

Research Article

Jakob R. E. Leimgruber* and Víctor Fernández-Mallat

Language attitudes and identity building in the linguistic landscape of Montreal

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Abstract: Few studies to date have considered the agency of readers in reinterpreting the cultural, historical, political, and social background of the linguistic landscape (LL; visible language in public space) and the ways in which individual and collective identities are discursively conceptualised through the LL. In this article, we present results from a study involving participants from three self-described sociolinguistic identities (Francophone, Anglophone, and Bilingual), reading signs found in the LL of Montreal. Using photographic prompts, we questioned participants about the probable location of signs, their languages, and the languages' placement on monolingual (French or English) and bilingual (French–English) signs emanating from both governmental and private entities. Further discussions about their emotive responses to the signs presented and the possible responses of “others” reveal the relative degrees of importance attached to these linguistic elements in constructing, negotiating, and communicating various and (more) fluid sociolinguistic identities.

Keywords: language and identity, language attitudes, linguistic landscape, mental maps, language planning, Montreal (Quebec)

1 Introduction

As a multilingual and multicultural metropolis, the city of Montreal is naturally home to a wide range of languages. The dominant ones, however, are French (the official language of the province and the mother tongue of 63% of Montrealers [Statistics Canada 2017]) and English (the other official language of Canada, known by 62% as a first or additional language in Montreal [Statistics Canada 2017]). Research on the sociolinguistic identities of Montrealers all seem to use the following two broad categories: “Francophones” and “Anglophones.” Stereotypically, the first reside in the eastern part of the island, while the second inhabit the western part of it. This very binary view of things (both in terms of language and geography) is actually partly borne out in census data, as can be seen on the map in Figure 1, as well as in sociolinguistic research carried out by Bouchard (2000) and Laur (2003), among others.

In addition, as pointed out by Robert (1992), this divide has existed since Montreal's second historic period (commonly referred to as *La conquête anglaise* “the British conquest” and dated from 1760 to 1867), during which the island's Anglophone population established itself in the city centre and in what is known today as the *West Island*, while the Francophone population was pushed towards and circumscribed in what is known as *l'Est de l'Île* “the East part of the island.”

* **Corresponding author: Jakob R. E. Leimgruber**, English Department, University of Freiburg, Freiburg 79085, Germany, e-mail: jakob.leimgruber@anglistik.uni-freiburg.de

Víctor Fernández-Mallat: Department of Spanish and Portuguese, Georgetown University, Washington, D.C. 20057, United States, e-mail: vf109@georgetown.edu

ORCID: Jakob R. E. Leimgruber 0000-0002-6408-6873; Víctor Fernández-Mallat 0000-0002-6991-9977

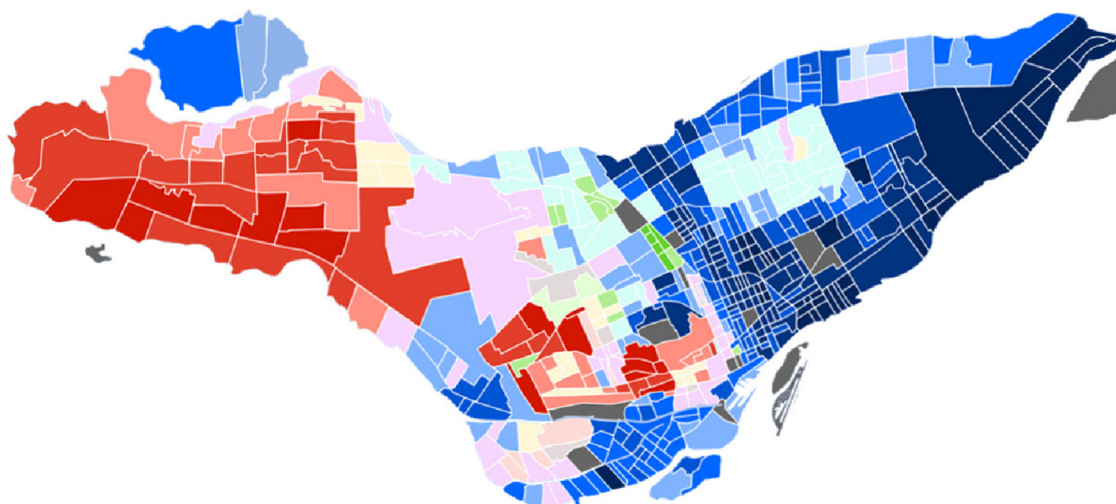


Figure 1: Census data (2011) showing the majority language most commonly used at home (by census tracts). The colour blue indicates French, red indicates English, and green indicates other languages. Darker shades indicate higher percentages (https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Montréal_-_Secteurs_statistique_2011_-_Langue_Maison.svg).

The problem with such divides (whether they be based on traditional census-informed maps or on linguists' descriptions of how language is segregated within Montreal) is that they only take into account one language – in this case, the language most commonly used at home – which allows for these rather clear-cut borders. Additionally, because it has been largely overlooked by the literature, we know little about how lay Montrealers discursively construct and negotiate their linguistic identities, both their own and those of “other” fellow citizens. In the diverse context of Montreal, these identities are, by necessity, complex, in that both individual and societal multilingualism coexist, and “true” monolingualism is rare. The labels “Francophone” and “Anglophone” are, therefore, not tied to monolingual constructs, but rather self-ascribed social and demographic descriptors that point to the perceived realities of our informants. They are reflective of an emic construction of social space in which it is not competence in a given language that justifies the use of the label, but allegiance to its wider social meaning. It is how such labels and identities are discursively constructed that we address here.

