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Today: Tuesday, May 6, 2008

Why We're Failing at French

And how to actually teach a language.

By **Shannon Bourbonnais**

Published: September 5, 2007

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TheTyee.ca

"Je t'aime." That was about the extent of my husband's French skills when he taught core French in his teaching practicum. He's not alone. But even though I am a francophone and have a degree in French, when I taught high school French for four years, fresh out of university, I watched with frustration as students passed the provincial French exams with high marks, then walked out the door, still unable to communicate their basic needs in French. Despite being a trained French teacher, I lacked the tools and enough hours of class time to impart authentic language skills to my students.

There are serious limitations to the way French is mainly now taught in schools. Students start French classes too late, spend too few hours in the classroom, and are often taught by teachers who often lack French fluency themselves and can't even use French as the language of instruction within the classroom. The Ministry of Education only requires schools to offer a second language from Grades 5 to 8, and while in an ideal world they spend half an hour a day on French, in many schools, it's often only an hour a week. And well-meaning, hard working, but under-prepared teachers, like my husband, have ineffective methods of teaching a language.

But while doing a Master's of Education, focusing on language, I came to the conclusion that none of those things is the real problem. The real problem is that we're teaching students complex grammar and vocabulary, but not teaching them how to communicate. And we don't teach language in the way that



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students actually learn it organically.

No 'authentic communication'

Students learn lists of nouns, such as "sports" or "clothes," and then they learn rules like when to use the past perfect versus imperfect. But that's not the way we speak. People communicate in sentences, and verbs are central to language. People communicate with statements like "I want," "I can" or "I have to." But because "want," "can" and "must" are irregular verbs in French, they are usually not taught in the first few years of standard French programs. Instead, in my high school French classes, I shamefully admit that I used English to explain advanced grammar to a group of students who could hardly speak enough French to ask me to repeat the question.

The provincial exams, which loom for Grade 12 students and their teachers, don't provide any incentive to become fluent either. Although there are some plans to change this in the future, the current exam is entirely written and based on grammar, vocabulary and reading. There is no spoken or listening component. So, students can graduate with As and Bs, without ever having engaged in a real French conversation, which is ironic given that the curriculum constantly mentions the notion of "authentic communication."

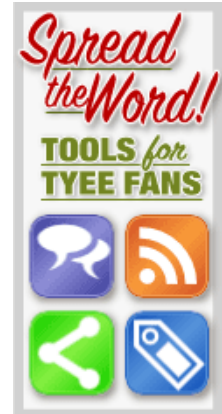
There are certainly many things that could be done to improve French skills upon graduation. We could take a lesson from the Europeans who begin second language lessons earlier and build exchange trips to other countries into their curriculum, for example. However, while these types of experiences are essential for kids to learn a second language, exchanges are expensive and time consuming in North America. And while we certainly need more teachers who are fluent in French, there are few opportunities for teachers to develop these skills.

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Foraging for French

Six years ago I walked into a classroom at a Vancouver elementary school and heard the Grade 2 students speaking French at a level my Grade 12 students weren't even close to achieving. Everything was in French -- kids were fighting in French, tattling on each other in French, even in the corner, out of earshot, they were all speaking French. I was convinced that it must be an immersion class, but these students were only getting 30 minutes of French instruction a



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day. I was so amazed that I went right back to my school in West Vancouver and told the principal, "We have to try this."

The classroom belonged to Wendy Maxwell, a French teacher who conducted 10 years of action research in her own classes while doing a Master's degree in Education, then gathered the best ways of teaching a language under one umbrella -- which she calls the Accelerated Integrative Method (AIM). There's nothing new about what Maxwell does: she teaches a second language the way we usually teach a first language. I studied her method in my own graduate work and, rather than teach grammar out of context, I now teach language and grammar through story, in the same way parents teach their children by reading to them.

Of course, it's more than just hearing a story that helps children learn a language; it's all the interaction that occurs between the parent and the child around the story. In my class, I might read the story of *Les Trois Petits Cochons* (*The Three Little Pigs*) out loud, but then the students often retell the story in their own words, act it out, or continue the story from their own imagination. And they use gestures with almost every word.

Maxwell's program, which is taught in 3,000 schools across Canada, includes a pared-down vocabulary of about 900 words that are necessary for basic fluency. Students work through the list in a systematic fashion, but not by memorization. The gestures that go along with every word, somewhat like sign language, allow students to use both the left and right brain. Also, students gesture and say each word as the teacher says it out loud, to maximize language use time. This makes learning more active (and fun), as do songs, and dance routines.

