” French down their throats, other groups
tried to make the prospect of becoming bilingual seem more pleasant,
coaxing Canadians to embrace the benefits afforded by bilingualism. At
present, it remains practically impossible for a day to go by without one
language-related issue or another making the news. Official languages and
bilingualism remain contentious and important aspects of Canada’s politics
and society. The debates surrounding them have deep roots, and today’s
dramas echo, and often repeat, those that have been ongoing for decades.

**Major Research Questions and Parameters**

A major objective of this book is to determine why some Canadians came to
believe fervently in the merits of individual bilingualism, to the extent of
being willing to fight for better educational opportunities and to promote
bilingualism as a national Canadian value during a period of intense constitu-
tional politics. Conversely, why is it that, fifty years after the B&B
Commission was formed, and with over forty years of federal government
funding and support for second-language education, the overall level of
English-French bilingualism among English-speaking Canadians has re-
mained low? There has been only a modest increase in the total number of
bilingual English-speaking Canadians over the past half century and a
slighter increase when this is expressed as a percentage of the population.
How do we account for the successes, and the failures, of the proponents of
individual bilingualism during these decades?

My main interests in writing this book relate to questions surrounding
the growth of personal bilingualism in the predominantly English-speaking
Canadian communities outside Quebec. By English-speaking Canadians, I
am referring to Canadians whose primary language of use was English. This
includes both those who had English as their mother tongue and those who
adopted English as their most commonly used language. The book empha-
sizes issues related to the promotion of bilingualism undertaken by civil so-
ciety actors, such as lobby groups and social movement organizations, and
Introduction

some quasi-governmental actors, such as the commissioner of official languages. I also examine the reactions, both positive and negative, to campaigns and efforts to promote bilingualism in English-speaking Canada. What emerges are explanations of how and why progress was made in expanding opportunities for French-language learning for those who chose to pursue this goal. It also becomes apparent why these efforts encountered fierce resistance in some quarters, beyond (but not excluding) anti-French prejudice.

“Bilingualism” can mean many different things. The term is imbued with powerful negative and positive connotations, and it was not uncommon for activists, politicians, and writers to muddy the waters deliberately. In the interests of clarity, a few definitions might be useful. The main interest of this book is with personal or individual bilingualism, which means the ability of individual people to communicate in both English and French (Canada’s two official languages after 1969). This is often confused with institutional bilingualism, which means the capacity of an institution – such as the federal government – to provide services and function in both English and French. Institutional bilingualism does not require that all individuals working for the institution be bilingual, though a certain percentage need to be to make it function. There are also several levels of language proficiency that an individual can reach, so the question of whether a person is bilingual might be answered in different ways depending on the threshold of language competency. On the issue of bilingualism as a national value, some Canadians supported both types of bilingualism, but many were resistant to the idea of individual bilingualism if it were anything other than a voluntary personal choice. Driving this book are questions related to personal bilingualism as opposed to how governments could or should be bilingual institutions (though these latter issues certainly crop up).

The Cast of Characters

When this project started, I intended to study the promotion of bilingualism aimed at all segments of the Canadian population. However, while delving into social movement campaigns and initiatives, it became apparent that little was done in Canada between 1960 and 2000 to try to increase bilingualism among Canadians older than postsecondary students, apart from language retraining programs for civil servants and the occasional reference to private language courses. The emphasis was overwhelmingly on language training for the next generation, or the “youth option,” as it was often called. That emphasis is now my main focus, though I cast an eye on
initiatives targeting the non–civil servant adult population, including those aimed at convincing adults of the merits of supporting – often with their tax dollars – programs capable of raising a bilingual generation of young Canadians. This in turn required gaining broad support for bilingualism as a Canadian value.

