



House of Commons
CANADA

Standing Committee on Official Languages

LANG • NUMBER 013 • 1st SESSION • 38th PARLIAMENT

EVIDENCE

Tuesday, February 1, 2005

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Chair

Mr. Pablo Rodriguez

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•(0905)

[Translation]

The Chair (Mr. Pablo Rodriguez (Honoré-Mercier, Lib.)): Hello, everybody.

[English]

Welcome to this first meeting.

[Translation]

It is wonderful to see you all again. I would like to wish you a Happy New Year. This is undoubtedly my last opportunity to do so, as February is already upon us. I would like to wish the committee every success in its endeavours.

You will note that today's meeting is divided up into two parts. During the first part, we will hear from a witness. The second part will take place in camera; we will discuss committee business, and more specifically, the possibility of travelling throughout Canada to check whether the official languages action plan is being implemented.

First of all, I would like to thank Mr. Mitchell for coming before the committee today. Mr. Mitchell has conducted a study on bilingualism in the public service. I would ask committee members to focus their questions not on his personal opinions, but mainly on the findings of the study that he carried out, of which you have a summary. Mr. Mitchell will make a very short presentation.

[English]

He is going to speak for about two minutes, and then we can go for a round of questions. We only have about an hour for this section of the meeting.

[Translation]

Mr. Mitchell.

Mr. James Mitchell (Partner, Sussex Circle Inc.): Thank you, Mr. Chair. First of all I'd like to say a few words by way of introduction.

I'm a former public servant. I come from western Canada. I was born in British Columbia and grew up in Saskatchewan. I have been living in Ottawa for 27 years.

[English]

I spent 16 years in the government and left the government 10 years ago to set up a consulting firm that does policy and organizational consulting for the government. This piece of work you have before you, which I think inspired you to call me as a

witness, is a typical piece of the consulting work our firm does for the government. It's a think piece on language training.

[Translation]

Mr. Chair, allow me to make one small correction to what you said at the start of the meeting. My text does not deal with official languages within the public service, but rather with language training in the public service.

[English]

You have the document. It's a long document and I'm not sure all members will have had a chance to look at it. I thought I would take just one minute to outline the key messages that are contained in that document. I've taken this directly out of the paper, Mr. Chairman, so all of the members have this material before them and the translators have it as well.

[Translation]

Mr. Yvon Godin (Acadie—Bathurst, NDP): Excuse me. We do not have a copy of the text.

The Chair: You don't?

The Clerk of the Committee (Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard): It was sent to your offices in January, but I brought a few copies just in case.

The Chair: It was sent to your offices. If anybody else wants a copy, that can be arranged. In any case, it should not make a difference because I do not think that you will have the time to read it this morning.

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chair, I wrote a report, a vision document, for the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency of Canada and the Canada School of Public Service. In this document, I put forth my ideas which are based on 20 interviews that I conducted with senior officials and others involved in language training outside the government.

[English]

So this is the document that inspired you to request my appearance this morning, and according to the clerk it was sent around.

The key messages from this document, which I would like to take just one minute to go over, are that Canada's commitment to linguistic duality is too important to be held hostage to our present approach to language of work and our present system of language training; the language training system today is costly, inefficient, and inflexible; it is not producing people who are truly bilingual or who have a continuing personal engagement with their second official language; too many of those who exit language training quickly lose whatever fluency they had acquired; and too many come out with their attitude toward their second language soured by months of language training and successive failures on the language test.

I am recommending a new approach to language training in the public service that is characterized by the following:

● (0910)

[Translation]

a fair balance between the responsibilities of the employer and those of the employee; greater flexibility in the delivery of training and testing; a more vigorous commitment by people and institutions towards the reality of two official languages within the public service of Canada; greater integration of language training with learning and professional development; and finally, a political commitment to the practical implications of linguistic duality within the public service of Canada, and effective leadership on the part of senior managers in order to give effect to this workplace and public service undertaking.

[English]

Mr. Chairman, those are the key messages in my report. It's 29 pages long, so there's lots in there. I'll be very happy to answer questions from the members of the committee on anything in it.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Mitchell.

Before we start, I want to say something.

[Translation]

I forgot to mention that our clerk, Ms. Marie-Louise Paradis, has retired. This is why she is not with us today. I would like to thank her, on behalf of the committee, for her excellent work last fall.

