Immigration and the Transformation of the French-language Communities in Toronto

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to analyse the role of languages in the social transformation of the French-speaking minority in Toronto, the most multicultural city in Canada. Drawing from a recent study conducted in 1999-2000, I will explain, based on discourse analysis, first how French-speaking minority organisations have changed in the past two decades to adapt to both official public policies affecting the recognition of the French-language minority, and to the demographic transformation of the community thanks to internal migration and immigration. I will explain, second, how two 'Francophone' immigrant groups, i.e. the Haitians, and the Mauritians, integrate (or prefer not to integrate) the French-speaking community when they settle in the predominantly English-speaking city of Toronto. We will see, on one hand, that the French-speaking organisations need the existence of a Francophone community in order to survive administratively, and that the demographic change is having an impact on their mission and on their day-to-day operations. We will see, on the other hand, that both Haitians and Mauritians have multiple identities, and multilingual language practices, and therefore their participation to the French-speaking community can be only transitional, unless the French language offers real possibilities to access material and/or cultural resources.

I will first examine how immigration, as part of broader human flows related to social and geographic mobility, contributes to social change. I will focus on migration trajectories and linguistic repertoires of immigrant communities, on one hand, and on the impact of governmental and administrative constraints, as well as of demographic change, on organizations created to serve a linguistic community,

on the other hand. In short, I will use two different angles to examine social change with respect to languages, communication and cultural exchange.

More precisely, based on empirical data collected in the Francophone communities of Toronto (Canada) in 1999-2000[1], I will examine how two groups of immigrants adapt to their new social and cultural environment when they settle in the largest and the most multicultural urban center in Canada, in terms of finding housing, accessing a job, and obtaining health services. I will examine two groups of immigrants which differ in terms of migration trajectories, as well as linguistic repertoires, i.e. Haitians and Mauritians.   This comparison will show that immigrants cannot be considered as a monolithic group, but communities differ considerably in their strategies of adaptation and in their impact on the transformation of the host society, depending on their social and communication practices.

Social change related to immigration is not a one way endeavour forced on immigrant individuals or communities: it also means the transformation of the host society.   Therefore, I will also examine how two community organizations providing services in the domains of housing, work and health, have been transforming their mission statements and their day-to-day operations to adapt to new governmental and administrative constraints, at the same time as the demographic realities were deeply transformed. These two organisations are a Francophone community and cultural center, and a Francophone community health center, which were created originally to serve the needs of the French-Canadians living in Toronto, as members of the Francophone official language minority of Canada. Their transformations since they have been created twenty to thirty years ago illustrate how immigration is crucial for the social and cultural reproduction of Francophone communities in Canada, as well as how the latter deal with the new realities.

To better understand the impact of immigration on the transformation of the Francophone communities in Toronto, my colleagues and I formulated the following research questions: Do French-speaking immigrants use the services offered by Francophone organizations to facilitate their settlement in Toronto? Which French-speaking immigrants integrate the Francophone communities and for what reasons? How do Francophone organisations facilitate the integration of French-speaking immigrants into the Francophone communities?   How are Francophone organisations transformed by the integration of new French-speaking immigrants?

Context

With its 4,683,000 inhabitants, Toronto is the largest urban centre in Canada (Statistics Canada, 2002). It attracts one third of the new immigrants to Canada, i.e. an average of 79,000 newcomers each year between 1991 and 1997 (Toronto Training Board, 2000). In the year 2000, approximately 40% of the population of the city was born in a foreign country, and if one includes the second generation born in Canada from parents born in a foreign country, this percentage reaches 60%. The population of Caucasian origins is now representing less than 50% of the population, and every year new immigrants continue to arrive from Asia, Africa, and the West Indies, among others.

Although Toronto is a multicultural, and surely a multilingual city if one considers the language practices of its citizens, English is the dominant mainstream language, the language in which most institutions and workplaces operate. However, it is also a metropolitan center of a confederation, which has recognised both English and French as its official languages, French being spoken by roughly 25% of the Canadian population mainly concentrated in the province of Québec (Statistics Canada, 2002). It is also the capital of the largest province of Canada, Ontario (11,4 million of inhabitants in 2001, or almost one third of the Canadian population, which reached over 31 million), which includes the largest number of French-speaking citizens outside Quebec, i.e. 480,000 or 4.5 % of its population, and which has recognised the rights of this official language minority to governmental services in this language (namely in the sector of health) in some designated regions, including Toronto.

Part of the 79,000 new immigrants who settle in Toronto every year come from countries where French is the official language, the language used in public life and in the education system. They encounter in Toronto a Francophone community of 80,000 people, whose language, however, is only the ninth most spoken language after English, Chinese, Italian, Portugese, Polish, Spanish, Punjabi, and Tagalog (Centre francophone, 2000:14-15). Toronto is also the leading city for the Canadian economy, where French-English bilingualism is needed to facilitate economic exchanges on national and international markets.

