

A Postbilingual Zone? Language and Translation Policy in Toronto

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Abstract: In Canada, translation has been conceptualized within multi-layered and interwoven historical and political processes of nation building. One strand of these processes is the country's language policy, known as "official bilingualism". This national construct is so entrenched that the Federal government has not perceived a need to pair Canada's language laws with any legislation on translation. Despite this void, or perhaps because of it, the professional translation market first emerged as a corollary of official bilingualism, and it remains inflected by its *a priori*, which have also driven the design of university translator training programs. In giving English and French preferred status over all other "minority" languages that once were (i.e. Indigenous languages) and/or might become (i.e. Ukrainian, Spanish, Chinese, Arabic, Urdu, etc.) vehicular languages in certain regions or cities, public policy, which includes content and funding of university programs, has also restricted translator training to "official languages". This paper presents some preliminary data from a project aimed at proposing models for "post-bilingual" language and translation policies. More precisely, it focuses on one of Canada's most linguistically heterogeneous spaces—Toronto—and its multilingual translation policy. Drawing on González Núñez' adaptation of Spolsky's language planning model, I argue in favour of a new set of language and translation policies that countenance disparate and, at times, contradictory linguistic realities across and within Canada's post-bilingual zones, foregrounding elements that might inform evidence-based policies. Also informed by language rights research (e.g. De Schutter), this paper also serves as a preliminary discussion of language and translation policies that might be the springboard for new models of translator training that would ensure equal access to translation services for speakers of minority languages.

Keywords: translation policy, language policy, Toronto, official bilingualism, post-bilingualism

Résumé : Au Canada, la traduction est née de processus de construction de la nation, qu'ils fussent historiques ou politiques, imbriqués et multi-couches. Un des volets de ces processus est la politique linguistique du pays, « le bilinguisme officiel ». Cette construction nationale est tellement enracinée que le gouvernement fédéral n'a aucunement ressenti le besoin de conjuguer aux lois linguistiques une législation de la traduction. Malgré ce vide, ou peut-être grâce à lui, le marché professionnel de la traduction est né en réponse au bilinguisme officiel et il reste influencé par ses *a priori*, qui ont, par là même, conditionné la conception des programmes universitaires de formation des traducteurs. En donnant à l'anglais et au français un statut privilégié par rapport à toutes les autres langues « minoritaires » existant autrefois (les langues autochtones) et/ou les langues véhiculaires (ukrainien, espagnol, chinois, arabe, urdu, etc.) de certaines régions ou villes, les politiques publiques, qui touchent le contenu et le financement des programmes universitaires, ont également restreint les formations en traduction aux « langues officielles ». Cet article présente les données préliminaires d'un projet dont le but est de proposer des modèles de politiques linguistiques post-bilingues et une politique de la traduction. Plus précisément, ce travail s'attache à un des espaces les plus hétérogènes au niveau linguistique au Canada, Toronto, et à sa politique de traduction multilingue. En s'appuyant sur l'adaptation que González Núñez fait du modèle d'aménagement linguistique de Spolsky, je propose un nouvel ensemble de politiques linguistiques et de la traduction qui inclut des réalités linguistiques disparates, et parfois contradictoires, dans les zones post-bilingues au Canada, mettant en avant des éléments qui pourraient façonner des politiques qui seraient fondées sur des informations factuelles. Cet article, également inspiré par la recherche en droits linguistiques (par ex. De Schutter), sert de discussion préliminaire au sujet de politiques linguistiques et de politiques de traduction qui pourraient servir de tremplin pour de nouveaux modèles de formation des traducteurs, lesquels garantiraient un accès égal aux services de traduction pour les locuteurs de langues minoritaires.