I would like to introduce Mr. Marc-Olivier Girard, our new clerk. He is new to us, but by no means is he a new clerk nor is he unfamiliar with official languages. He has worked for other committees. I am very happy that he is working with us, as I have heard a lot of good things about him. I would like to welcome him. Now, after that aside, we shall proceed with questions.

Mr. Lauzon, go ahead.

Mr. Guy Lauzon (Stormont—Dundas—South Glengarry, CPC): Thank you. I would like to wish a Happy New Year to all the members of the committee, and I want to welcome Mr. Mitchell.

[English]

Mr. Mitchell, I think this document is a summary of your "Toward a New Vision" document. In it you state—or some of your findings indicate—that the success rate of the oral interaction test for French as a second language for people trying to obtain level C decreased considerably between 2001 and 2002-03. It actually went from 54% being successful to 38%. Were you able to determine why that happened in such a short period of time?

Mr. James Mitchell: Monsieur Lauzon, for a really professional opinion on why that decline took place, you'd have to ask the people from the testing regime at the Public Service Commission or from some of the parts of the government you'll be calling before this committee.

But as far as I understand it, one reason for the decline in success is that many of the students who took the test most recently were students who for one reason or another were, you might say, the least skilled. They perhaps came to this far into their careers. They were getting into their mid-fifties without really having made themselves properly functionally bilingual, so they were the ones who for a variety of reasons, some of them personal and some of them professional, were perhaps the least ready or able to succeed on the test. That's the answer I've heard.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: They were the least motivated, maybe?

Mr. James Mitchell: Some of them would have been the least motivated, but many of them would have been very highly motivated but at a stage in life when perhaps they were not as able to learn a second language as quickly as they would have been if they'd done this when they were 30 or 35.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: I was thinking on my way over here. I, like you, was a public servant for 22 years and wrestled with this language testing, training, and backfilling and those kinds of things. I often wondered about one thing—and this may or may not be a fair question: is it more difficult for an adult to acquire a second language than it is for a young person?

Mr. James Mitchell: Monsieur Lauzon, I'm not an expert on those things, but everything I have been told tells me it is more difficult for adults to acquire a second language than it is for children or young people. If you want to learn a second language or a third, the younger you are when you do it the better.

But I don't want to pass myself off, sir, as an expert on language acquisition, training, or testing. I'm a guy who thinks about the public service and who was asked to look at this problem, this issue. I'm also someone who believes very much in two official languages and the importance of both official languages in the government. That's why I looked at it too.

● (0915)

Mr. Guy Lauzon: You mentioned in your summary that there was a very sour taste; I think that was the term you used. Public servants, after they left language training, had a sour taste. Is that the term you used?

Mr. James Mitchell: Yes, I did.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: They were "soured by months of language training and successive failures on the test". Can you expand on that?

Mr. James Mitchell: I think it's widely known, certainly in Ottawa and perhaps elsewhere in the public service, that many of the people who have spent many months in language training and have tried and failed to pass the test repeatedly find their initial enthusiasm for their language training opportunity and their enthusiasm for the acquisition of a second language, which is in most cases French, have become soured during the whole experience because they can't seem to pass the test. I think frustration over the testing experience is one of the things that has motivated the rethinking of language training that underpins this document.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: For those who were successful and went back into the workplace, I think it used to be that you had to do your test every two years. At one time you could get exempted from testing but I'm not sure what the rules are now. Is there a follow-up test if you haven't been exempted? Do you have to do it every two years now?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Lauzon, I don't know precisely what the rules are. I think it would be every five years rather than two, and there still is an exemption. You can still become exempted. If you're fluently bilingual and the testers determine that, they're not going to bother retesting you.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: What is the success rate on that subsequent test after two years, five years, or whatever it is?

Mr. James Mitchell: I honestly can't tell you, Mr. Lauzon. I just don't know. I'm not an expert.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: One of the concerns we always used to have was about retention. When you don't use a language, you lose the skills in it, and I'm evidence of that myself.

Mr. James Mitchell: I would agree with you, sir, that retention is a problem, and I do talk about that in this study. Frankly, because we have not yet reached the point of using both languages fully and properly, certainly in places like Ottawa, the environment is not conducive to people who have acquired second language proficiency retaining that proficiency.

