

French speaking canadians in the province of quebec history essay



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Language has always been the symbol of identity and assimilation. Today no other issue is posing the great danger to the Canada as in the prospect of Quebec sovereignty due to language and identity. This article describes the Quebec situation in terms of language and identity issue. In this article factors that lead to the adoption of Charter in Canada's parliament about the French Language in Quebec in 1977 is discussed. Quebecois were worry about being minorities in their own territories, where they have majority. Mainly after 1960s, the Francophone has held discriminatory feelings of fear and confidence. The fear of being weakened and dying as language and identity of distinct people and the confidence that they can perform better on its own. To these feelings is added the feeling of rejection. These conflicting attitudes have shaped language policy in Quebec in 1977. Since 1960s till now significant controversies exploded in Canadian society with the passage of restrictive language legislation. The laws have helped to reverse the position of the French language for French speakers in Quebec. But the issue is not only of language and identity but looking for separate nation. Even the linguistic law has also created some controversies of linguistic communal, individual rights and other minorities' rights.

Executive Summary

Quebec is the Canadian province with majority of French speakers or francophone opposite to the rest of Canada where English speaker are in majority. Due to that, issue of identity and language has taken into a great consideration since the quiet revolution in late 1960s. Francophone refers to French colonists who arrived in Canada during 17th and 18th centuries and whose mother tongue is French. Francophone where influence by many

factors like low birth rate of French speaker, power economic condition, English migrants etc to struggle for the survival of their language and identity. As a result of these efforts Quebecer achieves some success as well, recognizing the French language as official language of Canada along with English and the only official language of the province. Also the commercial sign, schools and media are to be carrying out in French language. This bill also created some controversies in Canada as many think that it is a racist bill because it is discriminatory against other ethnic groups and languages. Two referendums were also taken place in 1980 and 1995, but both the time the Quebecers' rejected the separation. In 2006 the House of Commons recognizes the Quebec as a nation within Canada. Which has solved the issue to a certain extent but still there are lots of Francophones demanding a separate nation for French speakers. Quebec is also facing some external pressure from the USA, ethnic societies and other Canadian provinces due to its current situation in the area. Current situation of Quebec suggests that they should stay as a province of Canada because they are not ready for the handling of the responsibilities of a new independent state. Even the French speakers now get every right for their identity and language so now the political parties use that issue for gaining political and financial advantages. The best approach is to have a referendum in Canada for such an issue and solve it with the consensus of all the representative parties of Canada.

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Introduction

This paper traces the language and identity progression of Quebec-Canada relations from quiet revolution till now. Quebecers are demanding for acquiring greater provincial powers and control within the Quebec with respect to language and identity because they have majority. In short, for Quebecers' independence is now about how the society works, live and play in a large within their ethnic group and their identity. This is being the case of Quebec struggling for its language and identity, since the Quiet revolution 1960s till 2010. In the first phase of article, brief history of Quebec has been describe in terms of French language and French and British invasion in early times. There were also many demographic factors which lead Quebec to fight for language and identity which force francophone's for the survival of the French language. These factors are low birth rate in French speakers families, lower socioeconomic status and a fear of mineralization in their own respective territories. Along with that large number of migrant attracted to Quebec because of English Schools in Quebec. To counter with such issues language policies were made in Quebec to protect the French language and identity. To restrict the access to English language schools, commercial signs in any other language, public administration and the rest of media and other communication should be carried out in French. These circumstances also give birth to new controversies among other ethnic groups for protecting their rights in the Quebec. In the later stage in the paper it is compare to the situation of Basque country. Comparisons were made with respect to similarities and differences in the situation of language of Quebec and Basque. The solution to the Quebec problem is to have a referendum in the entire Canada for Quebec separation but the separation will be harmful for <https://assignbuster.com/french-speaking-canadians-in-the-province-of-quebec-history-essay/>

both. Because if it is separated there is possibility of other ethnic groups may raise their voice for separation. For Quebec it will be hard to manage internal, economic and social factors and external, United State and French interference.

