

DEFINING FRANCOPHONES IN MINORITY  
SITUATIONS: AN ANALYSIS OF VARIOUS  
STATISTICAL DEFINITIONS AND THEIR  
IMPLICATIONS

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# INTRODUCTION

Many researchers and organizations conducting studies on Francophones in minority situations must consider how to define a Francophone based on the variables used by Statistics Canada. On the surface, this seems like a simple issue, but it raises others that have direct implications not only for research, but also for public policies created on the basis of statistical analyses.

Currently, two definitions apply to Canada's francophone population. The first includes people whose mother tongue—the first language learned and still understood—is French. This method excludes, among others, people whose mother tongue is not French but who speak French at home, and people whose knowledge of official languages is limited to French.

The second definition is based on a variable derived from data about knowledge of both official languages, mother tongue and language most often spoken at home. This is the definition of “First Official Language Spoken” (FOLS).

## **According to this definition,**

- 1) if a person knows only French, the FOLS is French;
- 2) if a person knows French and English and French is the mother tongue, the FOLS is French; and
- 3) if a person's mother tongue is both French and English or neither language, the official language most often spoken at home is the FOLS.

According to this method, people who most often speak both official languages at home are classified in the “French and English” FOLS category. A person who speaks neither official language and whose mother tongue is not an official language is classified in the “neither English nor French” category.

Defining a Francophone is a complex issue. In this discussion paper, we present a number of statistical definitions of a Francophone that take into account the linguistic variables used in the census and in a number of Statistics Canada studies. We hope to encourage discussion about these definitions to determine which one is most relevant for conducting statistical analyses on Francophones in minority situations, thereby enabling government officials to use these analyses as a basis for developing public policies and services for this segment of the population.

# 1. BACKGROUND

Until recently, quantifying the demographic weight of Francophones for the purpose of comparative research was a major concern for researchers and Francophone minority community leaders. To address this problem, the Joint Commission on Health Care Research for Francophones in Minority Situations began to study the issue.

Following a meeting of experts on May 31, 2005, in Ottawa, an initial document was produced to better identify the variables contributing to statistical definitions of Francophones in minority situations in Canada and to calculate how many variables there are according to the various proposed statistical definitions. The document was submitted during a meeting of the Joint Commission on January 27, 2006, and the members of the Commission recommended a more in-depth study of the issue leading to a more detailed paper on the subject. The purpose is to clarify the issue and enrich the discussion of the various ways to define a Francophone in a minority situation statistically as part of large-scale studies and for various services and organizations, and to present various methods and the implications of each, with a view to proposing solutions.

On July 19, 2006, these methods were submitted to a group of experts from various sectors and partners interested in the health of Francophones in minority situations, such as Statistics Canada, Health Canada, the Office of the Commissioner of Official Languages, the Consortium national de formation en santé, the Société santé en français, the Fédération des communautés francophones et acadienne du Canada, and Heritage Canada. As recommended by the Joint Commission on Research, the Consortium national de formation en santé and the Société Santé en français adopted the document and disseminated it.

The purpose of this document is to clarify the issue for researchers and other interested parties.

## 2. DESCRIPTION OF LINGUISTIC VARIABLES

To successfully determine which linguistic variables to apply in creating a statistical definition of a Francophone, we must first review Statistics Canada's census and statistical study variables.

Variables<sup>1</sup>

Mother tongue: Refers to the first language learned at home in childhood and **still understood** by an individual at the time of the census.

Home language: Refers to the language spoken **most often** or **on a regular basis** at home by an individual at the time of the census.

Knowledge of official languages: Refers to the ability to conduct a conversation in English only, in French only, in both English and French, or in neither of the official languages of Canada.

Language of work: Refers to the language used most often at work by an individual at the time of the census. Other languages used at work on a regular basis are also collected. This variable will not be considered in this document because the language of work relates to the active population (those aged 15 or over who are in the job market).

First official language spoken: refer to Appendix A for Statistics Canada's description of the derivation of this variable.

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<sup>1</sup> Source: Statistics Canada

### 3. METHODS FOR DEFINING FRANCOPHONES

Various possible statistical definitions of Francophones based on variables used in Statistics Canada censuses and studies are described below.