2 Linguistic landscape (LL)

Landry and Bourhis (1997) are usually credited with coining the term *linguistic landscape* to refer to visible language in public space. Their often-cited definition is quoted as follows:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25)

More recent studies, succinctly summarised by Gorter (2013), take into account any form of visual manifestation of language in public space, including “electronic flat-panel displays, LED neon lights, foam boards, electronic message centres, interactive touch screens, inflatable signage, and scrolling banners” (Gorter 2013, 191), to name but a few. Unsurprisingly, most research in the field of LL has taken place in urban spaces, where such written language is present in higher densities, leading to some preferring the designation *multilingual cityscape* (Gorter et al. 2012) and the publication of an edited volume entitled *Linguistic Landscape in the City* (Shohamy et al. 2010). Cities around the world have been the site of LL

studies: Montreal, of course, features prominently (Backhaus 2008; Bouchard 2012; Conseil de la langue française 2000; Dagenais et al. 2008; Landry and Bourhis 1997; Lamarre 2014), but so do other cities in the Americas, such as Chicago (Lyons and Rodríguez-Ordóñez 2015), Los Angeles (Carr 2017; Franco-Rodríguez 2005), New York (García et al. 2013; Hassa and Krajcik 2016), Washington, D.C. (Leeman and Modan 2010; Lou 2016), and San Juan of Puerto Rico (Maldonado 2015). In Europe, we may mention Brussels (Ben-Rafael and Ben-Rafael 2015; Janssens 2012; Vandenbroucke 2015; Wang and de Velde 2015), Edinburgh (Scott 2012), Liverpool and its Chinatown (Amos 2016), Rome (Gorter 2009), Strasbourg (Bogatto and Hélot 2010), and Toulouse (Diver 2011); in Asia, Bangkok (Huebner 2006), Beijing (Pan 2010), Hong Kong (Jaworski and Yeung 2010; Lam and Graddol 2017), Seoul (Tan and Tan 2015), Singapore (Hult and Kelly-Holmes 2018; Leimgruber 2018; Tang 2018), Suzhou (Li 2015), and Tokyo (Backhaus 2007); and in Africa cities including Addis Ababa (Lanza and Woldemariam 2014), Algiers (Messekher 2015), Cape Town (Kayam et al. 2012), Casablanca, Fes, and Rabat (Hassa 2012), and Meknés (Moustaoui 2019). This non-exhaustive overview serves to illustrate the field's focus on urban spaces as sites of particular interest with regard to bi- or multilingualism in general and the LL in particular, as it is in this contested space that language needs to be constantly re-established and re-negotiated.

Beyond the descriptive and theoretical approaches taken by the aforementioned studies, few of them, as Blommaert contends, have considered the agency of readers in reinterpreting this “cultural, historical, political, and social background” (2013, 41), which is present in any sign of the LL. Garvin (2010) is one such study in which informants physically walk the landscape while their responses to items in the LL are collected by the accompanying researcher; this method was further developed by Szabó and Troyer (2017, 2020) into the “tourist guide technique,” an approach that garners participant-led information about the material in the LL. Other recent interdisciplinary work has begun to investigate bilinguals' reading patterns of signs in Montreal's LL using eye-tracking methods commonly used in psycholinguistics (Leimgruber et al. 2020; Vingron et al. 2017). In doing so, variables such as font size, placement, and first language were found to correlate with the amount of time the text in a particular language was fixated by the participants' gaze. Also, in the case of Montreal, Lamarre (2014, 131) presented photographic prompts of signs with instances of “bilingual wordplay” (e.g. a shoe store named *Chouchou*, only fully transparent to bilinguals) and gathered residents' responses. In a study of the LL in Germany's Ruhr area, Ziegler et al. (2018) took into account language attitudes gathered through interviews and thus linked not only the demolinguistic diversity of the area with that in the LL but also respondents' perception of areal differences with the languages' actual distribution in the LL.

Of particular interest to us is the question of identity construction in the LL and the ways in which such identity factors in the LL can help us assess community relations and language attitudes more generally. Already in Landry and Bourhis' (1997) landmark article, LL signs were seen as fulfilling two basic functions. The first is the informational function, in which signs mark “the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community” (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25); furthermore, the presence of a given language on signs “indicates that the language in question can be used to communicate and obtain services within [...] the pertinent territory” (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25). It is, therefore, a very pragmatic and useful function of the sign, with real-world applications. The second one is the symbolic function, which is tied to the effect that “the absence or presence of one's own language on public signs [might have on] how one feels as a member of a language group within a bilingual or multilingual setting” (Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25). The inclusion of a language symbolises that this language is valued, that it is wanted, promoted, or simply there and recognised as such. The conspicuous absence of a language, on the other hand, suggests that it has lower value and status, and that it may not be of much use in society.

In the case of Quebec and Montreal, therefore, the aims of legislation that seek to ensure that French is not only present in the LL but also markedly predominant (see e.g. the Charter of the French Language and its section 58) can also be recast with these two functions in mind.¹ Informationally, French is needed in the

¹ It is worth noting that the LL of Montreal, as well as that of Quebec generally, contain languages other than French or English. These, however, tend to be largely ignored by public debates on issues of language in public space: it is the French–English dynamic that is of consequence in the local context.

LL to mark a territorial claim, which states that, within the confines of the province, French is available and desired for communication. Symbolically, it heightens the status of French to the extent that it is seen as a requirement for active participation in social life – and thus a desirable target language. This fact, as seen in the extant literature, may affect the way in which individual members of the community respond to the language's presence, absence, and even placement; in short, it has an effect on their language attitudes (see Section 3).

