



**Language Matters:  
A Policy-Research Seminar on Language Acquisition and Newcomer Integration**

**October 22, 2009  
Library and Archives Canada  
395 Wellington Street  
Ottawa, Ontario**

It is widely believed that acquiring the language(s) of the host society is critical to all aspects of the integration of newcomers – economic, social, cultural and political. In Canada, knowledge of either English or French is needed to acquire Canadian citizenship. And while linguistic diversity has always been a hallmark of Canadian society, this diversity has deepened with recent waves of immigration. Data show that in 2006, upon arrival, as many as 33% of newcomers had no ability in either of Canada’s official languages, and only 13% spoke either English or French as a first language.

There is overwhelming evidence that official language skills, including occupation-specific language skills and effective workplace communication, are important for positive labour market outcomes among newcomers. Recognizing that language skills are key to newcomers’ success and their ability to fully participate in their communities, the Government of Canada, in cooperation with provincial governments and other partners, offers a range of language training and related programs across the country to youth and adult newcomers. These programs are intermittently reviewed and updated to ensure that they are in tune with the changing needs of Canada’s newcomers.

Despite these initiatives, language remains a barrier to labour market success for many immigrants, especially skilled workers. Employers are finding that skilled workers’ ability in English or French - for which there is no minimum threshold under the current points system of selection - is not sufficient for the jobs they are applying for. At the same time, newcomers’ linguistic integration also depends on the receptivity of those listening to them, especially native speakers of English and French.

There is also evidence, not surprisingly, of a significant number of newcomers who work full-time in a language other than English or French. Ethnic enclaves can provide opportunities for newcomers to earn a living despite the inability to communicate fluently in an official language. And while ethnic enclaves and ethnic media offer social networks and initial settlement support to newcomers in their native language, heavy dependence on the enclave may weaken their linguistic and overall integration into mainstream society.

Maintenance of heritage languages poses a further complexity. Passing on the ancestral language to subsequent generations is valued by many ethno-cultural and Aboriginal communities, and is recognized as an important way of maintaining cultural diversity within a multicultural society such as Canada. In an era marked by increasing globalization and international trade, knowledge of languages other than English and French could be an asset to Canadian businesses and government.

This seminar will provide both national and international perspectives on the complex relationship between language acquisition and newcomer integration, with the twin objectives of informing policy discussions and identifying future research directions.

**DRAFT PROGRAM**

**8:00 – 8:45 Registration and Coffee**

**8:45 – 9:00 Welcome and Introduction**

- Howard Duncan, Metropolis Project

**9:00 – 10:30 Language Training and Testing: National and International Perspectives**

The Government of Canada in cooperation with provincial governments and other partners offers a wide range of language training and related programs across the country to youth and adult newcomers to help them along the integration continuum. What is the experience of various groups of newcomers in accessing these training programs? Are specialized programs required to cater to the needs of specific groups, including learners with low literacy? What are the attributes of an assessment system that both empowers language learners and measures the effectiveness of their training? Are there lessons to be learned from the experience of Europe, where some countries have begun to implement rigorous language testing regimes – both before and after arrival in the host country?

*Panellists:*

- Deborah Tunis, Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada (Chair)
- Yves Saint-Germain, Integration Branch, CIC: *Enhancing Language Skill Assessment: Real Results for Newcomers* (bilingual presentation)<sup>1</sup>
- Kenise Murphy Kilbride, Ryerson University: *Striving for Voice: Thoughts on language acquisition and integration offered by women who do not yet speak English*
- Rachel Wernick, Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, HRSDC: *Understanding the interaction of language, literacy and essential skills - possible policy directions to address the needs of immigrants with low literacy and essential skills*
- Gabrielle Hogan-Brun, University of Bristol: *Language Testing Regimes in Europe*

**10:30 – 10:45 Break**

**10:45 – 12:15 Language in the Workplace**

For newcomers - especially skilled workers - seeking to integrate into the Canadian labour market, official language ability is a critical asset. What have been the changes over time in the language knowledge of newcomers? What are the official language learning patterns over time, class of entry and work experience, and what is the relationship between levels of official language proficiency of recently arrived immigrants and their labour market achievements? Is there a gap between the employers' and the job-seeking immigrants' perceptions of language ability and communication skills? Is accent a barrier to employment of immigrants? How can occupation-specific analyses facilitate linguistic integration? If language ability is so critical to the labour market success of skilled workers, should a minimum threshold for official language ability be introduced in the initial selection process?

