



CANADIAN
PARENTS
FOR FRENCH

Building Linguistic Security

Be Brave,
Speak
French!



Advocacy-Oriented

Research Brief

Have you and/or your child(ren) experienced a sense that your level of French (either spoken or written or both) was not “as good as” that of native speakers?

I have certainly refrained from engaging in conversations in French and even on some occasions not volunteered the information that I can speak in French (even if it could help someone) for fear of my accent and fluency not being “good enough”.

Francophone communities can often seem and feel very elitist and exclusionary. This combined with my own feelings of my French not being good enough and having first-language francophones even say that to my face, have led to sometimes not wanting or feeling unable to continue or participate in French activities and studies.

Yes - for me as an English speaking Quebecker learning French in a French first language school, [I am] often teased about my accent, hesitations looking for words - and knowing that I did not have as much knowledge or history with the culture. And in later life, when visiting in France - being corrected and told that my French was so “regional”.

These comments depicted by speech bubbles were submitted by CPF members and their families in response to a CPF National questionnaire, Fall 2019.

Linguistic insecurity

Qu'est-ce que c'est?

BY **MEIKE WERNICKE** ASSISTANT PROFESSOR, DEPARTMENT OF LANGUAGE AND LITERACY EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA

“...linguistic insecurity is reinforced through the constant monitoring and correction of the language by those who claim to speak a better French, the right kind of French, the “real French” ...”

French in Canada has always held a precarious place, torn between a glorified European past and the necessity to establish itself as a legitimate French language variety on an English-dominant continent (Heller, 1999). Speakers of a minority language, Quebecers, Acadians, and Franco-phones across Western and Northern regions of the country encounter a sense of insecurity not only vis-à-vis the English-speaking majority, but also with regard to the French they speak, which has been stigmatized as a mere patois (Bouchard, 2002). This feeling of insecurity tends to be linked to a

perception that one's accent, choice of words and grammar fail to align with standardized language norms, leading to the fear of being discredited and deprived of an identity as members of the community or society in which these norms circulate (Bretegnier & Ledegen, 2002).

In schools and universities, linguistic insecurity is reinforced through the constant monitoring and correction of the language by those who claim to speak a better French, the right kind of French, the “real French” – as it is

spoken in France or on Radio Canada – not the franco-colombien spoken by youth in Victoria, British Columbia, or the chiac heard among high school students in Moncton, New Brunswick. In many regards, this insecurity about French in Canada can be traced back to the evolution of French from Latin, a centuries-long process that has left us with the idea of French as a homogenous, monocentric language and continues to reinforce the image of the ideal francophone as a monolingual speaker from Paris (Joseph, 1987).

Yes, I have felt [that my French was not good enough] on multiple occasions. This stems both from the difficulty of mastering an additional language and from linguistic insecurity.”



This feeling of insecurity tends to be linked to a perception that one's accent, choice of words and grammar fail to align with standardized language norms ...

How does linguistic insecurity impact teachers?

These manifestations of linguistic insecurity, increasingly documented in francophone communities across Canada (e.g., Boudreau & Perrot, 2005; Freynet & Clément, 2019; Walsh, 2019), are equally significant among second language speakers of French, including the majority of French second language (FSL) teachers who teach French immersion, core, extended or intensive French in our schools. For FSL teachers, this insecurity is most evident with regard to self-perceived language proficiency, lack of confidence vis-à-vis native speakers of French, and the fear of not appearing “bilingual enough.” Aside from having to face the usual question from parents, “Which French do you teach?” as well as sideways glances from colleagues monitoring the unintended slip of an anglicism in the staffroom, the overwhelming orientation to and preference for a native speaker standard more often than not requires negotiating a conflicting dual identity as both learner and teacher of French.

Aspiring to approximate a native speaker standard by investing in ongoing language development means that teachers risk having their authority as French language experts called into question, limiting access to a position as authentic speaker of French, an identity which essentially precludes any sort of language learning. Importantly, teachers’ lack of confidence is a major contributor to not only existing challenges in teacher recruitment but teacher retention in FSL programs, both of which are exacerbating the growing

shortage of French language teachers across Canada (Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019). Many teachers opt to leave their positions in French immersion to teach in the English stream where they feel less scrutinized and have access to a much wider range of readily available textbooks and other instructional resources. As research continues to show, French second language teachers spend substantially more time developing, translating, and adapting teaching materials than teachers in English subject areas, and for many there is little curriculum-related and student support in French (Jacquet & Dagenais, 2010; Lapkin et al., 2006; Wernicke, submitted). Moreover, participating in ongoing educational opportunities in French frequently requires expensive travel to professional conferences or immersion in a francophone region.

