

Multilingualism in the workplace, within the context of the francisation of businesses in Quebec

by Virginie Moffet and Pierre Bouchard

In order to address the concerns of the population with regard to the use of French, the Québec government adopted, in 1977, a Charter of the French language which lists various measures to be implemented in terms of the working language and the francisation of businesses. Certification, which is an important feature of the chapter relative to the francisation of companies, represents, in a manner, the official recognition of the achievement of francisation objectives specific to companies. There are nevertheless certain environmental, organisational, social and economical realities which do not systematically support the francisation process or the use of French in the workplace. In addition, recent data show that even though most workers with French as a mother tongue do work in a French speaking environment, a significant number of them work in English in Montréal and those of altogether different mother tongue are divided between the use of French and English, especially within the island of Montréal.

Summary

1. Introduction
2. The in-company francisation process
 - 2.1 Introduction of the francisation process of businesses
 - 2.2 The effects of certification on the use of French
3. French in the workplace
 - 3.1 The situation in the Montreal metropolitan area
 - 3.2 Workers of tertiary mother tongue and immigrants
 - 3.3 Language spoken in the home versus language spoken in the workplace
4. Conclusion
5. References

1. Introduction

For some time already, the language, or languages, used in the context of the workplace have been a cause for concern to certain States. Back in 2003, the general Office for the French language and languages of France, the Generalitat of Catalonia and the Québec Office for linguistic policies actually jointly organized international talks in linguistic practice within internationally oriented businesses¹. There was, amongst other topics, talk of the challenges which internationally oriented businesses, whether based in France, Catalonia, the Basque country or Québec are now facing, and what linguistic policies are to be retained in those different States.

Quebec's linguistic restructuring plan chose to support the use of French by adopting the Charter of the French language back in 1977. All the while declaring French the official language of Quebec, the Charter declared a number of fundamental rights, such as the right to communicate and work in French.

Several arrangements relating to the working language have been included in the Charter of the French language, namely those relating to language in the workplace (art. 41 to 50), language in business and trade (art. 51 to 71) and the francisation of companies (art. 129 to 154). Measures taken with regard to the working language all employees are subjected to concern the language used in the context of communications between employers and their staff, the language in which employment offers are advertised, the language used in congregations, and the language facilitating access to employment.

¹ The minutes of this talk have been published in French and in Catalan. They are available from the Quebec Office for linguistic policies or from the Generalitat of Catalonia.

Those measures relating to the language of business and trading set a linguistic framework within which business activities must be carried out: everything must be at least in French. These measures pertain to written information destined to consumers of goods and (written information on product labels, catalogues, software, toys, games, order forms, public posters, etc.). Lastly, the measures relating to the francisation of businesses- measures which only apply to companies employing 50 staff or more- describe the francisation process these companies must submit to.

From this angle, we will start by expanding on, in the first part of this article, the francisation process of businesses, as described in the Charter of the French language and we will aim to clearly explain its full scope. The second part will explore the question of the use of language in the workplace, notably the space occupied by French in Montréal.

2. The francisation process of businesses

The company certification process ordered by the Charter of the French language and modulated by the actions of the Quebec Office for the French language is unique in the world and probably still relatively unknown.