Historical background

Quebec is the province of Canada that is located in the East Central Canada.

Quebec is the only Canadian province that has the majority of French speaking population and the only one whose sole official language at provincial level is French. Although in Canada there are two official languages English and French. Quebec is not only the largest Canadian province by area but also after Ontario, is the second-largest administrative division and populous province. There are also some smaller communities of French Canadians exist throughout Canada that are migrated from different regions. The major French speaking Canadians reside in Quebec prefer to call themselves as Québécois (Quebeckers) instead of French Canadian.

French speaking Quebecers or francophone refers to French colonists who arrived in Canada during 17th and 18th centuries and whose mother tongue is French. Quebecers or francophone constitute the second largest ethnic group in Canada, and about 85% of French Canadians reside in Quebec. According to the census of 2006, 67% of residents of the Montreal Census Metropolitan Area have French mother tongue and outside the Montreal CMA, this figure is 93%. In 1996, the population of Quebec was 86% Catholic and 6% Protestant. In the development of the province the Catholic Church plays a major influential role. In politics the Government party Sovereignty plays a vital role in the politics of Quebec. The major event

taken place in 2006 was the Canadian House of Commons has passed the symbolic motion, recognizing the “ Québécois as a nation within a united Canada” (CTV News, 2006).

Quebecer Language

The French is the official language of Quebec and it is the only Canadian province with majority of Francophone population. According to the 2006 Census out of total population, 80.1 percent gives a singular response for French as their first language (Statistics Canada, 2008). About 97.4 percent of the total can be able to speak French, whether as their first, second, or in some cases, third language. A significant number of Quebecers consider themselves to be bilingual (possess the knowledge of both, French and English). Quebec has the highest proportion of bilinguals as compared to any other province in Canada. Opposite to that, only 10.2 percent of the total population in the rest of Canada has knowledge of both of the country's official languages (Statistics Canada, 2007-08). Since the 1970s, in the province of Quebec except French other languages have been permitted on commercial signs only if French is given marked prominence. But that law has also been the subject of controversy since the beginning.

Quebecer Identity and their Issues

The term Québécois is now replaced with the French Canadian or Quebecers to demonstrate the cultural and identity among French Canadians, living in province of Quebec. The major French Canadian nationalism and identity was based upon the protection of the French language and their identity.

Since the Quiet Revolution in 1960s, French Canadian struggle a lot to

protect and to keep alive the French Quebec language, culture and identity.
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The modern Québécois identity is based on a social and democratic idea of French Quebec, encouraging the French language and French-speaking culture in the arts, education, and business within the Province of Quebec (Bélanger, Claude 2000). According to Ethnic Diversity Survey of the 2001 found that French-speaking Canadians identified their ethnicity most often as Québécois, or French Canadian (Grofman, B. 2003). These grouped together by Jantzen (2005) as “ French New World” ancestries because they originated in Canada. He differentiates the English Canadian, as those whose family has been in Canada for multiple generations, and the French Canadian, are those who are the descendants of the original colonizer of Quebec in the 17th and 18th centuries (Jantzen (2005). In the late 1960s in Canada, there was only one official language and that was English. After a long continues struggle of Quebec for its language they finally get the result in the form French official language of Canada along with English.

Quebecers or francophone generally represent Québécois (masculine) or Québécoise (feminine) demonstrate their cultural and national identity. Those Francophone’s who identify themselves as Québécois and they do not have any French-Canadian origin, may not be identify as “ French Canadian”. Opposite to those who have French-Canadian origin, but support Quebec sovereignty, often find French-Canadian to be archaic or even pejorative. This is due to the strong social, cultural, and political ties that most Quebecers of French-Canadian origin, who represent francophone Quebecers, keeps within Quebec. It has given Québécois an ambiguous meaning (James, C. E. & Shadd, A. L 2001). Most of the English speaking Canadians of British or Canadian lineage generally cannot trace

their lineage as far back in Canada as French-speakers. Thus their ethnic and racial identities are weaker, For example, only 50% of third generation “Canadians” strongly identify as such. The survey report notes that 80% of Canadians whose families had been residing in Canada for three or more generations reported “Canadian and provincial or regional ethnic identities”. These identities include French New World descendents such as “Québécois” (37% of Quebec population), “Acadian” (6% of Atlantic Provinces) (Statistic Canada, 2003).