Conceptual Framework

For this study on immigration and the transformation of the Francophone communities in Toronto, our research team has conducted an interdisciplinary study of social realities by means of a discourse analysis (Labrie et al., 2001). We considered that social realities are constructed through discourse, and this is why we have tried to collect the voices of a variety of social actors, those who contribute to the dominant discourse, as well as those who are marginalized (Foucault 1976; Fairclough, 1992). Depending on their social position, social actors have a different

access to the production and the distribution of material and symbolic resources (Bourdieu, 1991).   Their social position partly explains the content of their discourse, as well as its linguistic forms.   Our discourse analysis consists in understanding and explaining discourses which are circulating, by focussing on constraints, conditions, tensions, contradictions, paradoxes.   By contrasting dominant and marginalized discourses, we try to reconstruct a synthesis of what we could call "the discourse polyphony" (Volochinov, 1973).

As we conducted a qualitative study, drawing from ethnography, we did not try to obtain a representative sample.   We rather aimed at cross-examining case studies, i.e. case studies which objective is not to describe communities or organisations, but rather to understand the constraints under which members of these communities and organisations act and interact, so that we can better understand the dynamics of social change within Francophone communities in Toronto.

I understand immigration as one facet of broader human flows, is typical of capitalism, the neo-liberal ideology currently priviledged by the western nation-states, globalization of markets, and the new economy, which all constitute the general conditions for social change affecting the current production and the distribution of material and symbolic resources, and which transform the patterns of social and geographic mobility for individuals and collectivities (Giddens,1990; Gee, Hull, and Lankshear, 1996; Bourdieu, 1998; Gadrey, 2000; Castells,2000). Social and geographic mobility are conditioned by migration trajectories and by linguistic repertoires.   In other words, migration trajectories are related to the availability of locations where access to material security is possible, and made easier, thanks to the presence of support networks.   And linguistic repertoires are related to the use of language varieties which facilitate communication, and which have a value on linguistic markets, as they can be enacted for example on the labor market, or in society in general.   Migration trajectories and linguistic repertoires are at the origin of the constitution of new identity repertoires, which serve for the representation of communities, and for their social, cultural and linguistic reproduction, i.e. for the new formulation of identity politics (Taylor, 1992; Quell, 2000).

Methodology

The methodology developed for this study has consisted in the collection of discourse data by means of interviews, ethnographic observations, as well as documentation.   We have conducted fourteen interviews with people of Haitian origin, as well as twelve interviews with people of Mauritian origin, including a few clients of the two participating agencies.   These interviews addressed their migration trajectories, their access to housing, work and health services, their

linguistic repertoires, and their links with Francophone and Anglophone organisations, or other organisations from their own communities.

We also worked closely with two Francophone agencies: the first one, the Franco-Club, has been conceived originally by the French-Canadians as a community and cultural centre and is now specialising in helping new French-speaking immigrants to integrate into Toronto in terms of access to housing and work, thanks to federal funding. The other one, the Franco-Clinic, has been conceived as a community health clinic serving the needs of the French-Canadian linguistic minority, whose clientele is currently mainly composed of new immigrants; it is funded by the Provincial government. We have conducted interviews with key staff in both agencies, i.e. fourteen interviews in the Franco-Club (almost the entire staff), and eleven interviews in the Franco-Clinic (or half its staff). Interviews addressed services provided to new immigrants, the evolution of the clientele and its needs, relationships between the agency and other agencies in Toronto, its links to funding agencies, mainly governenmental agencies, as well as staff recruitment. Discourse data has been transcribed and analysed by an interdisciplinary team composed of a sociolinguist, a linguistic anthropologist, a social worker, and a psycho-pedagogist, as well as graduate students specializing in sociology of education and intercultural studies (French studies). A category tree has been developed for the analysis, and data have been codified and processed accordingly using the software for content analysis called Nudist. This paper gives an overview of the conclusions of our study. But first, I will shortly describe the linguistic repertoire of Haitian and Mauritian communities, which are both familiar with multilingualism, as they evolve with their migration trajectories, and later condition their social and linguistic practices.

In Haiti, there is a linguistic stratification, with the use of Haitian Creole in daily language use, to which French is added as language of the elite and medium of education. In Mauritius, there is a complex language ecology, with official French and English bilingualism in state institutions, French being the dominant language, with the use of Mauritian Creole in daily practices, and with the cultivation of heritage languages within the Indian and the Chinese communities.