#### 3.1 Mother tongue

##### Advantage

This variable includes people for whom French is the first language learned and still understood.

##### Disadvantages

- This variable includes people who understand French but cannot speak it.
- This variable excludes people whose mother tongue is not French, but who speak it most often or regularly at home, and people for whom French is the first official language spoken.

##### Statistical impact

The number of Francophones according to this variable is **1,020,580**.

In the case of people whose mother tongue is both official languages, half are assigned English as their first official language and half are assigned French as their first official language in a number of Statistics Canada documents.

**Table 1<sup>2</sup>**

Provinces	Mother tongue		Total
	French <sup>a</sup>	French and English <sup>b</sup>	
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,180	345	2,525
Prince Edward Island	5,665	435	6,100
Nova Scotia	34,155	2,595	36,750
New Brunswick	236,770	5,290	242,060
Ontario	493,630	40,335	533,965
Manitoba	44,775	2,780	47,555
Saskatchewan	18,040	1,490	19,530
Alberta	59,735	6,255	65,990
British Columbia	56,105	7,525	63,630
Yukon Territory	890	95	985
Northwest Territories	970	95	1,065
Nunavut	405	20	425
<b>Canada, outside Quebec</b>	<b>953,320</b>	<b>67,260</b>	<b>1,020,580</b>
a. French only, and French and other languages			
b. English and French, and English, French and others			

<sup>2</sup>The data used in this document are from Heritage Canada's CD-ROM, *2001 Census, Personalized Tables*. AO 4234. These tables were created using a sample made up of 20% of the population.

## 3.2 Knowledge of official languages

### Advantage

This variable includes people who can express themselves orally in French. This definition includes French-speakers, as defined by their oral linguistic ability (speaking and comprehension).

### Disadvantages

- This variable relies on respondents' perception of their ability to participate in a conversation (a subjective variable), and cannot therefore ensure an "objective" evaluation of this ability.
- This variable does not make it possible to study the Francophone population because those who can conduct a conversation in French do not necessarily identify with the Francophone linguistic community. Their mother tongue could be another language.
- It is not possible to determine how many of those with knowledge of both official languages are Francophone (according to mother tongue, for example).

### Statistical impact

If we consider the number of people with knowledge of French **only**, this variable represents the smallest number of Francophones because a majority of Francophones know at least the two official languages. There are **115,175 unilingual Francophones** and **2,323,875** bilinguals. The data show that there are **2,439,050** people in Canada outside Quebec who can converse in French. It should be noted, however, that many of these people may have English or some other language as their mother tongue, which does not make them Francophones. If we include people whose mother tongue is English or another language, this variable indicates these people's level of interest in French.

**Table 2**

Provinces	Knowledge of official languages		
	French	French and English	Total
Newfoundland and Labrador	145	20,890	21,035
Prince Edward Island	95	15,990	16,085
Nova Scotia	790	90,265	91,055
New Brunswick	66,415	245,870	312,285
Ontario	42,305	1,319,715	1,362,020
Manitoba	1,250	102,845	104,095
Saskatchewan	360	49,000	49,360
Alberta	1,895	202,905	204,800
British Columbia	1,810	269,365	271,175
Yukon Territory	45	2,895	2,940
Northwest Territories	40	3,130	3,170
Nunavut	25	1,010	1,035
<b>Canada, outside Quebec</b>	<b>115,175</b>	<b>2,323,875</b>	<b>2,439,050</b>



### 3.3 Language spoken at home

#### Advantage

This variable makes it possible to estimate the number of people who speak French **most often** or **regularly** at home. This is a significant indicator of the vitality of the French language.<sup>3</sup>

#### Disadvantages

- It provides no information about the mother tongue of census respondents.
- It excludes people whose mother tongue is French but who speak English at home.

#### Statistical impact

A total of **978,360** people speak French at home at least regularly.

