

Language policy, social justice, and multilingualism in Canada: Calls for inclusion and linguistic de-hierarchization in education and society

Nikolay Slavkov

Professeur titulaire

Chaire de recherche en politiques linguistiques

Institut des langues officielles et du bilinguisme (ILOB)

Full Professor

Research Chair in Language Policy

Official Languages and Bilingualism Institute (OLBI)

Ni manàdjiyànànig Màmìwininì Anishinàbeg, ogog kà nàgadawàbandadjig iyo akì eko weshkad. Ako nongom egawìkàd kì mìgiwewàdj.

Ni manàdjiyànànig kakina Anishinàbeg ondaje kaye ogog kakina eniyagizidjig enigokamigàg Kanadàng eji ondàpinangig endàwàdjìn Odàwàng.

Ninisdawinawànànig kenawendamòdjig kije kikenindamàwin; weshkinìgidjig kaye kejejàdizidjig.

Nigijeweninmànànig ogog kà nìgànì sòngideyedjig; weshkad, nongom; kaye àyànikàdj.

Nous rendons hommage au peuple algonquin, gardien traditionnel de cette terre. Nous reconnaissons le lien sacré de longue date l'unissant à ce territoire, qui demeure non cédé. Nous rendons également hommage à toutes les personnes autochtones qui habitent Ottawa, qu'elles soient de la région ou d'ailleurs au Canada. Nous reconnaissons les gardiennes et gardiens des savoirs traditionnels de tous âges. Nous honorons aussi leurs dirigeantes et dirigeants d'hier, d'aujourd'hui et de demain, au courage indéniable.

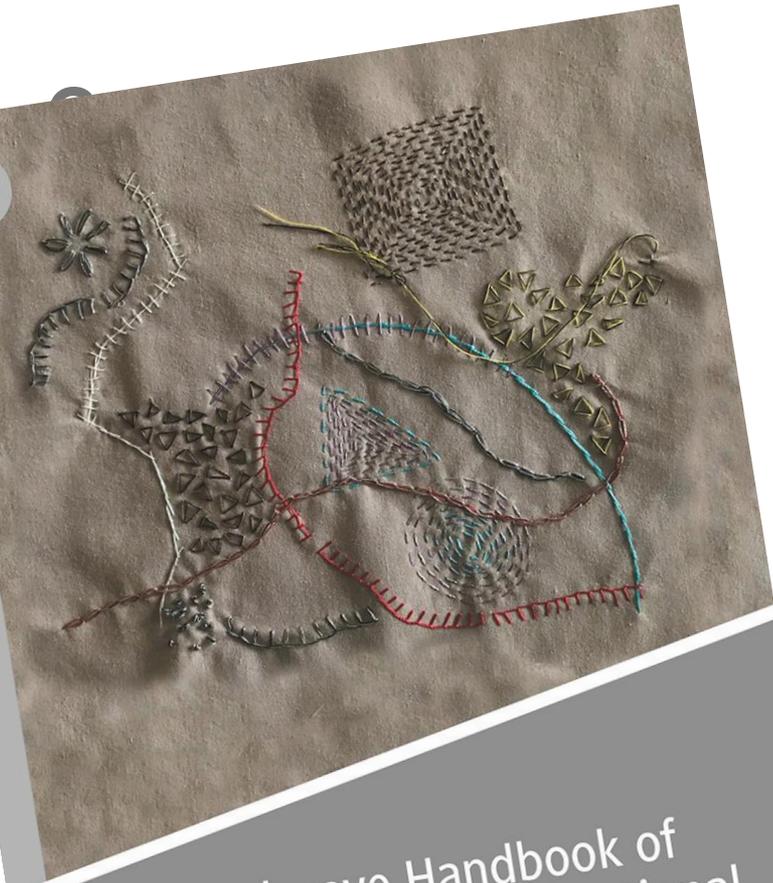
We pay respect to the Algonquin people, who are the traditional guardians of this land. We acknowledge their longstanding relationship with this territory, which remains unceded. We pay respect to all Indigenous people in this region, from all nations across Canada, who call Ottawa home. We acknowledge the traditional knowledge keepers, both young and old. And we honour their courageous leaders: past, present, and future.

