

## **The Comparative Advantages of Bilingualism on the Job Market: Survey of Studies**

**GHISLAIN SAVOIE**

CHIEF, SOCIAL RESEARCH GROUP, STRATEGIC RESEARCH AND ANALYSIS  
DIRECTORATE  
DEPARTMENT OF CANADIAN HERITAGE

### **Introduction**

The idea of undertaking this review came to me when I was watching television programs on second-language immersion and the great popularity of - and debates surrounding - these programs in Canada (more than 300,000 students are now registered in an immersion program). I was particularly struck by the consistency with which the students or their parents cited economic reasons for registering in immersion programs. In effect, although they frequently cited cultural and 'patriotic reasons', nearly all those interviewed said that they had decided to learn the other official language because it would more easily help them find a job or a better job.

Since second-language immersion programs have existed in Canada for twenty-five years, one might wonder what has become of the students who emerged from these immersion programs with the hope of finding greater success on the job market. Did they in fact find a job or a better job thanks to their knowledge of both official languages? Given the amount of time that has gone by, the large amounts of money that have been allocated to these programs and the large number of people who have participated in them, one might reasonably have thought that a number of program evaluations or in-depth studies would have been conducted to answer these questions. It was, therefore, with the intention of compiling the conclusions of these evaluations or studies that I initially undertook this project.

However, my search for documents, which is not exhaustive, has revealed that very few published surveys have been done to attempt to determine in a rigorous and scientific manner the comparative rate of success on the job market of students who have completed an immersion program, in comparison with that of the general student population. The surveys that have followed up on students after their participation in immersion have, above all, tried to measure such things as the quality or level of retention, several years later, of the language learned in immersion. More general studies look at certain aspects of the issue from the economic angle of employment, but most often, the conclusions relate to very small samples (sometimes a few dozen candidates or even fewer) or amount to a few generalizations that are accompanied by little empirical evidence.

This lack of research on graduates of immersion programs is no doubt a result of the difficulty encountered in finding these persons several years after their entry into the job market and in creating valid samples. In effect, there are no effective and affordable ways to create samples that are wide enough for solid conclusions to be drawn, and the researchers have had to neglect this subject. However, the partial elements available to us indicate that very conclusive results might be obtained if more detailed studies could be undertaken. The summary studies we have examined, which consist of interviews with former immersion students who have entered the job market lead me to conclude, with reservations, that immersion has helped them find a job. I will come back to these encouraging results later.

While there may have been few methodical studies done on access to the job market of persons who have benefited from immersion, which remains a promising field of study, there has been quite a bit more work done on the links between language and income. One of the prominent leaders in this area is Professor François Vaillancourt. Census data, among other things, lend themselves more easily to this type of analysis. To our knowledge, the studies looking at these issues were done mainly by researchers in Quebec and were based primarily on the situation in

Quebec. In addition, the great majority of these studies were done in the 1960s and 1970s. This is no doubt explained by the specific sociological and historical situation in Quebec, where these issues are of particular interest, and by the existential questions being asked by Quebec Francophones and Anglophones regarding their future and their fair place in the economy. It seems to me that there have been fewer such studies since the mid-1980s.

As the title of my paper indicates, I plan to survey the main conclusions flowing from the studies on the comparative advantages of bilingualism on the job market. Therefore, this is not intended as primary research; rather, it is intended as an overview of the conclusions that have come out of existing research in this field. This work, however, is not strictly a summary of these observations. I have analysed them with a critical eye, making judgments as to their explanatory value, pointing out some conceptual and methodological shortcomings, and identifying, where necessary, promising avenues for further research.

This document focuses on the bilingual individual who is trying to sell his or her labour power on the job market. However, from the economic point of view, the advantages of bilingualism are not evident solely at the individual level. Several researchers also look at bilingual companies (Professor Grin and Professor Breton, for example). Thus, aside from the fact that it has bilingual employees, a company may very well adopt a policy of bilingualism in its advertising or may use translators and interpreters for its communications with persons outside the company, rather than hiring bilingual personnel. However, for the purposes of this survey, I will focus on bilingual individuals, looking at the other levels of analysis only where this is relevant.

As any economist will tell you, measuring the economic advantages of bilingualism is much more difficult than measuring its costs. The benefits to be drawn from an investment in languages are as difficult to measure as the private and social benefits of education or of a library: it is understood that education pays and that a library is an investment in the future, but one would have to be very clever to truly measure all their economic benefits.