**Table 3**

Provinces	Language spoken at home		
	French <sup>a</sup>	French and English <sup>b</sup>	Total
Newfoundland and Labrador	425	2,635	3,060
Prince Edward Island	1,600	3,610	5,210
Nova Scotia	10,060	23,615	33,675
New Brunswick	175,405	70,275	245,680
Ontario	176,535	352,115	528,650
Manitoba	9,490	30,315	39,805
Saskatchewan	1,965	11,520	13,485
Alberta	8,895	44,000	52,895
British Columbia	7,910	45,700	53,610
Yukon Territory	220	650	870
Northwest Territories	205	795	1,000
Nunavut	130	290	420
<b>Canada, outside Quebec</b>	<b>392,840</b>	<b>585,520</b>	<b>978,360</b>
a. French only, and French and other languages			
b. English and French, and English, French and others			

<sup>3</sup>Based on the data in this document, it is not possible to distinguish between people who speak French **most often** at home and those who speak French **regularly** at home. The language spoken most often at home is an indicator of linguistic continuity and its complement, linguistic assimilation.

### 3.4 First official language spoken

#### Advantages

- This variable includes people whose mother tongue is not French.
- An advantage of this variable is that it categorizes those who know both official languages while taking into account their mother tongue and, if their mother tongue is bilingual, the home language.

#### Disadvantages

- This definition does not take into account Francophones whose mother tongue is English and French and who most often speak English at home. Therefore, many children of rights holders under section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* who are in exogamous families are not accounted for. This situation is due to the fact that English dominates as the home language in most exogamous families outside Quebec.

It should be noted that a definition based on mother tongue can also exclude children of Francophone rights holders if French is not their mother tongue.<sup>4</sup>

- The wording of this variable can be misleading because it suggests that the respondent uses one particular language more often, whereas it actually measures the respondent's linguistic potential. Only after the home language (the third categorization criterion for respondents) is taken into account can it be determined how frequently a language is used. This applies to a small segment of the population.

#### Statistical impact

The total number of people whose first official language spoken is French and whose first official languages spoken are French and English is **1,038,955**.

**Table 4**

Provinces	First official language spoken		
	French	French and English	Total
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,055	100	<b>2,155</b>
Prince Edward Island	5,235	80	<b>5,315</b>
Nova Scotia	33,175	1,185	<b>34,360</b>
New Brunswick	237,620	1,665	<b>239,285</b>
Ontario	489,905	75,605	<b>565,510</b>
Manitoba	42,415	1,940	<b>44,355</b>
Saskatchewan	16,205	685	<b>16,890</b>
Alberta	55,650	6,355	<b>62,005</b>
British Columbia	51,975	14,795	<b>66,770</b>
Yukon Territory	850	65	<b>915</b>
Northwest Territories	875	80	<b>955</b>
Nunavut	380	60	<b>440</b>
<b>Canada, outside Quebec</b>	<b>936,345</b>	<b>102,610</b>	<b>1,038,955</b>

<sup>4</sup> Francophone parents who hold these rights must meet the following criteria: they must be Canadian citizens, their mother tongue must be French, and they must reside in a province or territory where French is the minority language. Based on the data available from Statistics Canada, it is not possible to identify rights holders defined according to other criteria related to parents' or children's language of instruction.

### 3.5 Definitions based on combinations and intersections of variables

Other statistical definitions of Francophones, some of which optimize the number of Francophones, are possible. Some of the more relevant definitions are described below.

**a) People whose mother tongue is French and who still understand French, plus people who know French but whose mother tongue is neither English nor French.**

This combination includes people whose mother tongue is French or French and English and who still know French (French only, and French and English), as well as people whose mother tongue is neither French nor English but who know French. According to Statistics Canada's definition, knowledge of French refers to a respondent's assessment of his or her ability to conduct a conversation in French.

**Advantage**

This combination includes people with knowledge of French, excluding people whose mother tongue is English or English and a language other than French.

**Disadvantage**

This combination excludes people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses) but who have no knowledge of French. It therefore does not include people whose mother tongue is French but who can no longer conduct a conversation in French, and rights holders under section 23 of the *Charter* whose mother tongue is not French.

**Statistical impact**

According to this combination, there are **1,233,625** Francophones.