2.1 Introduction of the business francisation process

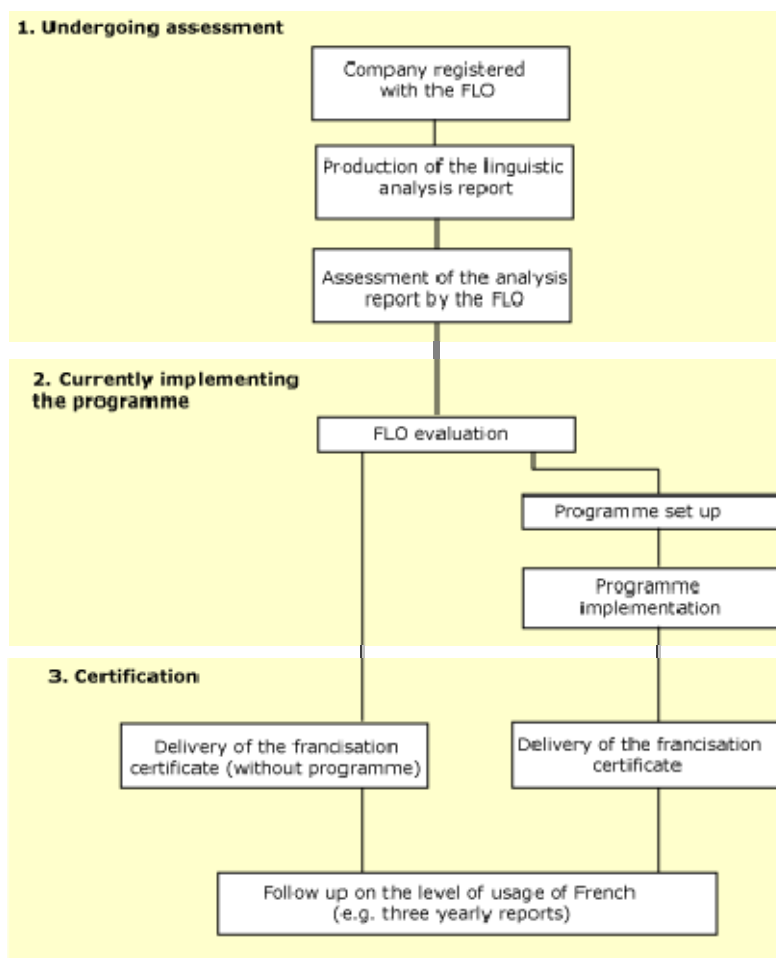
Before it is condition to obtain its francisation certificate, a company must first of all carry out an analysis of its linguistic situation and submit this analysis to the Office for assessment. The Office then delivers a francisation certificate to the company, provided that it is deemed to have a widespread enough use of the French language. Should this not be the case, the company² must set up a francisation programme adapted to its particular situation and implement the amendments deemed necessary according to a schedule agreed with the Office in order to obtain the certificate within reasonably close deadlines³ (see figure 1).

Obtaining the francisation certificate does not relieve the business from its duties with regard to the francisation process. Indeed, according to the amendments brought to the Charter of the French language in 1993, the certified company is under the obligation to continue to concern itself with francisation by delivering a report " to the Office on a three-yearly basis, describing the evolution of the use of French within the company" (Charter of the French language, art. 146). The following diagram summarises the main steps included in this francisation process.

² It is worth mentioning that companies which employ 100 staff or over are obliged to "set up a francisation commission" II (Charter of the French language, art. 136 to 138), half of which must be constituted by staff representatives, hence ensuring that responsibilities with regard to the implementation of the certification process between employees and employers are evenly shared.

³ On 31 March 2006, 79.5 % of the companies registered with the Office had been certified.

Figure 1. Certification process for companies of 50 or more employees



What are the implications of delivering this francisation certificate? Given the aforementioned steps, it is obvious that granting a francisation certificate constitutes an administrative deed set by the Quebec Office of French language following the assessment of its linguistic situation (Council for the French language, 1995: 94). The certificate constitutes, in a certain manner, an official recognition of the level of establishment of the French language reached as a result of negotiations which take into account the objectives set by law and the socio-economical context the concerned business is set within. The workers are therefore able to work in French, although certain environmental or organisational obligations might make it necessary for them to still have to work in English or in another language.

How do we explain this situation? Several factors may be put forward: This situation does not only derive from characteristics specific to the business. It may also depend on the social and inter-organisational context this business pertains to. Amongst the business's own specific characteristics, one must take into consideration the language of the owning entity (Bouchard, 1991), the relevance of the headquarters' geographical location in certain aspects, is linked to the origin of the ownership (foreign business = headquarters based outside Quebec) or with the language of the ownership (English speaking company \cong headquarters in Montreal or outside Quebec).

The company's business activity represents yet another one of the characteristics worth taking into consideration. Indeed, in addition to the linguistic or ethnic specialisations most commonly associated with certain fields (Raynauld and Vaillancourt, 1984)⁴, one also finds areas whose

⁴ They maintain, amongst other things that French-speaking establishments are mainly to be found within the most protected areas of business (agriculture, services, construction and public administration), while foreign businesses mainly focus on exploiting resources (mines and forests) and manufacturing. They also specify that English speaking businesses tend to cluster within the fields of transports and communications as

financial activities are affected by the lesser or greater intensity of their use of technology (Council for the French language, 1995: indicator 2.7) and, as a consequence, a more frequent use of English by the workers.