Sir John A. Macdonald, Canada's first prime minister, addressing the House of Commons in 1883 (in his second term)



When the school is on the reserve the child lives with its parents, who are savages; he is surrounded by savages, and though he may learn to read and write his habits, and training and mode of thought are Indian. He is simply a savage who can read and write. It has been strongly pressed on myself [...] that Indian children should be withdrawn as much as possible from the parental influence, and the only way to do that would be to put them in central training industrial schools where they will acquire the habits and modes of thought of white men.





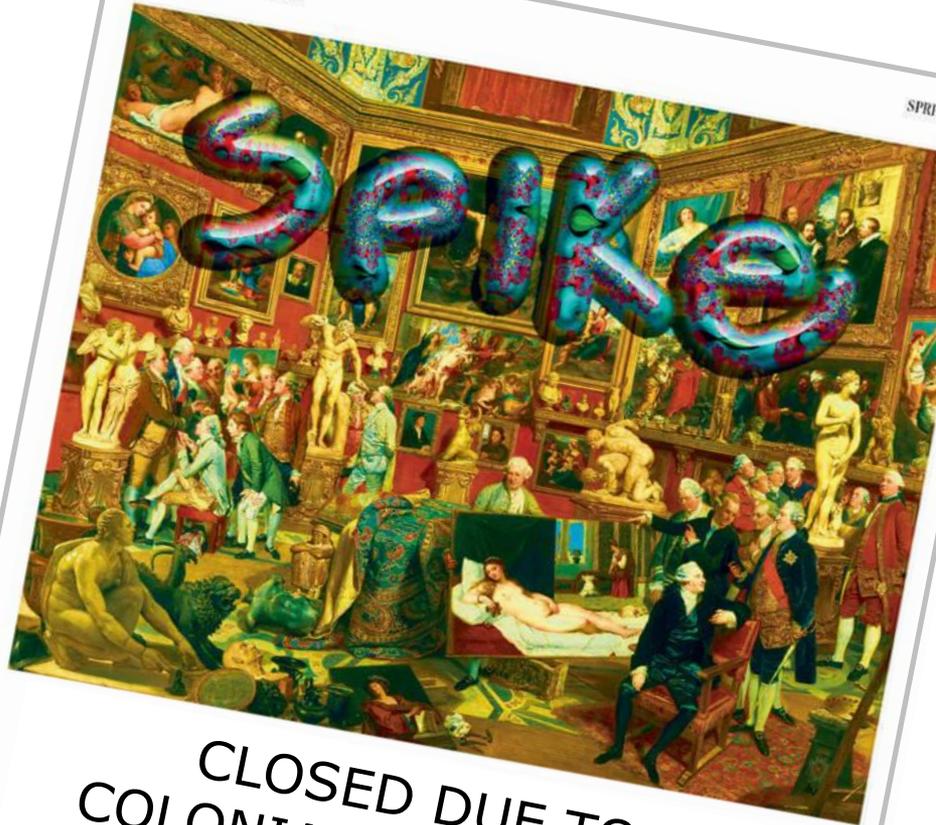
The Palgrave Handbook of Decolonising the Educational and Language Sciences

Edited by
Sangeeta Bagga-Gupta

palgra
macmillan

OPEN ACCESS

SPIKE ART MAGAZINE 75



CLOSED DUE TO COLONIALISM, ELITISM, AND A PRIVATE DINNER

DE/AT/EUR 18 GBP 16





Outline

1. Colonization
2. Ideology
3. Language ideologies and linguistic hierarchy in Canada
4. Story of an Indigenous professor and former Member of Parliament in Canada
5. Actions for Social Justice



Colonialism and domination



Overt colonialism:

- A given country or group conquers a territory and/or people in order to dominate, expand its influence or power, or gain additional resources:
 - Former colonial powers (e.g. Great Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, Belgium, the Netherlands, among many others)
 - Settler nations (e.g. Canada, the US, Australia, New Zealand, etc.,

Overt colonialism alive and well: current wars and calls for annexation

Covert colonialism:

- **A certain group dominates others and expects or forces them to conform to its practices, norms, and standards, to integrate or assimilate, or to give up their language and culture in favour of the dominant one.**



Ideology

- A set of views or beliefs, or a framework of constructing or interpreting the world around us.
- An ideology consists of a number of interconnected ideas that operate as a complex whole in helping us both interpret but also discursively (re)create, (re)imagine, (re)inforce our views of the world.
- Ideologies affect political and educational systems, government, and many other aspects of human life.





Key ideological processes

- Erasure: dominant ideologies do not acknowledge, deny the existence or importance of, or create rules or contexts in which certain objects disappear.
- Recursion: frequently repeating certain statements or messages that form part of a given ideology.
- Iconization: a given phenomenon or object is positioned positively or praised consistently to the point of becoming an icon, an object of adoration.

(See Gal, 2016, Irvine, 2019; Irvine & Gal, 2000 for a more complex view of the above processes)



Labels

- Labels are tools that reflect and also reinforce or perpetuate ideologies.

Compare:

explorers, settlers, visionaries, founding fathers of a new nation

vs.

occupiers, invaders, aggressors, oppressors





Modern Day Canada

- Two official languages (English and French)
- Multiple Indigenous languages (over 70)
- Multiple Immigrant/Heritage languages (over 130)
 - Rich and diverse linguistic portrait
 - Emphasis on bilingualism (official languages)



How many people are bilingual in Canada



People who can hold a conversation in both English and French

- 6%
- 18%
- 32%
- 41%
- 59%
- 84%
- 90%

How many people are bilingual in Canada



People who can hold a conversation in both English and French

- 6%
- 18%
- 32%
- 41%
- 59%
- 84%
- 90%

How many people are bilingual in Canada: another perspective



People who can hold a conversation in two languages but not necessarily English and French

- 6%
- 18%
- 32%
- 41%
- 59%
- 84%
- 90%



How many people are bilingual in Canada: another perspective



People who can hold a conversation in two languages but not necessarily English and French

- 6%
- 18%
- 32%
- 41%
- 59%
- 84%
- 90%



Canada, a country with two official languages as an ideology.



- The current status of Canada as a country with two official languages but in fact a multilingual society with English, French, Indigenous, Heritage/Immigrant, and Sign language speakers was achieved through complex historical processes involving various political and legislative events. (Haque and Patrick, 2015)
- Colonial legacy: “equal partnership between the two founding races” of Canada by the Royal Commission on Bilingualism and Biculturalism (RCBB, 1967, p. 173); Official Languages Act (1969).
 - Labels:
founding races, founding fathers, bilingualism, linguistic duality, languages of convergence

Erasure, recursion & iconization in the discourse of official languages



- “Languages of convergence” (statistics Canada 2022b)
- English-French Bilingualism “at the heart of Canadian values” (Canada School of Public Service, 2021)
- “Linguistic duality is a fundamental value. It is the pillar of society... We must never forget that linguistic duality has always been and will always be a part of Canada.” (Government of Canada, 2018).
- Linguistic duality “A Symbol of Inclusion at the Heart of Canadian Values” (CSPS, 2021)





Canada: a country with two official languages

- “Languages of Canada (Statistics Canada 2022b)
- English-French bilingualism is at the heart of Canadian values” (Canadian Service, 2021)
- “Linguistic duality is a core Canadian value. It is the pillar of our linguistic duality, a defining part of Canada.”
- Linguistic duality: A Symbol of Unity at the Heart of Canadian Values” (CSPS, 2021)

Erasure

Recursion

Iconization



The ghosts of racism, discrimination and abuse of Indigenous People



Residential school system existed for close to 200 years (with heavy government involvement starting in the 1880s and lasting until the 1990s) and caused immense intergenerational trauma to Indigenous people.