But it's not just a matter of environment. There are many causes, which I try to talk about in this report.

Mr. Guy Lauzon: Have you come up with any proposed solutions to stop this skid from 54% to 38% in the success rate? Can you make any suggestions as to how we can stem that and maybe reverse the trend?

Mr. James Mitchell: There are several aspects to a proper answer to your question. As I said, I think to some extent you saw a statistical bump there because of the particular cadre of public servants who were going through training and testing in that period. That's one point. Secondly and more importantly, how do you create a system in which more people are able to learn better and succeed better both on the tests and, more importantly, in the acquisition, use, and retention of that official language? That's the big question.

I do have some suggestions in here and they include a lot of things. They include the work environment in which people operate. They include individuals' understanding of their own obligation to retain the official language skills they've acquired from the government. Thirdly, it's a matter of general leadership within the public service and the government in reinforcing the importance of being able to use both official languages and in recognizing the

reality of and the fundamental necessity of respect for two official languages. There's a combination of factors that would contribute to having more people succeed at acquiring, using, and retaining that language skill.

[*Translation*]

The Chair: Thank you. Thank you, Mr. Lauzon.

Mr. André, you have the floor.

● (0920)

Mr. Guy André (Berthier—Maskinongé, BQ): First, I would like to wish all the committee members and Mr. Mitchell a Happy New Year.

I read your report and I would like to ask you a few questions. Thirty-five years after the Official Languages Act was passed, despite several initiatives on the part of the federal government, French is still not a language of work within the government. According to your report, the goal of having both languages spoken within federal institutions does not appear to have been met. I would even say that we have gone backwards, given the test results. In fact, you point out that the test results were somewhat lower between 2001 and 2003.

You also point out that people do not feel that increasing their proficiency in French is a necessary part of their professional development. You state that the reason these people decide to learn a second language, which is often French, is not because they feel this is a fundamental value but rather because they need to pass a test. The goal is to pass a test, not necessarily to learn a language in order to be more comfortable with it, and so on. So this is a problem about attitudes and values.

You also talk about greater political commitment on the part of the government in order to increase the use of French as a language of work. You mention the role of the private sector in language training. You state the employer and the employee should have greater responsibility in applying the principles of official languages.

My first question is, how can the government further encourage the application of official languages principles within institutions and ensure that official languages become values? Let's take the example of an anglophone who works in a federal institution and who would like to learn French for his or her own personal development as well as for the purposes of passing a test. Why do you refer to the private sector's role in your report? Are you questioning the government's ability to provide good services? What is the role of the private sector in language training? Why would the private sector be more effective at applying official languages principles?

Mr. James Mitchell: I would like to answer both parts of your question, Mr. André. How can the government improve the situation, emphasize the importance of official languages and improve the proficiency of its civil servants? First, that requires a commitment on the part of the government to the importance of official languages within the country and within the public service. Second, the government must increase, through its attitudes and its operations, the use of French in the workplace. Third, the government must give its employees more opportunities and tools to learn and use French. It must offer employees opportunities to learn, use and maintain their second language. Fourth, it must make senior management more responsible for official languages, because in my experience, it is essential that people in senior positions be truly bilingual and use both official languages in meetings, in the workplace and in negotiations. I'm talking about people who are truly bilingual. These people must not only pass a test but also be truly fluent in both languages. This means that the government can do many things to strengthen its commitment to both official languages.

The second part of your question was about the private sector's role in language training. In my report, I say two things. The federal government still has an important, even essential, role to play in language training because without its contribution, without its central capacity for research, standard setting, tests and new material, it won't happen. There are many private companies in Ottawa, Montreal, Calgary, Vancouver and Toronto that are highly competent in language training. They are very proud of their capacity, of their success and of the quality of their teaching staff. I think that it is almost impossible for the federal government to provide all training because it's too costly. It's a waste of resources and energy on the government's part.

My report recommends that the government acknowledge its key role and collaborate with the private sector; that it acknowledge the abilities of the private sector and the importance of its role in language training for civil servants, as well as the fact that language training is an industry in Canada, because Canada is an international expert in language training. This is a very important industry and one that has often been neglected by provincial and federal governments. Those are a few suggestions.

● (0925)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. André. That is all the time we have. Mr. Godin.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good morning, everyone. Good morning, Mr. Mitchell.