The major focus of this book is on how individual bilingualism was promoted to English-speaking Canadians by civil society organizations. The federal government was keen to promote its new official languages policies and could provide funding for some initiatives. But it was the grassroots energies of Canadians who believed in the merits of bilingualism and the new Canadian identity with which it was connected that helped these policies to flourish. These activists undertook campaigns so that the next generation of Canadians could grow up bilingual, further cementing bilingualism as a Canadian value. In the sections of this book dealing with the period prior to 1977, the emphasis is on a number of small, often isolated groups across the country. For the period following 1977, the emphasis shifts to the nationwide association of Canadian Parents for French (CPF). CPF is an organization of English-speaking parents – many of them unilingual – who wanted better opportunities for their children to learn French and lobbied at federal, provincial, and local levels across Canada to improve FSL programs and get French immersion programs created. Of the pro-bilingualism groups, CPF maintained the greatest array of archival and published primary sources, and many former members were willing to participate in oral history interviews. CPF was also by far the dominant organization working to improve access to bilingualism through the education system. I do consider other pro-bilingualism organizations, such as those that sponsored exchange programs, though their documentary records are more fragmentary. CPF was active in every province and territory, and I draw on examples from different parts of the country and communities of varying sizes and demographic profiles, without attempting exhaustive coverage of its activities.

Individuals and social movement organizations opposed to bilingualism and Canada's official language policies were less organized and left records that were much more fragmentary. They also – proudly – did not receive any funding from the government and thus were not subject to the same sort of reporting requirements facing groups such as Canadian Parents for French. Unfortunately, the consequence was that these groups did not maintain the same types of archival records or issue public financial statements or annual reports. The most well-known of these groups, the Alliance
for the Preservation of English in Canada, did publish a newsletter from the late 1970s to the mid-1990s, but there are no formal library holdings of the full run, and my efforts to track it down in private archives have yielded only individual issues or runs of a couple of years. My analysis of these organizations is therefore rooted more heavily in the books that they published, their direct interactions with pro-bilingualism groups, and their appearances in the media. Most of the key individuals involved in anti-bilingualism groups had passed away by the time that I was conducting my research. The one key individual still alive, Jock Andrew, declined to be interviewed, claiming that my “study, no matter how good, would be little more than the record of the conquest of a nation by a determined third of its population. I watched it happen and I do not wish to relive it again.”

This book devotes several chapters to the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The commissioner was an officer of Parliament who stood apart from the formal federal government bureaucracy. I am particularly interested in the “unofficial” nature of the commissioners’ activities as champions of bilingualism in Canada rather than in their formal “watchdog” or ombudsman roles of evaluating the progress of the official languages policies within federal agencies. The commissioners and their staffs demonstrated great creativity in fostering support for bilingualism among English-speaking Canadians. Although their actions in promoting personal bilingualism were not envisioned as part of the Official Languages Act, when this office was created, the commissioners’ initiatives were not opposed, and often were welcomed, by the governments of the day.

Canada’s public servants encountered personal bilingualism in ways very different and important from those of the language learners central to this book. Unlike those participating in bilingualism initiatives on a voluntary basis – whether as parents, students, or otherwise civically engaged Canadians – civil servants acquired French as a second language while “on the job,” where that skill was becoming compulsory. Bilingualism in their case was less promoted than mandated. How the federal government and its civil service developed official languages policies and dealt with bilingualism are questions that merit separate study. Certain aspects of this issue have been considered, whereas others await treatment. In this book, governments and their bureaucracies come into view as they interact with social movements, whether as targets of lobbying efforts or as funders for some groups.

A final group of individuals keenly involved in the activities covered by this book are the education experts and front-line teachers involved in second-language education. This book does not investigate the finer points of...
the academic debates over second-language education, nor does it provide a comprehensive study of the teachers’ associations and their activities. I am more interested in how the research conducted by experts was mobilized as part of the arguments of social movement actors for or against certain programs (and by their direct involvement, at times, within these organizations). But since both front-line teachers and education experts were engaged as allies for both pro- and anti-bilingualism groups, I tend to refer to them, their public position statements, and their activities when they came directly into contact or conflict with one of the social movement organizations. Similarly, I also look at some of the ways that groups such as the Canadian Association of Second-Language Teachers (CASLT) and the Canadian Association of Immersion Teachers (CAIT) worked together with advocates of second-language teaching to advance their mutual goals.

This period of French-language promotion in English-speaking Canada also witnessed efforts at partnership and joint action with Canada’s francophone minority community associations and organizations. In some cases, francophone groups partnered with English-speaking proponents of bilingualism to pursue joint goals. In other cases, they found themselves at odds when certain FSL learning programs ran counter to the priorities of the francophone groups. Sometimes the proponents of bilingualism found themselves, uncomfortably, in tense or adversarial relationships with their would-be allies.

