



# **SPEAKING UP**

**A History of Language and Politics in Canada and Quebec**

**Marcel Martel and Martin Pâquet**

Translated by Patricia Dumas



# **SPEAKING UP**

**A History of Language and Politics  
in Canada and Quebec**

**Marcel Martel and Martin Pâquet**

Translated by Patricia Gossas



BETWEEN THE LINES  
Toronto

**Speaking Up: A History of Language and Politics  
in Canada and Quebec**

First published in French as *Langue et politique au  
Canada et au Québec: Une synthèse historique*

©2010 Éditions du Boréal

English translation ©2012 Patricia Dumas

First published in English translation in 2012 by  
Between the Lines

401 Richmond Street West

Studio 277

Toronto, Ontario M5V 3A8

Canada

1-800-718-7201

[www.btlbooks.com](http://www.btlbooks.com)

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be  
photocopied, reproduced, stored in a retrieval system,  
or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic,  
mechanical, recording, or otherwise, without the written  
permission of Between the Lines, or (for photocopying in  
Canada only) Access Copyright, 1 Yonge Street, Suite 1900,  
Toronto, Ontario, M5E 1E5.

Every reasonable effort has been made to identify copyright  
holders. Between the Lines would be pleased to have any  
errors or omissions brought to its attention.

**Library and Archives Canada Cataloguing  
in Publication**

Martel, Marcel, 1965-

Speaking up : a history of language and  
politics in Canada and Quebec / Marcel Martel and  
Martin Pâquet.

Translation of: *Langue et politique au Canada et au  
Québec.*

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Issued also in electronic format.

ISBN 978-1-926662-93-0

1. Language policy-Canada-History. 2.  
Language policy-Québec (Province)-History. 3. French  
language-Political aspects-Canada-History. 4.  
Canada-Languages-Law and legislation-History.  
I. Pâquet, Martin, 1963- II. Title.

P119.32.C3M3813 2012 306.440971 C2012-903709-5

Cover design by Jennifer Tiberio

Front cover photo: Demonstration against Bill 22 in Quebec,  
1974 (BANQ, centre d'archives de Québec, Fonds du ministère  
des Communications, E10, S44, SS1, D74-698, P14).

Text design by David Vereschagin/Quadrat Communications  
Printed in Canada



Between the Lines gratefully acknowledges assistance for  
its publishing activities from the Canada Council for the  
Arts, the Ontario Arts Council, the Government of Ontario  
through the Ontario Book Publishers Tax Credit program and  
through the Ontario Book Initiative, and the Government of  
Canada through the Canada Book Fund.

We acknowledge the financial support of the Government of  
Canada, through the National Translation Program for Book  
Publishing for our translation activities.



**Canada Council  
for the Arts**

**Conseil des Arts  
du Canada**

**Canada**



**ONTARIO ARTS COUNCIL  
CONSEIL DES ARTS DE L'ONTARIO**

Praise for

## **SPEAKING UP**

"Through its impressive national scope, *Speaking Up* sheds new light on the history of minority-majority relations in the country. With a subtle understanding of the concerns of linguistic groups, primarily French and English, but also including Aboriginal and other languages, Martel and Pâquet deliver an engaging and convincing exploration of ethnic identities, schooling conflicts, and communication politics in a complex country."

– Colin M. Coates, Director, Robarts Centre for Canadian Studies,  
York University

"*Speaking Up* is an indispensable guide for anyone seeking to understand the place of language in Quebec politics. It is impossible to understand this province, or the desire of some here for independence, without an understanding of the historical context that defines the Québécois identity. Meticulously researched and comprehensive in scope, *Speaking Up* provides exactly that context. It should be required reading for English-Canadian pundits, most of whom so profoundly misunderstand this province."

– Ethan Cox, Montreal-based writer, activist and political  
commentator, and the Quebec correspondent for *rabble.ca*



BANQ, centre d'archives de Québec, Fonds du Conseil supérieur de la langue française, E96, S44, DR-5, P21

*To Normand Pâquet*

*To Georges-Henri Martel*

*To Sarah Courtemanche-Pâquet*

*Speech is a conquest of life.  
A red glow bursting into the realm,  
Sliding through cracks of silence, filling dreams.  
Walls quiver with the vivid clamour of voices.  
Thousands call for the return of Babel,  
From far-distant times, where the word was born.*

