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“I Am Not a Francophone”: Identity Choices and Discourses of Youth Associating With a Powerful Minority

Cynthia Groff ^a, Annie Pilote^b, and Karine Vieux-Fort^b

^aUniversiteit Leiden; ^bUniversité Laval

ABSTRACT

Taking a broad interest in the linguistic, educational, and identity issues relevant to young people, this article examines the experiences and discourses of linguistic minority youth in the French-dominant context of Québec City. Our analysis is based on qualitative interviews conducted with 10 young people who speak a language other than French at home and who chose to study in English at the postsecondary level. Beyond exploring the local impact of language policies, we focus on the identity choices these youth make in positioning themselves and the discourses that they appropriate in describing their sociolinguistic context. Findings suggest that tensions between linguistic groups in Québec are perpetuated through discourses that distance one group from another, including discourses of closed-mindedness and superiority. What the students in our study appear to be doing is rejecting a minority identity by invoking national and international scales through their discourses, scales in which English is dominant.

KEYWORDS

Adolescents; discourse; identity; language; language and society; linguistic minorities; power; Québec; social integration; youth

Although her father is a Francophone from the Canadian province of Québec, Jessica spent most of her childhood in the United States. Returning as a young adult, she began to experience the tensions between English and French speakers in Québec. As a student at the only English-language post-secondary institution in Québec City, she says:

I know the people at our school—some of them—are stuck up sometimes, like: “I’m better than you. I will be able to get a better job than you.” And they will [say] that to those with less English. Well, [people at] other schools are like: “Those darn English speakers, they ruin everything... They only speak English.”

She then provided an example:

Like, for some reason, two people started fighting during la fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste,¹ and one said: “Well, you don’t speak French like we do... you’re not a Quebecker,” and the other yelled: “I’m going to get a better job than you!” It was so childish.

Jessica’s comments demonstrate a cycle of boasting and insults reflecting ongoing language-based tensions in Québec society. She finds herself a minority in a city where Anglophones make up less than 2% of the population (Statistique Canada, 2011).

The history of the province of Québec has been marked by inequalities and tensions between Francophones and Anglophones. Although a numerical minority compared to Francophones, Anglophones held the reins to Québec’s economic power for many years and had a strong influence on politics (Dickinson, 2007). The Québec nationalist movement, which arose in the 1960s, challenged the political and economic domination of Anglophones over Francophones. Structured around the idea of the French language as the cement of Québec society, this movement generated

the *Charte de la langue française* (commonly called Bill 101) in 1977, proclaiming French the only official language of the Québec government and of public life. These changes influenced power relations between linguistic communities immensely, and Anglophones began to perceive themselves as minorities within a francophone society (Caldwell & Waddell, 1982; Clift & McLeod Arnopoulos, 1979). Although many Anglophones have come to understand the Francophones' need to protect their language and culture through strong language planning measures (Caldwell, 2002), tensions remain and are often revived when political issues threaten the delicate relationship between linguistic groups. On a microsocal level, tensions are also felt in day-to-day interactions and representations of linguistic groups that contribute to social boundaries between Francophones and Anglophones (Magnan, 2012; Pilote, Magnan, & Groff, 2011; Vieux-Fort & Pilote, 2010, 2013) and between Francophones and immigrants, who are also influenced by the linguistic tensions in their integration and identity formation (Allen, 2006; Steinbach, 2010). The reversal of the languages of power inside and outside the borders of Québec province creates a unique context for linguistic minority (LM) youth in the strategic negotiation of identities.

In a world in which languages are not neutral, youth in multilingual settings have been found to take an active role in negotiating their identities and in resisting linguistic impositions and dominant discourses (Pavlenko & Blackledge, 2004). The use of discourses in identity construction takes a unique form in the Québec City context. In light of the ongoing social categorization and tensions in the province of Québec and the power dynamics among languages locally and internationally, we interviewed 10 young people who speak a language other than French at home and who had chosen to attend the only English-language college² in Québec City, a French-dominant city in the province of Québec. Our participants included both Anglophones and allophones (as native speakers of languages other than French or English are often formally labeled in Québec).³ We examined qualitatively the experiences and discourses of these minority youth, taking a broad interest in the linguistic, educational, and identity issues relevant to young people.

The following sections describe the sociolinguistic context of Québec, review research on the linguistic identities of minority youth, and justify conceptually our research methodology. Drawing on the discourses of student interviewees, the first findings section, "Tension between linguistic groups: Youth experiences," highlights ways in which young people of non-francophone heritage are made to feel different in the social context of Québec City. Refusing to be cast in the role of a minority, these young people choose to position themselves as superior, using a deficit discourse of francophone closed-mindedness and identifying themselves with English, the international language of power, as described in the remaining findings sections, "The open- versus closed-minded discourse" and "Discourses of superiority."

Context: Language policy and power in Québec

Power dynamics are inherent in language policy and planning as decisions are made to favor some languages over others or to defend one language against the spread of another. Language policies often perpetuate linguistic inequalities, but they can also be used to resist domination and promote diversity (Tollefson, 1991). Although many language policies are imposed from the top down (Kaplan, 1989), language decisions occur not only at the national level but also at the institutional and individual levels (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), where individual agents can influence how languages are used and perceived. Recent studies have begun to take a more local perspective on language policy and planning and its impact (e.g., Canagarajah, 2005). The experiences and discourses of LM youth in Québec are influenced by the provincial policies promoting French and by the national and international contexts where English dominates.