Mots clés : politique de la traduction, politiques linguistiques, Toronto, bilinguisme officiel, post-bilinguisme

Resumo: No Canadá, a tradução sempre foi conceituada no seio de processos históricos e políticos multidimensionais e imbricados, ligados à construção da nação. Uma das vertentes destes processos é a política linguística, conhecida como “bilinguismo oficial”. Este construto nacional é tão enraizado, que o Governo Federal não reconhece a necessidade de adequar as leis canadenses relacionadas às línguas com qualquer legislação sobre a tradução. Apesar dessa lacuna – ou, talvez, em decorrência dela – o mercado profissional de tradução surgiu inicialmente como um corolário do bilinguismo oficial e se mantém determinado por este *a priori*, o que também orientou a formulação de programas de treinamento de tradutoras nas universidades. Ao privilegiar o inglês e o francês em detrimento de outras línguas “minoritárias” que já foram (ex., línguas indígenas) e/ou podem se tornar (ex. ucraniano, espanhol, chinês, árabe, urdu, etc) veiculares em certas regiões ou cidades, as políticas públicas, que incluem o conteúdo curricular e o financiamento de programas de formação universitária, têm também restringido o treinamento de tradutoras às “línguas oficiais”. Este trabalho apresenta dados preliminares de um projeto que propõe modelos para políticas linguísticas pós-bilíngues e relacionadas à tradução. De modo específico, focalizamos Toronto, um dos espaços mais heterogêneos linguisticamente, e sua política de tradução multilíngue. Com base na adaptação do modelo de planejamento linguístico de Spolsky, proposta por González Núñez, defendemos uma série de políticas linguísticas e de tradução para compor as realidades díspares e, não raro, contraditórias nas regiões pós-bilíngues do Canadá, ressaltando os elementos que poderão informar as políticas de base empírica. Com o respaldo de pesquisa no campo dos direitos linguísticos (ex. De Schutter), este trabalho também apresenta uma discussão preliminar sobre políticas linguísticas e de tradução que poderá impulsionar a elaboração de novos modelos de formação para tradutoras, que garantam às falantes de línguas minoritárias acesso igualitário aos serviços de tradução.

Palavras-chave: políticas de tradução, políticas linguísticas, Toronto, bilinguismo oficial, pós-bilinguismo

Resumen: En Canadá, la conceptualización de la traducción ha estado imbricada en complejos procesos históricos y políticos de construcción de la nación. Una de las vertientes de estos procesos es la política lingüística, conocida en Canadá como el “bilingüismo oficial”. Este modelo nacional se ha arraigado a tal punto que el gobierno federal canadiense no ha percibido la necesidad de acompañar las leyes lingüísticas del país con legislación relativa a la traducción. A pesar de este vacío, o quizás incluso a causa del mismo, el mercado de la traducción profesional surgió inicialmente como un corolario del bilingüismo oficial, y sigue estando bajo la influencia de esta relación de origen, la cual ha también orientado el diseño curricular de los programas de formación universitarios. Al otorgarle al francés y al inglés un estatus preferencial con respecto a otras lenguas “minoritarias”, algunas de las cuales eran lenguas vehiculares en ciertas regiones o ciudades (tales como las lenguas indígenas) y otras que podrían serlo (tales como el ucraniano, el español, el chino, el árabe, el urdu, etc.) la política pública, que contempla el contenido y la financiación de los programas universitarios, también ha restringido la formación de tradutoras y traductores a las “lenguas oficiales”. Este trabajo presenta datos preliminares de un proyecto cuyo objetivo es el de proponer modelos de políticas lingüísticas y de traducción “postbilingües”. Específicamente, se centra en Toronto, uno de los espacios canadienses de mayor heterogeneidad lingüística, y en su política de traducción multilíngüe. Con base en la adaptación del modelo de planeación lingüística de Spolsky que realizó González Núñez, el artículo presenta un argumento en favor de políticas lingüísticas y de traducción nuevas que respondan a las realidades lingüísticas marcadamente distintas y en ocasiones incluso contradictorias que se encuentran a lo largo de las zonas postbilingües de Canadá. La propuesta resalta elementos para una política basada en datos empíricos. El artículo parte también de investigaciones sobre derechos lingüísticos (tal como el de De Schutter) y busca, desde este punto de vista, servir de base para una discusión preliminar para la creación de políticas lingüísticas y de traducción que sirvan para generar nuevos modelos de formación de tradutoras y traductores orientados hacia la igualdad de acceso a servicios de traducción para los hablantes de lenguas minoritarias.