Another commonly reported challenge is the lack of daily meaningful interactions in French with colleagues or other French speakers outside the classroom and school, reinforcing fears of “losing one’s French,” especially among teachers in rural contexts who often find themselves as the only French teacher in a school. An important means of support for FSL teachers is to provide access to ongoing professional development, for example in the form of online graduate programs which allow teachers to become part of professional learning communities or to participate in professional learning with other French teachers, both locally and across Canada.

How does linguistic insecurity impact learners?

While research has shown linguistic insecurity impacting teachers’ instructional practices and decisions to access certain kinds of professional development (e.g., Wernicke, 2017), it also reproduces traditional monolingual models of language learning and use, notably for students who may themselves be aspiring to become French teachers in the future. Studies investigating French immersion students, for example, show they hold similar beliefs about having to approximate a native speaker standard of French and often express not feeling entitled to claim a bilingual identity (Roy, 2010).

For many FSL program graduates, their proficiency in French becomes relegated to the past and rarely admitted to or used

in the workplace, even when occasions to communicate in French present themselves. For those who continue their studies in French at university, linguistic insecurity has been evident in undergraduate students writing and oral competency, especially among former core French students (Lappin-Fortin, 2014). Ultimately more emphasis needs to be placed on moving beyond the continued emphasis on linguistic purism, to engage in current debates about the suitability of plurilingual practices in French language programs, in order to build more inclusive FSL classrooms in which heritage and local Indigenous languages, emerging English language learners, and learners with varying abilities are fully valued.

Feeling confident about one's use of a first, second or additional language has a direct effect on whether, with whom, and how one chooses to use these languages.

How do we address linguistic insecurity?

Professional development has always been an important element of ongoing education and support especially among FSL teachers in Canada. In the past, these professional development opportunities have tended to be either centered on pedagogical strategies and exploration of resources and technologies, or have relegated teachers to an exclusive position as language learners, rather than allowing for a combination of linguistic, cultural, and pedagogical development that integrates language and content and aligns with current approaches in the classroom. In order to facilitate these types of learning opportunities, an emerging emphasis is being placed on offering extended workshops (over one or several days or even weeks), to both pre- and in-service teachers, that attend to language development and effective interaction within professional contexts, in conjunction with intercultural learning and decolonizing and inclusive teaching practices that respond to new or redesigned school curricula.

Another crucial need for FSL teachers is adequate support in transitioning into the workplace as well as consistent mentorship at the start of teachers' teaching careers,

who are often faced with adjusting to a full-time position in their first year of teaching due to the current shortage of French language teachers. All these initiatives depend not only on research-informed programs and the expertise of university educators who are responsive to teacher candidates and who are responsive to teacher candidates and their professional obligations. What is also required is administrative support and additional time to implement these much-needed initiatives.

It goes without saying that French has played a central role in Canada's history and that it is important to ensure that all speakers of French in Canada are valued and able to contribute productively to the linguistic vitality of this country. Feeling confident about one's use of a first, second or additional language has a direct effect on whether, with whom, and how one chooses to use these languages. Effort is required to develop and sustain linguistic proficiency, and opportunities and resources must be in place to support ongoing language learning throughout one's lifetime. Shifting outdated thinking about linguistic ideals and norms will lead to a more inclusive language learning landscape. ■

Yes! Whenever we go to France, we constantly are addressed by native speakers in English after we ask questions, etc. in French. When asked why, they state that we are "Québécois" and it is easier to understand our English.

Linguistic (in)security

New name for a long-known phenomenon



BY **DERREK BENTLEY** VICE PRESIDENT, CPF NATIONAL BOARD OF DIRECTORS

The feeling of not being included, not being good enough, having inadequate language skills and lacking confidence have been experienced by French-speakers, especially in minority contexts, for years. Although this phenomenon had been researched for several years in the fields of linguistics and sociology, it has been difficult to pinpoint or identify until fairly recently. In 2014, the Fédération de la jeunesse canadienne-française, FJCF (Federation for French-speaking Canadian Youth), was given the mandate by its members to directly address the issue of linguistic insecurity. The FJCF began to directly address the topic, perhaps for the first time, across sectors and age-groups, with the support of many partners. As this work began, it was soon realized that the issue is present from coast-to-coast-to-coast and was becoming a priority intergenerationally and intersectorially.