I do not agree with you when you say that we are experts in language training, because there are countries where people learn six languages and get along better than we do in Canada, where we only have two. Right now, our success is rather modest, because it says that the number of level C's has been falling steadily since 2000-2001, having gone from 54 per cent to 38.7 per cent. There's a problem. I would like to hear your opinion on this subject.

Over the last few years, I believe that the government has not demonstrated seriousness with respect to bilingualism. People conclude that they don't really need to provide services if their bosses don't really want them to.

Let us take for example the Department of National Defence, wherein 60 per cent of employees are unilingual anglophones. In this situation, one wonders if the government is truly serious.

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Chairman, in my opinion, the current government—just like the previous government—is very serious when it comes to official languages. It takes its responsibilities with respect to language training very seriously, which is why the government ordered this study, this language training initiative. It launched the famous Dion plan, which dealt with official languages. The government allocated 200 or \$300 million to official languages two or three years ago.

In my opinion, the government is serious, but improvements in language training, learning, public servants' attitudes and the workplace have to be brought about step by step.

● (0930)

Mr. Yvon Godin: That is why I'm talking about the attitude of public servants as well as that of the government. The government set aside \$700 million for official languages through what is commonly known as the Dion plan. However, at the same time, when francophone communities go before the courts because there is a lack of services, and win their case, the federal government launches an appeal, claiming that these communities are in the wrong even if they won their case in the courts.

On the one hand, the government claims to want bilingualism in Canada; Canada is described as a bilingual country and both languages must be respected. On the other hand, communities and municipalities are told to go before the courts if they do not agree with the way the government is handling matters, and the government then appeals to challenge interpretations. There's a lack of seriousness somewhere. All of these studies are fine and good, but during this time, the years fly by.

Mr. James Mitchell: I will answer you briefly. My report does not deal with the situation of minority language communities, but in it, I do state that we have not reached our goal of becoming a society with two truly official languages. It is obvious, and it is one of my conclusions. We have not reached our goals, but the goals still exist.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Mr. Chairman, I do not want to confuse things. I'm not talking about what minority communities want. I'm talking about federal government services which were not provided in certain regions. This is why communities went before the courts. Following that, the federal government went to the Court of Appeal to fight the communities and say that they were wrong. Do you not believe that this is a bad example to set? These are the facts.

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Godin, I do not represent the government, I am merely a consultant, a writer.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What is the difference between the study done by the task force of the School of Public Service or the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency and your study? Could you explain the difference between the two studies?

Mr. James Mitchell: I will explain their respective responsibilities. The first group, the one on official languages, works at the Public Service Human Resources Management Agency, which is a small agency that reports to the President of the Treasury Board. The School of Public Service is a small agency responsible for training public service managers. One is responsible for official languages policy, and the other for language training.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Some studies have been done by the public service and you yourself have done a study. What's the difference between them? Are you saying the same thing?

Mr. James Mitchell: The purpose of my study was to make some suggestions regarding their work. They commissioned this study to get some suggestions. It is really a vision document. This is not government policy, but rather a contribution to their work.

Mr. Yvon Godin: What is different about your study?

Mr. James Mitchell: My study is simply a contribution to the work they do as public servants. They could appear before your committee. I am not speaking to you on their behalf; I am only speaking about my study. It reflects my ideas; I wrote it on the basis of the interviews I conducted. The opinions it contains are my own. I believe in the official languages and in Canada's linguistic duality.

I note in my report that we have not met our objectives. This is the fact, this is the reality. My study presents various ideas to improve the situation, to strengthen the importance of the official languages and to support officials in their efforts to achieve genuine skills in the second official language.

• (0935)

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Godin.

Mr. James Mitchell: I apologize if my French is not clear.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I apologize if my English is not perfect.

The Chair: Please proceed, Mr. Godbout.

Mr. Marc Godbout (Ottawa—Orléans, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

It is my turn to wish everyone a Happy New Year, in keeping with the tradition.

Welcome, Mr. Mitchell. What was your exact mandate in the study that was commissioned?

Mr. James Mitchell: My mandate was to consult about 20 senior managers involved in the official languages or language training in the public service, as well as other private sector experts, including a few directors of private language training companies. Based on these consultations, I was supposed to present my ideas about a new vision of language training in Canada. They wanted a report based on experiences and different points of view, but they also wanted my own ideas, since this is the type of work I have been doing for government departments and agencies. So this is a vision document, a contribution to the work these officials do under the mandate of their respective agencies.