The problem is that, in addition to the direct benefits that can flow from education, a library or, in the present case, knowledge of both official languages (higher salaries, access to jobs and promotions, increased mobility, larger clienteles, and so on) and that are relatively easy to measure empirically through compilation of statistics, surveys or polls, and so on, there are also a large number of other benefits that are plausible, more subtle, less direct, but no less real and that do not lend themselves as well to quantitative measurement. For example, there is reason to believe that knowledge of both official languages may lower the rate at which people drop out of school and may promote better social integration and increased participation in the job market for communities that would otherwise be marginalized, and thus may increase their contribution and productivity by optimizing use of their human capital. Knowledge of the language of the "other" makes a bilingual individual more sensitive to the culture and tastes of clients and partners; it may also encourage a decompartmentalizing of regional economies and ensure freer circulation of goods, persons, services and ideas; it may help create a better climate of social peace and conditions conducive to a healthy economy by promoting better communication and harmonious relations between all Canadians, in all regions of the country. Canada's bilingual image may make Canada more attractive for tourism and for certain types of investments, and so on. The importance of these indirect benefits of bilingualism is often evident only in the absence of bilingualism, and therefore eludes empirical measurement. However, that which is easy to measure is not necessarily more important. Looking only at the directly and easily quantifiable aspects is unacceptable reductionism, since the reality is much more rich and complex.

Empirical demonstration therefore does not always suffice for measuring the economic benefits of bilingualism. One must use the art of words and the force of logic and common sense to illustrate some indirect benefits. To attempt to convince the reader of the validity of our demonstrations, we will therefore use empirical data, where this is possible and desirable, but, in other cases, we will have to rely on good old common sense, on Cartesian logic, and on the analyses and informed

opinions of practitioners, academics and researchers. Bilingual individuals are themselves often in a better position to say whether their bilingualism has produced economic benefits (access to jobs, promotions, larger clientele and so on).

In order to structure the analysis of the data collected in a logical and coherent fashion, I have chosen two main subjects and have centred working hypotheses useful for argumentation around those subjects.

### **Bilingualism and employment**

#### a) Working hypothesis on access to employment

- Bilingual candidates can enter the job market more easily and can change jobs more easily than can unilingual persons.

This hypothesis presumes that bilingual persons seeking employment have an advantage on the job market. At worst, as Professor Grenier wrote, bilingualism has a neutral impact (in all logic, the only situation in which bilingualism might be a handicap is when an employer is a Francophobe or Anglophobe.) In principle, all positions are open to bilingual candidates: they have access to positions requiring French, English or both, and they therefore have an advantage over persons who know only one of the two languages.

One might take the hypothesis even further and presume that the candidate's bilingualism may give him an advantage for positions that have no language requirements. One might presume that, if two candidates are equally qualified, but one is bilingual, an employer may prefer the bilingual candidate, even if the position does not require bilingualism. In effect, an employer may believe that a candidate who has learned other languages has shown discipline, a spirit of initiative and a predisposition to learn new things. Persons who have gone through immersion say quite frequently in surveys that the learning of French has made it easier for them to learn other languages or skills. Two articles in *CPF National News* (Issue 66, Fall 1994) that support this have revealing titles:

"Learning a Third Language is Surprisingly Easy" and

"French Immersion Helped Me Learn Indonesian"

In a more complex study of Anglophone students who had taken French as their major in university, D.G. John describes as follows the multiple impact that these former students whom he interviewed attributed to learning French and which they said helped them in their career:

"The French Majors were overwhelmingly satisfied with their choice of discipline [86%]. They felt that their major had contributed valuable knowledge areas and skills to their development: communication skills in French and knowledge of French culture; analytical and critical skills, creative and research skills [...] Leading the way were the computer skills [...] and flexibility, adaptability or willingness to learn; also mentioned repeatedly were general communications skills, good organization and time management, research skills as well as management and business skills."

In this context, Professor Chorney quotes an employer who says that "having bilingual skills in a rapidly changing world made the employee much more flexible and more valuable to the company in their capacity to adapt."

We found that, except for surveys of former immersion students, very few studies have been done that have tried to establish a relationship between bilingualism and access to employment. Most

of the studies that look at the benefits of bilingualism on the job market examine the income gaps between bilingual and non-bilingual persons, meaning that the subjects have already reached the job market. Interesting surveys could certainly be done on the matter of access to employment, and various approaches can be envisaged.

