

*For Immediate Release*

## **Bilingualism Retains Strong Appeal Among Canadians French Remains Second Language of Choice for Most Anglophones**

**Ottawa, February 26 2004** – Bilingualism's appeal remains high among Canadians. It has special meaning for new Canadians, and is popular among younger Canadians.

In the context of the country's deepening multiculturalism and its position in the global economy, Canadians are convinced of the importance of speaking more than one language. A large majority thinks that learning a second language is important and agrees that those who speak more than one language will be more successful. And French is the first choice of most Anglophones when considering which second language their children should learn.

Fully 77% of Anglophones outside Quebec say that it is important for their children to learn to speak a language other than English, and 74% say that the most important second language for their children to learn is French.

Of those Anglophones outside Quebec who do not already speak French, 75% say they wish they did – the same number as reported in a survey conducted over 25 years ago.

These are some key findings of a survey of 2002 Canadians by the Centre for Research and Information on Canada (CRIC). The poll was conducted on CRIC's behalf by Environics Research Group between December 11 and 29, 2003. Results for a survey of this size are considered accurate to within plus or minus 2.2%, nineteen times out of twenty.

While the Census reports that only 7% of Anglophones outside of Quebec know both of Canada's official languages, a majority (53%) disagrees with the view that English is the only language needed to be successful in Canada. An even larger number (75%) reject the proposition that learning a second language is one of the least important subjects for students to study in school.

### **Perceived Benefits of Bilingualism**

The survey results suggest that two factors are foremost in shaping attitudes to learning a second language: perceived economic benefits; and a desire for personal fulfillment. Eighty-eight percent of Canadians agree that in today's global economy, people who speak more than one language will be more successful, and 82% agree that in Canada, if you speak French as well as English, you have a better chance of finding a good job. Overall, 85% of Canadians agree that learning a second language is one of the more fulfilling things a person can do.

Two of every three Canadians agree that living in a country with two official languages is one of the defining factors of what it means to be Canadian. Similarly, 65% of Anglophones outside Quebec say that learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help to keep the country united. Thus, an appreciation of Canada's linguistic duality is partially responsible for Canadians' continuing interest in learning the other official language.

### **Bilingualism and New Canadians**

English-French bilingualism has great appeal among Allophones and immigrants. While those who speak a language other than English or French have a natural inclination to want their children to learn it, most support the idea of English and French as Canada's official languages. In fact, among Canadians outside Quebec, immigrants are more likely than their domestic-born counterparts to say that they wish they could speak French, and that living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian.

Most importantly, throughout Canada, 75% of immigrants agree that "having two official languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants from different cultures and ethnic backgrounds," compared with 69% of those born in Canada. Among those who immigrated to Canada from a country outside of Europe or the United States, agreement rises to 83%.

"This is crucial," says Dr. Andrew Parkin, Co-Director of CRIC, "because it confirms the relevance of official bilingualism to new Canadians and its compatibility with multiculturalism." Parkin notes that previous surveys have shown that those Canadians who are supportive of multiculturalism also tend to be more supportive of official bilingualism.

The survey shows that, while languages other than French and English are clearly important to many, French is the most important second language for a majority of non-Francophone Canadians. Only 35% of Anglophones outside Quebec agree that it is more important for children in Canada to learn other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French. Sixty-three percent disagree.

Among immigrants living outside Quebec, 43% say that it is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages, than it is for them to learn French. A majority (55 %) disagree.

### **Bilingualism and Youth**

Bilingualism is strongly supported by Canadians in all age groups. However, young people often stand out as the most enthusiastic. For example, Anglophone Canadians outside of Quebec, aged 18-29, are slightly more likely (68%) than their older counterparts to agree that living in a country with two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian. They are more likely than the other age groups to say that having two official

languages has made Canada a more welcoming place for immigrants (72%), and that learning to speak French is an important way in which Canadians can help keep the country united (72%).

“Support for bilingualism among young Canadians and immigrants testifies to its continuing importance to the country,” adds Parkin. He pointed out that this confirmation comes at a time when the federal government has set a target of doubling the number of bilingual high-school graduates by the year 2013. A national symposium on official languages, organized by the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages and several other partners, will be held in Toronto from March 2 to 4 (see <http://www.ocol-clo.gc.ca/symposium/>).

Among Anglophones outside Quebec, young women tend to be more supportive of bilingualism than young men. For instance, within this group, 64% of women between the ages of 18 and 29 disagree with the suggestion that “in Canada, English is the only language you need to know in order to be successful,” compared with 50% of men in the same age group. The number of women in this group who say it is important for their children to learn a second language is 87%, 12 points higher than for their male counterparts. And one in three men in the same age group who do not already speak French do not express regret – that is, they disagree with the proposition that they wish they spoke French – while only one in five of their female counterparts feel the same.

### **Regional Variations**

Quebecers remain extremely supportive of bilingualism; 98% of Francophone Quebecers say that it is important for children to learn a second language, and 93% say that the most important second language for their children to learn is English.

Regionally, outside Quebec, Anglophones in Atlantic Canada are far and away the strongest backers of bilingualism, while support tends to be lower in the West. Nearly nine out of ten Atlantic Canadians agree that it is important for children to learn a language other than English; in the West, about three-quarters agree. Over three-quarters of Atlantic Canadian Anglophones say that living in a country that has two official languages is one of the things that really defines what it means to be Canadian, while the number in agreement in Western Canada is 56%.

In every province outside Quebec, a majority of Anglophone respondents say that French is the most important second language for children to learn. The figures range from 88% in Atlantic Canada to 58% in BC. Looking at all Anglophones outside Quebec, 74% opt for French, and 23% a language other than French (including 6% who choose Spanish, and 5% who choose Chinese).

Thirty-eight percent of Anglophones in BC mentioned a language other than French as the most important second language – more than in any other province. In this province, fully 16% opted for Chinese, and this figure rises to 28% for respondents in Vancouver.

After Chinese in BC, the specific language other than French most likely to be mentioned on a provincial basis was Cree in Saskatchewan – 11% of Anglophones in the province said this was the most important second language for children to learn.

Respondents in BC were also the most likely to agree that it is more important for children in Canada to learn to speak other languages like Spanish or Chinese than it is for them to learn to speak French. Forty-seven percent of Anglophones in the province agree, while 50% disagree.

These survey results are analyzed in more detail in CRIC Paper No. 13, *Bilingualism - Part of Our Past or Part of our Future?* In this paper, Dr. Andrew Parkin of CRIC and Dr. André Turcotte of Carleton University review 40 years of public opinion research on bilingualism, isolating key trends and detailing current attitudes on the subject. The paper is available on the CRIC website, [www.cric.ca](http://www.cric.ca).

The additional results from the survey being released today are available in the accompanying graphics package posted on the CRIC website.

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