Canada has two official languages: English and French. However, English is the dominant language in all provinces except Québec, where French is spoken by a majority of the population and is the only official language at the provincial level. Québec's primary language policy, *Charte de la langue française*, is designed to protect the French language against the influence of English in

North America. This policy recognizes French as the ordinary language of work, education, communications, commerce, and business. One of the most influential components of Québec's language policy has been the requirement that all children be educated in French schools at the primary and secondary levels, a measure intended to promote the linguistic integration of immigrants in French society (Girard-Lamoureux, 2004). An exception to this rule is made for Canadian Anglophones who wish to study in English, but restrictive criteria must be met for access to English public schools. No restrictions apply to the language of instruction at the postsecondary level.

Though justified by the strong sense of identity the French language represents for the majority of Québécois (Dickinson & Young, 2003), the introduction of this policy in 1977 has had a major impact on Anglophones in Québec, particularly on their minority status within the province (Caldwell & Waddell, 1982; Clift & McLeod Arnopoulos, 1979). The Quebec Community Groups Network (2009), bringing together English-language community organizations across Québec, has labeled Anglophones a *minority within a minority*. This label highlights the complexity of power relations between linguistic groups that shift according to the specific context at the local, provincial, national, or international level. Echoing the expression *fragile majority* used to describe Québec Francophones (McAndrew, 2010), we characterise Anglophones as a *powerful minority* within Québec.

In many ways the situation of Anglophones, and allophones, in the city and province of Québec parallels that of linguistic minorities throughout the world. When the official language of a region is not their own, speakers of the other languages fear for their linguistic and educational rights (Fishman, 1991). And yet the situation of Anglophones, as a uniquely powerful minority, is quite different given the status of English at the global level. English has been called a *killer language*, threatening linguistic diversity (Phillipson, 1992) and legitimizing inequalities (Tollefson, 1991), even as it spreads and changes around the world (Kachru, 1992). In light of the international importance of English (Calvet, 2006; De Swaan, 2001), youth are attracted to the English language, even in the province of Québec (St-Laurent, 2008).

Within the context of international, national, and provincial language and power issues, our research focuses locally on the experiences and discourses of 10 LM youth in Québec City. Pilote and Bolduc (2008) call for more such research on “the real concerns of stakeholders,” particularly young people educated in English, research that addresses how young people “see themselves in relation to the issue of language and culture in education, in Quebec” (p. 12).

Linguistic identity and appropriated discourse

Linguistic identities of minority youth in Québec and beyond

Research has drawn attention to the choice of bilingual (or multilingual) identities among LM youth in Canada (Dallaire & Denis, 2005; Gérin-Lajoie, 2003, 2013; Lamarre, 2007; Landry, Deveau, & Allard, 2006; Pilote, Magnan, & Vieux-Fort, 2010). Bilingual youth value their multiple identities, which allow them to circulate between linguistic communities (Pilote, 2007), the minority and the majority, and local and national spaces (Dallaire & Roma, 2003).

Recent studies have identified the role of English schools in the construction of bilingual or anglophone identities in Québec (Gérin-Lajoie, 2011; Magnan, 2011; Vieux-Fort & Pilote, 2013). Moreover, the separation of the public school system into two distinct language networks contributes to the (re)production of social boundaries between Francophones and Anglophones (Magnan, 2012; Pilote et al., 2011). A qualitative study of bilingual and trilingual youth in English schools in Montréal showed that English is valued for its practical utility and prestige and that these youth do not feel threatened by French, considering the status of English in North America (Gérin-Lajoie, 2011). These results contrast with research on francophone minorities in other Canadian provinces, where the minority language, French, is associated with a sense of identity and where youth demonstrate a critical perspective concerning power relations between language groups (Gérin-Lajoie, 2013; Pilote, 2007). Studies in Montréal have shown that allophone youth value a multilingual identity and are motivated for

language learning, recognizing the variable worth of English, French, and their native language in local, national, and international contexts (Lamarre & Paredes, 2003; Tokita, 2004).

Beyond Canada, research has highlighted bilingual and multilingual identities among LM youth internationally. Researchers consistently observe that the use of language and expressions of identity change depending on context (e.g., Mariou, 2012; Pietikäinen, 2012; Valentine, Sporton, & Bang Nielson, 2009). Differences in the value attributed to languages lead to feelings of tension in the linguistic practices and identities of minority youth (Utakis & Pita, 2005). Meanwhile, minority youth have been shown to use variation in their linguistic practices to create spaces where they can express complex identities that are not valued in the dominant culture (Doran, 2004). The importance of discourse has also been evident in research on youth identity construction. While some studies have described the use of discourses in defining others, as in the discursive construction of deficit identities for minorities (Briscoe & DeOliver, 2012), other studies have shown the use of discourses by youth in negotiating their own identities. Minority youth have been shown to appropriate counterdiscourses, resisting their marginalization, as in the case of South Asian youth in Hong Kong who, associating themselves with English, emphasized the superiority of English over the local languages (Gu & Patkin, 2013). In exploring the linguistic identities of minority youth in Québec City, as influenced by their specific sociolinguistic and language policy context, we focus on the discourses that they appropriate in explaining their experiences and perceptions of intergroup relations, as framed in the following section.