Also crucial to the discussion is the Lefebvrian (1991) distinction of the linguistic space as symbolically claimed by policy (as in the “symbolic” function of Landry and Bourhis 1997, 25), which is, on one hand, *perceived* as such (or not) by the people inhabiting that space, and, on the other hand, the linguistic space as it is actually *lived* by these actors – in short, their use of language and their linguistic practice in everyday life. Lefebvre's (1991) distinction between perceived and lived space lends itself well to the realities of Montreal, where ideas about language and its geographical distribution can differ quite radically from language use on the ground.

3 Language attitudes

Studies on language attitudes have a long tradition in Quebec. Kircher (2009, 77–117) gives an overview of such studies, distinguishing attitudes towards English and attitudes towards Quebec French. In fact, the study of language attitudes in general can be said to have originated in the province: Kircher (2009) identifies the study by Lambert et al. (1960) as the formative investigation that laid the groundwork for all future studies in the field. The Lambert et al. (1960) study used the matched-guise technique, in which recordings in French and English (spoken by the same speaker) were played to informants, who were then asked to evaluate the speakers in their respective guises. This approach was later replicated to test for the effect of various social factors on speaker evaluations or attitudes; thus, Anisfield and Lambert (1964) considered age and bilingualism, Lambert et al. (1966) considered the age of onset of certain attitudes, and Preston (1963) considered gender effects (both in the matched guises and in the informants), to name but a few. These studies have in common that the responses gathered from participants indicate that, back in the 1960s, Anglophones were awarded higher social status, prestige, and upward mobility than Francophones, even among Francophones themselves.

After *La révolution tranquille* “the Quiet revolution” of the mid-1970s and the passing of language legislation aimed at establishing French as the paramount language in Quebec (most notably Bill 101), language attitude studies took to investigate the effect of these policies on speakers' evaluations. Bourhis (1983), for instance, queried informants' language strategies in encounters with strangers in public space both before and after the passing of Bill 101. Another study by Bourhis (1984) investigated convergence towards either French or English among Francophone and Anglophone informants. These and other studies (Bourhis et al. 2007; Genesee 1982; Genesee and Holobow 1989; Moïse and Bourhis 1994) were very much interested in the effects that Bill 101 had on language attitudes and evaluations. Since then, several studies have found increasingly positive attitudes towards Quebec French (e.g. Byers-Heinlein 2002; Evans 2002; Fuga 2002; Kircher 2009; Laur 2008), with many suggesting ambivalent attitudes with regard to English among different groups of Francophones, who are typically acutely aware of the language's social and economic status within the rest of Canada, the United States, and the globalised market economy but who, nevertheless, show a marked preference for French within the local context (i.e. within the province).

In light of the above, this article addresses the three following research questions: (1) how is Montreal linguistically divided according to its inhabitants; (2) which identities are constructed through the consideration of the LL; and (3) what community relations and language attitudes can be inferred from these identities. These questions build on the above-mentioned census-based divisions and clear-cut sociolinguistic identities of Montrealers (see Section 1), examining whether these are currently shared in their subjective accounts of the city they inhabit or are they more complex and fluid in nature.

4 Methodology

In order to address these questions, we undertook fieldwork in the Montreal area, based largely on the *walking tour* methodology that Garvin (2010) used in her study and on the perceptual mapping used in Preston (1982). Garvin's qualitative approach consisted in the researcher physically walking around a neighbourhood with her participants and collecting their responses to elements of the LL, as and when they appeared on their route. Instead of such an "in-the-field" approach, the one we use here is more firmly rooted in the tools used by Preston (1982) in his perceptual dialectology, and in the map-labelling tasks utilised by Bucholtz et al. (2007). Specifically, we recruited six participants from three self-declared sociolinguistic backgrounds – two Francophones, two Anglophones, and two Bilinguals,² all locally-born White Montrealers between 30 and 60 years of age, with one male and one female from each category – among people belonging to the second named author's social network. The second author identifies himself as a Montrealer, but is not clearly aligned with the self-labelled categories used by the participants (Anglophone, Francophone, and Bilingual); rather, he would fall squarely into the category of non-White "Allophone," and, being known personally to the participants, his relational status *vis-à-vis* them mitigates, to a certain degree at least, the observer's paradox that might arise more prominently had he been perceived unequivocally as being a member of one of our three analytical categories. As established in previous studies using similar methods, such an approach has several benefits, including the valuable insider knowledge of both the researcher and the participants. The *Folk Linguistics* (Niedzielski and Preston 2000) perspectives thus taken into account shed an important light on the (language) ideologies underlying the local contact situation, all while remaining fully cognizant that such ideologies are not necessarily reflective of actual (socio-)linguistic facts on the ground.

The researcher met the participants in their homes and presented them with photographic prompts of signs from the Greater Montreal LL. These semi-structured interviews, carried out by the second named author, were tape-recorded, highly interactive, and around 30 min each. They typically began with background biographical information on the participants' linguistic history (the languages spoken in their childhood home, at school, and in the neighbourhood) in order to confirm their self-declared speech community membership.

The interviewees were then gradually presented with 12 photographic prompts. The signs on these photographs were carefully chosen to feature text in either French, English, or both, and came from both governmental and private entities (Figure 2). After casually asking for first reactions towards the photos, informants were pushed for more detailed attitudes towards monolingual and bilingual signage. As a final task towards the end of the interview, participants were asked to say where in Montreal they thought the pictures were taken. The resulting 169 min of recorded interviews were then listened to by both authors, and relevant passages were transcribed for closer analysis. The transcriptions were kept simple without systematic coding and subjected to a qualitative content analysis.