Fifty percent fluent?

In my classes I ask two questions: "Are the kids enjoying the language?" and "Do they have a functional level of fluency?" When Jean Chretien was prime minister, he announced a goal of having 50 per cent of Canadians graduate with working fluency in French by 2012. But only about one to two per cent of students will become fluent using traditional French teaching methods -- Maxwell is actually one of them -- but she realized that it doesn't work for most students. While some of my students excel more than others and not all have achieved a high level of fluency by Grade 6, all have the basic fluency to tell me their needs in class, and in all cases, their base level of French speaking and comprehension is much higher than the students I was teaching through traditional French classes. I no longer have to use even a word of English in my classes, and I've had parents tell me that when their family visited France or Quebec their child did all the ordering.

Of course, just because teachers use this method, it doesn't necessarily mean they will get the same results. No matter what method a teacher uses, he or she needs to be engaging and interesting and able to connect with students. A French teacher who doesn't have perfect grammar, but has enthusiasm and classroom presence, might be better than a francophone who assumes that kids know more than they do.

The teaching methodologies that I now employ in my classes transcend linguistic boundaries. Educators in Europe and Asia are interested in Maxwell's approach and the curriculum is being modified for use in Spanish classes,



English as a second language programs and First Nations language programs. New curriculum is also being developed for adults and high school students who wouldn't find *The Three Little Pigs* as relevant to their lives.

Language acquisition takes commitment and consistency on the part of students and teachers. But French class should be engaging and creative, not the daily dose of misery and memorization.

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Shannon Bourbonnais has been teaching French for 10 years in Vancouver, Winnipeg, France and the UK, and is currently on maternity leave from teaching primary school French in Vancouver. She has a Master's of Education in language acquisition.

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Bang-on article!

Percy 05-09-2007

This article rings true in my own experience of learning to communicate in French. I think we have to get away from the notion that French is an "international language", and that its "international" form (read Parisian French) should be the norm we learn in Canada. Wrong wrong wrong. We learn French in Canada because it is a live spoken language here, irrespective of its international status (which is undergoing a major eclipse). And the form we should learn (and train our ears to) is the Quebecois variety.

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Merci and more failing tips

 **gaulois** 05-09-2007

Merci to the Tyeer for finally publishing a story that should touch a substantial segment of its readership: francophones and francophiles in a country that has invested so much in State sponsored bilingualism.

Yep the methods of teaching a second language have dramatically improved since you last had to endure the torture way back.

In regards to the kind of French to teach, not sure about "Québécois" or "Français" French. As in English, there is such a thing as International French and it does not have to be the 1500 words counterpart version of globish, franbal or whatever. Do you people debate over teaching American or British English??? Assez de division as it is...

It is also important to understand the relationship between the local forms of the language and its international framework.

Finally it is also important to understand the relationship in between French and English in our BC environment, something that is under appreciated by the language schooling establishment IMO. Language schooling should come with a "User Guide" in an english speaking majority environment such as ours. The investment will otherwise vanish away in no time with deep regret at the opportunity lost. An anglo/franco "metis" may appreciate this more than others...

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50% French fluency!

 **Yammer** 05-09-2007

Sounds impressive! I wonder if that many students are actually fluent in English.

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come on Tyeer

 **asher** 05-09-2007

Oh come on Tyeer. This is an article promoting someone's language teaching method - this Maxwell thing. The Communicative Approach to language teaching has been around for decades with deep philosophical principles behind it. Then every once in a while some entrepreneur comes up with a new method! Get off it! This new method is superficial compared to the seachange between the Communicative Approach and the Grammar Translation Method (the one currently used in BC schools).

This article undermines the Tyeer's worth. Why not just post an advertisement for the George Foreman Grill.

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Just a minute....

 **dorothy** 05-09-2007

"...And the form we should learn (and train our ears to) is the Quebecois variety."

Ahem! wouldn't it make a Heck of a lot more sense out here out he Westcoast to learn Spanish or possibly Mandarin, even Tagalog. Check out this site for numbers:

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_

For many BC'ers, who have grown up here, the only memory connected with French in school was its use as a separator of the real people from the not-so-real people. Parents quickly figured out, that it offered a way to institute a school within the school, wherein things could go up a notch, while the English language class had to, throughout the years of 'trying French', contend with the disenchanting 'failures' who kept coming out of the French immersion class, until only those who 'fit in' were left there. It goes without saying, that this did not create a climate for learning, for those who opted for English from the beginning. They were, to put it mildly, royally shafted.

