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***The Horizontal Coordination of Research:
Advantages and Benefits***

Symposium: Official Languages Research Issues

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Check against delivery

Good morning ladies and gentlemen,

The Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages is proud to be associated with this symposium which was organized together with the Official Languages Secretariat. I would like to thank the Minister of Official Languages and her team for gathering here today those who are involved in research on official languages.

It's not often that so many researchers, community representatives and decision-makers come together to discuss research issues, especially when it comes to official languages. Yet, research remains one of the driving forces behind linguistic duality. It is essential for the government, both to support and guide policy and program development and to assess the progress made in terms of bilingualism and the vitality of official language communities. It also serves to identify the shortcomings that need to be addressed in these communities.

In the current issue of the *Canadian Journal of Political Science*, François Rocher of the University of Ottawa presents an analysis of the degree to which English-speaking scholars in Canada take into account the work of French-speaking scholars.¹ His premise, or as he puts it, his expectation, "which seems legitimate," is the following:

To fully understand the social and political Canadian reality implies a deep awareness of its complexity. It also implies that the researcher will take into consideration the works related to the object of research without systematically ignoring a significant proportion of scholarly work, particularly emanating from a different linguistic universe.

He then relates this assumption about research to the country as a whole:

If Canada, as a political community (and a national community, as is used widely in the vocabulary of English Canada) is composed of two global societies [...], scholarly production related to it must reflect this reality if it wishes to be *inclusive* and *comprehensive*.

He concludes his normative expectation by writing the following: "Knowledge of the French language, at least the capacity to read it, constitutes a prerequisite for a complete and serious analysis of Canada."

This statement, Rocher acknowledges, "will be very controversial for some, self-evident for others."

As far as I am concerned, it is self-evident.

¹ "The End of the 'Two Solitudes'? The Presence (or Absence) of the Work of French-speaking Scholars in Canadian Politics," *Canadian Journal of Political Science / Revue canadienne de science politique*, 40, 4 (December 2007): 833–857.

To summarize Rocher's research, which analyzed the degree to which English-Canadian scholars cite French-language sources, he concluded that there is a very small number of references to works produced in the French-speaking universe by English-speaking scholars writing about Canada: only about five per cent.

This may seem like a digression, but I think it provides a useful framework for discussing the challenges and the stakes for research on official languages.

As you know, we must face many challenges related to official languages. I think one of them is federal institutions' under-use of research as a tool for developing policies and programs.

Yesterday, you discussed a recent example of this. Statistics Canada recently released data from a post-census survey on community vitality. If no decision-makers, government research officers or researchers take the time to look at this data, we won't be able to accurately determine what the parameters are for language continuity and maintaining the mother tongue in minority situations. What bases can we use to develop policies? And if the communities do not have access to this research, how can they adequately implement development strategies based on an extensive knowledge of their own situation?

Obviously, researchers, research officers and community representatives who want to conduct studies face tangible obstacles. I will address this topic in a few minutes, when I talk about a study on research funding agencies that we just published.

The role of federal institutions under the amended Part VII

Part VII of the *Official Languages Act* allows us to recognize English and French as Canada's two official languages, languages that we must protect to ensure the future of our country. Because of Part VII of the Act, communities who have fought to have their fundamental rights recognized are now able to manage their own schools, share their culture, have access the legal system and take their place within Canadian society. Research on official languages is key if we want to stay the course.

Indeed, federal institutions are front row centre in terms of programs, policies and services for official language communities. Their activities must now reflect the 2005 amendments to Part VII of the Act, under which federal institutions are required to take positive measures to promote linguistic duality and enhance the vitality of official language minority communities. In order for institutions to fulfill these new responsibilities, research on official languages that is conducted by federal institutions and universities must provide the raw material to develop public policies that demonstrate sound management of language issues.

Research is an invaluable public asset. We often use the amount of money a country invests in research to measure its openness to creative solutions that address the various challenges facing the diverse societies in which we live. This is why federal

institutions must not only facilitate research on official languages but also use and disseminate its results. Such actions, which foster community development or the promotion of official languages, can be considered a positive measure.

Part VII does not mean that the federal government has to take responsibility of communities or become involved in areas under provincial jurisdiction. Nor is it a magic solution. However, it is clear that research on official languages and funding for it can and must play an important role in these positive measures. Now it is up to the federal government to take action.