Identity and the appropriation of discourses

Recent sociolinguistic theorizing on the concept of scale has helped in looking beyond the local context in analyzing phenomena such as speech events and the ways in which discourses are produced and appropriated (Blommaert, 2010). This includes analysis of “the jump from one scale to another: from the individual to the collective, the temporally situated to the trans-temporal, the unique to the common, the token to the type, the specific to the general” (Blommaert, 2007, p. 4). Such scale jumps are used by individuals who have access to certain sociolinguistic or discursive resources in order to exert power over others. Also important is the concept that “reality, seen from within one scale-level, is quite different from reality seen from within another scale-level” (p. 11). Canagarajah (2013) has asserted that people make use of or invoke scale rather than simply being shaped by scales: “Interactants construct the context that is operative in their talk by invoking different scales of time, space, and social life” (p. 155).

Regarding the concept of identity, Gumperz and Cook-Gumperz (1982) have highlighted “the role that communicative phenomena play in the exercise of power and control and in the production and reproduction of social identity” (p. 1). Similarly, in his reflections on talk as both a local and a global process, Erickson (2004) describes local communication both as influenced by factors outside of the interaction and as local and unique, leaving what he calls “wiggle room—spaces for agency within the conduct of discourse in everyday life” (p. 198). Interaction between individuals, involving continual adaptation and the display of identities, becomes “a work site for the production of discourse” (p. 190).

We see that individuals make use of linguistic discourses in constructing their identities, in what Pavlenko and Blackledge (2004) describe as “an attempt to self-name, to self-characterize, and to claim social spaces and social prerogatives” (p. 19). Hall (2002) provides a similar definition of identity, as “relational and reflexive, as *produced* through multiple forms and forces of discourse in relation to distinctive forms of power, and as *performed* as individuals negotiate multiple identifications across contexts of situated practice” (p. 14). The negotiation of identities through self-representations and interaction is particularly relevant to linguistic minorities, involving the appropriation of discourses for their own purposes, often in resistance to the identities ascribed to them by others (Hall, 2002). Through this study, our attention was drawn to ways in which young people choose to appropriate discourses and invoke scales in describing their social context and defining themselves in relation to others.

Methodology: Youth interviews in Québec City

This exploratory study focuses on interview data collected among Québec City's anglophone and allophone youth and addresses the question: How do anglophone and allophone youth in Québec City experience and explain their position as linguistic minorities in a francophone environment? Beyond exploring the local impact of language policies, we focus on the ways these youth interpret their social situation, the identity choices they make in positioning themselves, and the discourses that they appropriate in describing their sociolinguistic context. We were also interested in why Anglophones and allophones still experience tensions in Québec society and how these tensions are perpetuated through social interaction. Working with an awareness of the broader sociolinguistic context and the power dynamics involved, we took an inductive approach, searching qualitatively for what could be learned from patterns and themes that emerged in the data itself. We give voice to minority youth not to provide a complete description of their reality but to explore how their experiences and discourses shed light on the society in which they live. As Bucholtz (2011) observes, student responses “ideologically represent rather than reflect the local cultural context in which they are embedded” (p. 39). Data were collected through qualitative, semi-structured interviews. In our attention to the discourses used by interviewees, we recognized that the interview itself is a speech event, involving the joint construction of discourse between interviewee and interviewer (Briggs, 1986). We focused on what was said in this specific speech event (Hymes, 1974), while paying attention to the “multilayered contexts in which [this interaction] is embedded” (Farah, 1997, p. 131).

In Québec City, only 1.4% of the population are mother-tongue speakers of English, and only 2.9% have a mother tongue other than French or English (Statistique Canada, 2011). In recent years, Québec City has intensified its efforts at recruiting immigrants. A report based on the 2006 Census shows a 30% increase in new immigrants between 2001 and 2006 (Lessard & Echraf, 2009). Even with this important increase, Québec City remains quite homogeneous, with immigrants making up only 3.7% of the population compared to 20% in comparable Canadian cities. Looking more closely at the linguistic characteristics of Québec City immigrants, the report shows that French-speaking countries represent the most important source of immigrants. Visible minorities make up 44.3% of the total immigrant population in Québec City.

The 10 young people interviewed for this study were all students at the only English-language college in Québec City, one of only seven in the province. Although the institutional context of this college is English-dominant, the majority of students attending there are Francophone, reflecting Québec City's sociolinguistic context. Even though these young people attend a college where all instruction is in the English language, they are far from being the majority, with Francophones accounting for nearly 80% of the student body (Jedwab, 2004). A call for volunteers was sent by email to students who had been identified by this college as speaking a language other than French at home. One-on-one interviews were then arranged at the convenience of those who volunteered, although one pair of students (Michael and Cassandra) preferred to be interviewed together. We made an effort to build rapport and create a casual setting for the interviews, sharing personal stories and keeping a conversational tone. The semistructured interviews lasted between 1 and 2 hours and flexibly followed the train of thought of the interviewees. We used a loose set of questions with the goal of eliciting thoughts and stories related to language, identity, and future goals, including questions on Québec's linguistic groups, language use and attitudes, the influence of family and social groups, educational choices and adjustment, and future plans.

Qualitative analysis of the interviews involved multiple (re)readings of the interview transcripts, identification of recurring themes, and subsequent coding and analysis of the interviews in relation to those themes (Gibbs, 2007; Paillé & Mucchielli, 2012). Although our interviews and focus were guided by our research interests, we approached the data inductively, pursuing the themes that emerged as most relevant in the data. As a qualitative, interview-based study, this research values the voices of individuals, based on “an interest in the interpretations of reality as seen by the group

members” (Agar, 1996, p. 243). In this perspective, the researcher approaches a situation as a learner, exploring issues that defy original assumptions and categories (1996). This approach encourages a comprehensive analysis of data without a formal theoretical frame. We used our understanding and experiences in the larger context of the city, the province, and beyond in analyzing qualitatively what was said by local youth.