As the FJCF's work continued, the focus shifted from understanding linguistic insecurity to linguistic security, defined as, due to a variety of positive social factors, speakers feeling a legitimacy to their speaking when their perceived language norm becomes the language norm (Calvet, 2002). This positive reframing led to seeking solutions rather than dwelling on the many examples of insecurity. A process of idea-gathering took shape through a variety of consultations, targeted interviews and conversation-circles in various sectors and communities across Canada.

This period of information-gathering was capped off with a National Symposium on Linguistic Security in May 2019 that brought together French-speakers from different backgrounds of all ages to identify common objectives and courses

of action. Today, a National Strategy for Linguistic Security has been completed and released on March 20, 2020. This strategy aims to be a call to action in proposing a series of initiatives that a wide variety of sectors can implement based on their resources and realities. The four main sectors are education, the workplace, media and culture, and public policy and politics.

As this on-the-ground work occurs, it is exciting to see solutions develop to address the phenomenon and increase linguistic security for all French-speakers. Throughout the past couple of years, many local and national conferences have touched on the topic, and it was a recurring theme as Canada celebrated the 50th anniversary of the Official Languages Act. As much as linguistic security discussions are important for those who speak French as a first language – particularly for those who notice a gap between their use of French and the accepted 'standard', especially in a minority-community context – it is vital that we also ask ourselves how this phenomenon affects French second and additional language learners and speakers.

Differences in accents, syntax, grammar, vocabulary and other aspects that might make French-first language speakers feel insecure may also have the same effect on second or additional language speakers. These differences can result in a similar loss of confidence and perceived competence. In discussion with French second language speakers from across Canada with a variety of different identities and journeys, it became clear that this phenomenon of lacking linguistic security is rampant in the second language area as well.

These discussions lead to some findings that could perhaps be informative in formulating a strategy or set of initiatives to address linguistic insecurity among French second language speakers.

Where and when does linguistic insecurity happen?

- > Many moments and contexts have the potential to trigger feelings of linguistic insecurity;
- > Hypercorrection that exists in the education system can often lead to negative feelings about the language and possibly choosing a career where French will be used;
- > Francophone community events can be a space where French second language speakers feel as if their French is not “good enough”. Much work needs to be done around understanding and inclusion in the Francophonie.

On linguistic varieties and differences

- > It is impossible to say there is only one French. Many varieties of the language exist throughout the world, within a country, and even from community to community;
- > One’s context largely defines the variety of French one might use. We need to accept that every context is different, and there is beauty in those differences.

Towards increased linguistic security

- > Public spaces across Canada should have bilingual signs at a minimum;
- > Focus on encouragement instead of correction. Anyone speaking French should be encouraged; any accent or vocabulary variations should not be criticized;
- > Representation of all French accents in media and public spaces;
- > Judgement-free environments that encourage use of French outside of a formal education context.

Where we will be in 2039?

- > Governments at all levels support French-second language programs for all those who call Canada home, and learning both of Canada’s official languages is a right for all;
- > Headlines such as “Teacher who barely speaks French hired due to shortage of immersion teachers” are no longer seen because these issues have been resolved;
- > All French-speakers are included in the Francophonie no matter their accent, vocabulary, perceived proficiency, or identity.

Linguistic (in)security is experienced by French first-language speakers as well as French second and additional language learners. Increased understanding and action are needed to open up opportunities for all to use and be encouraged to use French as their means of communication.

The B.C. Francophone Youth Council (Conseil jeunesse francophone de la Colombie-Britannique, CJFCB) put together a committee by and for youth to address the topic.



Ce comité est composé de quatre ambassadeurs :

- > **Cloé Robert**, élève de 12^{ème} année à l’école de Penticton
- > **Geneviève Poitras**, élève de 11^{ème} année à l’école Jules-Verne de Vancouver
- > **Emily Deering**, élève de 12^{ème} année à l’école Carihi de Campbell River et membre du CA du Conseil jeunesse
- > **William Robertson**, adjoint à la programmation des Jeux de la Francophonie Canadienne 2020 pour le volet leadership

Il est encadré et formé par **Suzanne Robillard** – Doctorante au laboratoire de sociolinguistique de l’Université d’Ottawa et membre honorable à vie du Conseil jeunesse.

Building Linguistic Security - Be Brave, Speak French!

CONTRIBUTORS: **DIANE TIJMAN**, CPF NATIONAL, DIRECTOR AT LARGE WITH **BETTY GORMLEY**, **MICHAEL TRYON** AND **NICOLE THIBAUT**, CPF COED REPRESENTATIVES.



What we all can do:

Even the smallest comment or reaction can make one feel judged.