Vaillancourt (1988) devotes a concise but eloquent chapter to the matter of participation in the Quebec job market on the basis of language attributes in 1985. He shows clearly that all bilingual Francophones, Anglophones and allophones have a distinctly higher level of participation in the job market than do unilingual persons, all categories combined. The gaps are even greater for women:

**Table 1-Participation in Job Market by Language Group in Quebec. Men and Women, 1985**

Language group	Men		Women	
	RCR	%	RCR	%
Unilingual Anglophones	62.4	0.91	38.5	0.88
Bilingual Anglophones	78.7	1.15	64.2	1.47
Unilingual Francophones	68.3	1.00	43.7	1.00
Bilingual Francophones	80.6	1.18	63.2	1.45
Anglophone allophones	64.1	0.94	40.7	0.93
Francophone allophones	65.2	0.95	46.2	1.06
Bilingual allophones	76.2	1.12	62.5	1.43
Other allophones	42.2	0.62	25.7	0.59
Anglophones-Francophones	76.3	0.99	46.2	1.06
All	72.9	-	50.0	-

Source: Calculations made by F. Vaillancourt on the basis of microdata from the 1986 census.

RCR: Reference Category Ratio (unilingual Francophones).

Here also, one would have to refine the analysis to determine the importance of bilingualism relative to other explanatory factors, such as education.

Besides this type of study or the surveys of former immersion students, whose samples sometimes leave something to be desired, one can imagine other types of research that would shed more light in this area. Instead of interviewing immersion graduates, who are hard to reach, it would be easier to survey heads of companies by establishing a representative sample of the various types of establishments in various areas of the country, to determine the importance of bilingualism in their employment criteria. The data banks of the employment centres could eventually be a source that could be used in this regard. Professor Chorney conducted his little survey of Canadian companies in this connection, and although he acknowledges that his sample is not completely scientific, the results he obtained are very interesting. The large companies he contacted employ some 120,000 persons in the manufacturing, business, construction, pharmaceutical and other

sectors. Among other things, he concludes that the survey's results indicate that from the employee's point of view, bilingualism is of clear benefit for finding a job and keeping it. This observation applies to both Quebec and the rest of Canada. It would be appropriate to conduct a survey on a wider scale in this regard.

While the results obtained in Quebec are quite revealing (see Vaillancourt above), it is also interesting to look at the situation elsewhere in Canada. The surveys of former immersion students in English Canada may differ in the questions asked, but they largely converge with respect to the affirmative answers from respondents who feel that their learning of the second language was an asset for getting the job they were in (see Footnote 41 for references to such studies). For the purposes of this demonstration, we will give only a few examples here.

A survey of 414 graduates of French immersion programs and enriched core programs in Toronto in 1988 reveals that 29% of the subjects had originally chosen these programs with a view to their future career, but that this reason is given by 40% of them today. When asked whether knowledge of French helped them find a full-time job, 36% said yes. In addition, when asked whether they use French in their work, 58% said yes. The predominant responses were to the effect that "being bilingual was an edge in getting a job or getting promoted" (59%). The Annual Report of the Commissioner of Official Languages for 1994 (page 100) refers to a similar survey (*FSL: Learning French Matters in Toronto Schools*) that draws much the same conclusions. When asked whether they would choose the same type of studies if they had it to do again, the Report notes that 98% of the graduates of immersion programs and 86% of the graduates of enriched core programs said yes.

In their study on various aspects of immersion conducted with a group of 21 subjects in the Ottawa area, MacFarlane and Wesche examined the impact that immersion has had on the subjects' adult life. The most frequent response was "better job opportunities." Similarly, in their study of 78 immersion graduates in Saskatchewan, Hussum and Bryce ("A Survey of Graduates from a Saskatchewan French Immersion High School," *The Canadian Modern Language Review*, Vol. 48, No. 1, 1991) found that 35% of the respondents indicated that they enrolled in immersion to increase their choice of jobs or to find better jobs.

**Question: Main Reason for Entering French Immersion?**

<b>Reason</b>	<b>Number</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
Become bilingual/Learn second language	24	40.0
For more/better job opportunities	21	35.0
Mother tongue of parent	8	13.0
Learn about another culture	4	6.7
Educational value	1	1.7
Like French teacher	1	1.7
Best friend went into it first	1	1.7

However, we estimate that this response should be something like 56%, rather than 35%, owing to the poor wording of the question "Main Reason for Entering French Immersion?" To this question, 40% of the subjects replied "To become bilingual/learn second language." Thus worded, the question called for this tautological answer because, in reality, it can logically be presumed

that 100% of subjects who enrol in immersion courses do so to become bilingual. The question that should have been asked, to move beyond this primary reply stage was "Why do you want to become bilingual/learn another language?" I arrived at 56% by dividing the 40% on a pro rata basis, using the responses to the other responses given. Another methodological error I encountered a few times in these questionnaires was that of asking the candidates "Why did you choose immersion?" This is an error because, very often, the choice is made by the parents, not by the respondent, who was very young at the time. It would be better to ask a question such as "What advantage do you see in immersion?" or "What impact has immersion had on your life?"