If the globalisation of communication and information is able to explain, for the greater part, the non-certification, or the slowness in obtaining certification of certain companies, notably with companies which have been in the process of applying the programme for 10 years⁵ or more, it also contributes to the use of languages other than French in the workplace. The repercussions of globalisation affect, amongst other things companies whose products are made in Quebec while being destined to the outside (such as the aerospace industry, for example). These repercussions are also felt with products from other countries (United States, or Japan) or which are manufactured using ever more sophisticated technologies (like for the automotive industry). This globalisation context also plays a part when businesses resort to information technologies to carry out stock management or make long distance sales (from, say, Toronto or New York in the sales sector for example), to complete financial transactions destined to other countries or originating from other countries (like in the financial sector) and to transfer work schedules from one country to the other in order to approve the use of software licenses for companies in different time zones (which is the case with the electric and electronic product sector).

2.2 The effects of certification on the use of French

The issue of certifications with regard to the use of French has been the object of several critical assessments from trade unions, members of the Council for the French language, the tripartite work group for French⁶, the inter-ministerial committee on the situation of the French language and university research staff. All came to the conclusion that "certification" and "the use of French" are not one and the same thing, and that the certification of a company does not necessarily entail that its staff does indeed use French in the workplace; it is, at the very most, "a precursor to functional French, to life in French" (Inter-ministerial Committee on the situation of the French language, 1995: 87). One should nevertheless not conclude from these assessments that the certification process has no effect on the level of use of French.

A study which was carried out in 1995 by the Quebec office for the French language does indeed demonstrate that, in the Montreal region, the use of French is, as a general rule, more widespread within certified companies than in those that are not certified, regardless of whether this is in a written environment⁷ (postings and work documents), written communications from workers (on application forms or other written documents), or spoken communications with their superiors or with their colleagues (> 80 % compared with ≤ 65 %). The certification process has therefore genuinely influenced the level of usage of French by the workers. This doesn't consist of a mere francisation of the written environment⁸: it ensures that these workers use French over English in their written communications (be it to fill in forms or to draw up various documents) and in their spoken communications in respectively 87 % and 82 % of certified companies, whereas these figures stand at 67 % and 62 % in non-certified businesses. Nevertheless, it is worth emphasizing that the certification process has had a much more restricted effect with regard to software: only 49% of certified companies, compared with 26% of non-certified businesses tend to preferentially use software in French.

It does nevertheless appear that there has been, at least within the framework of the certification process, a certain progress in terms of the use of French in the workplace. In addition, one needs to be aware that this use remains precarious, as other languages and English especially are used more or less frequently at work, more obviously so in the Montreal region. This will be demonstrated in the second part of this article.

well as in the financial sector. This trend does however appear to be changing (Cf. Vaillancourt and Vaillancourt, 2005).

⁵ There are currently about 90 companies which have been in the process of applying for certification for over 10 years and several of these will probably never be able to obtain their francisation certificate, unless unforeseen developments occur to change this state of affairs.

⁶ This is the Tripartite Workgroup on the use of French in the workplace, which was established in 1988 by the ministry in charge of implementing the Charter of the French language and produced a report entitled "French as a necessary reorientation in the workplace"

⁷ The term "written environment" refers to written documents the company provides for its staff.

⁸ The use of French for work documents, especially in manuals or catalogues is one of the things required from the company by virtue of art. 141 of the Charter of the French language.

3. French in the workplace

For the first time since 2001, we have census data on the use of languages in the workplace which have allowed us to more accurately assess the level of use of French, English and other languages in the workplace.

3.1 The situation in Quebec and in the metropolitan Montreal area

This data shows that 82 % of workers usually work in French in Quebec (Quebec Office for the French language, 2006: indicator 2.9). In addition, by means of the second section dedicated to the matter, it is also possible to establish whether the workers targeted are using other languages in the workplace. In order to accurately assess this issue, we have drawn up the following typology for the two sections of matter of the language in the workplace.

Typology of the use of French and English in the workplace

		Typology	
Use of French	Use of English	Frequency of the use of French	Frequency of the use of English
Most common		French only	
Most common	Regularly	Mainly French (main language)	English as an additional language
Most common	Most common	French and English used with equal frequency	
Regularly	Most common	French as an additional language	Mainly English (main language)
	Most common		English only

It shows for example that although 59 % of these workers use French exclusively, the remaining 41% use English to varying degrees of frequency when not exclusively. (Quebec Office of the French language, 2006: indicator 2.13).