- “The residential school system was based on an assumption that European civilization and Christian religions were superior to Aboriginal culture, which was seen as being savage and brutal.” (Truth and Reconciliation Commission, 2015, p. 4).
- Reports of malnourishment, physical, psychological, and sexual abuse from residential school survivors abound, and some have called the residential school system equivalent to cultural genocide (TRC, 2015, p. 1) and linguicide (Fontaine, 2017).
- Mass graves of unidentified children at several former residential school sites (Cooper, 2023)



Robert-Falcon Ouellette

**Keynote
Speaker
at the
CCERBAL
Conference
May 8-10, 2025**

- Red Pheasant Cree Nation (Saskatchewan)
- Associate Professor, Faculty of Education, uOttawa
- Former Member of Parliament

ECSPM 2025: Actions for social justice in multilingual societies



Going beyond critical analysis



uOttawa

ECSPM 2025: Actions for social justice in multilingual societies; beyond critical analysis



- Multiculturalism Policy (1971), and later a Multiculturalism Act (1988).
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission's, a six-year inquiry (2009-15) that culminated in a substantial final report (2015) documenting and acknowledging the horrific experiences, including physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, cultural and linguistic genocide that occurred in the Residential School System (TRC, 2015). TRC (2007-2015): travelled across Canada (6500 witnesses); historical record; self-investigation; 94 calls to action.
- Indigenous Languages Act (2019): responds to some of the calls to action of the TRC (2015) and whose purpose is to support Indigenous Peoples in reclaiming, revitalizing, maintaining and strengthening Indigenous languages.
- Commissioner of Indigenous Languages: 2021.



Way forward?

- Official apologies, compensations
- Robert Falcon-Ouillette obtained unanimous consent to change the Standing Orders of the House of Commons for the full inclusion and interpretation of Indigenous languages.
- (Bilingualism better than monolingualism as a national policy: door opener to multilingualism?)
- Indiginization of the curriculum, **awareness raising/Conscientization?** regarding Indigenous people's cultures and languages, Indigenous symbols at universities and schools, Indigenous affirmations/land acknowledgments, Indigenous art on campuses, Indigenous language signage on campuses, alternative/creative practices, positive attitudes, ceremonies, oral traditions, etc.
- Learning Indigenous languages by non-Indigenous people
- Lobbying for change of labels and ideologies: deemphasize or qualify linguistic duality (perhaps not the entire story of the Canadian fabric); multilingualism as a descriptors of the fabric?

Way forward? New Ideologies



- Ideologies are not static, they evolve, change, fade, or get replaced
- New “improved” ideologies
- Ideological change: from racist and discriminatory ideologies to inclusion, equity and diversity ideologies.
- Ideological processes such as erasure, recursion, iconization can help to repair or reverse the damage done by older ideologies, i.e. the same processes that propelled older ideologies can also undo them.



Other developments

- Inspiration from countries like Ecuador and Bolivia whose constitutions have been amended to include Indigenous perspectives and have acknowledged the rights of nature
- In the province of Quebec, a river called Mutehekau Shipu (Magpie River) was recognized as a legal person. Transcending Western legal perspectives and granting such unique status to a river allows it to have fundamental rights, including the right to preservation of its natural biodiversity, the right to be free from pollution, and even the right to sue (implemented by its guardians).
- UN International Year of Indigenous Languages: 2019
- UNESCO Indigenous decade: 2022-2032