Our research team included three female scholars: a U.S.-American Anglophone of German heritage and short-term immigrant to Québec, who led in designing the project and conducted interviews with seven participants; a francophone resident of Quebec who grew up in a French minority setting (in a Canadian province other than Québec), whose previous research inspired and informed the project; and a Francophone born in Québec with a Creole-speaking immigrant father of Caribbean heritage, who conducted three of the interviews with allophone youth (Felipe, Leandra, and Salina) and worked closely with the first researcher in the preliminary analysis and coding of themes. All three researchers were involved in the analysis and interpretation of data, drawing from our own experiences in identifying with participants and in thinking about linguistic power relations.

The diversity of the participants adds significance to the experiences and discourses that they share. Pseudonyms are used in all cases. Four of the interviewees have one francophone parent from Québec, of whom two have another parent from the historical Anglophone community of Québec (Julie and Joe) and two have a parent from outside of the province (Jessica and Monique). Two are Anglophones whose parents come from other parts of Canada (Zacharie and Michael). Four are allophone immigrants, of whom two were educated within the French school system in Québec (Cassandra and Felipe) and two arrived in Québec for postsecondary education (Leandra and Salina). [Table 1](#) provides a fuller description of the 10 participants. Socioeconomic status was not emphasized in our research questions, and neither this nor gender emerged as relevant themes in the interviews. In terms of appearance, participants are Caucasian and/or Hispanic. Most of the interviewees emphasize Canadian identity over Québécois identity, with immigrants emphasizing their move to Canada rather than their move, in particular, to Québec. In general, the students value bilingualism and talk about both French and English friendships, although their choice of an English-language college has pulled them towards Anglophone social circles.

Tension between linguistic groups: Youth experiences

Made to feel different

The language-related policies and sociolinguistic climate described above are reflected in student experiences and discourses regarding life in Québec City. Some of the students talked about the historical and political tensions surrounding French and English, providing their opinions on Bill 101 and often expressing disapproval of the policies favoring French. The students’ comments also point towards social norms that divide Anglophones and Francophones in day-to-day situations. Social actors from both groups perpetuate these norms, which influence their view of social groups as well as the ways they interact with others.

Growing up in a bilingual (French-English) family, Joe has experienced the tension associated with the linguistic divide in Québec; he leans towards the Anglophone identity associated with his English education. His perception of the laws protecting French are negative, but he recognizes the social situation behind them:

If they try to touch Bill 101 or touch something out [of] the French heritage, the people will feel oppressed. Instead of trying to work together... they have a big Berlin Wall still in the middle. Both sides are talking, but they're not communicating.

Table 1. Participants

Pseudonyms	Background	Education	Home Languages	Reason attending English college	Future Plans
<i>Anglophones with one parent in the historical anglophone community and one francophone parent</i>					
Julie	Small-town Québec Father: French heritage; Mother: Irish heritage	English school in village; St. Patrick's HS	English*, French	The only English option; family had gone there	Attend an English university in small town
Joe (older student)	Montréal Father: Francophone Mother: Anglophone	English schools in Montréal	English, French	Tourism program	Uncertain
<i>Anglophones with one parent from outside of Québec and one francophone parent</i>					
Jessica	Many moves; southern U.S. Father: French Québécois Mother: U.S. American	Mostly English schools in the U.S.	English*, French	Easier in English	Attend Université Laval in Québec City
Monique	Western Canada Father: French Québécois; Mother: French heritage	French schools in western Canada; private French school in Québec	English*, French	Easier in English	Study law at McGill University in Montréal
<i>Anglophones with both parents from other provinces in Canada</i>					
Zacharie	Born in Montréal Father: Anglo from Ontario; Mother: Asian American	French primary school in Québec City; private French HS	English; fluent French with most friends	Enough French education; easier to write in English	Attend an English university in Montréal; settle in English Canada
Michael	Ontario; East European heritage; Came alone to study in QC	English schools in Ontario	English; French as second language	Easier in English	Attend Laval—to improve French; travel
<i>Allophone immigrants educated in Québec's French school system</i>					
Cassandra	Born in Eastern Europe; Mostly raised in Montréal	French schools in Montréal and Québec City	Eastern-European language, French; English as school language	To improve English	Attend McGill—to improve English
Felipe	South America Father: South American of European heritage; Mother: Brazilian	Spanish primary French primary and secondary	Spanish, Portuguese; now also English and French	To improve English	Study psychology at McGill University
<i>Allophones who arrived in Québec for post-secondary education</i>					
Leandra	Mexico; grandmother from Québec	Spanish primary and HS in Mexico; English HS in U.S.	Spanish	Needed English	Attend McGill (to be in cosmopolitan Montréal) or Laval (although she's afraid of the French)
Salina	Central America; Canadian citizen	Spanish schools in Central America	Spanish	Needed English	Study finance at a Montréal university; return to Central America

*Dominant language.

Joe's reference to a "Berlin Wall" is reminiscent of the separation between Anglophones and Francophones described in the classic novel by MacLennan (1945), *The Two Solitudes*, a reality that is still relevant for understanding identity formation and intergroup relations in Québec today. Julie also comes from a bilingual family, with a mother of Irish heritage giving her roots in the historic Anglophone community of Québec. She identifies and resists the social representation that equates "Québécois" with "Francophone":

They think that... there is just one way of being Québécois, and I don't think that. A lot of people think that. With, like, immigration and all that, they think you should be one way. I don't think that's right... There's not just one way to be a Canadian either.