As long as bill 101 is alive and well, and people in Quebec are trying to bulldoze bill 104, I see even less reason to tune my ear to anything other than my preferred Danish dialect, also known as English:

www.cbc.ca/canada/ottawa/story/2007/08/23/lan

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Points - Language - Reality

Ⓜ **murdock** 05-09-2007

Quote:

the current exam is entirely written and based on grammar, vocabulary and reading

as are most 'literary' subjects since the 'conversational' approach would mean that each and every student would need to 'speak' with someone! That would mean that the teachers might actually have to interact with their students in a more meaningful way! perish the thought -> teachers spending more than 3 mins a day on each student, why that would mean that there must be MORE TEACHERS!

Quote:

Language schooling should come with a "User Guide"

Yes, and one part of that guide needs to be a reminder that language is used as a 'divisive' tool in the establishment of 'nations' (see the Bill 104 situation in Quebec for a use of such a division tactic).

Quote:

Heck of a lot more sense out here out he Westcoast to learn Spanish or possibly Mandarin, even Tagalog.

Modern compulsory public schooling MAKING SENSE?!?!

That must be some sort of oxymoron.

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plus lentement s'il vous plait

Step easy 05-09-2007

Currently taking french in College and though i'm enjoying it, is kind of a mundane teaching method. The positive is that we have a lab once a week where nous parlons seulment. This can be effective i think though after six days, you tend to forget what you said!

I wish i had just gone and mastered this language years ago while still in high school. I strongly believe that the way to learn any language is to be immersed in it while still very young-like before age ten. That being said, i'm bound and determined, no matter my mature student status, to learn it this time. Part of our grade is not only on class participation (communication) but we also do listening comprehension, as well as speaking tests.

As an aside, the reason so many new locals can barely string a sentence together in english is not for lack of quality ESL training but rather because often these people fall into easy comfort zones where they wind up staying within fairly closed circles of people who speak their own mother tongue, which is understandably easy to do. True immersion however, means actively participating in your own education.

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Amen.

gardensnake 05-09-2007

It makes for more sense for us to abandon the much despised (among both parents, teachers and students) emphasis on French and replace those programs with more Chinese language programs. In BC, Chinese dialects far surpass French... for a student there are far more opportunities to pick up Chinese than French. I certainly have a far easier time finding people to speak Mandarin with than it was when I learned French.

Let's make something abundantly clear: French quickly losing its role as an international language. Less and less of France's former colonies even use the language and the place of France on the world stage.

It's time put aside the nationalist French-Canadian bullshit (as a demi-acadien, I'm quite fine with this) and show more respect to the many other minority languages in Canada! It's time we embraced the minority cultures that make BC the place that it is, and frankly French-Canadians don't play such a dominant role in that. In BC, these languages and cultures are far more prominent than French and not to mention, languages like Mandarin, Cantonese and Hindi that are now the new international languages.

We're not failing at French because the education system has failed but because all the blind ideology in the world cannot force a useless language on an unwilling population.

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English was my 5th

 **Fiat lux** 06-09-2007

English was my 5th language.

My native language was Hungarian, then in highschool, called Gymnasium in Europe, we had to learn Latin, German and French.

After up to 8 years in Latin, 6 in German and 4 in French, I barely passed and couldn't ask for a glass of water in either language, but I knew a lot of words. When I ended up in Austria after WW2, I picked up German in a few months to the extent that people were asking me which part of Germany I was coming from ?

When I went to England in 1948, a Cambridge professor, by the name of Birnbaum, told us to look at and listen to a language as music and try to absorb its melody and rhythm. That's when I realized how I could pick up German so fast, with total immersion.

I never took any English lessons after that, but realizing that English was just about a mixture of German and French words, I subscribed to the Daily Mirror and several magazines and spent hours reading them with a dictionary, until they began to make sense.

Had my first article published about a year later.

The grammatical way of teaching languages, used all over the world, is a waste of time. My grammar may not be perfect, but nobody ever said they couldn't understand my writings, now going back some 58 years in the language and the editors always correct my grammatical aberrations.

Here we have children in our elementary schools from Switzerland, Ukraine, Germany, who, without any of the nonsense of "English as the second language", are speaking perfectly, without any accent, in a few months, because they have to.