**Table 5**

<b>Provinces</b>	<b>French mother tongue (single and multiple responses) and knowledge of French</b>	<b>Knowledge of French (mother tongue other than French or English)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,260	370	2,630
Prince Edward Island	5,505	205	5,710
Nova Scotia	34,900	2,855	37,755
New Brunswick	240,095	2,175	242,270
Ontario	508,485	187,445	695,930
Manitoba	43,990	6,495	50,485
Saskatchewan	17,120	2,425	19,545
Alberta	59,295	19,370	78,665
British Columbia	55,960	41,905	97,865
Yukon Territory	875	225	1,100
Northwest Territories	935	215	1,150
Nunavut	385	135	520
<b>Canada, outside Quebec</b>	<b>969,805</b>	<b>263,820</b>	<b>1,233,625</b>

**b) Mother tongue and home language**

This combination includes people whose mother tongue is French plus those whose mother tongue is not French but who most often or regularly speak French at home. It also includes people who most often or regularly speak English **and** French at home (except those whose mother tongue is French, so that the same people are not counted twice) and people whose mother tongue is English (so that Anglophones are not included in this definition).

**Advantage**

This combination includes people whose mother tongue is French and people whose mother tongue is another language but who most often or regularly speak French at home.

**Disadvantage**

This combination excludes people with knowledge of French who do not speak it at home.

**Statistical impact**

There are **1,081,215** people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses) or who speak French or French and English most often or regularly at home, but whose mother tongue is neither French nor English.

**Table 6**

<b>Provinces</b>	<b>French mother tongue (single and multiple responses)</b>	<b>French spoken at home<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>French and English spoken at home<sup>b</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,525	35	60	2,785
Prince Edward Island	6,100	55	50	6,355
Nova Scotia	36,750	435	405	38,770
New Brunswick	242,060	2,305	465	248,645
Ontario	533,965	13,615	26,340	594,830
Manitoba	47,555	720	1,665	51,090
Saskatchewan	19,530	255	685	21,020
Alberta	65,990	1,480	3,635	73,510
British Columbia	63,630	2,115	6,185	74,765
Yukon Territory	985	25	20	1,055
Northwest Territories	1,065	10	50	1,175
Nunavut	425	10	25	475
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>	<b>1,020,580</b>	<b>21,060</b>	<b>39,585</b>	<b>1,081,225</b>
a. Excluding people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses)				
b. Excluding people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses) and English (single and multiple responses)				

c) **People with knowledge of only French, plus people with knowledge of both official languages whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses).**

**Advantage**

This definition includes people who know only French as well as all people with knowledge of both official languages whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses).

**Disadvantage**

This combination does not include people whose mother tongue is French but who no longer have knowledge of French.

**Statistical impact**

According to this definition, there are **977,610** Francophones.

**Table 7**

**Knowledge of (KOL) only French or knowledge of both official languages and French mother tongue (MT) (single and multiple responses)**

<b>Provinces</b>	<b>KOL French</b>	<b>KOL French and English, and MT French (single responses)</b>	<b>KOL French and English, and MT French (multiple responses)</b>	<b>Total</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	145	1,865	270	2,280
Prince Edward Island	95	5,100	310	5,505
Nova Scotia	790	32,000	2,170	34,960
New Brunswick	66,415	169,225	4,755	240,395
Ontario	42,305	438,540	33,535	514,380
Manitoba	1,250	40,810	2,095	44,155
Saskatchewan	360	15,720	1,130	17,210
Alberta	1,895	53,045	4,745	59,685
British Columbia	1,810	49,185	5,720	56,715
Yukon Territory	45	790	55	890
Northwest Territories	40	830	75	945
Nunavut	25	345	20	490
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>	<b>115,175</b>	<b>807,455</b>	<b>54,880</b>	<b>977,610</b>

- d) **People whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses) plus people whose mother tongue is not French but whose FOLS is French or French and English.**

**Advantage**

This definition includes Francophones whose mother tongue is not French.

**Disadvantage**

This definition does not include children of Francophone rights holders under the *Charter* whose mother tongue is not French, and people whose mother tongue is not French but who speak French regularly at home (e.g.: a Francophile married to an Anglophone).