Julie remembers walking down the street in Québec City when she was young, speaking English, and hearing someone shout at her: “Here we speak French!” She summarizes this as “little things like that. Not anything dramatic.” These situations, and her trivialization of them, illustrate the social norm of French as the legitimized public language of Québec.

Although the young people we interviewed talked about mixed friendship groups and did not emphasize conflict between groups in their comments, their discourses still portray the distinction between Francophones and Anglophones (and other non-Francophones). They each have stories of being made to feel different. If not outright excluding them, the majority has the power to make them feel that they do not quite belong. They have been considered the “other,” judged for their accent or for their language use, and in various ways excluded from the *Nous Québécois*. The following stories of Monique and Zacharie depict well the difficulty of truly belonging in the mainstream francophone culture of Québec. Both spent a large part of their childhood in Québec province and, by choice, attended French schools.

Monique: Trying to assimilate but giving up

When Monique moved from western Canada to Québec with her family, she already spoke French because her parents were of French heritage and she had attended French immersion schools. In Québec City, she attended French schools and tried her best to fit in with her peers. Eventually her attitude changed as she discovered how difficult the barrier of being different was to overcome:

They will see it as “you're different” because you come from somewhere else. They will say it, and everyone will make the same remark to you and—I don't think it is meant to be negative, but it is just—I remember when I got here... I just turned 12 and everybody was like “we only speak French” or “you have an English accent when you speak French.”

She had not realized that her French was perceived as accented before she came to Québec City, but she tried her best to change her accent: “So now I sound like somebody from here, I guess. And for what exactly that brought—it doesn't make you any better in the language because you can speak like them.”

After some time, Monique's attitude towards assimilation in Québec changed. Her first few years in Québec City, she tried to use French as much as possible, not wanting to appear different:

When I got here, I'd speak French... Sometimes in the mall, at the beginning, I was embarrassed to speak English to my Mom because everybody just turns around. But after that it is like “Who cares?” You just want to express yourself the easiest way possible.

Although she had originally thought of herself as bilingual, her experience in Québec changed that: “At a certain point, I just gave up and said ‘I'm an Anglophone’... The more I've stayed here, the less I'll do anything in French.” Although her “first reflex was to blend in,” after living in Québec, she just wants to leave. In her opinion, going to an English college has also influenced her friendship circles and contributed to the “deterioration” of her abilities in French. Despite her French heritage, Monique's inability to fit in with the francophone majority influenced her decision to claim an anglophone identity, distancing her further from the Francophones from whom she felt excluded.

Zacharie: Never fully integrated

Zacharie was born in Montréal to an Ontarian father and an Asian-American mother. Although he was sent to French private schools, English is the dominant language of the home. He has a preference for English and a stronger affiliation with the English community, and yet the languages are mixed in

his experience: “How can I separate them, because they both are in my social lives?” He explains that someone bilingual like himself can “navigate the barriers,” can “fit in with both groups.”

However, Zacharie says that people classify him as an Anglophone “just because of my name.” He remains the “other”: “They still see me as an Anglophone even though I speak fluent French as well as they do. I’m still not a Francophone; I’m an Anglophone.” This classification is more about heritage than about language skills. Zacharie has found that this category of Anglophone implies different treatment in Québec City. He senses what he calls an undertone of “I don’t really like you” or “stinginess” towards Anglophones. Searching for the word, he turns to French: “*mépris*” [*contempt/scorn*]. He has even overheard comments like “*les maudits anglais*” [the damned English].

Zacharie also expressed his own resentment towards the French and what he perceives as forced homogeneity: “The fact that they want to just force people into your [*sic*] culture is a little much for me.” Regarding integration, Zacharie talks about personal choice but also describes the feeling of exclusion that has hindered his full integration into the majority culture of Québec City:

I know I’m here, but I don’t feel 100% integrated. Because I just don’t want to be integrated into this culture as much. I’d rather be in an English-oriented culture...

So far I feel comfortable here, but not as accepted as I could be. Because I feel it is more Francophone than anything to me. I never fully integrated into the French culture.

Still, he explains that it has not been a bad experience living in Québec City; it has been a safe place. But he prefers more diversity in a “bigger” place such as Montréal. He does not feel that he belongs and he wants to leave: “Cause I don’t really like the closed-mindedness of the people here.”

The open- versus closed-minded discourse

Anglophones as open-minded and Francophones as closed-minded: Exploring the discourse

The theme of open- versus closed-mindedness came up repeatedly in participants’ discourse, though not present in the interview questions. The students sometimes refer to the city itself as a closed-minded place, and sometimes they explicitly label the Francophones, dominant in the city, as closed-minded in terms of linguistic and cultural diversity. This section explores the meaning and implications of this open- versus closed-minded discourse as it was used by the youth interviewed. We observe how this discourse comes as a reaction to being made to feel different, as presented in the previous section, and how it influences relationships and integration among Québec City’s youth. The open-minded/closed-minded labels are comparative and context-dependent. Anglophones and allophones are described as more open-minded when compared to Francophones, and Francophones as more closed-minded. Comparing Québec with the province where she was born, for example, Monique says: “It is a bit different. People aren’t as open.” As an immigrant, Leandra has an overall positive impression of people from Québec as very welcoming, but she concludes: “I think Anglophones are more open-minded, I guess. Because my best friends are more Anglophones than Francophones.” In some contexts, open-mindedness seems to mean openness to new relationships or warmth in relationship. Of course, relationships are more easily developed when language is less of a barrier, and Leandra speaks English more fluently than French.