Theoretical Framework and Bodies of Literature

In recent years, as archival sources have been opened to researchers, there has been a flurry of historical writing pertaining to the 1960s and 1970s. A key theme in much of this literature is how Canada’s national identity was undergoing transformation. This transformation could be seen in a number of ways. There were initiatives designed to promote a made-in-Canada popular culture. New social welfare programs aimed both to promote the health of the population and to build a broader sense of national community (and a larger federal government). A new politics of national identity emerged, seeking to replace an older, British Canadian model of identity with one more inclusive of the growing linguistic and ethnic diversity of the country.

Many authors point to the postwar years, particularly the 1960s, as a key transitional period between models of Canada. José Igartua argues in *The Other Quiet Revolution: National Identities in English Canada, 1945–71* that this decade saw the replacement of the British Canadian model with
English-speaking Canadians (or at least their elites) embracing a multi-cultural, bilingual approach. Bryan Palmer contends that the old models were blown up in the 1960s but that nothing concrete emerged to replace them. Chris Champion, on the other hand, sees strong traces of the British Canadian tradition in the new symbols and policies of the Pearson and Trudeau governments, even as they claimed to replace the old order. I have argued in work related to other aspects of the Canadian government’s identity policies that Igartua’s thesis is at least partly correct, though I see it as more of an ongoing process.

This book looks at a number of the language and cultural elements of the new Canadian identity emerging and vying for acceptance in this period. Although I have disagreed with certain aspects of Kenneth McRoberts’s *Misconceiving Canada: The Struggle for National Unity*, I do agree with his premise that the Trudeau government attempted to “implant a new Canadian identity” that transformed the way that many English Canadians think about Canada. Certainly, the new order seemed to have its adherents, but it was not universally accepted, which suggests that Champion’s arguments have at least some merit. There was a rearguard of English-speaking Canadians – many of whom were what Eva Mackey terms “unmarked,” white, “Canadian-Canadians,” or “ordinary Canadians” – who resented or resisted the new identity politics and did not see themselves, the “silent mass” of the majority, as being reflected in this new Canada.

The study of official languages, language learning, bilingualism, and English-French relations has received growing attention in recent decades from a wide array of scholars in different fields. Marcel Martel and Martin Pâquet have written an excellent overview of Canada’s language politics – available in both official languages – that provides a concise introduction to the major themes and questions that have animated these debates over the past four and a half centuries in North America. Their survey makes evident, however, that most of the scholarly work in political science, sociology, socio-linguistics, and history in Canada – and this is not a unique situation – deals largely with the political and social questions that relate to language rights and services for linguistic minorities. Indeed, these have long been the animating questions that seem to guide language laws and policies in many countries. How does one accommodate linguistic diversity? How far should services in the minority language be extended? To what extent should minorities be permitted to control their own educational systems or be educated in their mother tongues? How much autonomy could or should be provided to minority-language communities? What are the
sociological impacts of living in a minority situation and of bilingualism on the minority-language community individual? How can language laws be crafted to protect minorities? There is a wealth of literature on this topic in both Canada and other countries, not surprising since it deals with fundamental issues of cultural survival and preservation, issues often dear to the hearts of scholars from these communities studying these topics.

Education specialists, with Canadian experts among the leaders in the field, have made great strides in analyzing the “how” questions related to best practices in second-language instruction. They have also identified key issues related to student motivation and parental support and how these issues relate to success in language learning. But those studies, by and large, are not primarily interested in the broader national or regional political and cultural contexts in which this education takes place. The issues of how to craft policies and how to create broad support among the majority population for enhancing bilingualism have not really been addressed, and these issues animate this study.