Having clarified those issues, we will now focus on the Montreal metropolitan area, which comprises both the island of Montreal and its peripheral regions (the “crown” of Montreal). Half of all employment in Quebec is indeed concentrated within this area, which also happens to be the most diverse in terms of languages: almost 30% of workers are not of French mother tongue, while this proportion does not exceed 6% in other areas of Quebec.

This area has other interesting features derived from its linguistic disparity (the island of Montreal compared with the crown of Montréal) and the commuting which characterises it: 40 % of those residing in peripheral areas work on the island.

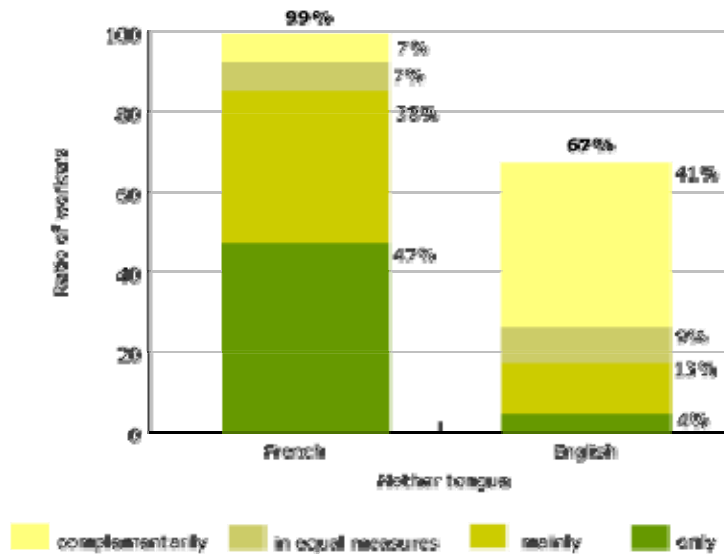
In the metropolitan area of Montreal as a whole, 72 % of those who work tend to do so in French: 42 % only use this language and 30 % work predominantly in French, while resorting to English to a minor extent. Still, the situation observed on the territories of the island of Montréal is very different: 88 % of manpower works mainly in French in the crown area of Montreal, compared with 65% within the island⁹.

On the island of Montreal we can accurately say that the near totality (99 %) of native French speaking workers uses their mother language at work: 47 % use French, 38 % use mainly French, and 14 % use it to the same extent or less than English. With regard to their English speaking colleagues, two thirds of them (67 %) speak French at work, 4 % only use French, 13 % use it over English, 9 %, to the same extent as English and 41 %, use it less frequently than English.

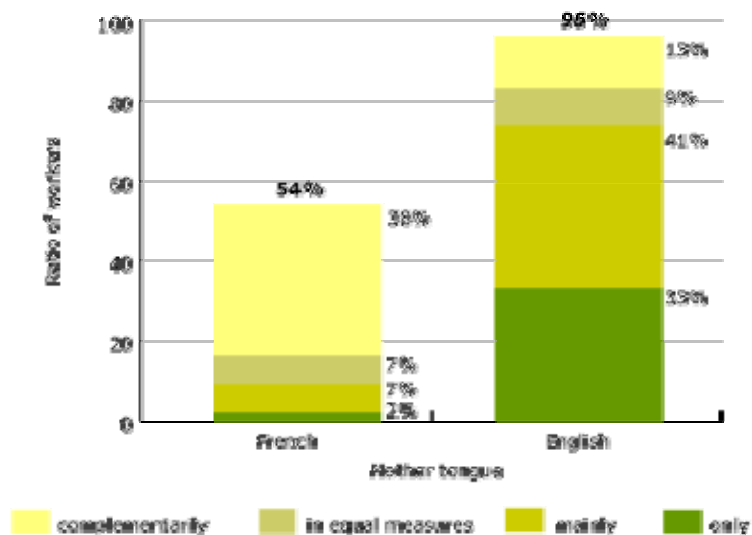
In parallel, English is also frequently used by the workforce based on the island of Montreal: 54 % of French speaking workers use it, (38 % in a complementary manner) and this proportion amounts to 96 % with English speaking workers (33 % use only this language).

⁹ In this article, we will deal exclusively with the situation of those who work on the island of Montreal. Any reader wishing to find out more about the Montreal metropolitan area as whole or the whole of Quebec is invited to visit the website of the Quebec Office of French language at the following address: http://www.oqlf.gouv.qc.ca/ressources/bibliotheque/sociolinguistique/oqlf_faslin_02_20060606.pdf.