## Contents

	<b>Introduction</b>	<b>1</b>
	The relation between language and politics	2
	General trends in the language issue	5
	The six phases of a movement	8
Chapter 1	<b>From religion to language: 1539-1848</b>	<b>11</b>
	The king's language and faith	12
	<i>Ordinance of Villers-Cotterêts on the</i>	
	<i>Administration of Justice (August 1539)</i>	13
	Emergence of a new language issue	23
	Nationalizing language	30
	<i>The 92 Resolutions (1834)</i>	33
Chapter 2	<b>The first language tremors: The school crises in Canada, 1848-1927</b>	<b>45</b>
	Prohibiting in a context of fear	47
	<i>Regulation 17: Circular of Instruction No. 17 for</i>	
	<i>Ontario Separate Schools for the School Year 1912-1913</i>	60
	Quebec: denouncing and enacting	64
	<i>The LaVergne Law (1910)—An Act to amend</i>	
	<i>the Civil Code, respecting contracts made with</i>	
	<i>public utility companies</i>	70
	Showing solidarity to improve action	70

Chapter 3	<b>All quiet on the front: From the repeal of Regulation 17 to the Laurendeau-Dunton Commission, 1927-63</b>	<b>75</b>
	Questions of identity and language	76
	Where were governments through all of this?	85
	<i>An Act to amend the Civil Service Act (1938)</i>	87
	Turmoil and new questioning	94
	<i>The Impertinences of Brother Anonymous (1959)</i>	99
Chapter 4	<b>Action-reaction: Commissions of inquiry and agitation, 1963-69</b>	<b>107</b>
	Speaking out	108
	Channelling the citizens' voices	118
	<i>Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (1963)</i>	119
	<i>Commission of Inquiry on the Situation of the French Language and the Language Rights of Francophones (1968)</i>	128
	Urging the state to act	133
Chapter 5	<b>Action: Language laws, 1969-82</b>	<b>145</b>
	Ottawa's solution: institutional bilingualism	146
	<i>Canada's Official Languages Act (1968-69)</i>	147
	Quebec's common good: from freedom of choice to unilingualism	160
	<i>Charter of the French Language (1977)</i>	167
	The multiple provincial language policies	175
Chapter 6	<b>Law and language since 1982</b>	<b>187</b>
	Law as the new language environment	188
	<i>Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982)</i>	191
	<i>Reference re Secession of Quebec (1998)</i>	195
	<i>An Act respecting the exercise of the fundamental rights and prerogatives of the Québec people and the Québec State, called Bill 99 (2000)</i>	196
	Mapping the interpretations of the Charter	198
	The vitality of minority communities and Aboriginal peoples	211

<b>Conclusion</b>	<b>235</b>
General trends in the language issue	238
How to live together: the weight of citizens' actions	238
The duties of living together: the permanency of law and norms	241
The will to live together: language between market and memory	245
Acknowledgements	249
Abbreviations	252
Notes	253
Bibliography	268
Index	278

# INTRODUCTION

---

*Comment abolir les siècles qui séparent les langages  
des significations?*

- Pierre Perrault, *Le Grand Jeu des miroirs*  
(*Irréconciliable désir de fleuve*)

In 1974 the Royal Canadian Mounted Police asked its officers in Quebec to gather information on individuals and groups advocating for French unilingualism in the province. In doing this, the police force was not only attempting to assess support for the cause, but also trying to determine the potential for violence among citizens who had taken part in public demonstrations.

The language demonstrations taking place at that time were not the first of their kind in Canada. By the end of the 1960s several groups had already mobilized around language issues—not just in Quebec but elsewhere in Canada, in particular Ontario and New Brunswick. The issue of language was inspiring many people to speak up—to raise their voices in resistance and seek power in the public sphere. In this way the issue of language was helping to define the common interests of an entire political community.

If some policy-makers believed in 1974 that they were facing a new problem on the language front, they were deluding themselves. The 1960s had been characterized by a sense of anxiety about the place of the French language in the public sphere and as the common language of Quebec. Moreover, by

that time the language issue had been influencing political life and public debates for several decades—even several centuries. From the arrival of the first settlers in New France, the king of France had promoted linguistic uniformity in an effort to establish French as the common language in the colony. After the British conquest of 1760 introduced the use of English, the status of French remained contested by advocates of ethnic and linguistic uniformity, first within the British North American provinces and later within the Dominion of Canada. Resistance to the arbitrary power that these advocates exercised over language led to a series of political crises throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Intimately linked to nation-building, these crises were a potential threat to public peace because they questioned dominant socio-economic relations and inequalities based on language. To ensure public order, community elites and policy-makers—whether elected members of legislatures or federal and provincial civil servants—employed a number of methods to reduce the potential for unrest. These varied methods—part of an overall policy designed to recognize and manage diversity—ranged from language-planning policies to court actions, and included various symbolic gestures. As it turned out, RCMP surveillance was just one of the many interventions set in place.