In both the Canadian and the international literature, some attention has been paid to resistance to bilingualism among majority populations, particularly with regard to the Official English or English-only movements in the United States. This research emphasizes resistance among the majority population to extending any official recognition to other languages, particularly in education. Raymond Tatalovich considers these campaigns of resistance to be intimately tied to nativism and anti-immigration discourses. James Crawford and Carol Schmid add that these English-only or anti-bilingualism campaigns serve as proxies for concerns over any recognition of diversity that might create “special status” for a group or render acceptable a civil society that operates in a language other than English. Although these works do not directly address the issue of English-speaking Americans who choose to learn another language (such as Spanish), they do provide useful concepts for understanding Canadians who opposed all forms of bilingualism, ranging from government services in French, to French minority-language education, to FSL education for English-speaking Canadians.

Bilingual countries in Europe are of limited value as points of contrast with Canada in terms of second-language learning because, in many cases, the “minority” language learned as the second official language by students has greater prestige as an international or regional language. This is the case in Belgium, for example, where until recently the numerically larger Flemish community was more likely to learn the other official language because French had greater international status than Dutch. Although almost a third
of Finland’s population speaks Swedish as a second language, the language of their small linguistic minority and numerically more populous neighbour, this pales next to the more than 60 percent who speak English. Recent experiments with immersion education in the province of Andalusia, Spain, use languages such as English and French, not Spain’s minority languages of Basque and Catalan. In any case, there appears to be something distinctive about countries in the so-called Anglosphere in terms of their resistance to learning second languages that sets them apart from continental Europe and other parts of the world. This resistance seems to be linked to the growing international predominance of English and its popularity as a second language among people with other mother tongues.17

I examine much of bilingualism promoters’ activism through the lens of social movements, even though the actors in this book do not really resemble the stereotypical militant 1960s social activist. This stereotype, admittedly, is overblown and unrepresentative of the diversity of social movement activism. Even in the 1960s, for instance, Canadian peace activists in Voice of Women were keen to maintain their image as “respectable” women and indeed used it to their advantage.18 In their 1998 book, David Meyer and Sidney Tarrow posited that, in the decades following the 1960s, social movement activity became more widespread and socially acceptable or at least less subject to social opprobrium. A much wider array of actors could engage in a more established array of social movement activism tactics and strategies, and governments were becoming much more used to dealing with social movements. They argued that a “social movement society” had emerged by the 1990s.19 More recent scholarship has reconsidered the timing of the emergence of this society and qualified some of its premises.20 Many of its conclusions have been borne out in the Canadian context, often with an earlier start date for the “normalization” of social movement–government relations than posited by Meyer and Tarrow. Indeed, even before the appearance of their work, Leslie Pal had convincingly argued that the Trudeau and Mulroney governments, through the Department of the Secretary of State, had been directly funding a host of different social movement organizations, with the partial objective of bolstering public support for their social and cultural policy objectives. Pal had argued that this did not mean direct government control over these groups, though it did channel their social movement activism in certain directions.21 Historians – including Dominique Clément, Kevin Brushett, and Andrew Nurse – have further developed our understanding of this important government–social movement dynamic in post-1960s Canada.22
Historical institutionalist approaches to public policy are key to my understanding of how social movements related to bilingualism operated in the Canadian context. This approach, which owes much to the scholarship of Theda Skocpol and Paul Pierson, and much earlier theoretical work by sociologist Max Weber, attaches great importance to the state as an active and autonomous participant in public policy debates, often acting through bureaucracies and civil services. As Paul Pierson observes, policy legacies also matter a great deal, since policies put in place during one historical period will shape politics and policy development in future periods. This is referred to as “path dependency,” since it creates a preference for a given set of policy choices that is often difficult to change. This is particularly important for understanding the role of the commissioner of official languages. The first commissioner, Keith Spicer, took the office in an unanticipated direction, with major ramifications for how the office later maintained its involvement in bilingualism promotion. Neo-pluralist scholars, building on historical institutionalist theories, have added governments and bureaucracies to the repertoire of key actors that can seek to shape public policy. They acknowledge that the bureaucracy might deliberately seek to cultivate and support certain social movement actors and citizen groups to support its policies. The relationship between Canadian Parents for French and the Department of the Secretary of State (as well as the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages), examined in the middle chapters of this book, is much more easily comprehended in light of this theoretical framework.