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<sup>1</sup> Simultaneous interpretation will be provided. Listening devices will be available at the registration desk.

*Panellists:*

- Heidi Smith, Immigration Branch, CIC (Chair)
- Monica Boyd, University of Toronto: *Immigration Trends, Language Skills and the Labour Market Integration of Recent Immigrants*
- Silma Hudson Roddau, Progress Career Planning Institute: *Language Barriers to Employment Faced by Internationally Educated Professionals*
- Wendy Swedlove, Canadian Tourism Human Resource Council: *Occupational Language Analyses Helping Newcomers Integrate into the Tourism Industry*
- Alanna MacDougall, Ryerson University Graduate: *Hearing Audible Minorities: Accent, Discrimination, and the Integration of Immigrants into the Canadian Labour Market*

**12:15 – 1:15**      **Lunch Break** (*Please explore the nearby restaurants and cafes.*)

**1:15 – 2:30**      **Heritage Languages, Integration and Globalization**

One of the objectives of *The Canadian Multiculturalism Act* is to “preserve and enhance the use of languages other than English and French, while strengthening the status and use of the official languages of Canada”. What does the emphasis on integration – through acquisition of English or French - mean for the maintenance of other languages? Are heritage languages being passed on to successive generations? What impact does the consumption of non-English or non-French media have on Canadian communities in terms of social cohesion and participation in civic life? How important is multilingualism for individuals and institutions that serve newcomers and help them during the settlement process? Is knowledge of languages other than English and French an asset for Canadians – and Canada - in a globalizing environment?

*Panellists:*

- Satya Brink, National Learning Policy Research, HRSDC (Chair)
- Jim Cummins, University of Toronto: *Wanted: A Language Policy for Canada in an Era of Globalization*
- Jean-Pierre Corbeil, Statistics Canada: *La transmission de la langue ancestrale / Passing on the ancestral language in Canada* (presentation in French)
- Catherine Murray, Simon Fraser University: *Not Another Solitude: Third Language Media Matters*

**2:30 – 2:45**      **Break**

**2:45 – 4:00**      **Language and Social Integration**

While a considerable amount of research exists on the relationship between language and labour market integration, less is known about how host language and heritage language skills affect newcomers’ social integration. Is immigrants’ propensity towards integrative behaviour, like acquisition of citizenship, linked to their host country language skills? What are the links between official language usage - or lack of it - and indicators of civic participation such as voting, volunteering and membership in associations? How do “linguicism” and other forms of discrimination affect newcomer integration and inter-group relations? What is the role of language in connecting Canadians, both new and established, as well as connecting generations within families, through socially integrative activities such as sports?

DRAFT PROGRAM – SUBJECT TO CHANGE

*Panellists:*

- Ümit Kiziltan, Citizenship and Multiculturalism Branch, CIC (Chair)
- Monica Boyd, University of Toronto: *Joining and Belonging: Language Use and the Civic Participation of Immigrants*
- Richard Bourhis, Université du Québec à Montréal: *Experiencing discrimination and linguicism in Quebec and Canada* (bilingual presentation)
- Parminder Singh, CBC/OMNI TV: *Hockey Night* in Punjabi : Connecting Generations, Connecting Canadians

**4:00 – 4:15      Wrap-up and Conclusions**

- Howard Duncan, Metropolis Project

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*Citizenship and Multiculturalism Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada*

*Integration Branch, Citizenship and Immigration Canada*

*Office of Literacy and Essential Skills, Human Resources and Skills Development Canada*