

Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages / Commissariat aux langues officielles

Understanding Linguistic (In)security

We need to build more linguistic security in Canadian society. That means building more acceptance and acknowledgment of the diverse varieties of English and French in Canada and of people's efforts to learn our official languages, both within the public service and in wider society.

Raymond Théberge

WHO IS AFFECTED BY LINGUISTIC INSECURITY? EVERYONE!
Linguistic insecurity in English or French is the idea that people aren't comfortable using these languages in situations where they should be able to, whether it's using their first official language or their second official language.

LINGUISTIC INSECURITY IN THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

Public servants have a lot to say...
Our survey of linguistic insecurity in bilingual language of work regions within the public service got a lot of attention; nearly 11,000 employees who work in these areas responded, and over 4,000 employees outside these areas also wanted to share their views.*

*Survey conducted in March 2019, non-probability sample

National Capital Region and New Brunswick
Areas that are bilingual for language of work purposes and where employees may serve the public in both official languages.

Ontario and Quebec
Areas that are not bilingual for language of work purposes but where employees may serve the public in both official languages.

Other provinces and territories
Areas that are not bilingual for work purposes but where employees may serve the public in both official languages.

SURVEY RESULTS:
French language insecurity was the most significant challenge overall for both Francophones and Anglophones, especially for speaking French, but also for writing and when asking to be supervised in French.

Experienced issues in French:	Experienced issues in English:
44% of Francophones	15% of Anglophones (20% in QC, outside the National Capital Region)
39% of Anglophones	11% of Francophones (18% in QC, outside the National Capital Region)

REASONS WHY PUBLIC SERVANTS DON'T ALWAYS FEEL COMFORTABLE USING ENGLISH OR FRENCH AT WORK

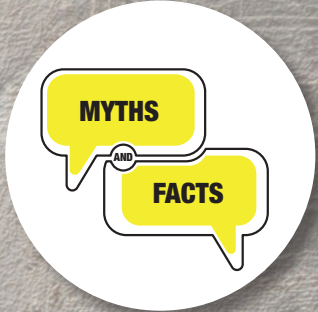
- My supervisor/colleagues aren't comfortable enough in my preferred official language.
- People will judge my accent and grammar.
- There is no budget for training and my workload is too heavy to maintain my second language.
- If I try practicing my second official language, my colleagues will just switch to the other language.
- If I use my first official language, people will think I'm a troublemaker.
- The language isn't often used where I work.
- I'm out of practice.

Many Anglophones and Francophones wanted more opportunities to use French at work. Some wanted more opportunities to use English at work in areas where French is the majority language.

Public servants who felt uncomfortable using their first official language were often concerned about inconveniencing others.

Public servants who felt uncomfortable using their second official language were often concerned about being judged.

Both Anglophones and Francophones reported a stronger ability to understand their second official language compared with their ability to speak or write it.



Questions? Come chat with us!

March 1, 10:30 a.m.–11:30 a.m. (ET)

March 1, 2:00 p.m.–3:00 p.m. (ET)