In examining the social movements involved in these debates, my focus is somewhat different from that of theorists who seek broad explanations for how and why social movements arise. My analysis does draw on a number of the concepts from social movement scholarship to explain the successes or failures of the social movements discussed in this book. However, rather than being wedded to a single theoretical framework of social movement theory and applying it systematically to all aspects of pro- and anti-bilingualism social movements, my research suggests that elements from various (sometimes competing) theoretical schools are applicable to different points in the history of these movements. No single theoretical framework fully captures the history of social movement activism around the issue of bilingualism, but many of the concepts and tools from this literature are useful in helping to explain certain elements of both how these social movements operated internally and how they interacted with both the state and Canadian society.
In particular, I draw on aspects of both resource mobilization theory and the political process models developed by Sidney Tarrow, Doug McAdam, John McCarthy, and others. Resource mobilization theorists have emphasized how social movements mobilize supporters around a common cause and then attempt to maximize the diverse resources that they can bring to bear – people, expertise, money, and so on – in support of that cause. The political process model acknowledges the importance of mobilizing these resources and adds the concept of the political opportunity structure, which refers to key windows of opportunity when social movements can have impacts on policy. These windows are affected by various factors, including openness of the political system, sympathetic allies, divisions among elites, and stability or instability of political alignments. This model posits that there are key points in history when a political system might be more open or more closed to the possibility of change and that movements can capitalize on these points. In other words, a social movement’s success is determined not solely by its own resources but also by external factors in the system that it seeks to change.

Within the theoretical literature on political opportunities are heated debates about whether these opportunities spawn social movements or whether pre-existing social movement actors create and foster the conditions that lead to more open political systems. In some respects, this is a “chicken-and-egg” problem, since the conditions that foster political opportunities for one social movement can result from the actions of other social movements. Tarrow’s “cycles of contention” model is useful here. Tarrow notes that historically there have been waves of social protest and social movement activity. A given social movement’s activities, if successful, can spur additional social movements into action, because they either demonstrate the existence of political opportunities or in fact bring them into being. The actions of this next wave of social movements can in turn lead to greater openness by the state to change or to a period of repression. They can also trigger actions by counter-movements opposed to the new directions taken by the state and society. These interactions are extremely complex. They are also historically contingent, which makes developing a predictive theoretical model highly problematic. As a tool for explaining events in the past, however, the concept of political opportunities is useful to my analysis.

Early theoretical models of both political opportunities and resource mobilization tended to be dismissive of earlier psychological and sociological scholarship on collective behaviour that focused on the role played...
by grievances in instigating social movement activity; their emphasis was on external political structures and concrete resources that could be brought to bear on social movement organization activity. More recent scholarship has brought these two schools together, adopting a broader conceptualization of collective behaviour theory that encompasses other motivational factors, such as emotions, values, and discontent with existing structures and governance. Together they feed into larger debates about the concept of “framing,” which applies both to how social movements define the types of injustices and problems that they seek to address and to how the movements define themselves and their values and how they conceptualize the states and societies in which they operate.

These new approaches are also the products of interactions between North American scholars and European scholars of the “new social movement theory” school who were studying concepts such as the creation of collective identities. The new social movement school has been challenged, however, on its initial argument that many post-1960 social movements (unlike their predecessors from the labour movement, for example) were primarily driven by identities and values rather than a material basis. Many scholars have argued that this distinction is perhaps not so clear-cut. Nevertheless, the conceptual tools of framing and collective identities have been incorporated into revised versions of the political process model. Indeed, as will become evident when I consider the motivations of those who advocated for bilingualism and French-language education for their children, issues around values and considerations of potential economic advantages were both in play.

My analysis of social movements is also influenced by Miriam Smith, who does not see a stark division between social movements (or social movement organizations) and interest groups in terms of their actions or organizational structures. The same concepts can be productively employed to analyze the behaviour of both groups, if clearly definable differences between them even exist. Throughout this analysis of social movement and interest group activity, evidence drawn from the actions of these groups is the driving force, with concepts and tools from these theoretical models applied as appropriate. My main objective is to explain how and why these pro- and anti-bilingualism social movements succeeded and failed, not to prove or disprove a particular theoretical model.