5 Results

This section is divided into three parts. Section 5.1 considers the geographical placement of the signs in the pictures as reported by participants. Section 5.2 concerns the attitudes expressed to the language used in the LL. Section 5.3 takes a closer look at expressions of linguistic identity.

5.1 Geographical awareness

Participants' responses as to the geographical location of the signs in the photographic prompts are presented in Figure 3, where the background map is shaded by census-based distribution of home languages; the circles impressionistically highlight the areas and neighbourhoods mentioned by our informants when

² Our participants' self-identification already points to the inadequacy of "Francophone" vs "Anglophone," as two informants defined themselves as Bilinguals.



Figure 2: Photographic prompts of signs in the Montreal LL. (a) governmental English sign, (b) governmental bilingual sign, (c) private English sign, (d) private French sign, (e) private bilingual sign, and (f) governmental French sign.

describing the location of the signs in the photographic prompts – they are, therefore, a reflection of the participants’ own mental map. A few things transpire from this representation: first, there is a fairly good overlap between the geographical distribution of home languages as reported in census data on one hand, and the perceived location of monolingual signs on the other, with French-only signs largely concentrated on the eastern half of the island, and English-only signs mostly in the West Island and the Westmount neighbourhood (just west of the city centre). Second, our informants located most bilingual signs in the downtown area around the boulevard Saint-Laurent (also known as “The Main”) and the Mile-End and Mont-Royal neighbourhoods (the three of which are located roughly in the middle of the island). Third, this central downtown location is also where respondents were most specific about location (as indicated by the size of the circles in Figure 3).

In sum, the stereotypical East–West divide borne out in census data and described sociolinguistically in Bouchard (2000) and Laur (2003) is still very much in the minds of our participants, though there seems to be room for a buffer zone located between East and West in which, according to our informants’ conceptualisations of the LL of Montreal, both French and English may simultaneously occupy the same space. In other words, in our participants’ mental maps and boundaries, the East–West divide is not as sharp as it has been described in the above-cited studies and offers room for an imagined transition zone between the two languages. Note that the actual location of the signs that were presented to our participants is not of much

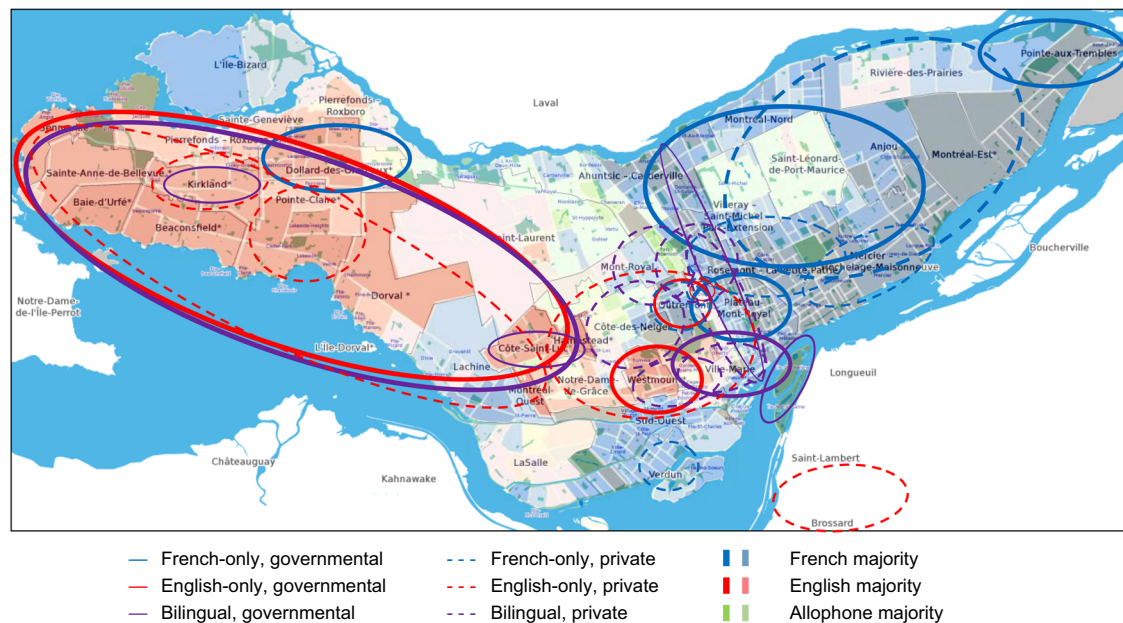


Figure 3: Map of Montreal with the named locations of the LL signs presented. Census subdivisions (in the background) are colour-coded by home language (data from the 2011 census).

relevance here: it is their *perception* of where signs with a particular linguistic content may or may not be that is the main focus of attention.

5.2 Attitudes towards the LL

The attitudes towards the photographic prompts fall into three main categories, distinguished by the languages on the signs: bilingual signs, monolingual French signs, and monolingual English signs. These findings are summarised in Table 1.

Attitudes towards bilingual signs are overwhelmingly positive. In our sample, both Anglophones and Bilinguals expressed fully positive attitudes towards bilingual signage. In the case of the Francophones, positive attitudes prevail too, with only slightly lower levels of support in the case of one respondent, a self-declared sovereignist who grew up in an anglophone neighbourhood.