It is that simple, although personally I still and will always have an accent.

Ed Deak.

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I'm with Gardensnake

 **Fii** 06-09-2007

"Having 50 per cent of Canadians graduate with working fluency in French by 2012...."

Why??

I learned French in Ontario the old-fashioned way- conjugating verb after verb, a French teacher who spoke only English, a curriculum so booring and irrelevant that at about 10 minutes into every class I was kicked out for goofing around. I can read French and understand a bit~ and you know what? That's good enough.

We don't NEED to know French. Face it~ Mandarin is where it's at.

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Some interesting perspectives and ...

 [reality_check](#) 06-09-2007

Having learned English in my teens after moving to Canada and having had to suffer through lessons of German in my own country before, I can testify to the fact that learning a language does not make sense to children unless they understand that there is a need to learn them (if there is one at all). That's the crux of the matter! We --as adults-- understand that for business, travelling reasons, or general educational purposes, learning a language makes sense, but most kids do not get it! And why would they? So, Ed, makes a good point. It would make more sense to learn any language in the place it is used or in an environment where it is imperative that one needs to learn it. 2 months in China when you are 6, 7, 8 and, voila, I bet in no time would anyone be nearly fluent in Chinese! (Children of diplomats are usually polyglot because of that). That would make sense, folks! Actually, maybe we could save ourselves a few bucks, airplane trips (and pollution/Co2 release), and force someone to live in Chinatown or Metrotown for a few years or a summer camp full of Chinese children! It certainly would be more affordable, even though not as "relevant and effective".

As whether or not we should learn one language or another, it all depends! If the sole reason to learn a language is business (making money), then, yes, Chinese or Hindi makes more sense than French. If it is for travelling purposes, Spanish would win after English in the number of countries could visit French ... French makes actually good sense according to this <http://www2.ignatius.edu/faculty/turner/langu>. And, if our purpose is to get more out of life by learning another language (get other points of views,...), a strong case could be made for French again, although Arabic would help in terms of reducing racism. Locally, of course, Punjabi and Mandarin would make a lot of sense. So, yes, mandarin (who makes sense for 2 categories out of 3) would be a good choice. But, how many great movies are made in Mandarin as opposed to French? I understand the East Indian Bollywood is second to Hollywood, but I am not sure whether or not most of the movies produced there carry the same intellectual weight as French movies? Are those movies spoken in Punjabi or Hindi? So, it all depends why one is learning a language. But, foremost, learning a language should be as meaningful and done as early as possible. In that regard, second-language schools or programs are ill-equipped to enable anyone (unless there is a strong reason for learning a language) to learn --and even less ... master-- a language (especially its pronunciation, which is almost unattainable in a native-like way after puberty, a fact that is not well known by unilingual speakers).

BTW, another good reason to learn another language (and often overlooked) is the empathy that one gains towards second-language speakers when one tries to learn a second language).

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Core French vs. French Immersion

 [slim](#) 07-09-2007

At the elementary level, I have supply taught in both Core French and French Immersion classes. My French isn't very good. I'm in those classes because the school district cannot find a regular FSL qualified supply teacher. I do notice a difference in attitudes between students who take Core French and Those in French Immersion. The French Immersion students are functional in the early grades. They recognize the importance of learning French. Core French students seem to have a negative attitude in learning French. They know that the French they learn will be useless. They use crappy text booklets called *Acti-vie*. The booklets contain very little content that is relevant to the students' daily lives. They contain little cultural information about France, Quebec, and French speaking territories overseas. While grammar does not need to be learned through rote, these booklets contain no grammar information.

My best experience in improving my French was when I took a two week language course at a private language school in southern France. The morning class had 12 students. We spoke only French and learned grammar instruction orally and in writing. The afternoon class had only six students where we learned to speak French.

I do congratulate Shannon Bourbonnais on trying different methods to get the students to communicate in French. I think that is what students want to learn--how to communicate. The students' grammar does not need to be perfect in the early grades. The students just need to be understood. If they say "Je suis douze ans" instead of the correct "J'ai douze ans", that is OK as long as others can understand. Communicating in any language is 75% listening and speaking. Only 25% is through reading and writing. Instruction in any new language should come close to those percentages.

I recommend teachers and older students look at the [European Language Passport](#) and [European Language Portfolio](#) websites. They give descriptors in six levels from A1 A2 B1 B2 C1 and C2. The categories are listening, spoken interaction, spoken production, reading, and writing. I believe that a student should be able to achieve each level in three years. If a Core French student starts learning French in grade four or five, he/she should perform at a B1+ level which is equivalent to functional independent.