Engaging with how bilingualism was received among the English Canadian population from the 1960s on also requires considering the many factors that social, political, economic, and cultural historians apply more
Introduction

broadly to their analyses of all events. Debates over the merits of bilingualism related intimately to the shifting terrain of and debates over Canadian national identity and took place against the backdrop of major constitutional debates, including the 1967 Confederation of Tomorrow Conference, the 1980 Quebec Referendum, the 1980–82 patriation of the Constitution, the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, and the 1995 Quebec Referendum. They must all be borne in mind as the context in which Canadians considered the place of English and French in their country’s politics and society. Nor is this an issue that can be discussed in solely national terms. Significant regional differences from province to province, and within individual provinces, not only played a role in shaping intellectual attitudes toward bilingualism but also determined the practical considerations about whether resources to improve bilingualism among the population were available.

Issues of race and ethnicity also played a complicated role in the debates over bilingualism. Much of the anti-bilingualism rhetoric was couched in explicitly racist language, casting aspersions on both the French language and the “French Canadian race” that spoke it. Although it might seem peculiar now to think of French Canadians as a “race,” it is important to bear in mind that many aspects of race are a social construction. French Canadians were certainly treated as a different racial group in the 1960s and 1970s. This treatment, indeed, led Pierre Vallières, an intellectual sympathetic to the Front de Libération du Québec (FLQ), to title his manifesto *White Niggers of America*, likening French Canadians to African Americans. On a less confrontational level, there was active debate about the merits of biculturalism versus multiculturalism in forging a new Canadian identity. Many of Canada’s racial and ethnic communities felt alienated from the bilingualism discourse. This fed into concerns, particularly linked to French immersion, about the inclusion or exclusion of new immigrants and racial minorities.

Class-based analysis was routinely a part of critiques of the French programs advanced by opponents of bilingualism. French immersion, in particular, was often subject to allegations of upper-middle-class privilege and elitism. Gender was also a crucial factor in how resources were mobilized, particularly in the pro-bilingualism camp. Gender-based factors also played into discussions on whom bilingualism was perceived to benefit, particularly with respect to jobs for teachers and which students took French classes. Age and generational identity also shaped people’s opinions about bilingualism. There was often a fairly stark divide along age lines (and, to a
certain extent, by ethnic identity) between the most fervent pro- and anti-bilingualism advocates.

Broad trends in the economy also came into play in the debates about how best to advance bilingualism. Not always the merits of language learning but sometimes the perceived costs of these programs in a contracting economy were at issue. The personal stakes of individuals and their livelihoods and jobs cannot be ignored. And, of course, the changing demographic tides, particularly those affecting Canada’s student-aged population, which waned and waxed over the decades covered in this book, added broader structural considerations of which programs would be sustainable.

There were broader intellectual debates over educational philosophies and over opportunity and equity in society that fed into the specific debates about French-language education and bilingualism. Arguments related to special French programs, whether French immersion or extended French, were often not about the merits of the programs themselves, and how effective they were in teaching the language, but about broader concerns over equality of opportunity and streaming. Opponents of expanded French programs, even optional ones, frequently cast this in terms of a zero-sum game in which some students would benefit and others would not. Similarly, proposals to expand the amount of core French within the regular curriculum were opposed because of how other programs or subjects might suffer. Debates over which students could benefit from second-language learning were often framed as concerns about students with learning disabilities or special needs.

All of these aforementioned factors combined and interacted in diverse ways, in different local contexts, and at different points during the years covered in this book. No single factor provides an adequate explanation of how and why certain groups achieved their objectives regarding personal bilingualism, but together these factors shape the arguments that this book advances.

The Progression of Bilingualism in English-Speaking Canada
This book advances a number of arguments related to developments in individual bilingualism in English-speaking Canada. Supporters of bilingualism largely agreed with the vision of Canadian identity that valued two official languages as framed from the 1960s on. They actively articulated and advanced this conception of Canada. Beyond this conception, they were
sold on the educational, intellectual, and economic merits of individual bilingualism. As the decade progressed, they became increasingly convinced of the merits of bilingualism in the context of globalization. The key activists in the social movements favourable to bilingualism were often, but not always, concerned about the national unity dimensions of the language question. Much of their success, at least in terms of creating new optional language programs, can be attributed to a favourable political opportunity structure, particularly in the 1970s and 1980s, when there were key governmental supports in terms of both program and organizational funding.