Challenges successes and continuous problem

Conditions leading to new language and Nation

Quebecois nationalism and identity movement were taking into the great consideration during late 1960s. The objective behind the movement was to sustain and extend the importance of French language (McWhinney 1979). The mood of nationalistic movement mood was influence by several factors, which ultimately leads to major language changes in Quebec policies and sovereignty. That makes the Quebecers to think for survival of their identity. Mainly those factors were decline in the fertility rate among the French Quebecois was very crucial and taken into a great consideration. The birth rate of French Canadian decline rapidly during the quiet revolution in period from 1960-1966. Birth rate decline from 4. 2 children per 1000 married women in 1956 to 1961 to 2. 3 children per 1000 married women for the period from 1966 to 1971. Quebec’s birthrate was the lowest of all the Canadian provinces in the 1990s (Joy 1992). Quebec fertility rate from 1986 to 1991 was only 1. 5 (Chevrier, 1997). In 1931, 7. 2 percent of the population outside of Quebec had French as their mother tongue. This

proportion dropped to less than 5.0 percent in 1991. Because of significant changes in fertility rates and immigration, Quebec's proportion of the Canadian population has dropped from 27.7 percent in 1931 to 24.1 in 2001 (Chevrier, 2003).

The adaptation of new immigrants to English as language is another key factor that leads to language reform in Quebec. Along with that the growing fears of French as rare language among Quebecers both within Canada and within the province of Quebec (Esman, 1985). English language was significantly adopted by immigrants coming to the province and they prefer to send their children to English rather than French schools. More than 85 percent of all immigrants in Quebec choose English language schools in the late 1960s, approximately 70 percent of Italian-speaking children in the Montreal area sent their children to schools in English (Gagnon, 1997).

The fourth reason for legislating of language policy was related to the civil rights movement and the self-assertion of the French speaking population in Quebec in the period 1960s and 1970s. When Pierre Vallières wrote his famous revolutionary work (entitled it as *Nègres blancs d'Amérique* (White Niggers of America), 1967) about the Quebec. It was perceived by many Quebecers as they are discriminated in comparison to the English speakers in Quebec, and condemned the capitalist system in the 1960s and 1970s.

Quebec Successes and Continuing Problem

In 1977, French was made as the official language of this Quebec but it does not mean that status of French and French speakers improved. This occurred because of the introduction of Bill 101, which the Parti Québécois brought

into law in 1977 to restrict access to an education in English in the province. After more than a quarter decade of the Bill, demographic factors lead to some successes. According to the Canadian Census of 2001, 81.2 percent of Quebecers still speak French as their mother language. In addition to that, 41 percent of Quebecers said they can speak both French and English in 2001 in comparison to 38 percent in 1996. Also the number of Anglophones reporting that they are bilingual in Quebec also increased from 62 percent in 1996 to 66 percent in 2001. Approximately 50 percent of the allophones speak both French and English (Statistics Canada, 2002). The ratio to the number of non French speaker to attending French language schools has increased significantly. This ratio is greater among the young people. According to 2001 census, 90.2 percent of young immigrants were enrolled in French schools (Chevrier, 2003). On the whole, everyday relations between the linguistic groups are cordial, and show a willingness to accommodate each other (Larrivée, 2003).