**Statistical impact**

This adds **104,530** people to respondents whose mother tongue is French for a total of **1,125,110**.

**Table 8**

**French mother tongue (MT) and first official language spoken (FOLS) French, or French and English**

<b>Provinces</b>	<b>MT French (single and multiple responses)</b>	<b>FOLS French<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>FOLS French and English<sup>a</sup></b>	<b>Total</b>
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,525	15	60	<b>2,600</b>
Prince Edward Island	6,100	0	25	<b>6,125</b>
Nova Scotia	36,750	165	815	<b>37,730</b>
New Brunswick	242,060	680	495	<b>243,235</b>
Ontario	533,965	11,425	66,720	<b>612,110</b>
Manitoba	47,555	315	1,475	<b>49,345</b>
Saskatchewan	19,530	140	535	<b>20,205</b>
Alberta	65,990	825	5,490	<b>72,305</b>
British Columbia	63,630	1,465	13,665	<b>78,760</b>
Yukon Territory	985	25	60	<b>1,070</b>
Northwest Territories	1,065	10	60	<b>1,135</b>
Nunavut	425	10	55	<b>490</b>
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>	<b>1,020,580</b>	<b>15,075</b>	<b>89,455</b>	<b>1,125,110</b>
a. Excluding French mother tongue (single and multiple responses)				

**e) Mother tongue and knowledge of official languages**

This combination includes people whose mother tongue is French and people whose mother tongue is not French but whose only official language is French. The total for this definition includes people whose mother tongue is both official languages and people with knowledge of both French and English but whose mother tongue is neither French nor English.

**Advantage**

This combination includes all people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses), as well as all people who know only French but whose mother tongue is not French (single and multiple responses) and people whose mother tongue is neither English nor French but who know both official languages.

**Disadvantage**

This definition does not include children of Francophone rights holders under the *Charter* whose mother tongue is English or English and a language other than French, but who have one parent whose mother tongue is French.

**Statistical impact**

There are **1,285,390** people in this combination.

**Table 9**

**Mother tongue and knowledge of French**

Provinces	French mother tongue (single and multiple responses)	Knowledge of French <sup>a</sup>	Knowledge of English and French <sup>b</sup>	Total
Newfoundland and Labrador	2,525	15	355	2,895
Prince Edward Island	6,100	0	205	6,305
Nova Scotia	36,750	60	2,820	39,630
New Brunswick	242,060	305	2,090	244,455
Ontario	533,965	5,895	182,080	721,940
Manitoba	47,555	160	6,355	54,070
Saskatchewan	19,530	90	2,350	21,970
Alberta	65,990	390	19,040	85,420
British Columbia	63,630	755	41,230	105,635
Yukon Territory	985	10	215	1,210
Northwest Territories	1,065	0	215	1,280
Nunavut	425	10	135	570
<b>Canada outside Quebec</b>	<b>1,020,580</b>	<b>7,690</b>	<b>257,090</b>	<b>1,285,380</b>
a. Excluding people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses) b. Excluding people whose mother tongues are French (single and multiple responses) and English (single and multiple responses)				

## CONCLUSION

The definition that covers the greatest number of Francophones is the knowledge of official languages variable, which totals **2,439,050** people. However, the weakness associated with this variable is that it includes a large segment of people who know French but who do not identify with the Francophone community.

The definition discussed in 3.5 d) includes **1,125,110** Francophones. Its advantage is that it combines the two variables most commonly used to identify Francophones statistically: mother tongue and FOLS. Combining these two variables in a single definition compensates for the weaknesses of each individual variable. On the one hand, the FOLS variable has the disadvantage of classifying as Anglophone people whose mother tongue is English and French but who speak English most often at home. As we have emphasized, this definition excludes the children of Francophone rights holders who have both official languages as their mother tongue and who speak English most often at home. This could eventually come to exclude a greater number of people if more Francophone rights holders in exogamous homes transmit both official languages to their children as mother tongues. This would lead to success in terms of respect for the equality of both official languages but failure in terms of the number of people belonging to the official language minority. On the other hand, the mother tongue variable excludes the growing number of Canadians who identify with the Francophone community but whose mother tongue is not French. This variable also excludes about half of the children of Francophone rights holders, that is, those who have one Francophone parent but whose mother tongue is not French. The combination of mother tongue and FOLS variables is therefore significantly more inclusive, but it does not include all potential members of the Francophonie.