Table 1: Summary of attitudinal responses by Francophones, Anglophones, and Bilinguals to photographic prompts showing bilingual, French-only, and English-only signs with governmental and private authorship

	Francophones	Anglophones	Bilinguals
Bilingual signs	governmental: +/+ private: +/+	governmental: ++/++ private: + +/+	governmental: ++/++ private: ++/++
French-only signs	governmental: ++/++ private: ++/+	governmental: – –/– private: ?/+	governmental: ++/++ private: –/+
English-only signs	governmental: – –/– private: –/–	governmental: +/– – private: ++/– –	governmental: ?/– – private: –/+
Legislation French first/larger	governmental: ++/++ private: ++/++	governmental: – –/– – private: –/+	governmental: =/+ private: =/+

Attitudes towards legislated French dominance: ++, very positive; +, positive; =, neutral; –, negative; – –, very negative; ?, missing data.

It is in the monolingual signs that differences begin to emerge. French-only signs were seen positively by Francophones and Bilinguals, although Bilinguals are less positive about private signs being entirely in French. Anglophones make a fairly strict distinction between governmental and private signs: in the case of private signs, personal preferences and commercial interests should prevail, and signs should be customer-oriented regardless of language. This explains their rather neutral evaluations of French-only private signs. French-only governmental signs, on the other hand, were viewed more negatively; the argument here typically was that they should be bilingual if issues of security and clarity were at stake. Take, for instance, the beach sign (Figure 2b), which particularly concerned one of our Anglophone informants because of the rather small size of the English text that could potentially be problematic in the event of someone drowning. One might also venture that the conspicuous absence of a language on a governmentally sanctioned sign delegitimises that language in the public sphere in a somewhat more official capacity than a private sign would do.

Monolingual English signs were, perhaps predictably, viewed negatively by Francophones, but also by Bilinguals. Interestingly, the latter were more accepting of such signs if they came from private authors. Governmental English-only signs, however, were largely seen negatively. Terms used included *irritant* “irritating” and *irrespectueux* “disrespectful,” and informants also expressed feelings of being invaded (*ça me donne l'impression de me faire envahir*). The two Anglophones were split on the issue: for one, English-only signs were entirely unacceptable (he said that the normal expectation in Montreal, which he sees as a francophone city, is that signs should be at least in French), whereas for the other, it was much more acceptable, particularly in the case of privately authored signage. Looking at the picture of a bar whose signage is in English only, this latter informant mentioned that no Francophone is going to stop having a beer with friends because of this.

Another question asked during the interview was about attitudes towards the legislation that require French to be at least twice as large as English (Section 58 of the Charter of the French language and its relevant subordinate legislation). This is evaluated entirely positively by Francophones. The arguments were that predominance has to be given to French, in line with the law. Anglophones, on the other hand, are highly critical of the legislation, one of them using the adjective *ridiculous*. Interestingly, this negative evaluation holds more strongly for governmental signs than for privately authored ones, where there is some support. The two Bilinguals, conversely, do not seem to have strong feelings about the legislation: one is entirely neutral (his feeling for the order is best represented by his use of the adverb *whatever*), the other mildly positive towards it, saying that the order French first, English second seems to be common sense because of the legislation, but that she would not be bothered by an alternative order.

It is noteworthy that from the responses that we gathered in these interviews, it would appear that many of the stereotypes that a layperson may have about this issue are actually confirmed in our sample: Francophones mostly support legislation designed to heighten the status of French and view French-only signs positively, English-only ones negatively, and bilingual ones mostly positively; Anglophones are more critical of the legislation and view French-only signs negatively; Bilinguals are highly positive about bilingual signs but more relaxed about the other ones. Unexpectedly, though, given the previous literature on language attitudes cited above, the common ground seems to be that Bilingual signs are positively evaluated by all informants in our sample, regardless of linguistic background. Indeed, everyone seemed to agree that having bilingual signs in a city like Montreal (where Francophones, Anglophones, and Bilinguals coexist) made a lot of sense.

5.3 Identity

The results regarding the expression of linguistic identities among informants are easily summarised as follows: every individual interviewed recognises two main linguistic groups in Montreal, that of Francophones and that of Anglophones. Interestingly, this is the case even among the two participants that defined themselves as Bilinguals. This suggests that these identities are not necessarily tied to notions of language proficiency and/or practice *per se*, but, as will become evident from the following excerpts, to issues pertaining to the way in which these groups conceptualise the linguistic space of Montreal.

Francophones, on one hand, are perceived as seeing themselves existing in a francophone space, whereas Anglophones, on the other hand, are perceived as having no choice but to cope with the predominance of French and content themselves with, at most, the idea that, under certain circumstances (e.g. governmental signage), Montreal can be considered a bilingual space. This is partially illustrated in Excerpt (1), where Molly, a 40-year-old self-described Anglophone woman establishes this distinction.

(1) Molly, 40, Anglophone³

[27:38] In the context of being... here [R: Yeah] I think there is a certain... like... assumption that... the Anglos are the underdogs. [R: OK. In terms of like.] so you don't... it's like... you don't really have the right to be pissed off. [R: OK. Mhm.] Uhm [R: So there's a lot of contention then, do you think?] It's... uhm... yeah, it's just... but I... I... I think that... a lot of Anglos. definitely... still think of themselves as in a bilingual place. [R: OK... yeah] whereas Francophones think of themselves as in a francophone place. [R: Yeah] Right?

Here, in addition to making a clear distinction between Anglophones and Francophones in how they think about the place they inhabit, Molly establishes Anglophones as having an *underdog* status that disallows them to criticise this linguistic reality (“you don't really have the right to be pissed off”), which points to a certain level of disenfranchisement of Montreal's Anglophone community.

This distinction is further illustrated in Excerpts (2) and (3), where Julie, a 35-year-old self-described Francophone, and Laurent, a 37-year-old self-described Bilingual, share their thoughts on this matter.

