

JUST SIX
QUESTIONS

RESEARCH
SUMMARY



My parents may not be French sir, but I am: exploration of linguistic identity of Francophone bilingual youth in transition in multicultural, multilingual Ontario

Key Details

KEY WORDS

Linguistic identity, linguistic loyalty, Francophone, Canada, minority

POPULATION GROUP

Francophone youth

STEPPING UP THEMES

Diversity, Social Inclusion and Safety; Education, training and apprenticeships

RESEARCH ORIGIN

Canada

SOURCE

Academic

“I’ve been told I have this HORRIBLE Franco-Ontarian accent and I intend to lose it”... He no longer felt the same pride in his performance of being Francophone; in his new setting, it was not recognised as being legitimately a Francophone one, but rather that of an Anglophone attempting, poorly, a Francophone performance’ ”

1. What is the research about?

This research is about bilingual French/English speaking youth and the challenges they experience with their identity when they transition from a French-language secondary school to post-secondary education. The youth in this study identify as Francophone but when they leave their home communities they encounter challenges in how others perceive and interact with them.

The research is an exploration of linguistic identity, and associated positive and negative experienced. The students in this research are not typical Francophones. For some, they grew up in English speaking homes with no ancestral ties to Francophone culture aside from the connections they made themselves through pursuing French-based education. For others, they had one traditionally Francophone parent. None of the participants in this study grew up in a French-only speaking home.

In their home communities their identities as Francophone or bilingual were accepted, despite their communities being predominately English speaking and in Ontario. This research is an exploration of how those identities are threatened and questioned as the youth move away from their home communities to pursue post-secondary education.

2. Where did the research take place?

The research took place in Ontario. Students were originally graduates of Ecole secondaire l’Assomption.

3. Who is this research about?

This research is about 15 self-identified Francophone graduates of a French secondary school who left their home communities to attend either a French language, bilingual, or Anglophone post-secondary education in Ontario.

4. How was the research done?

The researcher collected background demographic information through questionnaires and met with the students for interviews a minimum of three times over 18 months. Data was also gathered through emails and phone calls between the participants and the researcher. The researcher also referred to field notes and her personal journal for data.

5. What are the key findings?

All the youth had their identities challenged by peers and educators at their post-secondary education institutions. To their new community, they did not fit the imagined norm of Francophone because of their last name or accent. Some began to question

their linguistic identity. This questioning had varying impacts on the students. One student dropped out of university. One adopted an Anglophone identity. One took on the role of educating others and advocating for linguistic diversity.

The youth who transitioned most successfully to post-secondary education were able to navigate both Francophone and Anglophone cultures and norms. Unfortunately, the youth who attended Anglophone colleges and universities felt that their Francophone communities disapproved of their choice. They also experienced culture shock when moving to a new Francophone community with more bilingual, rather than monolingual norms. This research reveals that instead of one Francophone community, there are multiple Francophone communities in Ontario, all with different norms for inclusion.

6. Why does this research matter for youth work?

Narrow definitions of linguistic identity limit and restrict the membership to a linguistic group already identified as declining. It is important to embrace and nurture linguistic diversity. Monolingual (French or English only) communities should support youth to experience bilingual opportunities. Bilingual communities should embrace linguistic diversity. There is no “pure” or authentic linguistic identity. Youth workers can support bilingual spaces and programming that encourages linguistic

diversity. Young people should have opportunities to explore and experience linguistic communities beyond their home community. Both sending and receiving communities need to support young people to access a variety of linguistic contexts.

In Ontario, the Francophone community is a minority. Therefore, in order for it to survive, this author recommends that we need to be more open to linguistic diversity. In other words, if only “pure” Francophones are able to embody a Francophone linguistic identity and people who speak French as a second language are rejected from that community, the community will become even smaller. The message here is that promoting bilingualism, or multi-lingualism, is in the best interest of all linguistic and cultural identities.



Lamoureux, Sylvie (2012). “My parents may not be French sir, but I am”: exploration of linguistic identity of Francophone bilingual youth in transition in multicultural, multilingual Ontario. *International Journal of Multilingualism*. 9(2)151-164.