- **As one fluent in French or simply further on your path to bilingualism:** *How can you be more aware of language insecurity in others and support them?*
- **As a learner on the path:** *What can you do to overcome the fear-factor and develop your risk-taking strategies for using French?*



For French Learners:

Be brave, speak French as often as you can.

- Feel free to start a conversation with *“Aujourd’hui j’ai le courage de parler en français”* (eventually you won’t feel a need to).
- Wear a CPF button that says: *“Je parle français”, “J’apprends le français”* or *“J’appuie le français”*.



For Parents:

Praise your child’s efforts in French and celebrate their progress. Value what linguistic variety brings to our society.

- Explain to your child and other parents that there are many varieties of French. These are desirable in sharing the richness of the language.
- Recognize that your child’s teacher may have a different accent than other teachers and that is perfectly okay. They will use different expressions which reflect where they learned the language.
- Be careful when commenting about how another person speaks French.



For Teachers:

Foster a risk-taking attitude throughout your career.

- Encourage colleagues to speak French with you in and outside the school. Find a mentor that will correct your French in a positive and encouraging manner.
- Support your colleagues’ efforts so they can develop their French skills. Be a gracious role model.
- Participate in summer immersion experiences, language “boot camps” or school exchanges, including virtual ones as great ways to build your confidence in a safe, non-threatening setting. Use the language portfolio as a motivational tool.

AT HOME:

Make French part of your daily home life for all members of the family. The more you hear French, the easier it will be to join in.



Watch television and movies in French (with or without subtitles). Listen to French radio and check out the latest in French music. Follow the news in two languages.



Turn your text messaging system on your phone to French. Seek out French audio books and apps for your child.



Make connections with French-speaking neighbours. Together, seek out activities organized by the Francophone community in your area.

IN THE COMMUNITY:

Take the risk, speak French as you attend opportunities and cultural events.



Take in a French festival. Join a French choir. Play recreational hockey in French. Take a French cooking class and enjoy the French conversation, culture and food!



Sign your child up for French activities at the library, spring break or summer camps.



Seek out meeting spaces that bring French language learners and French speakers together.



Ask your regional Francophone centre to put up a sign that says: "Ici, nous accueillons les apprenants du français".

**How does linguistic insecurity affect the use of French around you?
Around your family members?**

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**How can you contribute to increasing linguistic security –
for yourself, your child, and your child's teacher?**

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Supporting Linguistic Security for Language Learners Students and Teachers

BY **WENDY CARR** PROFESSOR OF TEACHING,
FACULTY OF EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA,
CPF NATIONAL, DIRECTOR AT LARGE

Language learning, which comprises the development of intercultural understandings and, for educators, staying abreast of pedagogical innovation, is a life-long endeavour. If this notion were more widely accepted and supported in schools, by school boards, faculties of education and levels of governments, it could dramatically shift the degree to which linguistic insecurity currently acts as a barrier.



The recent OCOL/CPF (2019) report, *Accessing opportunity: A study on challenges in FSL education teacher supply and demand in Canada* positions linguistic insecurity or lack of linguistic confidence as a barrier not only to some students enrolling (or deciding not to enrol) in FSL teacher education programs but also to teachers participating in language professional development. The report links teachers' lack of confidence to challenges in recruitment and retention, which in turn contribute to French teacher shortages across Canada. A lack of confidence is also noted among FSL students (Arnott, in press; Rehner, 2014; TDSB, 2018) where students indicate insecurity about conversing (more than about reading or writing), particularly with Francophones. This lack of confidence is borne out in anecdotal evidence gathered by CPF (samples of which are included in this issue).

The current state of FSL teacher supply and demand in Canada limits access to FSL programming for Canadian youth as seen in various school boards across Canada whose administrations claim that insufficient numbers of French-qualified teachers restrict the number of immersion classes. In addition to the growing demand for French immersion programs and not enough teachers, there is another challenge. According to several recent studies (OPSBA, 2018; Surrey School District 2018), the retention of FSL teachers, once hired in immersion, core or intensive positions, is also an ongoing challenge. FSL teachers' linguistic insecurity (also referred to as lack of linguistic confidence) is cited as a contributing factor (Kline-Martin, 2018; Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, 2019).