(2) Julie, 35, Francophone

[28:10] J'ai l'impression que historiquement c'est toujours les Francophones par rapport à l'anglais, parce que les Anglais historiquement ont toujours été une minorité pis j'pense qu'ils ont toujours été habitués de... de voir des trucs francophones ou des trucs en français.⁴

(3) Laurent, 37, Bilingual

[24:57] Ben y'a les Francophones qui c'est sûr ils prennent pour acquis que tout doit être au moins en français. [R: Ouin...] Pis y'a les Anglos qui à mon avis sont genre euh... habitués à que tout soit majoritairement en français là. Pour eux euh... c'est juste de même pis j'pense pas que ça les affecte ben gros.⁵

Here, similar to Molly, Julie and Laurent recognise that, broadly speaking, there are Francophones and Anglophones, that the former have naturalised the prevalence of French over English, even taking it for granted, that the latter are in a way resigned to this linguistic order, and that, to cite Laurent, “this is just how things are.”

It is important to note here, however, that most informants (five out of six) further problematise the categories *Francophone* and *Anglophone*, which they themselves introduced. A first example can be found in Excerpt (4) below.

(4) Molly, 40, Anglophone

[28:30 R: OK, so you think like the. legal issue is the one that's. shaping kind of this conflict?] I think that that the political... uhm... that v... a... a few political haters... create... the room for the discourse [R: Yeah] I don't think it's the majority. I don't think it can be labelled as Francophones or Anglophones... at all [R: Mhm] I don't think that Francophone... I think that there's a lot of Francophones that wouldn't be offended by this.

³ Informants are identified by a gendered pseudonym, their age, and their linguistic background. Transcription conventions: R, researcher; ..., pauses; underlined, emphasis.

⁴ [28:10] I think that historically it's always the Francophones *vis-à-vis* English, because historically the Anglos have always been a minority and I think they've always been used to... to seeing francophone things or things in French.

⁵ [24:57] Well, there's the Francophones that for sure take for granted that everything must be at least in French. [R: Yup...] Then there's the Anglos that, in my view, are like erm... used to everything being mainly in French. For them erm... this is just how things are and I don't think it affects them much.

Here, Molly's argument is that the categories *Francophone* and *Anglophone* are not monolithic and thus cannot be put in a one-to-one relationship with mutually exclusive positions. In fact, according to Molly, there is a silent majority for whom the language quarrel does not present as contentious an issue. The explanation for the conflict offered by Molly is that "a few political haters" monopolise ("create," even) public discourse and that, as a result, the silent majority, for whom the language issue is fairly irrelevant, is not represented in the language debate. Though Molly does not provide additional details on what types of individuals constitute this silent majority, Excerpts (5) and (6) indicate that the division between people more and less concerned by the language issue may well be taking shape along generational lines.

(5) Julie, 35, Francophone

[26:33] Moi j'me sens pas... j'ai pas envie de monter aux barricades quand on voit quelque chose écrit en anglais là... mais en même temps j'me dis justement les... faudrait qu'ça change éventuellement par exemple si j'vois comme ça un panneau juste en anglais. J'me dis OK là faudrait que par exemple quelque chose soit fait, comme... c'est ça. Mais euh... mais j'vais pas non plus là m'insurger comme j'ai l'impression que ma mère le fait par exemple.

[27:50] La formation du Bloc Québécois et du Parti Québécois pis ma grand-maman était très... militante là. Ben dans c'temps là en plus, ben Parti Québécois ça voulait dire le fait francophone... Et ma mère... ouais.⁶

(6) Léa, 30, Bilingual

[29:07] Sérieux là... p't-être ma mère pis mes tantes auraient été fâchées de voir des pancartes comme ça avec juste du français. Mais là on est-tu encore là? Moi j'penserai pas.⁷

In Excerpt (5), Julie links her own experience with that of her parents' and her grandparents' generation and notices how there is less concern now, or at least less militant sentiment to redress the former power imbalance. While she does show some concern regarding English-only signs, saying that she wishes that *quelque chose* "something" ought to be done to address it, she does not see the need to actively protest the issue like her mother and grandmother might do.

Similar to Julie, in Excerpt (6), Léa, a 30-year-old self-described Bilingual, establishes a difference between how her English-speaking elders (she describes her mother and aunts as Anglophones) may react to French-only signs and how her and her contemporaries are past the polarisation and politicisation of the linguistic debate.

Interestingly, Mario, a self-described Francophone who, at 60 years, could well be categorised as a member of the older generation to which Julie and Léa are referring in Excerpts (5) and (6), is clearly in agreement with the idea that the language issue is fairly irrelevant for members of the younger generation, whereas it is a contentious issue for him and other people his age or older whose life experiences (e.g. getting a job or not, experiencing a revolution, etc.) were importantly affected by it. This is illustrated in Excerpt (7).

(7) Mario, 60, Francophone

[20:53] Les plus jeunes... ouais. Les classes... au niveau de l'éducation, d'après moi, on pourrait y trouver peut-être des euh... des grosses tendances là. Dans ces catégories là... non, avec les groupes d'âge là. [R: Plus de bilinguisme?] Oui. Ils sont plus loin aussi de tout ce qui est arrivé, qui a amené à ça. Tsé, dans l'fond, ma génération à moi, nos parents, les autres

⁶ [26:33] Me, I don't feel... I don't feel the need to shout from the rooftops when I see something written in English... but at the same time, I think they... it should probably change, for example, if I see like that a sign that is just in English. I think to myself OK here something should be done, like... that's it. But erm... I'm not going to rebel like I think my mother would do for example. [27:50] The creation of the Bloc Québécois and of the Parti Québécois and my grandmother was very... militant... Well and in that time, the Parti Québécois meant the French fact... And my mother... yeah.