Palabras clave: política de traducción, política lingüística, Toronto, biligüismo oficial, postbilingüismo

This paper presents preliminary findings of an ongoing project aimed at exploring current language and translation practices in Canada and, more specifically, at seeking explicit and implicit expressions of public policies regarding the provision of translation services in languages other than English and French. This case study focuses on Toronto which, I hypothesized, might be emerging as what might be termed a postbilingual language and translation zone. The notion of “zone” builds on Mary Louise Pratt’s “contact zones”¹ and, in this specific case, refers to social spaces where official bilingualism coexists with practices involving other languages. The “post” in the term postbilingual echoes Anthony Kwame Appiah in that postbilingualism is viewed here as a process, one that is not a “space-clearing gesture” aimed at transcending or even superseding official bilingualism. Postbilingualism is thus seen as “a shift or a transition conceptualized as the reconfiguration of a field, rather than as a movement of linear transcendence between two mutually exclusive states” (Hall 254).

This project began with a review of existing language laws at the federal level; then, focusing more narrowly on Ontario and Toronto, it entailed a search for current legislative and policy documents dealing with the provision of services, first in English and French, then in non-official languages in Ontario and in Toronto. In the next phase, which is ongoing, data gathering is expanded to other provincial and municipal jurisdictions.²

Language and Translation Policies

Bernard Spolsky posits a three-dimensional model of language policy, one comprised of *language practices*, *language beliefs*, and *language management*. Language practices are “the actual language practices of the members of the speech community—what variety they use for each of the communicative functions they recognize, what variants they use with various interlocutors, what rules they agree upon for speech and silence, for dealing with common topics, for expressing or concealing identity” (5). Language beliefs are “the values assigned by members of a speech community to each variety and variant and their beliefs about the importance of these values” (5). Finally, language management refers to the “efforts by some members of a speech community who have or believe they have authority over other members to modify their language practice, such as by forcing or encouraging them to use a different variety or even a different variant” (5). Of further interest is the proposal put forth by John Walsh, who argues in favour of an integrated model for policy-making that is not based on “high-level organized management alone (i.e. government-led planning)”, but also leaves room for “a consideration of both the ecology (the actual use of languages) and the ideology (the things that people really believe about languages)” (qtd. in Williams, 175).

¹ Mary Louise Pratt describes contact zones as “social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today” (7).

² Initial results of this second phase were presented in a paper titled “Notes toward post-bilingual translation policies”, written in collaboration with Adrijana Jerkic, and presented at the CATS conference in Toronto, in June 2017. I thank Adrijana for her input in this project and specifically for her assistance in gathering some of the data presented here.

As Colin Williams points out, “language policy is [...] always about politics and, sometimes about furthering the goals of a language community” (174). In Canada, it has been, and continues to be, about both, sometimes simultaneously. Canada’s official language laws ensure both individual and territorial rights—that is, all Canadians have a right to federally mandated services in English or French regardless of where they may travel within the boundaries of the country and, at the same time, they may have specific rights in certain provinces, regions and cities as a result of longstanding lobbying efforts by certain linguistic communities.

Although a few scholars working in language policy and planning (Kaplan and Baldauf; Beukes) acknowledge the role of translation as a mechanism for implementing legislated rights in plurilingual contexts, most elide translation (cf. Freeland and Patrick; Spolsky). For translation scholars, however, translation is intricately woven into geopolitical processes, including empire-building, colonization, nation-building, armed conflicts and migration.³ This recognition has led Reine Meylaerts to state unambiguously that there can be no language policy without a translation policy (“Translational” 745).

Thus, translation studies, as it examines the interrelationships between cross-linguistic and cross-cultural practices on the one hand, and “sociopolitical and sociolinguistic structures and oppositions” (Meylaerts “Conceptualizing” 65) on the other, might inform and enhance language policy development. This is what Gabriel González Núñez proposes in mapping translation policy onto Spolsky’s model. He posits three categories of translation policies: *translation practice*, *translation beliefs*, and *translation management*. For González Núñez, translation practices are “the actual translation practices of a given community”, whereas translation beliefs are “the beliefs that members of a community hold about issues such as what the value is or is not of offering translation in certain contexts for certain groups or to achieve certain ends.” Finally, translation management refers to “the decisions regarding translation made by people who have the authority to decide the use or non-use of translation within a domain” (González Núñez 92).