Mr. Marc Godbout: Are they the people who recommended a sample of about 20 senior managers? I must say I find that a rather small sample. Did this idea come from the Public Service Commission? We should perhaps have some idea about the size of the study. Did it cost \$10,000 or over \$100,000?

We should verify the scientific aspect of the research, after all. You were simply asked to interview a few people and come back with your ideas. I respect that. However, I would like to know what type of study it was. Was it really a research study?

Mr. James Mitchell: No, sir. You are quite right. It was not a research study, or a scientific study, or a survey of the opinions of a large number of officials. It was not that at all. Rather, as the title indicates, it was a coherent proposal setting out a vision of language training in the public service in the future. These are the ideas of a single individual, myself.

Mr. Marc Godbout: As you said yourself—and I found you very honest—your are not an expert on language training. Did you consult some more scientific research analyzing various language training programs and their effectiveness? One of your recommendations is that consideration be given to the private sector. Personally, I have no objection. However, you say almost nothing about the parapublic sector, namely community colleges and universities in this country, which are doing great things internationally in language training. If you were unable to do that, do you think it would be advisable to do a good study of the various government, para-governmental and private language training programs to determine how we could get value for money in the area of language training?

Mr. James Mitchell: I very much agree with your suggestion. I mentioned two or three times in the document that the parapublic, private and federal sectors really have a role to play. The capabilities of the colleges are growing in this area, and people in government are well aware of this. I say in my report that the government must focus its efforts on the key work it alone can do and give the private and parapublic sectors a broader area of activity. I think that by distributing the work in this way, we could work more effectively and more cheaply while better meeting students' needs. This would allow us to support a very important part of our economy.

I remember the point raised by Mr. Godin or another committee member. According to my information, we are really experts on language training, not language learning. Everyone, including the experts from Language Training Canada, told me that our tools, our research and our approach were the most innovative in the world. We were told that we could export our systems, even though we do not always get very good results with respect to learning. However, we excel in training.

I apologize, Mr. Chairman: my answer was too long. The fact remains that I agree fully as regards the parapublic sector, and colleges.

• (0940)

The Chair: Thank you.

Thank you, Mr. Godbout; that is all the time we have.

[English]

We'll go for a second-last round, five minutes each.

Monsieur Poilievre.

[*Translation*]

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I would like to thank our witness for appearing before us today.

First of all, I would like to know whether or not you feel that the language exam requirements should be made easier or harder?

Mr. James Mitchell: That is a good question. There is no consensus amongst the people I have questioned on that topic. There are two factors: the requirements and our expectations. Are our expectations too high or too low?

Next, do our tests adequately measure the level of competence? These are two different questions. Amongst those individuals questioned, I believe that there is some consensus that the current tests are not necessarily the best way of assessing competence. They have told me that they are currently adjusting the tests and the test system.

Mr. Poilievre, you also asked whether or not our expectations were too high or too low? I really believe in what we call true functional bilingualism. This level of bilingualism is perhaps higher than mine but it is much lower than that of many members of Parliament and other really bilingual people in Ottawa. So this would be a level that is higher than mine, but we are not necessarily talking about perfection. What I'm looking for, in this case, is an expectation that would meet the needs of employees and the general public and which would enhance our services with respect to this public. However, no consensus has been reached on this matter.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: In answering my question, you asked another: are the expectations too high? I would like you to answer that question.

● (0945)

Mr. James Mitchell: I feel that we have to expect more from public servants. However, I do not think that we should expect them to be perfectly bilingual.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Should we be lowering or increasing the requirements or the number of positions requiring bilingualism? Should we have more positions where bilingualism is essential?

Mr. James Mitchell: As I said in my report, this is a matter we need to look into. This is very important in those regions of Canada where the second language is used very rarely. That is the case in British Columbia and in Newfoundland, in particular, where there are few francophones, or in Quebec regions where there are not many anglophones. We may have too many executive level positions that are classified bilingual imperative, but I do not know. I have not looked into this matter in detail and I am not an expert. I do not think that I am qualified to undertake such a study, but this is something we need to examine.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Mr. Mitchell, our challenge is to strike a balance. I represent an Ottawa riding where there are a lot of unilingual anglophone public servants. They want to work in the public service and they respect the principle of bilingualism. In their view, there should be no compromise with respect to bilingualism, but they do not want to be prevented from working in the public

service and making a real contribution to their country. In your opinion, how can we reach this balance?