Several students caught an apparent contradiction and explained the difference between the liberal approach to issues like sexuality or alcohol and conservative attitudes regarding language and ethnic diversity. Joe expresses it like this: “We claim to be the most open-minded province, but we’re... so closed, for the most part... We’re open-minded to gays and nudity, but when it comes to languages, we’re like: ‘Kiss my ass’... ‘Don’t touch my French!’”

Lack of diversity as lack of elasticity: Québec City as closed-minded and homogenous

The relatively homogenous make-up of Québec City, with its large francophone majority, is mentioned as a primary explanation for closed-mindedness. Contrasts are drawn to Montréal and other large metropolitan cities with greater cultural and linguistic diversity. Monique explains: “Unlike Montréal or Ottawa, which are very multicultural... I almost get the feeling like Québec City is more of a small place... It feels smaller. More of a closed mentality.” Before moving to Québec City with her family, Monique had never heard someone identified as a Black person and had never been to a school with so few racial minorities. Here, she heard people referred to as: “the Chinese girl, the Black person.” Although she does not think those labels are intended as insults, she was shocked to hear them. The same is true for English speakers, she explains. Since almost everyone speaks French, the English speakers stick out as different.

Educated in French schools ever since her family moved from Eastern Europe, Cassandra does not feel like an outsider. “But it’s true,” she says, “that in Québec [City] there is less acceptance of immigrants than in Montréal.” Similarly, Salina misses the diversity of friendships she was able to establish during her English studies in Montréal: “When I came here it was really hard because people here are really... mostly Québécois, Québec-Quebeckers... And they’re mostly people—I think—people from Québec. They’re really—their way.” In contrast to the diversity that the students have experienced in other places, they feel the effects of homogeneity and the rigidity of social norms in Québec City.

Michael, who grew up in Toronto and has European heritage, perceives an absence of ethnic communities in Québec City and talks about the adjustment required to fit into the dominant cultural group, “the Québec one.” He describes multiculturalism as the result of elasticity in social interaction, an elasticity that grows through cultural contacts:

It’s all about being flexible... In Montréal the elastic has been stretched, it’s very much a multicultural society, whereas Québec [City]—it’s more touchy because there are less culture(s)... but I think with time... maybe in the future there will be more of a... multicultural Québec than it is now.

On the individual level, Michael also describes an elasticity that involves mobility, having new experiences in new places, but it also involves being open to such experiences and open to others with different experiences, values, and norms.

The homogenous makeup of the city is not the only factor that makes it seem closed-minded. The students perceive a preference for homogeneity, an attitude implying that the city (and province) *should* be homogenous. As mentioned in the previous section, Julie resists the idea that there is only one way to be Québécois or Canadian. Zacharie also expresses disapproval of Québec’s attempts to homogenize immigrants or to “force people” into a certain culture.

Lack of world experience, lack of interest, and lack of English: A deficit discourse

Some of the students excused so-called closed-mindedness by explaining that many Québec Francophones have not had experiences outside of their own city or region. Having moved from her home country to Montréal and from there to Québec City, Cassandra says that she has no fear of “changing school or making new friends or changing place.” In contrast, she talks about francophone friends in Québec who lack such diverse experiences:

There are some... that stay in the same country and are afraid to go elsewhere because they never experienced it... Because they were born here, raised here, lived in one home, one room, one garden, one street... one language, one friend. [*Laughter*] No, not friend, but one same group. And when it comes to going to another country or learning another language, [they’d say]: “I’d prefer to live in Québec where I know all my family and all my friends and... my street, my room, my TV.”

She and Michael, who were interviewed together, associate this attitude with pride and patriotism. Cassandra describes some of her more “patriotic” francophone friends as those “who never went to another country” and who would be more likely to object to someone in Québec who does not speak

French (or speak it well). Michael responds to this as follows: “You can be patriotic, but I think there’s a limit... [They] just haven’t had a worldly experience that has opened them to others.” Monique also describes the “open one[s]” as “those who have lived outside the province or at least the city” and explains the closed-mindedness of others in terms of lack of knowledge: “Some people despise the English because they don’t know or understand them.” Monique perceived a “who cares” attitude from her classmates when it came to learning about other countries.

For Zacharie, closed-mindedness is also associated with a disinterest in English and with restricted opportunities:

I think English is very important to learn, so the fact that Québec [City] is like: “We don’t need English”—it’s just ridiculous and dumb... That’s why I’d like to at least go to Montréal where it’s a bit more open-minded.

Closed-minded in this sense seems to mean restriction or lack of openness to opportunities. Interestingly, Zacharie personifies the whole city of Québec, implying a widespread rejection of English. The above uses of the “closed-minded” discourse clearly reflect a deficit mentality in these students’ representations of Québec City Francophones. Francophones are portrayed as having a lack of world experience, a lack of English skills, and a lack of interest in these. The sense of superiority implied in this discourse is discussed further below.

Some exceptions: The relative nature of the closed-minded discourse

The analysis of a discourse includes searching for patterns and then searching for explanations for deviation from those patterns. While the theme of closed-mindedness in Québec City seemed strong in most of our interviews, two participants actually characterized Québec City as “open-minded,” even in terms of cultural and linguistic diversity. The comparative nature of this discourse and the previous experiences of these interviewees in less accepting places help to explain their different perspective. Jessica is a special case. Having moved from the southern United States, where she experienced a racially segregated and socially conservative context, she views Québec City as very open. Of her French friends, she says that they speak English well, do student exchanges and travel a lot, a lot more than people where she grew up, at least. Joe provides another exception to the “closed-minded Québec City” discourse. From his experience growing up on the border of segregated francophone and anglophone neighborhoods, he finds Montréal to be less accepting of diversity than Québec City. Although his mother is Francophone, he was often the victim of stereotyping simply because of his English last name. He has not experienced the same in Québec City in his roles as student and as employee in the downtown center of tourism: “I’d say it’s not as bad in Québec City because we’re more open-minded.”