There were also a number of key positive factors related to resource mobilization. This was particularly the case from the late 1960s to the early 1980s, when the pro-bilingualism groups could draw heavily on the energies and skills of relatively young, and often university-educated, mothers not in the paid workforce. They could also count on supportive allies in the media, business community, bureaucracy, and all three major political parties. Many of the pro-bilingualism activists had previous experience in other social movement activities and organizing. Educational research was a crucial tool in the arsenal of bilingualism’s promoters. The new French programs, especially immersion, were extensively studied by academics, and the results were positive. Canadian Parents for French actively disseminated the results of this research, which played a major role in overcoming myths and fears about French immersion. Parents flocked to enrol their children in these programs because of the job opportunities and the intellectual and cultural benefits that they believed would result.

Opponents of bilingualism arrived at their position for an array of reasons, and this affected the intensity of their opposition. There was some opposition from teachers’ unions and administrators in the English-speaking stream of the provincial education systems. This often stemmed from fears of potential job losses, pointing to the merits of the economic grievance–based theories of social movement mobilization. At the other end of the spectrum were xenophobic individuals who saw no merit in the French language and were hostile to Quebec’s culture (the terms “priest-ridden” and “backward” were bandied about freely). Between these two poles were various individuals and groups fearful or uneasy about the rise of a new conception of Canada in which bilingualism challenged their privileged position, whether on the personal level or on the broader level of institutional bilingualism. They were often unlikely to separate the two completely in their rhetoric. Emotions, particularly anger and fear, were also potent motivators for action among these actors. Many of them expressed variants
of the argument that the language question “should have been settled with the conquest.” This speaks to their conceptions of political and social power and how it was challenged by the new value attached to bilingualism.

Broader national questions played a role in determining the general sympathies of English-speaking Canadians for French second-language education specifically as opposed to second-language instruction more broadly. Turmoil over Quebec separatism from 1976 to 1980, and again in the constitutional crises from 1987 to 1995, dampened support for French second-language learning. The spectre of Quebec separating diminished the appeal, for many English-speaking Canadians, of pushing for French-language instruction for their children. Some linked this to a quid pro quo for what they saw as diminished English-language rights in Quebec, while others thought that the value of French-language skills would be lessened in a Canada without Quebec. Although a substantial number of Canadians were willing to contemplate bilingualism as a gesture of national unity in the 1960s and 1970s, they were less likely, in the later period covered in this book, to think that it would have any impact.

New programs to enhance French education did have costs, and the extent to which concerns over costs, particularly in recessionary periods, could be allayed by the promise of federal funding played a major role in the success or failure of many local campaigns for FSL and French immersion. Federal government cutbacks to funding of bilingual programs and organizations that supported bilingualism made in two major rounds – the late 1970s and early 1990s – came at the worst possible moments in terms of waning sympathies for French-language learning because of constitutional turmoil and heightened economic concerns about the costs of these programs. Although we should shy away from counterfactual arguments and historical “what-ifs” regarding what might have happened if the federal government had sustained, or even increased, its budget for official languages programming during these periods, we can observe what did happen. Those indicators – stalled provincial investment in French second-language programming, plateauing enrolment in French immersion in the mid-1990s, and plummeting public support for mandatory FSL learning in the 1990s – indicate that these cutbacks certainly did not help. The emphasis of this book is not on the bilingualism policies in the federal public service, but one might make the case that there was a failure of nerve in the federal government to defend strongly the principle that, in some cases, mandatory bilingualism would be part of how it operated. It might also have been more forceful in asserting that Canadian individuals and provincial governments
should not have assumed or expected that Ottawa would bear sole responsibility for training a bilingual workforce.

The development of policies for and debates about bilingualism in English-speaking Canada did not take place in a completely linear fashion, and the chronology of events in one community did not always line up with what was happening elsewhere in the country. I was overwhelmed, in conducting the primary source research for this book, by the richness of the material available, the revealing interviews that I was able to conduct, and the detailed stories that I would be able to tell for so many Canadian communities. Naturally, not all of their stories could fit into this book. I have selected individual case studies that illustrate particular points about social movement activities or factors influencing a given debate. As a result, though the chapters that follow are organized both chronologically and thematically as much as possible, the individual case studies are not always confined to the chronological boundaries of the chapters.