Mr. James Mitchell: All public servants must know, at the start of their career, the expectations of the organization towards its employees. For example, if you want to become an executive, you need to become bilingual. In my opinion, we need to empower individuals when it comes to their careers.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Simard, please.

Hon. Raymond Simard (Saint Boniface, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Welcome, Mr. Mitchell.

I would like to go back to the matter of the sampling. You interviewed only 20 senior officials and I feel that this could pose a problem in the sense that your results may not enable us to see things in proper perspective. Today, there are hundreds of thousands of young people who are attending or who attended immersion schools. Had your sample included some of these young people who are joining the government today and who are often perfectly bilingual, the results could have been significantly different. Did you think about that? Was your mandate to specifically find out what was happening at the senior official level?

Mr. James Mitchell: I would simply tell you, Mr. Simard, that I did not do any research. I did not survey thousands or hundreds of thousands of individuals. This was more like an issues paper based on the opinions and perspectives of senior officials and other individuals, particularly from the private sector. This is not an expression of their opinion. These are my views.

Secondly, I fully agree with you: there are thousands of young Canadians throughout the country who are perfectly or functionally bilingual and who have major responsibilities in the public service of Canada. They are a source of hope for me. I fully agree with you on this matter. These young people represent the future of the public service, and this paper focused not only on the problems in 2005 or 2004, but especially on the future of the public service.

● (0950)

Hon. Raymond Simard: Before, we talked about senior public servants aged 50 to 55 who might be a little less motivated. You're not the one who said that, but decreased motivation was mentioned. Maybe that's reality. Someone at the end of his career doesn't necessarily have the motivation to learn a second language or to push hard in that direction. In order to get more precise results, your sample should have included people at all levels, I would think.

I have trouble trusting your results. After all, you were in contact with people who just about all had the same concerns and were in the twilight years of their career, and had less motivation than the younger people. Could you answer that one, please?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Simard, I hope you don't get the impression that this document presents the complaints and points of view of old public servants in their fifties. I tried—I don't know if I managed—to set out a vision for the future, for a public service totally respectful of both official languages at all levels in the workplace and in its dealings with the public. That was really my intent. If I didn't manage, you can be the judge.

I agree with your premise.

Hon. Raymond Simard: I am quite happy to hear you say that if people in the public service want to have access to senior positions, they must become bilingual. I don't think we should accept any kind of compromise in that area. I much appreciate your comments in that respect. Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you, Mr. Simard.

Back to Mr. André.

Mr. Guy André: Thank you.

Of course, I think the government must be more rigorous in implementing its Official Languages Act. When you look at what's happening at Air Canada, at National Defence or at the RCMP, and also at what we've witnessed on Parliament Hill recently, it seems clear that some people do not speak both languages. That's a simple acknowledgment. Thus, if the government were more rigorous in seeing to it that people acquired both languages, it might improve the situation.

For example, if I'm a computer expert, I must necessarily know a computer language. If I am in a job in which I must use both languages, I should automatically know the computer system and both languages. That's what I would call rigorous. If you are going to be rigorous in promoting both languages, that must be a job requirement. I'm not sure that aspect is always respected. That was a comment.

As for values, I rather agree with Mr. Simard. In order for anglophones to like French and want to get to know that language, you have to start with education. If I apply for a position where I have to learn English to pass a test, if there's no resonance between that and my principles and my values, it becomes more difficult. Education and values are developed in childhood and during the teen years. It's the whole education system that might be affected.

To get back to my question, I was reading these statistics. We're told that

the percentage of anglophones successfully passing the French as a second language oral interaction test to attain the "C" level has been constantly decreasing since 2000-2001, falling from 54 per cent to 38.7 per cent in 2002-2003. Conversely, 81.9 p. 100 of francophones passed the English oral interaction test on their first try to attain the same level.

How do you explain the fact that francophones more easily accept the use of the English language or, at least, pass the tests more successfully?