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Hmm for "Mandarin is where it's at"

 **gaulois** 07-09-2007

We have this word in French called "soumis" in regards to a group attitude toward a dominant group.

I would like to think that North-America is a trilingual continent: English, Spanish and French. But it is not going to happen if we do not stand for these languages. The world is certainly no longer a single language one. But perhaps we have to build from an existing base.

Just think about the character set involved in Chinese (or Punjabi). Don't think we can handle it without a stronger foothold in other languages at least sharing the same character set.

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The real reason we fail at French

 **Yammer** 07-09-2007

It has less to do with how it's taught than with why it is taught.

Math you need in order to understand proportions, logic, and sciences.

Sciences you need in order to understand and develop the world out there.

The arts you need in order to understand and develop the world inside.

Mandatory French? Obviously a sop to national unity, a political move to make Canada more accomodating to Francophones, i.e. the Quebec vote. All the other reasons to learn French are true and valid (intellectual development, acknowledgement of minority languages in Canada, travel), but they also apply to learning Mandarin, Cantonese, Punjabi etc, which are, properly, optional subjects.

It's impossible not to be cynical and thus dispirited about the mandatory French game, which dooms it to fail.

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Actually COMMUNICATIONS is where it's at..

 **village** 07-09-2007

Language is but a subset of this most important " glue " , and actually becomes the communications blueprint of any nation...

Hence in a MIND OF CANADA perspective , it would be worthwhile remembering what constitutes the making of this country...

Indeed the very memory of our road travelled as a " NATION " , ***is to be found and not lost in one of the first European nations language that claimed this land for itself..***

What is interesting about any language group is to remind ourselves that the many, many , many First Nations languages hold some of the most important lore and cultural understanding of how this land pulses.., how it lives.., (Nature , by any other word), Indeed the TREES and US podcast series goes some distance in laying the foundation for this kind of understanding of our land.., and my guess is that FIRST NATIONS languages that we are in danger of losing forever, **hold some of the most important clues and knowledge of this very land we call CANADA..(*)**

As to the EUROPEAN CHAPTER of our collective lives.., some near 400 years of settlements by peoples who came to be called *CANADIENS**..., have indeed kept within their archives and collective memory a certain experience and understanding of the earliest of the CANADA's we've come to know ,right up to this day..

Why the French language is important .. is due to the fact that within the ARCHIVES of our NATION...there exist many , many documents that were written and recorded in that very first of the EUROPEAN LANGUAGES that was to leave an imprint on our country..*

(continued ...)

[Suggest as offensive](#) | [Help](#)**[i]Within a communications matrix of languages of Canada[/i].. I** **village** 07-09-2007

Within a communications matrix of languages of Canada.. I would say that because that particular language (FRENCH)played such an important role in defining the CANADA of today.. and more so , because one of the largest language group to this day... *within Canada* is still that particular language .. - holding as it does one of the keys .. to not only the MEMORY .. of CANADA ITSELF... but also providing some of the " VIVE LA DIFFERENCE" that other nations can clearly identify as to one of the defining traits of this country...-

then my friend ...

I would ask of all readers to put the question of any of these languages mentioned in the previous posts .., within a COMMUNICATIONS CONTEXTand ask yourself in what way , can all Canadians strengthen our IDENTITY....,

In my books , the learning of some of the building blocks of our collective mind.., would be placed high on the " things to do" , (that is to say , becoming aware of the respective roles that the earliest language groups played in disseminating the kind of information and knowledge that was to help tremendously the settlements that followed these earliest of *CANADIENS* and eventual *CANADIANS* of the future.*..

I would also place my sights high on the World Languages that will become the gateway to the trade routes of the world.. as well as becoming some of the bridges to a better understanding (innerstanding and outerstanding) of our emerging 21st Century identity*..,

However I would start with a better understanding at home and concentrate not only of the MIND OF CANADA as it is becoming , but would add an urgency is better understanding of how this " mind " evolved to where it's at today.

Village,

[Suggest as offensive](#) | [Help](#)**conjugation etc..** **Chris Sullivan** 07-09-2007

I tell people I had 13 years of French and can't speak it. Maybe I should be ashamed.