From discourses about closed-mindedness, it is easy to detect a sense of superiority and an obvious preference for people and places that are more “open.” Some of the students did not put the blame directly on Francophones, given that they live in a rather homogenous city and have had few experiences outside the area. Still, a condescending attitude is revealed in this discourse, and there remains an implication of choice in being or not being open-minded. This sense of superiority is explored in the following section in relation to discourses about learning and using English, about diversity, and about choice of college institution.

Discourses of superiority

Jessica’s comments at the beginning of this article describe a discourse of superiority, the weapon of an Anglophone who is verbally attacked because of language. The sense of superiority that becomes evident in student discourses regarding Francophones centers around the value of English and the value of diversity and extends to the value of the English college that they attend, as an English-dominant, multicultural space.

Superiority of the English language

The value of the English language is highlighted in the stories and discourses of the students. Zacharie, for example, associates English-language knowledge directly with success in the business world: “If you don’t know English you don’t belong in business.” Jessica extends this idea to job opportunities beyond Québec: “If you know English you can work anywhere in the world.” She elaborates:

My English skills mean that I have more possibility of working other places since I go to English school. I can work all over the US, I can work in Europe—anywhere they speak French or English. So it opens up 100% more possibilities than if I spoke one language.

Similarly, Leandra describes English as important for “being someone” and “getting somewhere.” Joe also talks about open doors of opportunity, particularly in relation to his English skills: “English is a very... useful tool... It’s going to open so many doors.” Like many of the other interviewees, Joe said that he would send his own children to English schools because of the opportunities it opens up to them. Julie describes her socialization into an understanding of the value of English, influenced by what she has been told by others:

When I would babysit French-speaking kids, and they would be really kind-of jealous, or their parents would say: “You’re just so lucky that you speak English...” Like, “you’re privileged.” I didn’t really understand, but I think now I’m really lucky... I’m proud I can speak two languages.

In describing how “lucky” she is to be able to speak two languages, Julie emphasizes the economic value in terms of the cost that would be required of others to learn another language: “A lot of people, you know, would give a tooth to be able to speak another language and we have it for *free*.”

In contrast to discourses about the value of English, some interviewees talked about the resistance to English in Québec City. Joe says that English is seen as a threat, as something that could “taint the gene pool” of francophone Québec. The threat of English to Québec’s collective identity stands in contrast to the individual opportunities offered through learning English. As Monique puts it: “The attitude is like English is the enemy. At the same time, they have to learn English for their own good.” Emphasis on francophone resistance to English and to English learning, when contrasted with the value of English in the world, positions the interviewees as possessing a superior skill and reflects negatively on Francophones who are portrayed as rejecting that skill. Julie adds some nuance, however, noting that many Francophones choose to study in English at the college level.

Superiority of diversity

As emphasized in the above section on open-mindedness, students portray the presence of and acceptance of diversity as superior. Felipe, who was born in South America to parents from different ethnic backgrounds, values his diverse background and experiences:

I would tend to say that people who speak more than one language are more cultivated... I don’t want to sound cocky, but I might be more—I feel like I might be more, not developed, but more advanced to talk about something as world politics and something like that, because I don’t only know what I was born with.

Other immigrant students also expressed pride in their own heritage. Salina talks about the preferred values for ways of treating people in her native Central American culture. Cassandra, though she moved to Québec when she was young, embraces her Eastern European identity, and Michael, of European heritage, calls himself “Canadian, with enriched European.” In describing their diverse identities, however, our interviewees generally do not embrace a French Québec identity. They, in fact, seem to distance themselves from it.

Emphasizing a lack of diversity in Québec City allows our interviewees another opportunity to position themselves as superior, as representing and accepting diversity. In the next section, the students present their English college as a superior place, a haven of diversity in the city. As Monique says: “You have to actually come to [this college] to realize that people actually speak other languages

than French in this city... I do hear people speak English around, but it will be in Old Québec. It will be tourists.”

Superiority of Québec City's English college

A conversation between Michael and Cassandra, in their joint interview, captured their perspective on their college as a superior space within Québec City. The discussion started as they explained why they had chosen to attend the English college: Michael because English is his mother tongue and Cassandra for the opportunity to improve her English. Michael then comments on the uniqueness of this college environment, comparing it with the nearby French college:

I didn't realize how different it would be from the rest of Québec City. Because it's an English *cégep*, you get a lot of people from different—elsewhere and mentalities, and that's what I love about the school. The different ways of thinking in comparison to [the nearby French college]... [Our college] is a bit more multicultural than the others.

Cassandra immediately adds: “and also the dreams of the people are not the same.” She goes on to explain:

People go to [the nearby French college] who are French [and] know they will be in Québec all their life—I think the majority case—and they just want to become something and work as an average person for society. And, at [our college], [what] I find interesting is that when you meet a person you see that person has much bigger dreams... They are all talking worldwide. Otherwise, students talk locally.

Cassandra goes on to say: “They know that English can help them open up to the whole world and not just this country, this street, this house, this little job.” This has been her own experience in wanting to improve her English: “Because I too don't really think I'm going to stay in Québec.”