Quebec still faces some real challenges and continuing problems. Like low Adaptation and assimilation of francophone's outside of Quebec and low birth rate inside. These factors Quebec are responsible for the decrease in the French-speaking population in Canada to 22.9 percent in 2001, down from 23.5 percent in 1996 (Statistics Canada 2002). Quebec had the largest net loss of any of the provinces according to the 2001 census. English still dominates the North American continent as a whole. The dominance of English is especially felt in the areas of foreign trade, the internet, television, and among Quebecer who use a language other than French. Still the insecurity about the French language, while reduced, has not disappeared.

Quebec: Separate nation or Canadian Province

Internal Circumstances

According to world ranking Quebec is the second highest indebted non-central government. Annual deficits of Quebec still exceed the value of three billion Canadian dollars per year. Along with that public bureaucracy is already distended; even so, thousands of federal employees have pledged to absorb by the Quebec government. Who are now lives in or have to ties after Quebec independence. The Quebec government is not ready and prepared to take the responsibilities and debts of Separate nation. Other estimates that Quebec Province also has to accept the federal government's debts, which is a very large amount (Fry, E. H. 1996-97). Along with all that 50 percent of debt would be payable to investors outside Quebec, and they may also suffer the additional lower bond rating challenges and a devalued currency. In addition to economic growth, provincial unemployment is also very low as compare to the rest of Canada. In 1996 the unemployment rate was 11.8 percent, two percentage points more than Canada's overall 9.4 percent jobless rate. Like only 3000 jobs were created in Quebec, compared with 26,000 in British Columbia, 33,000 in Alberta, and 150,000 in Ontario (Fry, E. H. 1996-97).

Along with these entire economic shortcoming the other big issues is Quebec politics; Quebec political parties raise issues periodically with central Canadian government and also threatening them as well. But the purpose of them is not just to solve the issue of language and French identity but to take some financial benefits from the Canadian government. Due to all these facts now the rest of Canada also want them to be separated from the

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Canada because they are not only a burden on Canada but also creating racist policies like Bill 101. According to which the only official language of Quebec is French, just opposite to the rest of Canada where two official languages are French and English. The Bill also discriminates against other ethnic groups and minority languages because they are only allowed if French allows them. So the issue of Quebec is more political than an issue of language and identity. People respond as their politicians' portray the image to the public. Just as in 2006 the Canadian House of Commons passed a symbolic motion recognizing the "Québécois as a nation within a united Canada. Every political party was strongly agreed with the suggestions and later on that bill was passed" (CTV News, 2006). Even the political party that always demands Quebec as a separate nation and not the state within the state.

External Circumstances

Although in a situation where the Quebecers declare their declaration of unilateral independence, the Canadian government must have to intervene. There will be two reasons for intervention in the matter: one to protect the rights of the federally-protected minorities within the Quebec, and second to secure federal assets. France has the policy of "non-intervention in the matter of Quebec but non-indifference," for example, has been a constant irritation to Ottawa (Alex Morrison, 1992). The United States is the single most vital external actor in any Québec separation situation. If the United States felt that instability in its northern part on its northern border threatened its own security, they will intervene. Such intervention will also possibly occur due to the political pressures from within the US government or from interest

groups or a national press interested in newly Canada. Whatever is going to be the ethical issue of intervention, the reality is that that the United States will keep a close eye on the situation. The intervention of United State might be in the form of direct military intervention, if they security threats, the imposition of sanctions.

The most possible grounds for external intervention would range from directly by threat or force or by ant other mean, like third party arbitration in response to ethnic, minority protection, humanitarian assistance, resource protection or stability concerns. Due to the fact if the issue is not properly and timely handle it would lead to ethnic war among the different group within Canada and also within Quebec as well. The other Canadian provinces like Ottawa are also ready to create hurdle for Quebec if it get separation.