The definition discussed in 3.5 e) includes **1,285,390** people whose mother tongue is French (single and multiple responses), and people whose mother tongue is a language other than French and who know only French, and people whose mother tongue is a language other than French or English and who know both official languages. This definition ensures that all people who can **potentially** identify with Francophones are included, and it does not prevent them from identifying with other linguistic communities. The data show that new Canadians are more likely to integrate into the Anglophone community, but there is no justification for associating them with any given official language community initially. This combination includes the greatest number of Francophones. Its advantage is that it does not include people whose mother tongue is English and who know French and English. It might be possible to exclude from this combination people who most often speak English at home, but the data used in this document do not enable us to calculate that number. Nevertheless, it is worth noting that the definition in 3.5 e) has the same disadvantage as the one associated with the mother tongue variable, i.e. that it does not include the children of Francophone rights holders whose mother tongue is not French.

In conclusion, it would be unwise to propose one single variable or combination of variables to statistically define a Francophone because the relevance of the definitions selected depends on the context of the research and the resulting intervention. We have found that the Francophone population varies significantly depending on the definitions selected. Although some indicate a large number of Francophones, it is important to consider the relevance of such a definition. If the purpose is to include as many Francophones as possible, including Francophiles, the knowledge of language variable is relevant. However, if the purpose is to include Francophones for the purpose of defining identity, a variable or combination of variables that is relevant for that purpose must be selected.



We have identified no fewer than three variables that legitimize inclusion in the Canadian Francophonie. We consider mother tongue to be a relevant variable in many cases because it indicates legitimate origins as part of the Francophonie. However, in terms of delivering certain services, knowledge and use of the language may be important variables to consider. A combination that includes new Canadians who know French or both official languages, such as those included in Tables 8 and 9, is almost inevitable given the Canadian official languages policy. New Canadians who speak languages other than French and English may legitimately belong to the Francophonie because they choose to integrate into the Francophone linguistic community.

In a legal context, particularly in the context of section 23 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, the definition must include rights holders. This is a legitimate inclusion based on rights. Even children whose mother tongue is not French can attend French-language schools if one parent is a rights holder. They can become productive members of the Francophone community thanks to their educational rights. Although the combination in Table 8 represents progress in this sense, it does have one limitation. More in-depth analysis with the assistance of the Statistics Canada database may make it possible to take these limitations into consideration and develop a combination that includes all Francophone rights holders. Although Statistics Canada can always be asked to supply more specific linguistic variables, it is the responsibility of various stakeholders to analyze the relevance of the variables they use in their analyses.

## APPENDIX A

### FIRST OFFICIAL LANGUAGE SPOKEN

This variable was derived within the framework of the application of the *Official Languages Act*.

This derivation method is described in the regulations concerning the use of official languages for the provision of public services. It takes into account, first, knowledge of the two official languages, second, mother tongue, and, third, home language.

People who can conduct a conversation in French only are assigned French as their first official language spoken. People who can carry on a conversation in English only are assigned English as their first official language spoken. The responses to questions on mother tongue and home language are subsequently used to establish the first official language spoken by people who speak both English and French, or who cannot speak either of the two official languages. The French category includes people who have French only or French and at least one non-official language as their mother tongue. The English category includes people who have English only or English and at least one non-official language as their mother tongue. For cases that have not yet been classified, people are assigned to the French category when they speak French only or French and at least one non-official language as their home language. The same procedure is followed for English. Thus, the population is classified into two main categories: English or French. It is necessary to add two residual categories for people who cannot be classified in accordance with the information available: English and French, and neither English nor French.

#### Source

Statistics Canada: <http://www12.statcan.ca/english/census01/Products/Reference/dict/pop044.htm>  
(site consulted March 15, 2005)

## APPENDIX B

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