On the basis of the studies presented here and others I have consulted, one may conclude that knowledge of the other official language is indeed an advantage for access to the job market, and this statement seems to have been valid for all of Canada in the early 1990s.

However, these results do not tell us to what extent bilingualism was a decisive factor in the obtaining of a position, or whether it was only one among other factors. More in-depth research is needed.

It would be appropriate to refine the studies further to research the matter in greater depth and determine the importance of other competing factors to explain the results. One might ask to what extent other variables, such as the age of the bilingual candidates, their general level of education, their sex, their occupation, the geographic location or their employment sector, may have played a part in their getting a job. For example, one might think that, in some employment sectors, a candidate's bilingualism would be a negligible factor (extraction of raw materials, agriculture, manufacturing and so on), while, in others, bilingualism might be very advantageous (business, administrative services, communications and so on).

Similarly, the benefit is probably not the same for men as for women. Women often work in jobs involving front-line contact with clients (e.g. secretarial, receptionist, sales, and waitressing positions), positions in which bilingualism is frequently sought. It would therefore not be surprising if more women than men in a given region, with a given level of training and so on, were to say that bilingualism helped them find a job. Along the same lines, it would be interesting to further the research and better assess the importance of bilingualism for access to positions in the sectors of the future that are now emerging (communications, services and other knowledge-intensive fields).

The studies on access to employment that I have examined do not go very far in breaking down the results on the basis of the various dimensions of which I just spoke. However, researchers who have studied the relationships between language and income have gone much further in this direction. I will give a brief overview of this research field.

b) Working hypothesis regarding employment income:

- Bilingual employees earn more than unilingual employees.

### **Conceptual and methodological problems**

Several approaches have been taken to establish a link between the bilingualism of individuals and their employment income. The major challenge in this review is not so much to describe each of these approaches and their nuances as to take stock of the results obtained and draw general conclusions. In effect, it is very difficult to compile or add up the results obtained in different studies and arrive at a grand total. The research done in this field is far from cumulative. Often, researchers do not seem inclined to further existing studies, and approach the question from different angles. They do not always adopt the same concepts, indicators or control variables, and do not all agree on the phenomenon to be explained (the dependent variable of employment

income). For example, some use the definition of bilingualism used in the censuses (which is not without slippage or subjectivity, since the respondent is called upon to evaluate himself or herself), while others use more rigid or more flexible definitions, something which, of course produces different results. In his 1983 survey of the literature with Robert Lacroix, Professor Vaillancourt has succeeded, if not in compiling the various studies he surveyed, at least in reconciling them, in explaining why they did not all arrive at the same result, even though they related to the same populations.

In addition, the results vary as a result of so many different factors that one must constantly make nuances and be very careful not to draw premature conclusions. Thus, the studies often show substantial variations in the income of bilingual persons, depending on mother tongue, age, level of education, sex, ethnic origin, sector of the economy, type of employment and so on, and, at the same time, depending on when the survey was done and on the geographic area considered. Obviously, I cannot provide a detailed breakdown of these data in this short working paper. I will limit myself here to the major trends that seem to have been emerging over the last twenty years, omitting the details and all their nuances.

In his previously mentioned analysis of job market participation in Quebec in 1985, Vaillancourt hypothesizes that:

"the relationship between linguistic characteristics and job market participation is similar to that which exists between linguistic characteristics and employment income. Thus, bilingual individuals are more likely not only to work, but also to work for a greater number of weeks than [unilingual persons], since they have much more human capital than do the latter."