The Adatation of Haitians and Mauritians in Toronto

Haitians migrated in two waves. The first one consisted of intellectuals escaping dictature during the sixties and the seventies; the second one consisted of people from all social classes escaping political and economic turmoil and benefiting from the presence of established Haitian communities in North America, first in Florida, New York and Montreal, and later in Ottawa and Toronto. At their arrival in Toronto, Haitians have generally acquired varieties of Canadian French in Montreal, as well as of English in the US.

Mauritians started migrating after the independence of Mauritius and the economic crisis that followed. Indo-Mauritians who belonged to the elite of landowners and professionals were the first to come, and later Sino-Mauritians from the middle class, i.e. small shops owners, who opted massively for Toronto where they could count on the presence of fellow Mauritians, and especially of a large Chinese community. Mauritians belong to a multicultural people who have at their disposal a variety of options when it comes to integrating into the multicultural environment of Toronto, with a linguistic repertoire composed of standard French and English, in addition to Mauritian Creole, as well as language varieties from South East Asia, or from Chinese such as Hakka. While Indo-Mauritians are mainly of Hindu or Muslim obedience, Sino-Mauritians are generally Christians, and often Catholics, which brings them closer to their French-Canadian fellows.

Both Haitians and Mauritians have migration trajectories and linguistic repertoires which condition differently their adaptation to Toronto, with regard to Francophone institutions. Haitians who arrived in the seventies have developed solid institutional bonds in the Francophone organisations, compared to the Mauritians who arrived subsequently, but the time of settlement does not explain this difference. Recurrent political crises and dramatic changes in power in Haiti have had an impact on Haitian communities in Toronto, making the structuration of an associative life impossible because of internal political divisions. For many Haitians of the first wave of migration, who had a high level of education and an excellent knowledge of standard French, the solution has consisted in joining the Francophone society. As for Creolophone people from the second wave, and as for the youth, the Francophone society is not as attractive, and the solution often resides in joining other communities based on some other identity markers, such as Black communities, Carribean communities, or more generally multicultural communities.

The integration is generally easier for the Mauritians, whose professionals can adapt into the mainstream English-speaking society, while maintaining an interest for the elitist cultural activities of the Francophone society. Their mastering of standard French besides English offers them a valued linguistic capital, especially for women who can easily find clerical jobs as bilingual secretaries in Anglo-dominant work environments. But for most Mauritians, who actually speak Hakka rather than Cantonese, which has been until now the dominant Chinese language variety in Toronto, it remains difficult to develop institutional bonds within the Chinese communities, and since they speak French besides Mauritian Creole, they tend to integrate into Francophone communities, in particular when it comes to religious practices, since some Catholic institutions located in suburbs already operate in French. As a matter of fact, the main point of contact between Sino-Mauritians and Francophones is restricted to religious activities, as well as to the work environments.

While many Haitians we interviewed transited through Francophone organisations to assist them when they settled in Toronto, and many Haitians were part of the staff or of the clientele of the two participating agencies, Mauritians actually limited their interactions with the Francophone communities, as said previously, to religious activities or to workplace; few of them worked for the participating agencies, or even used their services as clients. These differences can be explained through the different migration trajectoires of the two groups, their linguistic repertoires, and the (in)visibility of members of the Haitian and Mauritian communities in the Francophone organisations, which is also conditioned by the socio-political circumstances of their migration, and their linguistic repertoires.

If the first generation of Haitians and Mauritians is multilingual, and wishes to transmit to its children its national heritage culture, which is both geographically distant and currently undergoing rapid change; the second generation which has been schooled in Canada, either in French or in English, often regrets not knowing the Creole languages, and is reluctant to adopt the national ideals of their parents, and often prefers to engage in new forms of identity politics associated to multiculturalism. Let's now turn to the Francophone agencies.

The transformation of Francophone organizations

Both organizations which participated to this research project have been founded during the past thirty years, as the result of political struggles conducted by French-Canadians from Ontario and Québec, as well as affluent immigrants from Europe, who were committed to obtain equal rights as one of the two founding peoples of Canada. They fought to obtain parallel institutions to the mainstream Anglophone society. Both the Franco-Club and the Franco-Clinic are well established agencies, which benefit from recognition, credibility and legitimity from the funding agencies of the Federal and Provincial governments. But at the same time, both agencies have been forced to revisit their mission statements and their day-to-day operations during the nineties; on one hand, they had to cope with the changing demographic realities, but also, on the other hand, they had to adapt to the transformation of the role of the state, which abandoned the ideology of the welfare state to promote a neo-liberal approach. In both agencies, the clientele for which they were created, the French-Canadians, is absent, and instead we find a clientele of ethnocultural origins which has completely different types of needs.