Underpinning most of the aforementioned work is the notion of “language rights”, that is, language viewed as a universal human right. While this notion has received strong and compelling critiques from a variety of quarters including sociolinguistics, anthropology, sociology and language education (see Freeland and Patrick), it has proven helpful to translation scholars attempting to bring to light the complex and often unexamined intersections between translation and the development and enactment of language policies. Meylaerts in particular underscores that “determining the rules of language use presupposes determining the right to translation within a democratic society” (744). Drawing upon the example of Belgium, she advocates the concept of “linguistic and *translational* territoriality regimes” which, she says, might enable us to better understand the “sets of linguistic and *translational* legal rules [that] regulate citizens’ language use in education, legal affairs, political institutions, the media, and

³ On empire-building and colonial projects, see for example: Eric Cheyfitz; and Vicente Rafael; on power and conflict, see Baker (*Translation and Conflict* and “Interpreters and Translators”); Bielsa and Bassnett; and Tymoczko; on migration and displacement, see Cronin; Polezzi; and Inghilleri.

administration and thus determine their linguistic and translational rights and their chances for participatory citizenship and integration” (744-45). While I share Meylaerts’ premise, I avoid the term “territoriality regime”, which, as demonstrated by Helder De Schutter, has too often been coterminous with fixed notions of language and national identity. Opting instead for the notion of “zone”, the focus here is on language and translation practices in Canada’s language and translation zones.

Language and Translation Policies in Canada

Any discussion of languages in Canada must first acknowledge that multi-layered and interwoven historical and political processes of colonization, recolonization and nation-building have led to a national language policy that not only abstracts the cultures and languages of the First Peoples, but has contributed, along with other practices, to rendering Canada’s Indigenous peoples voiceless in their own languages. This project does not examine language and translation policies regarding Indigenous languages, as this a process that should be undertaken and led by Indigenous people with the collaboration of the various federal and provincial governments and experts in language revitalization.

In Canada, the *British North America Act* (1867), established English and French as the only official languages of the country. This legislative framework has not undergone any substantive review in the 150 years of its existence. Official bilingualism was institutionalized a century later by the *Official Languages Act* (OLA), then further entrenched by Article 16 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (1982). The overarching objective of both Acts was to protect minority settler languages in Canada, specifically English in Québec and French elsewhere in the country. It was only with the *Charter* that speakers of other languages gained some limited linguistic rights in specific spheres. According to Williams, who looks at several territorially-based models, language planning in contexts such as this one has been characterized by a “lack of conceptual clarity and methodological rigour” (193). The criteria used to confirm or revoke the designated status of minority languages, he says “were chosen early in the twentieth century without any reference whatsoever to the actual or predicted demolinguistic trends” (193). While language policies in some parts of the world may have been drafted in the twentieth century, Canada’s was developed nearly a century earlier and is inflected by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century identity politics and definitions of the modern state. It can be argued that, as such, Canada’s language policy is not easily subjected to the same criteria for conceptual clarity as newer documents. Nonetheless, many of the instruments for implementing this policy are more recent and should indeed be subject to such critical examination, especially in light of the intensified worldwide migration flows that have characterized the decades since the end of the Second World War. Indeed, Williams also points out that “these lacunae [in conceptual clarity and methodological rigour] would pose a serious challenge to policy makers even if there was little population mobility [...]” (183). Dynamic, plural and fragmented societies upset the often ill-defined relationships between “serving the needs of the official minority” and ensuring access for

“non-native speakers, overseas migrants and period workers, the overwhelming majority of whom do not speak the minority language and may have little real competence in the working language of the host state” (Williams, 183).