Even if, theoretically, this hypothesis were valid, I would be more inclined to suppose that the relationship between bilingualism and job market participation is closer than the relationship between bilingualism and income. Take the hypothetical example of a waiter or waitress in a restaurant. A bilingual waitress may be able to get a job more easily than a unilingual waitress, but it does not necessarily follow that she will automatically be paid more than her unilingual colleague. The direct economic benefit of her bilingualism might relate only to access to employment, not to wages. (Of course, the bilingual waitress may eventually earn more money because of the higher tips given to her by a larger clientele or by customers happy to be served in their own language.) In other words, not all employers pay a bilingualism bonus, and, if the bilingual candidate gets a higher salary than the unilingual one, I think this might most often be due to the fact that his or her bilingualism opens more doors, increases the choice of higher-paying jobs, provides greater mobility by enabling him or her to change jobs more often and get more promotions. In short, I expect to find that the relationship between bilingualism and employment is more constant than the relationship between bilingualism and income.

Boulet (1980), who has studied the situation from 1961 to 1978 in Montreal, has found that bilingual Anglophones had the highest employment income in 1961, followed, in order, by unilingual Anglophones, bilingual Francophones, bilingual allophones and unilingual Francophones. However, in 1978, all the bilingual groups were earning more than the unilingual Anglophones, and the gap between unilingual Francophones and Anglophones had closed considerably.

One can say that the bilingualism of individuals continues to be profitable on the job market, in particular for more educated persons, managers and persons in the service sector and other knowledge-intensive sectors. In Quebec, however, authors (Vaillancourt, Lachapelle, Grenier, Levine, Anglejan) agree that English is no longer as essential as it was up until the 1970s. The importance of French in the economy has grown in Quebec (according to a Secor study done in 1980, the proportion of Francophones in managerial positions rose from 69% in 1964 to 75% in 1979), to such an extent that the bilingualization rate of Anglophones has made a tremendous

leap, rising from 37% in 1971 to 59% today, compared with 26% to 32% for the same period among Francophones (Commissioner of Official Languages reports).

Obviously, this reversal of the situation cannot be attributed to market forces only. Language laws, including those pertaining to the francization of businesses, have also accelerated the trend, but other factors are considered even more important by experts (including Vaillancourt, 1989): growth of the public sector, growth in Francophone-controlled employment, growth in the purchasing power of Francophones and the departure of companies' headquarters, which have moved west, in the direction of other development forces. No doubt, one might also point to the exodus of unilingual Anglophones, which has helped increase the proportion of bilingual Anglophones.

Some paradoxes or singularities that used to be revealed by studies seem to have disappeared today, or at least to have been diminished. An example of such a paradox is the fact that, in some Anglophone-controlled industrial sectors, unilingual Anglophones earned more in 1970 than bilingual Anglophones.

To summarize the situation in Quebec, one can say that, although English was not as essential in Quebec in the 1980s as it had been before, the data indicate that bilingualism continues to provide a valuable comparative advantage on the job market for managerial positions. What is the situation elsewhere in Canada?

It is more difficult to assess the situation in the rest of Canada. The studies are less clear in this regard. Shapiro and Stelcner (1981), basing themselves on studies by Robb and Gunderson, conclude that bilingualism for wage-earners was not a significant advantage on the job market.

However, using a broader definition of the concept of "bilingualism," the authors qualify this conclusion somewhat:

"For francophone and allophone males, being bilingual entailed an earning advantage over speaking only English or French. Anglophones, bilingual or not, earned more than any other group. Relative to unilingual anglophones (the standard) bilingual anglophones did not have a statistically significant earnings advantage. Francophones earned less than all anglophones (17.2% less if unilingual and 9.6% less if bilingual). Bilingual allophones earned a premium over other allophones and earned 5.6% more than unilingual francophones."

Other studies of this kind arrive at more or less the same conclusion (Report of the Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism, Carliner [1981] and others). However, the important thing for Canada as a whole is to determine in what direction the situation is moving. This issue has generated debate in the public forum and in the media last year, when Toronto's *Globe and Mail* ran an article (Alanna Mitchell, March 23, 1994) with the following headline: "Hopes for bilingualism unrealized. Statistics show gap in French-English incomes has grown." Using more solid census data, William Johnson of *The Gazette* responded to this article on April 20, 1994, and there has as yet been no response to his article. The comparative data of Statistics Canada that Johnson used indicate that the income gaps between Anglophones and Francophones shrank everywhere in Canada between 1970 and 1990, except in Newfoundland and the Yukon. Moreover, Johnson points out that, in 1990, Francophones were better paid than or as well paid as Anglophones in all the provinces and territories except Quebec and New Brunswick.

