Using the Social Movement Lens to Understand Changing Attitudes Toward Linguistic Pluralism: The Example of New Brunswick, Canada

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I was asked to present the case of the province of New Brunswick as regards the relationship between the two official language groups and attitudes towards linguistic pluralism. New Brunswick is a small province, located in eastern Canada. Its population is less than one million. The particularity and the interest of examining this small province in this conference is that it is the only Canadian province to have both English and French as official languages. Just under one third of its population is French-speaking. I should mention that the French population in Eastern Canada has deep historic roots in the region, being the first settlers. They call themselves Acadians. What is particular in New Brunswick is that some regions are very homogeneous. To give you an idea, living in the North East of this province could easily be compared to living in rural Québec in terms of the linguistic environment being overwhelmingly French. New Brunswick does not attract a lot of immigrants and aboriginal languages speakers are only a few thousand. In total, only 2.6% of the population does not have English or French as their mother tongue[1]. As for bilingualism rates, according to the last census (2011), a third of the population is bilingual. But bilingualism is unevenly distributed: 71% of Francophones also speak English, but only 15% of the English-speaking population knows French[2].

In addition to recognising both languages in the provincial institutions and offering services to the population in both official languages, New Brunswick also has two distinct education systems based on a linguistic division at the Department of Education. This is what we call Dualism in Education. Furthermore, New Brunswick has a law recognising the presence of two linguistic communities and the right of each community to manage its own cultural institutions. The principles of this law are also enshrined in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms.

But it was not always like this. Still in the 1960s, French, the language of one third of New Brunswick's population, was not fully recognised. How did this change happen where today the institutions of the francophone minority community are recognized both provincially and federally in the Charter of Rights

[1] Statistique Canada (2011). Recensement de la population, 2011. Disponible en ligne : http://www12.statcan.gc.ca/census-recensement/index-fra.cfm.
[2] Statistique Canada, *Ibid.*

and Freedoms? From an analytical perspective, I would like to put forward the idea that we could refine our comprehension of the changing attitudes toward linguistic pluralism if we look at it was a social movement, which very few analysts or scholars do so far. Social movements express power struggles, and, in my view, when we analyse language issues in Canada, we often mistakenly simplify this power struggle as one that takes place between the linguistic minority and the State. However, as social movement theorists put it, social movements are based on the contestation of standardized identities[3]. Or, to put it simply, they usually contest the categories of what is considered "normal" and "abnormal". In this case, the view of New Brunswick and Canada as solely Anglo-Saxon societies was, and still is, contested by what we could see as a francophonist movement. To oppose a worldview, actors are mobilized, social actions are taken by groups and organisations, and the movements often become institutionalized with well-organised groups, lobbies, and often political parties that are either formed on the basis of the issue, or traditional parties that start taking a stand on the issues when the movement in question gains more definitive power. Even if many of the activities of a social movement are directed towards the State, the intended social change, and thus the power relation, concerns the whole of society. The State remains a key political player and the legal framework provides an effective mechanism for managing social relationship when collective interests must be expressed or when a compromise must be reached[4]. Thus, proposed or actually realized changes to the legal framework can be a reflection of this power struggle for social change. Following this perspective, the recognition of a linguistic group through the enactment of laws which protect or promote their interests is also a reflection of a changing worldview in society, even if there is no absolute consensus in the population.

If we focus again on the development of the recognition of French in the New Brunswick case, as I have shown in previous work, since the 19th century, when Acadian nationalism took form, Acadians progressively built themselves an institutional network, including organisations, media, schools, colleges, and a university. They organized themselves as a political community able to act collectively for themselves in different ways. Elites and other social actors used this organizational network to gain recognition from government[5]. At different times, they used different strategies, from simple political lobby, to a secret society, to public protests, to a more partnership-based approach with the federal and provincial governments. What my previous work has also shown is that being organized as a

[3] For an theoretical analysis, see Nash, Kate (2010). *Contemporary Political Sociology. Globalization, Politics, and Power (second edition)*. Chichester (UK) : Willey-Blackwell.
[4] Duran, Patrice (2009). « Légitimité, droit et action publique », *L'Année sociologique*, vol. 59, n.2, p. 303-344.
[5] Landry, Michelle (2015). *L'Acadie politique. Histoire sociopolitique de l'Acadie du Nouveau-Brunswick*. Québec : Presses de l'Université Laval.

sociopolitical group plays a role in maintaining coherence and permitting the group to project itself as a political community, and therefore helps in gaining the recognition it is seeking[6].

The views of governments with regard to linguistic pluralism in New Brunswick, and at the federal level, started to change mostly in the 1960s when radical separatist ideas were rising in Quebec. The sovereignist movement in Québec had a great influence, not only in Québec or on the federal government. It helped francophonist movements in other provinces. In New Brunswick, it influenced activists, but it also pushed the provincial government to deal with its own linguistic tensions. Even in the 1990s, many will remember that the inscription of the recognition of two linguistic communities in New Brunswick and their right to their own institutions in the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedom was engaged in the context of a constitutional negotiation aiming to have the government of Québec to endorse the 1982 constitutional amendment.

I will finish by answering one of the questions that was submitted to us by the organisers, which was if learning French-as-a-second-language played a role in changing attitudes towards linguistic pluralism. Considering the analytical standpoint, I have just briefly shared with you, I would suggest the hypothesis that it is rather the opposite relationship: Learning French became more and more normal with the progressive recognition of the French-Canadian people and attractive with the bilingualisation of institutions, as professional opportunities for bilingual individual increased.

To sum up, looking at the changing views on linguistic pluralism through the lenses of a social movement helps us to see how this is a power relationship that seeks to redefine society and how we all see and understand that society. In a majority – minority context, the State becomes a central player, once it adopts the social movement's view. Its use of laws, administrative reforms and programs can contribute to changing the worldview of the majority group, which, in the case I have discussed here, are the English-speakers in New Brunswick.

[6] Landry, M., *Ibid.*