### **The relation between language and politics**

This book—as a contribution to the history of political culture—explores the historical relation between language and politics in Canada and Quebec, from the first language edict passed by the king of France in 1539 to the twenty-first century. We hasten to add that it does not present a history of language-planning policies, although such policies have occupied a decisive place in the history of Canada and Quebec since the arrival of Europeans.

What we mean by the word “language” in the phrase “language and politics” is not simply a matter of the system of signs—whether words, sounds, graphics, or gestures—that people use to communicate with each other. Rather, we use “language” to refer to the manifestations of social relationships and practices—including goals and rules—that change over time. For example, the French used at the

court of Francis I or the English employed at the court of Elizabeth I is not the same as the French used today by Michel Garneau and Patrice Desbiens or the English used by Leonard Cohen and Gordon Downie. Not only have the vocabulary and grammar changed; but the socio-historical contexts, and the values and meanings expressed by the languages, are no longer the same.

Consequently, in this historical study of the relationship between language and politics, our approach to language is three-dimensional. First of all, we see language as the mode of communication that social actors use to exchange meaning in their interactions. Second, we see it as an identity symbol through which individuals express both inwardly and outwardly, to others, their specific characteristics and sense of social belonging. Third, we see language as a political issue when it becomes the discourse of speakers who convey the aspirations, divisions, alliances, rivalries, and neutrality of their communities. Language is a political issue because political actors assign it intrinsic value. Indeed, French, English, and indigenous languages in Canada and Quebec are not neutral modes of communication. On the contrary, they put into words fundamental concepts about common interests, sealing the social bond; this explains their particularly sensitive nature. Language is also a political issue because, beyond the limits of any given discourse in which individuals tend to become trapped, languages reveal the socio-historical reality of struggles, relations of domination, and inequalities within society. Language is political because it embodies the human relationship to the real world.

A study of the relation between language and politics must also raise the question of governance, which we understand as how a state goes about managing social divisions and determining how people will live together in the future. In the case of the language issue in Canada and Quebec, such a study implies the three dimensions analysed by political scientists David Cameron and Richard Simeon, among others: the *vouloir-vivre collectif* (will to live together), *devoir-vivre collectif* (duties of living together), and *comment-vivre ensemble* (how to live together).

The first dimension, the will to live together—which harkens back to Ernest Renan's famous formula for defining a nation—is based on a feeling of belonging to a historical community, the sharing of cultural references, and the desire to connect a shared past to a shared

future. Whether in 1755, 1912, or 1977, the use of French in Acadia, Ontario, and Quebec does not indicate a similar desire to live together because the socio-economic contexts and political frameworks of each time and place are different. As for the duties of living together, these conditions are determined by the imperial power of political institutions—from the older kingdoms of France and Great Britain to the newer federal and provincial states. The second dimension—the duties of living together—emanates from the setting of standards aimed at homogenizing the population within a given territory in order to ensure civil peace despite social divisions. Since 1539—the year in which King Francis I established French as the administrative language of his realm—various language laws, court decisions, and appeals for linguistic quality standards have shaped the duties of living together. The third dimension—how to live together—depends upon the political ramifications of power given that people in a particular society or social milieu do not all have access to the same resources or share the same dominant socio-economic positions. An Aboriginal person on a reserve or a federal civil servant, a Franco-Ontarian activist in 1927 or one in 2002, an Italian-speaking parent in Saint-Léonard or a supporter of French unilingualism: these actors will all perceive the issue of how to live together differently.

The question of *how to live together* involves exercising power and resisting it; it entails developing various strategies that can be used in negotiations or confrontations, alliances or rivalries, pacification or reconciliation. For people throughout the centuries in Canada and Quebec, the will to live together, the duties of living together, and the question of how to live together have intertwined to shape the issue of language.

When viewed as a political issue, then, language becomes intimately linked to questions of how people live together in time and space. The language issue insinuates itself into the history of relations between individuals; it reflects the standards and power relationships within society; it also reveals the aspirations of a community. Language and politics combine in their relations to determine the past, present, and future of a community. In Canada and Quebec the language issue, in all its facets and across history, has been at the very heart of political interactions.

## **General trends in the language issue**

Through more than four and a half centuries in Canada and Quebec, several general trends in the relationship between language and politics have developed, endured, or faded depending on how deeply they have been linked to the broader contexts. But one permanent feature in public policies has remained, rooted in the basic requirements of the duties of living together: the need to homogenize the population as a means of exercising power within a given territory. Homogenization necessitates the adoption of measures that govern communications between individuals and political jurisdictions, whether they are colonial or state-controlled. For the authorities, the efficient exercise of power requires that a population share common characteristics, including, potentially, the use of a given language.

