

The 1961 Census showed 565,000 persons of other than French origin as able to speak both English and French. Just over 318,000 or 56 p.c. of these were of British Isles origins, 48,000 of Italian, 32,000 of Jewish, 27,000 of German, and 18,000 of Polish ethnic background. Smaller numbers were reported from among a variety of European and Asiatic ethnic groups. As would be expected, the extent to which members of these groups were able to speak both English and French depended quite largely upon the proportion of their number residing in the Province of Quebec or neighbouring communities in which there were large numbers of French-speaking persons. For example, just over half of the 318,000 bilingual persons of British Isles ethnic background resided in Quebec Province. Although only 4 p.c. of the total population in Canada of this numerically largest ethnic group were bilingual, about 30 p.c. of those living in the Province of Quebec could speak both French and English. Similarly, among residents of this province belonging to other ethnic groups those reporting the highest percentages able to speak both languages were: Russian, 38 p.c.; Asiatic, 37 p.c.; Jewish, 36 p.c.; Italian, 35 p.c.; Polish, 32 p.c. and Scandinavian, 31 p.c.

Among the foreign born population, 216,000 or around 8 p.c. had acquired a speaking knowledge of both English and French at the 1961 Census date. Ability to speak both languages among the foreign born was much more evident in Quebec Province than elsewhere, where 28 p.c. of this group reported ability to speak both English and French at the 1961 Census. Among the more recent arrivals in this country, i.e., those who had immigrated to Canada between 1951 and 1961, one quarter of the residents of this province were able to speak both English and French by the date of the latest census.

From what has been said it may be concluded that the degree to which the population of a given province, city, rural or urban area is able to speak both English and French depends to a considerable extent upon the ratio of people of French to non-French origin in the area under observation. In metropolitan centres where a substantial number of bilingual persons are found, this relationship is quite apparent. For example, if the three metropolitan areas of Montreal, Ottawa and Quebec—where the population of French ethnic group rises from around two fifths of the total in Ottawa, to almost two thirds in Montreal and close to 95 p.c. in Metropolitan Quebec—are examined, it will be found that the percentage of the French ethnic group able to speak both languages was highest in Metropolitan Ottawa at 60 p.c., declining to just over 40 p.c. in Metropolitan Montreal and to 23 p.c. in the Metropolitan Quebec area. Hence where there is a lower percentage of the French ethnic group in the total population of these metropolitan areas there is a higher proportion of bilingual persons in the group and, conversely, where a high percentage of the total population is of French ethnic background, such as in Metropolitan Quebec, there is a lower percentage of bilingual persons in that area.

Although the percentage of the population of non-French ethnic groups in these three metropolitan areas who were able to speak both English and French was not as high as for the French ethnic group, the same tendency may be observed. To illustrate, in Quebec Metropolitan Area, not much more than 5 p.c. of the population was of non-French ethnic background. Among this group 52 p.c. were able to speak both French and English at the 1961 Census and in this predominantly French-speaking area another 28 p.c. of this non-French ethnic group spoke French but not English. Thus, in this metropolitan area 80 p.c. of the population reporting ethnic origins other than French were able to speak French. In Metropolitan Montreal where the non-French ethnic groups accounted for around 35 p.c. of the total population, 30 p.c. were able to speak both languages, but in the Ottawa area where approximately 60 p.c. of the population was reported as belonging to non-French ethnic groups, the proportion who were able to speak both French and English was much lower at 11 p.c.

The importance of this factor of the ratio of the French to other ethnic groups in particular types of areas on the ability to speak both English and French is also evident when comparison is made of the extent of bilingualism among the population of the French, on the one hand, and other ethnic groups, on the other, in the rural areas of the Provinces of Ontario and Quebec. Although the population of French ethnic background in rural Ontario is concentrated largely in the eastern and in the northern parts of the province,