

*Official Languages*

Canadians to the English-speaking minority continues at the present rate of 95 per cent. If the French social dynamics, in Montreal, is already threatened with a French-speaking majority of 63 per cent, how can it be strengthened, in the presence of an English-speaking majority? Montreal is the vital centre of cultural and industrial life in Quebec. When a vital organ is endangered in the system, is there any hope left to the person concerned? The following argument is usually given to that assertion; But if everyone is bilingual on Montreal island, French will no longer be in danger.

Generally speaking, bilingualism concerns individuals rather than society as a whole. Collective bilingualism pre-supposes the existence of two social dynamics at work within the same society, in order to maintain and ensure the functioning and development of two distinct structures as regards culture, language and personality. Wherever that exists, one of the two structures must necessarily, sooner or later, dominate the other. The supremacy of a group of structures on another has always been true at the level of the individuals, no matter how they may have learned two languages. There are no exceptions to this rule, even in the case of the present right honourable Prime Minister.

It is clear that those who learn French in Maillardville, British Columbia, do not participate to the same extent in a strong French linguistic-cultural structure as those who were privileged to be born and brought up in Quebec City, which is relatively homogeneous, or in a very homogeneous centre like Paris.

Even if Premier Bennett offered a free education in French to the French-speaking minority of his province, from the cradle to the grave, he would not be able to change the fact that French is not part of the institutional and global life of British Columbia. The effect would be about the same as if the French Canadians were granted the same privilege in England, in Italy, or in Russia. This generous offer, at best, could only facilitate things, to a degree, for the French-speaking minority in British Columbia. And even if the high society of Vancouver became as truly bilingual as the English elite in Great Britain for example, it would in no way modify the absolute supremacy of the English element's dynamics in this Pacific province. One thing is certain, it would not help in the least the French-speaking element in Quebec.

[Mr. Matte.]

The co-existence of two language structures within the bilingual language of French Canadians allows the English pronunciation to affect French structures, rhythm, intonation, as well as vowel length and accent.

But the most serious and perhaps most sinister invasion is taking place on the semantic level. It is subtle and destructive. The semantic confusion in the mind of most French Canadians is beyond description. The average bilingual person—I do not mean the elite—is truly handicapped in that he is seldom able to speak properly and consciously in either language.

In any language, every word has its own semantic contents, defined by various contexts, each having its exact meaning and shade. It is difficult enough to learn to understand the exact meaning of words or to separate them within one language, because the meaning of words is ever changing, let alone to master the fuzzy outlines of semantic fields in two languages, especially if one has greater stability, because of its greater use and creativeness, based on powerful social dynamics. This is not only due to a more frequent use of English, but because most new concepts originate in English, and every French Canadian cannot be expected to carry constantly a dictionary under his arm, which, in any case, would be of very little use to him, since it hardly reflects the environment.

Moreover, French Canadians are not born first-rate translators or interpreters any more than their English counterparts. The official qualified translators are like prisoners, chained to their pile of dictionaries from France which very often prove to be inadequate to translate Anglo-American facts of North America. Their translations are close imitations of the English style and way of thinking for translators themselves are not living in or do not come from a creative, homogeneous and dynamic French environment. Only the best among them succeed reasonably well in recreating in their translations the French style and turn of mind. For the worst of them, who are not in slight minority, their job consists in writing English with French words. The federal statutes, and even those of the Quebec national assembly, are classical examples of those awkward, clumsy translations which are obvious imitations of the English way of conceiving and expressing ideas. But even if all translations of English texts were perfect, let us not forget that the way to learn a language is not by reading but by listening. What we learn