Future of Quebec and there possible solution

Some people think that, only way to protect the French language and identity is to separate the Québec province from the rest of Canada. The central inspiration behind the nation is the issue of language, many believe that Québec will get more benefit economically and socially, if it were to separate from Canada. Opposite to that, many Quebecers feel if the Canadian government do not recognising Québec as a separate society, with its own unique language, identity and economy within the Canada, it will be a great lost in this increasingly globalised world for Quebec. The `Bloc Québécois` is the Political party of Canada represents this desire for sovereignty. That does the politics on the issue of having separate nation from Quebec. But the ground situation is quite different from what they demand. Politically, economically within the Quebec and in rest of Canada as <https://assignbuster.com/french-speaking-canadians-in-the-province-of-quebec-history-essay/>

well they are not in a position to have separate state. Also looking into the external scenario as well they have lot of threats which will make it more badly for new Quebec nation. To solve these issues Canada especially Quebec needs a good, strong politically and socially influential leader. Because if the Canada is not going to solve it in better way than it might lead to other ethnic and language issue in the country. But Canadian House of Commons, declaration of 'Quebecois' is a nation within 'united Canada' was great move which lower the issue into a great extent.

If the Quebec want to have separate nation because of language than they must have to realize the fact that in any case they have to survive in the globalize world with English. Today English is consider as the one global language and it is called "Globalish" and it is also the main source of trade, communication, media etc. So in both cases either Quebec is separated or exists within the Canada as province, Quebecers or francophone has to learn English. Keeping knowledge of the language is not the bad thing to do as the Quebecers' do. But the political parties of Quebec, using it as the advantage in political ground by making it as issue of identity. Which Canadian government had already given them by accepting as nation within the nation. Presently the Quebecers or francophone is getting support from provincial as well as federal government socially and economically as well. But once they get separated from Canada they will also lose the edge which have currently in the globalize world. The best possible solution is to have a referendum in the Quebec and in rest of Canada about the separation of Quebec. On the basis of that referendum they had to make the decision with the consensus of all political parties of the entire Canada.

Important events took place since 1980

In a referendum that was held in 1980, Quebecers voted against sovereignty by the margin of 60-40. In 1981 the Quebec government took steps to ban all public signs that are in English and any other language except French. The amendment of repatriation on Canada's constitution, except Quebec, all other provincial government and Federal government of Canada are agreed upon. Quebec government Premier René Lévesque insists to veto over the Canadian's repatriation constitutional change. That was discarded by the Prime Minister Trudeau, by making repatriate amendment 1982. In 1988 the Supreme Court of Canada again reverses the sign law of 'French only' Quebec. However, Quebec reinstated the law and as a result; the ratification of the Meech Lake Accord was slowed by Manitoba Premier Gary Filmon. Due to these certain issues, Bloc Québécois political party was created by French Canadian politicians in 1990.

In referendum of 1995, again the Quebecers rejected the separation from Canada but this time the margin was very narrow 50.6 "no" to separation. Quebecer Premier Jacques explains the reason of failure as it is due to the negative and humiliating remarks against non French speakers. Finally 27th November 2006, Canadian House of Commons, announced that 'Québécois' is a nation within 'united Canada'. After making such a change, some people think that it is the first step toward the separation of Quebec from Canada. Other has a different view; they think that it is a clever and far reaching effort to make Quebec unproblematic province once for all. But whatever the case that was a very good step taken by the House of Commons because now Quebecers don't have any solid reason to demand for separation.

Quebec Vs Basques; similarities / differences

Basque Country is used to refer to the people located on the shores of the Bay of Biscay and on the two sides of the western Pyrenees that separate the Spanish and French States. The Basque language is considered as one of the oldest languages of pre-Indo-European languages, and its origins are still unknown. Two important features about the Basque people are historically obvious. First is the difficulty in harmonizing internal relations among Basque people and reaching the common agreement with consensus.

Second is the use of force or violence as tools to solve this problem. They think that issues can be best solved by the power. The main issue of Basque country is also like Quebec, language and identity. There has been continuous struggle to defend a different social reality or identity, one that includes a different language, a different culture, and different customs. Due to that reason number of conflicts and wars are occurred prior to the 19th century because of integration to Kingdoms or States that wished to incorporate the Basque into their territory. These states have periodically influence them by force to follow the identity and language of ruler state. This was very damaging to the identity of different Basque cultures.