References

- Conteh, J., & Meier, G. (Eds.) (2014). *The multilingual turn in languages education: Opportunities and challenges*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters.
- Cooper, A. (2023, Feb 12). Canada's unmarked graves: How residential schools carried out "cultural genocide" against indigenous children. CBC News. <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/canada-residential-schools-unmarked-graves-indigenous-children-60-minutes-2023-02-12/>
- Coste, Daniel, Danièle Moore & Geneviève Zarate. 2009. *Plurilingual and pluricultural competence*. Strasbourg: Council of Europe. Retrieved from <https://rm.coe.int/090000168069d29c>
- Cummings, W., Garrison, J., & Sergent, J. (2021, Jan 6). By the numbers: President Donald Trump's failed efforts to overturn the election. USA Today. <https://www.usatoday.com/in-depth/news/politics/elections/2021/01/06/trumps-failed-efforts-overturn-election-numbers/4130307001/>
- Department of Canadian Heritage, Government of Canada. (2021). *Indigenous Languages Act*. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/standing-committee/dm-transition-material-2021/indigenous-languages-act.html#a2a>
- Fontaine, L. (2017). Redress of Linguicide: Residential Schools and Assimilation in Canada. *British Journal of Canadian Studies*, 30(2), DOI: <https://doi.org/10.3828/bjcs.2017.11>
- Foucault, M. (1972). *The Archaeology of Knowledge*. New York: Pantheon Books.
- Foucault, M. (1977). *Discipline and Punish*. London: Tavistock.





References

- Gal, Susan. 2016. Scale-making: comparison and perspective as ideological projects. In E. Summerson Carr and Michael Lempert (eds.), *Scale: Discourse and Dimensions of Social Life*, 91–111. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- García, O. (2011). *Bilingual education in the 21st century: A global perspective*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Global Affairs Canada (GAC), Government of Canada. (2023). *Canada and the G7*. https://www.international.gc.ca/world-monde/international_relations-relations_internationales/g7/index.aspx?lang=eng
- Grosjean, F. (1989). Neurolinguists, beware! The bilingual is not two monolinguals in one person. *Brain and language*, 36(1), 3-15.
- Haque, E. (2019). A Foucauldian Approach to Language Policy in Canada. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *Language Politics and Policies: Perspectives from Canada and the United States* (pp. 232-243). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/9781108684804.013
- Haque, E., & Patrick, D. (2015). Indigenous languages and the racial hierarchisation of language policy in Canada. *Journal of Multilingual and Multicultural Development*, 36(1), 27–41. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01434632.2014.892499>
- Indigenous Languages Act, S.C. 2019, c. 23. <https://www.canada.ca/en/canadian-heritage/corporate/transparency/open-government/standing-committee/dm-transition-material-2021/indigenous-languages-act.html#a2a>
- Irvine, J. T. (2019). Regimenting ideologies. *Language & Communication*, 66, 67–71. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.langcom.2018.10.005>





References

- Slavkov, N., Melo-Pfeifer, S. & Kerschhofer-Puhalo, N. (2022). The Changing Face of the “Native Speaker”: Perspectives from Multilingualism and Globalization. Berlin, Boston: De Gruyter Mouton. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9781501512353>
- Statistics Canada, Government of Canada. (2006). Canada's Ethnocultural Mosaic, 2006 Census. (97-562-XIE2006001). <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2006/as-sa/97-562/pdf/97-562-XIE2006001.pdf>
- Statistics Canada, Government of Canada. (2023). Canada's population estimates, first quarter 2023. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/daily-quotidien/230628/dq230628c-eng.htm>
- Statistics Canada, Government of Canada. (2023). Multilingualism of Canadian households. <https://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/2021/as-sa/98-200-X/2021014/98-200-X2021014-eng.cfm>
- Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) of Canada. (2015). Honouring the truth, reconciling for the future: Summary of the Final Report of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission of Canada. Retrieved from <http://publications.gc.ca/site/eng/9.800288/publication.html>
- United States Census Bureau. (2023, June 29). U.S and World Population Clock. <https://www.census.gov/popclock/>
- Vetter, E., & Slavkov, N. (2022). Introduction: How to learn to teach multilingual learning. AILA Review, 35(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.1075/aila.00052.int>



**iGracias! Merci! Thank
you! Благодаря!**



Des questions ?

Over to you!

Nikolay Slavkov
nikolay.slavkov@uottawa.ca



uOttawa