The Franco-Club was created during the seventies as a federation of various cultural and community organisations serving the Francophones who were mainly consisting of people from Northern or Eastern Ontario, Québec and Europe. Its creation was encouraged by the Federal government which was interested in promoting its vision of bilingualism at the hearth of the largest city in Canada, and by other levels of governments as long as they used to fund cultural activities. Later in the nineties, governmental support has been reduced, rules for using public

funds have been strictly codified, and the original clientele has vanished. The Franco-Club had to reorient its mission statement and its day-to-day operations, and, at a time when migration to Toronto increased and became more diversified with French-speaking immigrants from the Caribbeans and Africa, the solution resided in offering services in French for new immigrants (such as settlement assistance to find housing and work), a solution which has received full support from the Federal government. With time, the staff has diversified, although there is still a stratification with full-time permanent employees who are mostly of French-Canadian or European origins, and part-time contractual employees who are mainly from the recently immigrated Francophone communities. Struggles exist around the mission statement of the Franco-Club, as the centre with which all Francophones should be able to identify, and as an agency which sub-contracts governmental services aimed specifically at recently arrived immigrants (in their first three years, during which the Federal government is responsible for supporting settlement).

Similarly, the Franco-Clinic was created in the eighties, thanks to the establishment of regular funding from the provincial ministry of health and social services, as the result of many years of struggles by militant French-Canadians. They wanted to obtain services in French, the co-official language at the federal level, and language of services at the provincial level, services which should be offered in parallel to the mainstream services delivered in English. Its mission was originally to offer preventive and curative health care, but as the government adopted the neo-liberal ideology in the late nineties, funding for community health care has been cut drastically. The Franco-Clinic is under constraints of bureaucratic nature, which would like to see the "clients" to be regularly monitored by the one and the same clinic, while the Francophone clientele is very mobile, and presents a variety of needs, some of them requesting a high level of specialization. On one hand, French-Canadians are not using the services of the Clinic as it was originally expected, maybe because they are bilingual, or they choose their health specialists according to their medical expertise and not their language, or they prefer to use services closer to their home or their workplace, or they prefer the anonymity of the mainstream health services. On the other hand, new immigrants, who constitute approximately 80% of the clientele of the Clinic, use the services but only for a transitional stage, i.e. in their first two to three years after settlement in Toronto, i.e. as long as they need to sufficiently master English to transfer to the mainstream services, or as long as they need to move to the suburbs, as soon as they have access to social mobility. For the Franco-Clinic, the challenge is twofold: to serve a population which is disseminated on a large territory and which is geographically mobile, and to fidelize a clientele which tends to abandon its services as soon as it acquires a sufficient level of bilingualism and social mobility. As the headship of the Franco-Clinic has originally been occupied by a Neo-Canadian, its staff is

relatively diversified, but similarly to the Franco-Club, for various reasons the professional jobs tend to be occupied by French-Canadians and Europeans, and the support staff jobs by recent immigrants. This constitutes a challenge, since, in order to accept to become fidelized, clients of recent arrival, need to identify with their health professionals, and might turn, in the future, to mainstream services in which the multicultural element is more visible, or to the creation of their own French-speaking multicultural services.

Human flows, social change, and multilingualism

In the Haitian communities, there are differences based on the migration waves and on political orientations, but also a desire to participate into the Francophone communities reimagined as pluralist, through their participation within institutions, organisations or associations, not as clients, but as full members. They nevertheless face problems when it comes to really being part of the "Francophonie", because of its fragmentation and because of its legitimizing ideology based on French-canadianness. Mauritians have limited needs towards the "Francophonie" because of their familiarity with English, and because of internal fragmentations, although we observe a use of Francophone spaces when it comes to religious activities or bilingual jobs. For both communities, it remains difficult to get fully accepted as Francophones, which leads to the creation of ethnic organisations, or to alliances with mainstream English-speaking organisations. This shows that migration trajectories and linguistic repertoires condition the relationship the migrant communities establish with Francophone organisations.

As for the organisations, these have been created by French-Canadians and by Europeans who tried to obtain parallel institutions functioning in French in conformity with a vision of bilingualism across Canada, typical of the seventies. Their mission statements and their day-to-day operations have been transformed drastically, with the new ideologies promoted by the state, and with the demographic transformations of the Francophone society. The Francophone society appears as fragmented, and difficult to reach for organisations which focus on services offered to a clientele defined on the basis of its language as an identity marker, but which also possesses a wide linguistic repertoire and which is socially and geographically mobile (internationally, nationally, as well as within the limits of the city). Clearly, immigration is crucial for the social, cultural and linguistic reproduction of the Francophone communities in Toronto. The transformations of the Francophone communities are evolving in unexpected directions, but at the same time, the existence of Francophone communities contributes enormously to the creation of a diverse society, and the existence of parallel Francophone institutions represents an option for access to social mobility for Francophones of all origins.

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