Until the French Revolution, the main criterion of homogenization within a territory was religious denomination. Whenever and wherever legal and political regulations were established, the language issue was subordinate to religion because allegiance to the sovereign was a matter of faith—and the tragic deportation of Acadians in 1755 serves as a demonstration of what happens when a people have an adherence to what is considered the wrong religion in the wrong place. With the toppling of the ruling estates in Europe and the development of new political models based on concepts of nation, the language issue was redefined. From then on, language was tightly connected to nationhood. In the case of the English language, the British, faced with the threat of the French Revolution, retreated into an ethno-cultural concept of nation that spread to the colonies across the Atlantic; while the French language in Lower Canada became a symbol of national identity after the crushing of the Patriotes' rebellion of 1837–38 and the rejection of the republican ideal. Confronted by the clearly expressed will of some English Canadians to assimilate them, French Canadians would in future integrate the French language as an inseparable element of their will to live together. It became the very definition of their nation.

With the development of the modern state and the rise of the bourgeoisie to positions of power in the nineteenth century, the language issue took on new dimensions. In the North American British provinces, mirroring the hegemony of the liberal order, as historian

Ian McKay points out, the language issue exemplified the relationship between capital and work, with the industrial and commercial bourgeoisie expressing themselves mainly in English and many workers and farmers knowing only French. To mitigate social conflicts arising from the proximity of various ethno-linguistic communities, the state, or its ruling elites, adopted an approach of mutual accommodation based on the concepts of law, order, and good government. The promotion of harmony between the majority and minorities took place through informal relations established between members of the French- and English-speaking elites. While some minorities, such as the French Canadians and Acadians, were part of the political community, others, such as the Aboriginal peoples, were excluded. The state did not necessarily act as a mediator in the fulfilment of this ideal of *bonne entente*, rooted in the firm requirements of *how to live together* and aimed at controlling potential conflicts. Still, the rhetoric of harmony did not prevent major crises from breaking out, such as the resistance surrounding Ontario's Regulation 17, which was issued in 1912 and restricted French as a language of instruction to the first two years of schooling. The law was not repealed until 1927.

After the Second World War, the mutual-accommodation approach crumbled under the rise of individualism, the development of communication technologies, the acceleration of international migratory movements, and greater access to education. From then on, social relations came under the yoke of a new political culture whose formal standards were to become preponderant in the 1960s. As members of various communities began to speak out publicly—sometimes in a disorderly manner—disassociating themselves from the elites, the definitions and guidelines previously used to contain conflicts no longer worked. In the case of the language issue per se, language—a mark of cultural identity as well as a cultural reality—was at the very core of the *will to live together* of francophones and of Aboriginal peoples. From then on, confronted by potentially explosive situations—such as conflicts over the language used in schools in Saint-Léonard in 1967–68 and student protests over an increase in tuition fees at the Université de Moncton in 1968–69—elites were forced to ask for the intervention of the federal and provincial governments, which had the resources necessary to set formal standards.

At first those resources included the scientific expertise required to assess the kinds of intervention needed. Based on the works of various commissions of inquiry set up at the turn of the sixties and seventies, the federal and provincial governments made specific choices with regard to language planning—bilingualism or unilingualism—in order to reduce the outbursts of violence created by social conflict and turmoil. The choices made reflected how the political leaders perceived the public's interest. The English-Canadian leaders favoured a bilingual and multicultural Canadian society rooted in individual rights. Quebec leaders favoured a model of society in which French unilingualism would be an instrument of socio-economic development and collective emancipation. For their part, the political leaders of French-speaking minority groups viewed language as an indicator of the vitality of their community. They saw that vitality as being essential to their survival. Indigenous peoples similarly saw it as being essential to their future well-being.

By the 1980s the government approach in this area came increasingly under the mantle of the law and its legal arsenal. Following the example of the international legal regime that took shape after the Universal Declaration of Human Rights of 1948, Canada and Quebec each contributed in their own way to the promotion of rights, including language rights. The repatriation of the Constitution in 1982 brought about the entrenchment of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, whose articles were regularly referred to in the numerous language cases brought to court. Language was transformed from a political problem to a legal dispute. Furthermore, with regard to language matters, the rulings of judges were no longer based solely on the clauses pertaining to the *duties of living together*. Indeed, the courts became the preferred theatre of operations for strategies on *how to live together*, with the various protagonists seeking to have their respective concepts of the language issue prevail. Although the concepts basically reflected the primacy of individual rights, they did not as such exclude compliance with collective rights, as demonstrated by recent Supreme Court rulings or the management of disputed Aboriginal claims.

Finally, the hegemony of the marketplace altered the linguistic relationship between capital and work. The increasing globalization of cultural exchanges and interactions, the economic concept of social