⁷ Seriously though... maybe my mother and my aunts would have been annoyed by seeing signs like that with only French. But are we still there now? I wouldn't think so.

gens, ils ont vécu où est-ce qui avait une vraie dominance... presque un écrasement anglophone. Quelqu'un pour s'trouver un emploi s'il parlait pas anglais... enfin il s'faisait écraser. Toute la révolution tranquille a permis de changer ça un peu, d'amener ça égal. Fait qu'eux autres sont plus loin de ça, de ces conflits là. Fait que c'est normal... ils le sentent moins. [R: Les jeunes sont loin des tensions historiques?] Exactement.⁸

To summarise, informants recognise two broad linguistic identities in Montreal: Francophones and Anglophones. The former tend to be seen as taking the predominance of French over English for granted and possibly concerned about English-only signs, because it challenges the *fait francophone* “French fact” highlighted by Julie in Excerpt (5). The latter are generally seen as having come to terms with their current minority status and, as a result, possibly not too concerned by the presence of French-only signs in the LL. Yet, despite this reductionist view of Montreal’s linguistic actors, some informants further problematised these categories by mentioning that there is a generational split in terms of who takes the language issue to heart and who does not (or less so). Older people, whether they are Francophones or Anglophones, are seen as those for whom the language issue continues to be contentious, in part because their life experiences were directly affected by it. By contrast, and regardless of their language identity, younger people are perceived as less concerned about the language issue, which they see as something anchored in the past and, accordingly, as a matter to which they cannot (or do not want to) relate in the same manner as their elders.

6 Discussion

Our participants exhibit a geographical perception of the language distribution in Montreal that is imbued with the folk linguistic and rather simplistic assumption of a fairly binary arrangement of a francophone East and an anglophone West. These views are clearly based in reality to some extent, since, as shown above, census data do in fact reveal more French being spoken in the East and more English in the West. What is less obvious with respect to such census data is the perception of a “transition” zone in between these two larger linguistic areas, a zone in which bilingualism is currently perceived to be most prevalent, expected, and increasingly accepted as evinced by the overall positive attitudes that bilingual signage elicited from our participants regardless of their self-described sociolinguistic identity. As seen above, such an intermediate zone is absent in previous research and, while not necessarily grounded in census realities, does justice to the heavy daily work-based in-migration this central area experiences: it is, after all, the centre of service-based economic activities in the city, to which, therefore, commuters from all conceivable neighbourhoods converge. In Montreal, with its two major languages, such a mixed and transitory area may very well come to be perceived and accepted as inherently bilingual in these two languages. Additionally, this perception is also borne out in actual use: one may mention here the famous greeting “bonjour, hi” (see e.g. Leimgruber 2019, 163), which, while found throughout Montreal, is predominant in downtown shops and service outlets, whereas it is virtually absent in the francophone East (see also Tissot 2017, who notices a similar distribution). Its predominance in that sector of the city and the fact that it indexes the existence of bilingual practices and, accordingly, of a (growing) bilingual space, actually prompted the current government – the nationalist–autonomist Coalition Avenir Québec or CAQ – to try to legislate a ban on its use in shops back in 2019. While the proposal received some quiet encouragement from sectors of the population who adhere to the CAQ’s nationalist–autonomist ideas, it faced such strong

⁸ [20:53] Younger people... yeah. Social classes... at the education level, in my opinion, we could maybe find erm... clear trends. In those categories... no, it's with the age groups. [R: More bilingualism?] Yes. They're also further from everything that happened, from what led to this. Y'know, basically, my generation, our parents, other people, they lived under real dominance... almost an Anglophone hammer. If you wanted to get a job and you didn't speak English... well, you would get run over. The Quiet Revolution changed that a bit, it made it more equal. So, they're further from all that, from those conflicts. So, it's normal that... they feel it less. [Q: Are young people over historical tensions?] Exactly.

criticism from opposing parties and the general public that the coalition backtracked on the ban (Authier 2019).

As far as the language attitudes expressed by our participants are concerned, they correspond to what might be expected from the existing literature. Whereas Lambert et al. (1960; 1966) reported that Francophones had internalised the systemic discrimination against the French language in Quebec, a generation later this was shown by Evans (2002) to have morphed into a more self-confident stance. In our study, Francophones display very favourable attitudes towards French, with outspoken criticism for English-only signs. Bilingual signs were met with high levels of tolerance as long as French was markedly predominant. Similar attitudes can be seen among Bilinguals. Anglophones, on the other hand, seem to reluctantly accept the “French fact” in Montreal. Contrary to findings from the 1960s, the predominance of French (not just numerically, but also in everyday life as well as in law) is seen as an unavoidable reality that has resulted in the Anglophone community transitioning from an elite minority status to a (still de facto privileged, but less obviously so) “regular” minority.

Regarding identities, in the course of the interviews, informants variously identified two main socio-linguistic groups. The Anglophone Molly, quoted above, settles for the two groups on the basis of how they perceive the linguistic space of Montreal: on one hand are the Francophones, who see the greater Montreal area as a French-speaking space; a space where, therefore, French should be present in the LL and the other language may also appear, given a good reason. On the other hand, Anglophones see the same territory as a bilingual space, in which the two languages coexist and ought to be given equal prominence in the LL. Molly herself sees the Montreal metropolitan region as neither fully francophone nor fully anglophone, and in doing so, aligns herself with the perspective that she ascribed to Anglophones earlier on; that is, of present-day Montreal as a bilingual space.