Similar to the issue of Quebec, survival of language and identity, but the both the situations are quite different in many aspects. For example in case of Quebec, the issue is now more political than the issue of identity and language because Canadian government had provided them every right to strengthen their language and identity. In 2006, Canadian government also accepted Quebec as nation within the nation along with 101 Bill. Opposite to that Basque country was invaded many times by French and Spanish state

and tries to enforce their culture on them. Like prohibit in the use of the Basque language and various cultural expressions. Not only that but also they are trying to solve issues and problem by force, violence which causes number of casualties periodically and uncertainty. So although the issue is same in both the locations but the situation is entirely different.

Does this relate to the area of the world you come from?

Pakistan is a multilingualism country; there are many cases of language based identity. Even the provinces are described in terms of language base identity. Main languages are Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto and Balochi etc these are all used to create or sustain ethnic identity and affiliation. Urdu is the official language of the country along with the English. But the language base identity is not the sole drive of the identity in case Pakistan, it works along with the religion. These two together make the identity of the nation just as opposite in case of Quebec, where the main issue is French language. Although in Pakistan politician do use the language base identity, but their purpose is just to strengthen their vote bank. The issue seems like language is not actually of language but equal distribution of resources and power.

Discussion and Evaluation

What is important is that, just as the language help in the creation of single nation, in the same way it also helps in the shaping of ethnic identity. The sense of isolation in the ethnic group contains, the nation can only be build by conforming that they share the pie; that they have respect for each other's values, their language and identity. If that is going to happened the frustrations will make people united against it with many symbols and one of which is language. These circumstance leads to the creation of new nation
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but over the breakage of existing one. So if it is right that language creates nations than there is also no doubt if those circumstances are not properly handled, it is the reason of breaking nations. The issue is very sensitive because of the emotional attachments of the groups to its history and identity. Managing such kind of problem in beginning is very important otherwise it will only end at the separation, violence and hatred.

Just as the case of Quebec where the issue of language and had taken a great consideration after 1960s. Although Canadian government had handled the situation very effectively as for the matter is concern. Canadian government also accepted the French language as the official language of Canada and only official language in Quebec. They have given the full rights to protect and strengthen French language in all fields of life in Quebec. Even though these rights were also misused in the Bill 101 where they have restricted other ethnic and language groups only to French language. Along with that Quebec government and political parties also misusing the issue and use it for their political gain. Due to that they receive huge funds from Canadian government. After all these circumstances today the rest of Canada also want to separate the Quebec from Canada. But issue is not as simple as it looks like. If Canada separates them than also there will more ethnic groups will raise the same kind of issues and they will also demand for separation. Along with that, there will also start fighting resources among themselves and the external pressure will also be superior. Quebec is also not in position to take the responsibility of separate sovereign nation, so it's better to be a part of the Canada.

Conclusion

If Quebecers want to have a separate nation for French speakers than the best possible solution is to have the referendum in the entire Canada along with Quebec. Along with that they have to take every step with complete census so as to avoid any social and ethnic issue which leads to violence or damage. Challenges to the independence are predictable; there will be various issues of concern for the newly independent like Ottawa will try to push Quebec to the verge of instability and collapse. Economic conditions, meeting its fiscal deficit every year, resource and debt distribution between Canada and Quebec are the challenges, which Quebec has to tackle with if they get separated. Above all the issue of territory has to be achieved to the satisfaction of all parties with the eruption of escalatory friction and violence. Canadian history, as well as extensive study of current ethnic conflict, offers comprehensive reasons to believe that Québec's separation to independence will be everything but peaceful. Although the separation will bring damages for both in long run and short run as well. So before separating, they have to try to make each and every effort evade the perfect storm. And live as one nation and that is Canada.