• (0955)

Mr. James Mitchell: That's a good question. In my opinion, there are two main reasons explaining the difference between the success of the francophones and that of the anglophones. First, at the outset, francophones recognize that if they want to pursue a career within the public service, especially at the senior levels, they must be bilingual.

Then, most francophones work in an environment where they hear a lot of English. They also have the benefit of television, among other things. There are more language reinforcement sources for francophones who want to improve their English. They are favoured because of the environment and moreover their attitude is very favourable to English. But francophones also say that if they recognize English, they also want French be recognized. They want their mother tongue to be respected. I agree with that.

On the other hand, the situation is different for the anglophones. If they come from Saskatchewan or Vancouver, they haven't had much contact with French as a second language. When they are hired by the public service, they are not aware of the reality of both official languages. Nor do they easily accept that you have to learn a second language and use it. So you have to consider the environment, personal attitude as well as personal experience.

Mr. Chairman, we often hear about the disparity. We are disappointed that the success rate has decreased. In my opinion, a lot of progress has been made during the last 30 years. The difference is unbelievable. Moreover, the attitude of anglophones toward French is generally very positive. In the public service in Ottawa, anglophones respect French. They are quite aware of the existence of both official languages. They know that the senior executives must be bilingual. They also know that there must be more French used in the work environment. There are far more bilingual public servants than 30 years ago. However, as a society, we have not yet attained our objectives.

The Chair: Mr. Godin, do you want to wrap it up?

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Did the public service have a reaction to your study?

Mr. James Mitchell: I believe the reaction is positive. In any case, I haven't heard any criticism so far. People who have read the report have reacted in a positive manner.

Mr. Yvon Godin: You say that you haven't heard any criticism, but have you had an opportunity to present your study to the public service?

Mr. James Mitchell: Yes, I was invited to present my ideas and conclusions to different committees in different departments, to groups of senior officials as well as to the committee in charge of improving official languages within the departments.

• (1000)

Mr. Yvon Godin: Before, you talked about attitude and benefits. You said that the francophones had better access to English television and that they also had access to the anglophone community. In my opinion, here, in Ottawa, anglophones have access to French television and to the francophone community as they live near Gatineau. In fact, you have put your finger on it. Let's be honest concerning the requirements for working for the federal government: if you don't speak English, you won't be hired; but if you speak English and you don't speak French, you will get the opportunity to learn it later and it's going to take a while.

Mr. James Mitchell: I hope that in the future we will have a public service in which all public servants will recognize and respect both official languages and where people in bilingual positions will use and master their second language. I want the public servants and the people from Ottawa to know the Quebec side of the river as well as the Ontario side. I want the people from Ottawa to know the Hull and Upper Gatineau restaurants as well as those in Ottawa and Renfrew county.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I'm talking about the government's attitude. As I've said at many meetings of this committee, you won't find a single deputy minister who doesn't speak English in the Government of Canada. On the other hand, you will find deputy ministers who don't speak French. It's still a question of attitude. As you have indicated so clearly, the francophone who wants to get a job as a public servant must learn both official languages, otherwise he won't get in, while the anglophone doesn't have to do that. So the government's attitude must change. I repeat: the government is not serious.

Maybe that should be part of your study. You should go further and meet other people. Mr. Simard talked about a sampling of 20 senior executives. Maybe those people had preconceived ideas. Do you intend to interview other people who are headed for the senior levels, to see what their attitude is and to see whether they'll say that there is really no need to learn the other language?

Mr. James Mitchell: Mr. Godin, I don't have any such data because I didn't research that matter and I'm probably not the person in the best position to do that kind of research, but my personal opinion is that the younger people don't have that attitude.

Mr. Yvon Godin: I agree with you on that.

Mr. James Mitchell: I think that the young people are showing more commitment to both official languages. As I was saying, there are things yet to be done, stages to go through because we haven't yet attained the goal, but I think there is hope with our youth.

Mr. Yvon Godin: Thank you.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

Are you done, Mr. Godin?

[*English*]

Thank you very much, Mr. Mitchell.

[*Translation*]

We're done with the first part of our meeting. Thank you very much for having shared your study and your thoughts and answering our questions.

I'll suspend the meeting for two minutes and then we'll discuss our committee's future work in camera.

[*The meeting continues in camera.*]

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Publié en conformité de l'autorité du Président de la Chambre des communes

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