Graphique 1



Graphique 2



3.2 Workers of tertiary mother tongue and immigrants

The sustained use of French and the non-negligible use of English are equally perceivable with workers who do not have French or English as a mother language. Indeed, the percentage of workers who use French (78 %) is similar to that of those who use English (77 %). As shown in the following table, this equality is perceivable for each frequency of use for each working language.

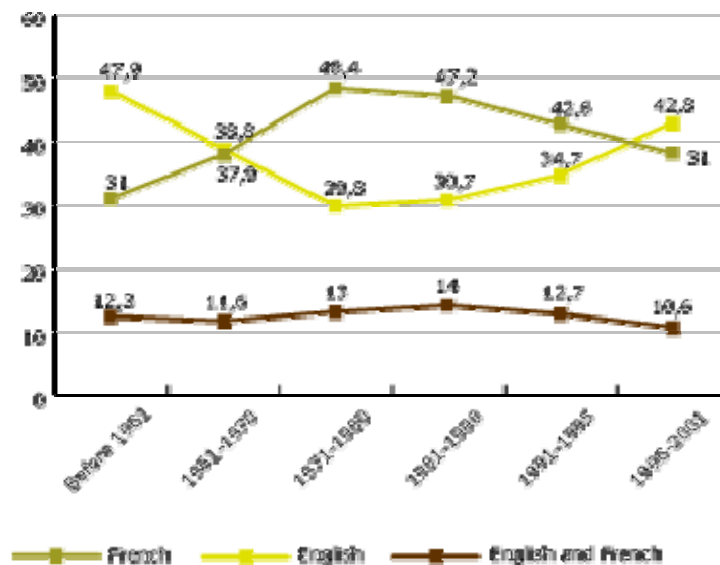
Table 1. Ratio of workers of tertiary mother language according to the frequency of usage of French and English in the workplace

Frequency of the use of French		Frequency of the use of English	
French only	16,4	English only	15,6
Mainly French	23,7	Mainly English	23,4
Equal frequency (*)	16,1	Equal frequency (*)	16,1
Regularly French	22,1	Regularly English	22,5
No French used	21,7	No English used	22,5
Total (number)	242.340	Total (number)	242.340
(*) French and English used with equal frequency		(*) French and English used with equal frequency	

It is important to state the extent to which the time the immigrants came to live in Quebec has affected things as it puts an altogether different perspective on the situation: with regard to those who arrived before 1961, English is the predominant language in the workplace, as back in those days, over half of the Montreal working population used to work in that language. With regard to immigrants from subsequent slices, that is, those who immigrated from 1961 to 1970, French and English are used in similar ratios ($\approx 38\%$) whereas in later ones, that is, 1971 to 1980 and 1981 to 1990, French is used by half of the workforce whilst English is the working language in about 30% of all cases.

With more recently arrived immigrants, it has been noted that a smaller ratio of workers appear to use French compared to the previous two slices. Moreover, with regard to the workers who arrived between 1996 and 2001, the use of English is slightly more widespread than French in the workplace (43% vs. 38%). These figures are summarized in the graph below.

Graphique 3. Ratio of immigrant workers of tertiary mother tongue according to language used in the workplace. Island of Montréal, 2001