Canada’s OLA, in ensuring equality of linguistic rights for speakers of English and French, has had immense significance in the development of a culture of translation in Canada. In fact, since it provides for documents to be “made, enacted, printed, published or tabled in both official languages”, the OLA effectively ushered in an era of institutionalized translation at the federal level. Yet the link between linguistic rights and translation is not made; translation is not mentioned explicitly in the OLA, and only in passing in the Charter. Moreover, the plurality of cultures and languages in individuals and communities is not addressed in any of the legislation that grants linguistic rights to minority languages. Most importantly, the question of translation as a service—including criteria for accreditation of providers and quality assurance—is not addressed in any federal legislation or regulation. Finally, I have yet to find evidence of mechanisms to ensure ongoing and regular review of language policy that might take into account the evolving demolinguistic situation in Canada and seek to address the needs of its linguistically heterogeneous population.

Although there is no such thing as a “Canadian Translation Act”, the existence of the *Translation Bureau Act*, merits some discussion. This Act establishes the Bureau as a governmental service unit and outlines its mandate, duties and functions. Nowhere in the Act are the Bureau’s “two languages” identified. This is done in article 3(d) of the Translation Bureau Regulations, which stipulate that translation will “conform, in so far as Canadian usage permits, to ‘le français universel’ or Standard English, whichever is applicable.” Significantly, no clause in either the Act or the Regulations explicitly excludes languages other than English and French. As Meylaerts and González Núñez point out, citing Jenkins (26), “policy is about absences as well as presences, about what is not said as much as what is said” (1).

Ontario as Language and Translation Zone

In many of Canada’s zones (provinces, regions, cities) where explicit federal language policies and implicit translation policies operate, actual language and translation practices do not conform entirely to official bilingualism. In fact, language planning regimes vary from province to province. Each province has implemented some measures to recognize the official languages or the provision of French-language services. In some cases, these measures are legislative, such as the Ontario *French Language Services Act*, which was enacted in 1982. An examination of the current demolinguistic landscape provides some hints regarding the relationships between official bilingualism—legislated language management—and other language policies that are based on actual language practices in certain zones.

The proportion of Canadians whose first language is neither English nor French has more than doubled since 1981, growing from under 10% to 23% in 2011. This

percentage is expected to reach 32% by 2031 (SLMC). Between 2001 and 2011, the number of languages spoken in Canada also increased, rising from slightly over 100 to over 200 languages (Census). According to 2011 census data, Ontario has the second-highest number of non-official and non-Aboriginal language speakers, with 25.5%. In stark contrast, the percentage of minority French speakers in Ontario sits at 3.9%.

Provincial government websites provide a snapshot of the current language landscape in Canada's provinces. Ontario's website, in accordance with its *French Language Services Act*, is available, in its entirety, in both English and French. Some ministry websites also include links to resources in languages other than English and French. Two examples are the Ontario Ministry of Health and Long-Term Care, which produces brochures in 27 languages ("Understanding"), and the Ontario Ministry of Labour, which offers versions of several publications, some in 10 languages, and some in as many as 20 ("Other Languages").

Toronto as Language and Translation Zone

According to Peter Backaus,

Being the first point of contact between the government and the general public, the municipal level is the place where linguistic problems have to be dealt with on a day-by-day basis. Cities and other smaller administrative bodies therefore may design language policies that both in practice and in ideology clearly deviate from what national language planners have in mind. (qtd. in Spolsky 242)

While this project began with a search for explicit translation policies at the municipal level in Toronto, the demolinguistic data we later gathered provided information relating to language practices in this city where postofficial bilingualism at the individual and community levels is already the *de facto* model. In 2011 (Census), 2.3% of Toronto's population identified as French language speakers, while 45% had a mother tongue other than English or French; these languages numbered approximately 160. The City of Toronto website reflects this demolinguistic reality, as it features a "Translate" button that leads to the following message: "The City of Toronto's website can be translated into many languages using the Google Translate tool. This tool gives residents and visitors who speak other languages a way of accessing City information featured on the website." Using a drop-down menu, users can select from a list of 51 languages, including French.