In an effort to try to situate these events for readers, Chapter 1 provides a broad historical overview of the period covered by this book, identifying the key political events, constitutional debates, and social, demographic, and economic trends that formed the backdrop for the specific debates over bilingualism. Readers familiar with post-1960 Canadian history might wish to proceed straight to Chapter 2, which examines the early activism of groups interested in bilingualism prior to the 1969 Official Languages Act and federal funding for educational programs. Chapter 3 begins the discussion of the curious role played by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages. The first commissioner, Keith Spicer, went beyond the formal mandate of his office to try to foster greater appreciation of bilingualism among English-speaking Canadians, and he attempted to create more focus on the youth-oriented dimensions of these efforts. Chapter 4 examines developments in the social movements during the Spicer years, from 1970 to 1976, in the years leading up to the election of the Parti Québécois. This chapter pays particular attention both to the often isolated parent groups attempting to use federal funding to convince their school boards to offer better French programs and to the early anti-bilingualism activists who felt deeply threatened by the Official Languages Act and hoped to stop official bilingualism in its tracks.

Chapters 5 to 7 cover the first decade of Canadian Parents for French, from 1977 to 1986. In Chapter 5, I examine the national-level activities of this new social movement of English-speaking parents as it established its infrastructure, published materials on French-language learning, and lobbied the
federal and provincial governments to provide funding for French-language learning. It also faced off against increasingly high-profile anti-bilingualism individuals and groups, including Jock Andrew and the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada. Chapter 6 discusses the role played by Maxwell Yalden, who became the commissioner of official languages as CPF was getting started. He held this office in a period spanning both the first Quebec Referendum and the creation of the Charter of Rights and Freedoms, and the chapter analyzes his efforts to continue and deepen the initial work done by Spicer. Chapter 7 takes a community-based approach to CPF, looking at a number of local efforts to expand FSL programs and French immersion and considering the challenges that these parents faced.

By the mid-1980s, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages was retreating from activist promotion of individual bilingualism, and Chapter 8 looks at what remained of those efforts during the terms of D’Iberville Fortier and Victor Goldbloom in the late 1980s and 1990s. In Chapters 9 and 10, I look at the incredibly tumultuous decade of constitutional crisis from 1986 to 1996 and study the clashing pro- and anti-bilingualism activism that took place against the backdrop of the Meech Lake and Charlottetown Accords, Quebec’s revived language debates, the economic recession of the early 1990s, and the 1995 Quebec Referendum. In Chapter 9, I note that Canadian Parents for French still had some momentum and provide evidence of improved Canadian attitudes toward bilingualism (particularly through polling) in the late 1980s. In Chapter 10, though, which covers the first half of the 1990s, I note that financial cutbacks and a strained constitutional climate caused enrolments in French immersion to stall and public support for French-language learning to decline. Anti-Quebec sentiments fuelled the growth of the Alliance for the Preservation of English in Canada and other groups that took direct aim at French immersion and FSL programming in Canadian schools. This decade sapped much of the momentum and optimism of bilingualism’s supporters. Chapter 11 covers the turn of the millennium, a period when activists and politicians tried to figure out how to move forward and revitalize the bilingualism dossier. Finally, the conclusion pulls together the major findings on how and why activists on both sides of the individual bilingualism debate succeeded or failed in achieving their objectives, and it offers some explanations of the relatively limited progress in making English-speaking Canadians, as a group, more bilingual than they had been in the 1960s.

For advocates of bilingualism, these were exciting decades. They thought that they were helping to build a better Canada and a brighter future for the
next generation. Learning French would open doors and provide enrichment for their children. For opponents of bilingualism, its spread was connected to the decline of the vision of Canada that they cherished. The expansion of French-language learning was deeply threatening to them, and they reacted with hostility and vitriol. It all made for a spirited atmosphere as these social movement activists engaged with society and the state, trying to make the case for their vision of Canada and the place of languages within it. There was creativity along with conflict, perseverance along with passion. Bilingualism was anything but boring; it got to the root of how Canadians thought about themselves. It is to the story of how their campaigns played out that I now turn.