As their conversation continues, they talk about students from their college who have been able to fulfil their dreams, dreams that are not unrealistic but that “seem big for people here in Québec,” such as being accepted at Yale or traveling abroad. Cassandra explains that within the “very patriotic” context of Québec City, “people who go to [our college] are not like the rest.” A sense of superiority about the English college is linked to the superior multicultural atmosphere of the school. Although many of the students there are first-language French speakers, Michael describes the acceptance he has felt in a more multicultural environment. Cassandra and Michael end their discussion talking about the rejection of [their college] and of other English schools by some Francophones. While the non-francophone students seem to be claiming a superior stance, not just in their interviews but also in social contexts, this boasting seems to be triggered by rejection from others.

Conclusions: Issues of scale and power in identity choices

A pattern emerges from the above findings, a pattern that was also reflected in Jessica's story in the introduction. To simplify, Francophones portray Anglophones, and often by extension allophones, as minorities who “ruin everything,” refusing to integrate into the majority francophone society. Meanwhile, Anglophones and allophones choose to present themselves as superior, as possessing superior skills and job opportunities, contrasting themselves with “closed-minded” Francophones. Each of these actions could be interpreted as a reaction to the other action. They may even together perpetuate a cycle: rejection of the conceited, powerful minority on one hand and refusal of a minority status through claimed superiority on the other hand. Although we have not shown the prevalence of this pattern in Québec society or found evidence for causality, we observe the pattern in the experiences and discourses of 10 diverse youth who have identified themselves as non-francophone and who have chosen an English college education. The perpetuated cycle may help to explain ongoing tension between linguistic groups in Québec as, through their discourses, the groups distance themselves from one another.

Social actors have been shown to construct ethnic boundaries through interaction processes, as they classify and categorize people in terms of “us” and “them” (Barth, 1969). The ways in which individuals interact with each other are shaped by the identification categories that they use, categories that have less to do with cultural differences than with constructs that dichotomize members and non-members (Barth, 2008). Our findings reflect such dichotomization between groups. Juteau (1999) observes that these boundaries have a dual characteristic: internal (the “we” sense of belonging) and external (as defined by the other and with the power to exclude). For Juteau, that sense of exclusion often precedes the internal construction of a sense of collective identity. Our informants describe their experiences of being made to feel different, responding with discourses that position them as superior and characterize the other as “closed-minded,” thus reinforcing the boundaries. Our results are consistent with previous research in Québec City, showing that the education system contributes to the construction of the boundaries between Francophones and Anglophones (Magnan, 2012; Pilote et al., 2011). However, this article analyses in greater depth how discourse and interactions are linked to broader social representations and power dynamics.

Although the data presented here seem to highlight negative experiences of Anglophones and allophones in Québec City, our interviewees also talked about friendly relationships with Francophones, some resisting the linguistic categorization of their social circles and minimizing the differences between linguistic groups. The discourses that they chose to invoke in the interviews, however, reflect broader social tensions. The daily experiences of individuals in mixed social groups seem to contrast with the powerful collective discourses that divide those groups, discourses that may influence the ways that youth interact and provide a distorted reflection of reality. While constrained by these collective discourses, young people show their agency as they make use of the “wiggle room” (Erickson, 2004) available in their use of discourses and in the construction of their identities.

Minority youth in Québec have the rather unique opportunity to identify themselves with English, the international language of power. While at the local and provincial levels, they are linguistic minorities, at the national and international levels, they can associate themselves with the powerful “majority.” They choose the scale that better serves their interests (Blommaert, 2007; Canagarajah, 2013), using the superiority of their status at the macro level to navigate their minority situation at a more micro level. What the students in our study appear to be doing is invoking national and international scales through their discourses, scales in which English is dominant. They use discursive resources, shifting scale in order to resist the minority identity they face on the provincial scale. Invoking a more macro-level scale, they position themselves as open-minded and associate themselves with diversity, with a superior language and with a superior school. The concrete decision to attend an English college is a significant analogue to more abstract discourse choices, especially given the availability of more career tracks at the larger French colleges in Québec City. Our interviewees’ discourse strategies justify their decision. This micro-level English-language institution gains prestige when viewed from a more macro perspective.

Although more data would be needed to address the differences between the experiences of anglophone and allophone youth, their experiences are in many ways parallel. Being made to feel different and displaying a sense of superiority go hand-in-hand. When one does not feel truly included, choosing a competing, higher-status identity becomes an attractive strategy. Individual strategies, including invoking discourses of superiority and shifting scales, reinforce the boundary, and/or the perception of a boundary, between linguistic groups in Québec. Is the difficulty of integration a result of exclusion or a choice? Perhaps it is both. While LM young people are made to feel different in Québec City, they choose discourses and scales that position them as superior, both shaped by and shaping their circumstances. Our analysis shows the connection between power and identity in young people’s discursive self-construction of linguistic identities, addressing the dynamics between their identity construction and the perceived construction of their identities by others.

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ORCID

Cynthia Groff  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-9652-2094>

Notes

1. The Fête de la Saint-Jean-Baptiste, on the Catholic calendar, is a French-Canadian celebration. Under the influence of Québec's nationalist movement, it has become a civic holiday, Fête Nationale du Québec.
2. College refers here to Québec's unique postsecondary education institution called "cégep" (*collège d'enseignement général et professionnel*), offering general education and professional training. Its diploma gives access to university.
3. Although these immigrant allophones are ethnic and cultural minorities as well, we focused on their status as linguistic minorities in our interviews and analysis.

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