Partnerships

I am not the first person to emphasize the importance of developing partnerships between post-secondary institutions, researchers and funding agencies involved in research on official languages, communities and federal institutions. This conference is a good example of this. We need to get rid of the “siloing” mentality, especially when it comes to official languages.

Developing an approach such as this one can be positive in several respects. For researchers, partnerships can mean greater financial support, the creation of a research team, networking opportunities with other researchers, more action-research within communities, the establishment of research centres or even increased productivity in terms of research, but above all, better quality research. Of course, the pursuit of research work is an essential step, but the results must also be disseminated. Transferring knowledge requires explaining the research results so that community members and public service decision-makers can have access to them and use them.

There are currently some shortcomings in official languages research because of the absence of partnerships lack of funding, and often human resources to conduct the research. At the Office of the Commissioner, we are increasing our focus on research and trying to make up for these shortcomings by conducting research that would not necessarily be undertaken by others.

Study on funding agencies

This week, we published a study on the role of federal research funding agencies. In it, we made recommendations and suggested courses of action to improve research conditions, both when the research is carried out in minority-language post-secondary institutions and when it deals with official languages issues.

The study allowed us to identify a number of barriers faced by researchers in small universities in minority situations. It shows that a low priority is given to official languages research and that Francophone researchers from these types of universities face additional obstacles, namely the predominance of English as the

language of publication and peer committee members' limited ability to evaluate applications submitted in French. Also, Francophone or bilingual universities are, for the most part, small institutions with a very different mandate than that of large, urban majority-language universities. As a result, they must overcome other obstacles, including the lack of research infrastructure, researchers' physical and intellectual isolation from the scientific community as well as greater teaching and administrative responsibilities.

Researchers, whether they come from small institutions or are studying official languages, are also unhappy about the lack of consideration for their particular situation shown by peer committees that evaluate funding applications. Under current conditions, researchers in small universities are at a disadvantage when they compete with large universities, and their success rate is not very encouraging. They even claim that they refrain from submitting funding applications for this very reason.

In order to ensure that they are treated fairly, researchers must have access to tools and resources that are adapted to their particular situation. In this respect, both federal research funding agencies and governments and post-secondary institutions have an important role to play. For its part, official languages research must be better integrated into the research programs, plans and priorities of universities, research funding agencies and the government.

Fortunately, progress can be made and a willingness to work together is evident. During the course of this study, and more specifically at a discussion forum in November 2006, researchers and funding agencies proposed innovative ideas and practices in order to encourage research in official language minority institutions and to promote research on linguistic duality.

After analyzing the challenges that were raised and taking into account the best practices that were described, we made nine recommendations, eight of which were addressed to federal research funding agencies:

- Develop a strategy to promote the different types of research programs offered;
- Ensure adequate evaluation in both official languages;
- Establish a specific funding mechanism for small bilingual and official language minority universities to help sustain research capacity at the professor and student levels, and increase research infrastructure in these establishments;
- Set aside a funding envelope to encourage small official language minority universities to create research centres and increase their capacity to partner with existing networks;
- Continue to streamline their funding application processes in consultation with university researchers;
- Develop a strategy to increase the awareness, knowledge and comprehension of peer review committee members about the particular circumstances and obstacles of researchers at small official language minority universities;

- Set aside stable funding for research on official languages issues and for disseminating the results of the research;
- Keep disaggregated data on funding to official language minority institutions and for research on official languages issues.

In my final recommendation I asked the Canada Research Chairs Program to encourage universities to create and fund research chairs on official languages issues.

Future outlook

This study was conducted because we wanted to help research funding agencies fulfill their new responsibilities under Part VII of the Act. By describing the research conditions in official language minority communities and research on official languages issues, in addition to compiling a list of existing initiatives, we think we have established a solid basis that you can rely on to support your future actions in order to improve the situation.

The federal department representatives who are with us today will have a crucial role to play in this regard. I hope that the question of research and the need for departments to work together on this issue and provide the necessary resources will be an important part of the new action plan.

Conclusion

Why is research on official languages important? We are gathered at this conference today because together we form a circle. Researchers study official language minorities, governments need solid research to base their policies and programs on in order to better serve all Canadians and the communities depend on these programs in order to flourish.

Therefore, I encourage you to keep working together and developing partnerships between the main players.

Thank you.