The only explicit and publicly available language and translation policy I have found at the municipal level is the City of Toronto's *Multilingual Services Policy*, which was adopted in 2002. The Policy is based on six principles, including the value of diversity and the importance of access. Among these principles: "The City of Toronto will provide high quality, accurate translations that meet professional standards" (6). It distinguishes between the delivery of "multilingual services" and "French Language Services", each of

which is addressed in a separate section. The wording for each merits quoting at length. The section on multilingual services begins with a policy statement, which is followed by detailed contextual instructions:

The delivery of multilingual services requires sound judgement and decision-making in ascertaining how interpretation and translation needs can be met in the most effective manner. [...] The decision to translate a document or provide interpretation services into one or more languages requires that a number of factors be considered:

- (a) Demographics
- (b) Language needs of a particular community
- (c) Language needs of a particular geographic area or neighbourhood
- (d) Type of City information

(Multilingual Services Policy 7)

Operating procedures are also set out, including budgeting for translation and interpreting services in annual work plans, scheduling printing and production of translated documents, assessing the effectiveness of translation and interpreting, and the contracting of translation and interpreting services by the City at competitive rates (20).

In contrast, the section on French language services reads as follows:

The Province of Ontario's French Language Services Act guarantees each individual the right to receive provincial government services in 23 designated areas of the province; the City of Toronto is one such area. Under the Act, *municipalities are not required to provide French language services, even in designated areas. Municipalities are responsible for deciding whether or not to provide their services in French.*

This policy recommends that the translation of documents into French be provided whenever public information on citywide issues is also translated into another language.

(Multilingual Services Policy 8, Emphasis added)

The Toronto document foregrounds the tensions between national and zone-specific language and translation policies in a context characterized by demolinguistic factors that were not envisaged by federal and provincial legislators and policy-makers. At the same time, it finds a means of articulating a model for their respective and overlapping implementation and shows that linguistic and translational policies in Canada's language zones can be receptive to dynamic and changing demolinguistic configurations. This document attests to some measure of reflection on the ideological commitments that underwrite both language and translation practices in Canada.

Conclusion

Toronto's Multilingual Services Policy is one of many threads—some of which are yet to be identified—that might enable us to weave a new, plural, differentiated, and contextually relevant network of linguistic and translational policies that build on official bilingualism, policies that might be conceptualized as postbilingual. While acknowledging and protecting the material and symbolic significance of official bilingualism in Canada's linguistic and cultural landscape, such policies should be grounded in empirical studies of linguistic practices in Canada's multiple, plural and differentiated language and translation zones. First and foremost, such policies should be informed by existing language and translation practice. Optimally, they would: a) be based on regularly updated demolinguistic data; b) include mechanisms for recognizing new phenomena and responding to them (e.g. regularly scheduled reviews); and c) provide guidelines for quality control, including requirements for services from professionals (e.g. university trained or certified).

The next phase of this project will expand data gathering to other major Canadian cities characterized by linguistic plurality. It is our hope that, when examined alongside demolinguistic data, evidence of linguistic and translation practices, beliefs and management may contribute to the formulation of zone-specific models for the provision of translation services so that "individuals can communicate in the language of their choice." Such models would also imply "the implementation of specific training programs, at least to recruit multilingual public servants, translators and interpreters" (Kymlicka and Patten, qtd. in Diaz Fouces 71).

This last element of language and translation policy is significant, as it speaks to González Núñez' notion of translation beliefs, that is, the value accorded to translation services offered in certain contexts for specific groups. Ensuring access to quality translation services implies the creation of mechanisms to train professional translators. Yet current language and translation practices, specifically in Toronto, are not mirrored in existing university translator training programs. Canada's university degree programs in translation are closely linked with the country's language management initiatives, but do not reflect its linguistic heterogeneity. Training translators almost exclusively in French and English is no longer tenable in Canada, if it ever was. In fact, existing university programs contribute to language management efforts aimed at transforming "linguistically *heterogeneous* territories into linguistically *unified* territories [and] entail costs that are undesirable from the point of view of justice" (De Schutter 106). Postbilingual translation policies might be the springboard for the conceptualization and funding of new models in university translator training that ensure equal access to quality professional translation services for speakers of minority languages in specific translation zones.

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