Obviously, the figures used by Johnson relate to Anglophones and Francophones, and not to bilingual persons as such. However, even if an increasing number of Anglophones are studying French, the data show that it is primarily Francophones who are bilingual outside Quebec to such an extent that Johnson's figures give a good idea of the situation for bilingual Francophones. Johnson himself acknowledges that more in-depth studies are required to support his conclusion, that regional, rather than provincial, comparisons must be made, and that other factors, such as

age and level of education, must be controlled. I know that such a study is now being conducted. I will therefore now refrain from anticipating the conclusions of that study.

## **Conclusion**

Through this brief survey, I have attempted to determine the extent to which the studies examined supported the hypothesis that being bilingual is an advantage for access to the job market and for obtaining a higher income. Although this survey has not provided an unequivocal answer to this question, a number of these studies lead me to believe that knowing both official languages is a comparative advantage on the job market, in some regions more than others, in some activity sectors more than in others and so on.

This subject remains an open field for analysis and study that needs to be approached using a more rigorous methodology. For example, we have spoken freely of bilingualism, without specifying the level of mastery and use of the other language or even of the first language. Analysis has also been limited to a static representation of reality, with reality described as it appears, not as it could be.

There are lessons to be learned from this survey. As with any investment, an investment in human capital (here, the learning of the other official language) has an objective value in itself. However, it may be that on the one hand the possessor of this capital uses it poorly, invests it poorly, and that on the other hand the person hiring a bilingual person uses this human capital poorly, is not aware of its full value and does not take the best advantage of it. In short, it is not enough to examine the extent to which an individual's bilingualism produces concrete benefits for that individual. An examination should also be done of how this human capital can be maximized, how it can be fully used - for example, by making business people more "aware" of the business opportunities and advantages that this human capital could provide if they make more effective use of it.

I believe that in many cases the problem is one of a lack of awareness. A recent survey of Canadian exporters (discussed in a conversation with Mr. Jean Fahmy of the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages) revealed that few of them used a language other than English in their international dealings and that they did not believe the situation would be otherwise in the future. Is this because knowledge of another language is not objectively useful and profitable, or is it because these business people are not fully aware of the possible advantages? I believe that in many cases, the problem is one of a lack of awareness of changing realities. It is true, of course, that the issue is not the same for all exporters. For a company exporting oil by tanker or making bulk shipments of wheat, wood or ore, language may indeed not be very important. However, knowledge of the client's language might be very much in the interests of a company exporting consulting engineer services or products intended for retail sale. In a television program on the international activities of the Lavalin company, whose services had been retained by Morocco for improving its telephone system, a Moroccan minister said that, all else being equal, Lavalin had been awarded the contract because of the engineers' ability to communicate in French.

In support of this point of view, I would like to quote British trade minister Richard Needham:

"British firms are losing hundreds of export markets because of their reluctance to speak the language of the target country and to understand its way of life [...] Between 30% and 40% of small and medium-size businesses in the United Kingdom realize that they are losing markets for linguistic or cultural reasons [...] A business that works is one that understands, in each market the consumer's tastes, his culture and his language."

It would no doubt be appropriate to copy the British trade minister's example and make Canadian business people more aware of the opportunities for stimulating their interregional and

international exchanges and thus improve their performance by making better use of language, especially since Canada has an historical advantage over its main economic partners with respect to operating in more than one language.

I cannot conclude this document without saying something about a most unfortunate paradox that characterizes Canadian bilingualism today and that is closely related to the issues examined in this document: I am speaking of the fact that a number of Francophone minorities in Canada are prey to heavy assimilation, while Anglophones are registering in large numbers in French immersion courses in the hope of becoming bilingual.

This is a big waste of human capital that will be twice as costly when those Francophones who have been assimilated decide to register in immersion to re-learn the language of their ancestors!

Although the total number of bilingual persons is increasing despite assimilation, the situation involves a significant loss for Canada. Some people maintain that bilingualism of Francophones outside Quebec is often the first step toward assimilation. That may very well be true. However, without bilingualism, a number of these communities would be ghettoized or marginalized in relation to the economic and social life of their region, and I think that that would be just as tragic.

In addition to endeavouring to convince governments that are insisting on delaying the implementation of the provisions in the Charter of Rights regarding school governance by language minorities, it seems to me that it would be appropriate to make them and Canadians in general more aware of the importance of bilingualism everywhere in Canada, in these times of major economic changes. Following the example of Moncton or Winnipeg, these communities could try to make better use of the advantages that bilingualism could create for them, for example by stimulating tourism.

This document is intended as a modest contribution toward that promotion of bilingualism's importance from an economic point of view.