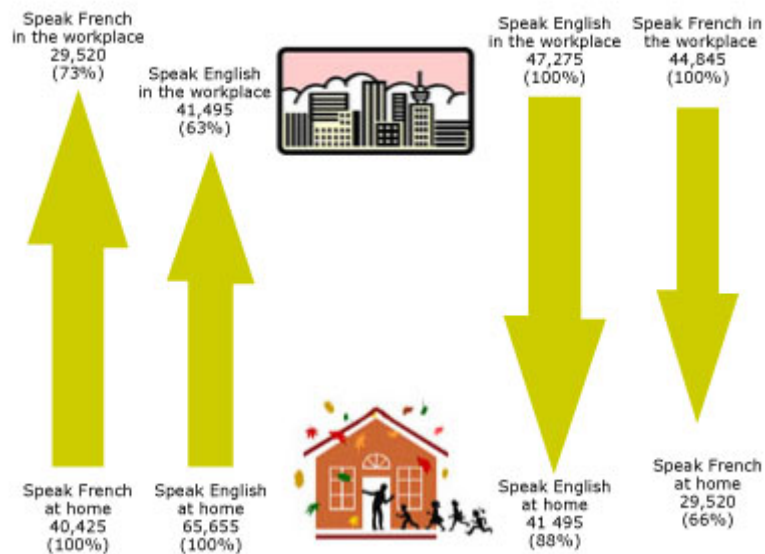


3.3 Languages spoken in the home vs. language spoken in the workplace

The Canadian census allows us to see the link between the language most frequently used at home and the one used in the workplace. The data analysed shows that three quarters of workers of tertiary mother tongue who speak French at home tend to work in French, whereas of those who speak English at home, two thirds also speak it in the workplace. This indicates that it is more common for workers of tertiary mother language who have substituted their own language for French¹⁰ to work in French as well than is the case when English is the substituted language.

¹⁰ Use of a language other than one's own mother tongue within the home.

Figure 2



From the reverse perspective, that is, when observing the link between the use of a language at work and the consequent use of that same language in the home, we can conclude that in the case of workers of tertiary mother tongue who have carried out a linguistic replacement and most frequently use English in the workplace, 88 % also use English at home. This link between the language spoken at work and that used in the home is weaker on the French speaking front: 66 % of those who work in French also speak French at home. In conclusion, the link between the language used at work and that used in the home seems more pronounced when workers of tertiary mother tongue use English at work rather than French.

4. Conclusion

Lastly, we can see that in 2001, the majority of workers of French mother tongue were working in French, although there was also a considerable percentage (52 %) working in English in Montreal. Workers with English as a mother tongue found it harder to progress in a professional context without the use of a second language: 63 % of them worked in French whilst also using English.

Those of tertiary mother language, on the other hand, are split between the use of French and English at work. In addition, we have observed that recent immigrants (1991-2001) tend to use French to a lesser extent than their predecessors who arrived between 1971 and 1990.

The francisation process of companies which has been in force for almost 30 years now has borne its fruits: the use of French is now generally more widespread in certified companies than in those which are not certified. Moreover, the near totality of native French speaking workers use French in the workplace, to a greater or lesser extent, although English is gaining importance in the Montréal working environment due not only to the characteristic of the business (language of owning entity, location of the headquarters) but also as a result of the globalisation of communications which is now imposing certain constraints on various areas of finance which are legitimating the current linguistic policies in force in Quebec after almost 30 years of enforcement..

5. References

BÉLAND, P. *Languages in the workplace in the Montréal area in 2001*, Superior Council for the French language, Quebec Government, 2004.

BOUCHARD, P. *The stakes of the francisation of Quebec businesses (1977-1984)*, Coll. Languages and companies, Montréal, Office of the French language 1991.

INTERMINISTERIAL COMMITTEE ON THE SITUATION OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, *French as a common language. Issues for the Quebec society*, [Québec], ministry for Culture and Communications, [12], 1996.

COUNCIL FOR THE FRENCH LANGUAGE, *Indicators of language on the workplace in Quebec 1994 Edition*, Québec, Council for the French language [4], 1995.

MARMEN, L., J.P. SEGUIN and C. JAWORSKI. *Test for the 1998 national census. Analysis of linguistic variables*, Canada Statistics: Miméo, 1999.

QUEBEC OFFICE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE. *Characteristics of the population of Quebec: trend profile 1991-2001*, Government of Québec, 2005.

QUEBEC OFFICE OF THE FRENCH LANGUAGE. *Language in the workplace: indicators relative to the evolution of the active population and the use of languages in the workplace in 2001*, Quebec Government, 2006.

QUÉBEC (PROVINCE), MINISTRY OF CULTURE AND COMMUNICATIONS. *Quebec policies on the information highway: Acting differently*, Québec, ministry of Culture and Communications, 1998.

RAYNAULD, A. and F. VAILLANCOURT. *The ownership of businesses: the situation of Quebec in 1978*, Files of the Council for the French language, Studies and research into the French language, Studies and research n° 19, Official publisher of Québec, Québec, 1984.

VAILLANCOURT, F. ET L. VAILLANCOURT. *The property of employers in Quebec in 2003 according to the group of French linguistic belonging* Québec, 2005.

Virginie Moffet

Pierre Bouchard

Pierre.Bouchard@oqlf.gouv.qc.ca