The Francophone Julie likewise identifies two groups, but the distinction here is based on how these groups perceive the LL. On one hand, there are the Francophones, who do not accept English-only in the Montreal LL, and on the other, the Anglophones, who are used to seeing French-only signs in the city’s LL and, therefore, are less concerned about it. Interestingly, both Julie and Mario, who are one generation apart, make a further distinction between older Francophones, for whom the language issue is of great concern, and younger Francophones, who are less likely to get involved in issues of linguistic advocacy; this is also mentioned by the Bilingual Léa. Such an age-graded view may be reflective of changes in how the language situation in Montreal, and Quebec more generally, is understood by agents in the local context. It is certainly the case that among young people, bilingualism in French and English is becoming measurably more common in Canada and particularly so in Quebec. According to census data, over the period 2006–2016, the proportion of self-declared bilinguals in the 5–17 age group has risen from 16 to 19% in Canada and from 28 to 33% in Quebec (Parent 2020). With a third of the young population of the province now being bilingual, Julie’s more nuanced view of the language situation, which she contrasts with that of her parents, is rooted in a change in language repertoires at the generational scale.

Given the clear recognition and acceptance of a bilingual transition zone in the spatial conceptualisation of Montreal’s linguistic space, as well as the use of the label “Bilingual” in informants’ self-descriptions, it is interesting to note that the sociolinguistic category “Bilingual” is not directly referenced in the interviews with our informants. There remains a binary view of the situation with Francophones pitted against Anglophones, albeit with an awareness that these categories are not fully homogeneous and may be debated. That said, bilingualism often appeared as a defining feature of Anglophones in general: Anglophones were often described as bilingual, or at least as being more positively inclined towards bilingualism than Francophones. The reported perception of linguistic space on the island is reminiscent of the “perceived space” of Lefebvre (1991), which needs to be conceptualised differently from the “lived spaces” actually encountered by informants on the ground.

The Francophones are viewed slightly differently by the participants quoted above: for instance, despite briefly questioning the ontological status of both the categories Francophone and Anglophone, Molly – who self-describes as Anglophone – says that the former can easily remain monolingual in French in the sociolinguistic space of Montreal while the latter could not afford to do so. Julie and Mario – who self-describe as Francophone – are more nuanced and identify a generational divide in their ingroup; while

older Francophones see a problem with English in the LL and are more likely to insist on French monolingualism, younger Francophones are less concerned with the language conflict and actually quite at ease with bilingualism. The distinction between Francophones and Anglophones is, therefore, not solely rooted in language: in fact, many Francophone Montrealers are competent in English and *vice versa*. Nonetheless, as evinced by our participants' responses, the binary juxtaposition of the two categories remains present, but presumably for other, non-linguistic reasons found in cultural, economic, and human geographic motives (see e.g. Bougie et al. 2011, who highlight the common economic experiences across the linguistic divide).

In sum, we can distinguish between, on one hand, a lived linguistic performance and identity, which sees many Montrealers living bilingual, even multilingual, lives, with a range of linguistic and cultural orientations, and, on the other hand, a perceived duality of "Francophone" and "Anglophone" identities, which are premised on an allegiance to these cultural and identity groups, which themselves are closely linked to (ideas of) language.

7 Conclusion

The classic distinction of the Montreal linguistic space into a francophone East and an anglophone West remains strongly anchored in the minds of our participants. The responses to the geographical placement task suggest that these linguistic territories are seen as distinct, relatively closed spaces. Nonetheless, beyond the still very present dichotomy of Francophone versus Anglophone, we see the gradual emergence and acceptance (see the results from Section 3) of bilingual spaces and signage, which, in turn, facilitate the emergence and acceptance of more fluid linguistic identities. In these less rigid identities, bilingualism, which implies the use of English among Francophones, is becoming unremarkable, perhaps even banal. There is, therefore, a change underway towards, on one hand, a city with an ever-growing midtown bilingual area, where both bilingual signage and bilingual speakers seem to have been "normalised," accepted, and even expected by our participants, and, on the other hand, towards a three-way distinction between bilingual Anglophones (for whom being monolingual may not be a choice), (older and disappearing) monolingual Francophones, and (younger and emergent) bilingual Francophones.

Much as previously shown by Lamarre (2014), the use of photographic prompts featuring signage in given languages, but without information as to their actual geographic location, has the advantage of directly appealing to informants' reactions towards the sign itself, rather than its immediate context. The resulting mental map of the LL gives valuable insights into how linguistic space is perceived.

In terms of identity construction, in addition, we see an increasingly less rigid distinction; the Anglophone population is jointly constructed as bilingual, by both Francophones and Anglophones themselves; the Francophone respondents also consider young Francophones as bilingual. The Anglophone respondents, however, construct Francophones in general not so much in terms of bilingualism but as being able to afford monolingualism, something which they cannot do for themselves in English. As was seen, this distinction is borne out in current census data showing an increasing bilingualism among Canadian (and especially Quebecois) youths. The actual labels used ("Francophone" and "Anglophone") suggest an ongoing persistence of these concepts, even if they are no longer firmly rooted in language but rather grounded in different subcultures or political allegiances (federalists vs sovereignists). The erstwhile linguistic facts governing group affiliation are no longer as clearly part of the equation as they might have been.

Of course, given the qualitative nature of our study, we cannot make broad generalisations that ignore the great variety in the way with which people tend to construct their sociolinguistic identities, sociolinguistically conceptualise their lived spaces, and express their language attitudes. Nevertheless, there are clear trends apparent in the way in which our participants addressed these three issues according to their self-identification that invite future research to further explore the dynamic way in which Montrealers currently conceptualise their sociolinguistic selves, sociolinguistically compartmentalise the space they inhabit, and react to the different languages represented in their LL.

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