What may have been wrong with memorizing verb conjugations is that I don't remember being asked to use each form in a sentence. In fact the thing that a student should be able to do, but often couldn't, back then, was speak an original French sentence at all. They could usually pass a vocabulary memorization test, and often decline verbs by rote, but putting these memorized entities into service was not done much.

Now I live in a city that's fairly bilingual and often wish I was. I married someone who is, but it hasn't rubbed off.

-the great tax waster

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The poetry of village

 [gaulois](#) 07-09-2007

Quite the essay! Identity is unfortunately a concept that many people cannot relate with because they have never been in a situation of truly losing it. People obviously have to see value in French before they invest themselves into it. "Pas facile", as we say...

The mere fact that French is so decoupled from business and commercial interests means something special to me, as bias as I am on language matters. If English is recognized as the language of Business, would we be ready to acknowledge that French is the language of Culture and thus much closer to one's identity? It splits one's brain. Can't buy that at Costco either...

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er, no thanks...

 [dorothy](#) 07-09-2007

That's why we cannot fail , in passing on not only to our children, but to all future immigration that will come to our land.., the importance of that LANGUAGE.. (FRENCH)..

One of the pillars of our communications identity..

Well, I think you need to talk to your Immigrations Department then, because the bill of goods I was sold did not include having a fifth language crammed down my throat, for which I couldn't see a use.

In my garden, I plant a lot of stuff. Some of the plants grow like gangbusters, big and husky and healthy with no help at all. Others I could baby forever, and they cling precariously on the edge of expiration no matter what I do. I give up on the last kind. Why fight nature? Part of my inherited communications identity is a brand of rugged pragmatism: let fall what cannot stand, in other words cut your losses. Another example: it is a slow death to be trampled by geese. You get my drift. If something has to constantly be propped, by hook and crook and under great effort and expense, AND its proponents then start to lecture others on how precious and superior it is, I get somewhat disenchanted. How about getting off the high horse to begin with?

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French needs to be simplified to ... (1/2)

 [reality_check](#) 07-09-2007

... have any chance of surviving as a top international language, but the elite in French countries do not want that because that would --in effect-- be levelling things. Not sure about all languages of the world but how one speaks or write English or French defines as being of a certain class (and intelligence,...). Of course, it is all BS as there is little correlation between one's intelligence and one's linguistic abilities, although , if your parents were richer than the average, they probably had an edge as a parent and their children as students, but I digress. Anyway, the French elite will destroy French as an international language. Do they care? They could not care less as power and money is foremost in their mind. However, their country (all countries) is losing competitively too as times spent learning a language with incongruities takes time and time away from content learning or skill learning. The same can be said about English with its incredibly hard spelling rules. Of course will state that these rules, remnants of the development of languages. As a linguist, as a bilingual person, and as an educator, I do see the need for those languages to be simplified. With the digitalization of the printed material, changes will soon be possible. However, I am sure changes in power will never happen, unless we can count on our athletes, actors, models, and singers to turn their huge salaries in levelling things off. The elite knows that is not going to take place.

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French needs to be simplified ... (2/2)

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In learning a language, motivation is key and these methods try hard to make it fun. However, it is artificial and ephemeral. As others have pointed out, one needs to use a language to improve one's proficiency in it. How many times can you use French in Vancouver? As an immersion teacher I noticed that MORE students are interested in learning French, mainly because their parents are and their peers are in it. After a few years, after all students have gained a general ability to make themselves understood by each other, there is very limited desire for them to reach higher levels of mastery. However, immersion programs offer a much better ways of learning a language by far. Unlike the propangada, it is not for everyone. Not everyone learns their first language with the same ease, and the same can be said about one's second language. Also, we do some students a great disservice (in the name of stating that my child is different, ... is in French immersion,... elitism). Students who are not strong in learning will struggle even more and learn even less if they try to learn using another language. As far as core French is concerned, I think Mandarin or Hindi would be more relevant. Let's face it. Very few people from the west will ever go to Quebec. And many wil not appreciate or understand the beauty of this culture. However, Canada needs something, ... French (maybe Mandarin or Hindi is ok?) to make itself different from the big elephant that the US is. French carries a culture that very different from an Anglo-Saxon culture, protestant, US-like, if you will. Not to say that this will make a huge difference and not to say that many Anglo-Saxons do not uphold similar values or philosophies that French vehiculates, but there is a diiference, a distinctness about French-canadians, French-speaking people. BTW, distinct in French means different. Some anti-French people made this word to mean something that is not, for sheer political or ideological reasons. But, that's another story!

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