Recommendations emerging from the 2018 State of FSL Teacher Supply in Canada Roundtable hosted by CPF included implementing measures to support teachers in their efforts to improve their language proficiency and linguistic and cultural confidence. The 2018 CPF policy statement, *FSL Proficiency Levels and Assessment*¹, provides a useful and proactive perspective for thinking about linguistic security. It suggests celebrating and encouraging ongoing student and teacher language learning during all stages of their trajectories through the use of CEFR-calibrated portfolios. These have been shown to provide a consistent, universally-understood framework for self-directed monitoring of one's language learning over time, which is both useful and empowering for learners at all ages. (See Arnott & Vignola (2018) for analysis of the use of language portfolios with future FSL teachers.)

¹ CPF Network public policy statements: <https://cpf.ca/en/research-advocacy/advocacy/network-public-policy-position-statements-and-white-papers>

Students and teachers need ongoing opportunities for engaged language use, ideally with some immersive occasions in francophone settings, in order to keep their levels of linguistic proficiency and security strong.

Language learning, which comprises the development of intercultural understandings and, for educators, staying abreast of pedagogical innovation, is a life-long endeavour. If this notion were more widely accepted and supported in schools, by school boards, faculties of education and levels of governments, it could dramatically shift the degree to which linguistic insecurity currently acts as a barrier. A dynamic, long-term approach could contribute to:

- students feeling confident about and wanting to continue their language learning during and after schooling,
- pre-service teacher applicants feeling confident enough to apply to FSL teacher education options knowing there would be ongoing language learning built into their program,

- teachers in FSL teaching positions feeling fully secure; examples include those who
 - accept a position (because FSL is a high demand area) but without feeling confident about their proficiency, leading them eventually to leave the French stream,
 - enjoy teaching core or intensive French and would like to try teaching immersion but feel “stuck” at their current level of proficiency,
 - do not have much opportunity to improve their level of proficiency due to little French interaction outside their classroom and/or pressures of teaching French (including lack of resources and/or questions about the quality of their French).

If schools, school boards and faculties of education were to acknowledge that ongoing linguistic development is a necessary educational/professional requirement, this stance could shift the current way of thinking where linguistic proficiency is viewed as a static point rather than an active “work in progress”. For graduates of FSL programs who have attained a certain level of proficiency at graduation, this level represents a point along their trajectory rather than a final destination. Students and teachers need ongoing opportunities for engaged language use, ideally with some immersive occasions in francophone settings, in order to keep their levels of linguistic proficiency and security strong. This requires sustained effort, structure and support.

CPF Network Calls to Action

School & Boards

1 Encourage the use of language portfolios in schools to develop student autonomy in relation to their own language learning and progress, e.g., <https://www.unb.ca/fredericton/second-language/research-publications/current-projects/schoolbased-languageportfolio.html>

2 Support ongoing language learning as key part of teacher professional development. This requires funding/planning for immersive experiences and other forms of professional learning.

3 Support the use of language portfolios as a proactive, self-directed structure for charting ongoing learning (e.g., <https://www.caslt.org/en/boutique-en/portfolio-for-teachers-en>)

Provincial/Territorial & Federal Governments

4 Support funding for language learning for teachers (including cultural and pedagogical components). This can take the form of evening, weekend, online courses and/or summer immersion experiences.

Faculties of Education

5 Support the notion that pre-service FSL teachers are language learners who will continue learning in their teacher education program and as beginning teachers. Support the use of pre-service teacher language portfolios, e.g., <https://lled.educ.ubc.ca/language-portfolio>

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Linguistic insecurity - Qu'est-ce que c'est?

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Additional Resources

The Osez, Dare! Website provides reflection tools and resources to support the use of French, including videos targeting high school students and university students created with the support of Canadian Parents for French. <https://osez-dare.aadnc-aandc.gc.ca>

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Linguistic (in)security: New name for a long-known phenomenon

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To obtain additional printed copies, contact the CPF National Office: cpf@cpf.ca.

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Have you and/or your child(ren) experienced a sense that your level of French (either spoken or written or both) was not “as good as” that of native speakers?

Yes – On a regular basis in front of peers, colleagues and others. I feel specifically targeted and singled out when it comes to written French.

Although I did have experiences of insecurity, I also experience encounters with many encouraging native speakers who complimented my French, stated that I have no accent, and suggested they would hire me to teach in a French school because my French is better than many teachers there ... these types of comments did offer me encouragement at the time and helped me build my risk-taking skills, to continue learning and using French to eventually improve over time.

I regularly experience a feeling of difference because of my accent in French, which is not Franco-Canadian. I have been relieved in the past when my children are recognized for having a French-Canadian accent.



I do not speak French myself, but I have witnessed French immersion students (in high school) being told by Francophone students that their French is “no good” or, “you don’t speak good French”.



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